

ZDENEK FIBICH

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This Czech composer is nowhere near as well known as Dvorak or Smetena, but has written some fine music and is an interesting character. He was born on 21 December 1850 in Vsebonce, the son of a forestry official and, as a result, they lived on various woodland estates. Zdenek was educated at home by his mother but then sent to school in Vienna at the age of nine and, two years later, attended a school in Prague. His piano studies continued with Moscheles in Leipzig and composition was studied with Judasson and Ernst Richter. He had a year in Paris and concluded his studies in Mannheim with Vinzenz Lachner.

He married Ruzena Hanusova when he was 23 and worked as a choirmaster in Vilnius. In August 1874, he returned to Prague where his wife died of a lung complaint. His newly born twins had died. In August 1875, he married his wife's sister, Betty but, in 1867, left her for a former student, Anezka Schulzova, who wrote the libretti for his later operas and for whom he wrote his many Moods and Impressions for piano of which there are 376 pieces.

His Opus 1 is a Piano Trio in F minor but, later, while a choirmaster in Vilnius, he composed his first String Quartet in A. This was 1874. In 1878, he composed his String Quartet in G Op 8 when he was second conductor at the Prague National Theatre and soon to be the conductor of the Russian Church in Prague. While this G major quartet is not highly praised it is well written with melody, harmony and excellent form. It is claimed to show some influence of Felix Mendelssohn. In addition to these two quartets, there is his Theme and Variations for string quartet of 1883.

[PDF of Piano Trio in F minor](#)

His mature works seem to show two main influences that of Schumann as a German Romantic and Wagner for whom Fibich had an understandable admiration. There is little, if any, trace of Czech nationalism in his music which you find in Smetena and Dvorak.

There are several symphonic poems such as The Jew of Prague of 1871. Othello Op 6 is inspired by Shakespeare and was premiered in Prague on 7 December 1873 conducted by Smetena. There are some beautiful themes and a brutal climax. Spring Op 13 was described as a symphonic picture and was premiered in Prague under Adolf Cech on 25 March 1881. It is music of varied ideas.

The Symphony no 1 in F Op 17 is a splendid piece and deserves universal recognition. Like Schumann's Symphony no 2, it has everything a symphony must have.

This satisfying first symphony of Fibich has a coherent logic, beauty, excitement, rhythmic drive and leaves a profound impression.

1875 saw the completion of the symphonic poem Zabož, Slavoy and Ludex Op 37 often evocative and vigorous

Another Shakespeare play inspired the symphonic poem The Tempest Op 46 which begins with a depiction of the storm and shipwreck and ends with a spirit of reconciliation and resolution of Shakespeare's drama. The Tempest is the title of one of Fibich's operas but this Symphonic poem is a separate work.

Toman and the Wood Nymph Op 49 was premiered in March 1878 although completed in 1875. It is a usual story of a man fleeing from his cheating lover and the music conveys languor and resignation.

The Symphony no 2 of 1893 is a disappointment particularly when compared to the superb first symphony. This second symphony seems to be pastoral and anaemic.

There are seven operas

Bukovin	1871
Blanik	1877
Bride of Messina	1883
The Tempest	1894
Hedy	1895
Sarka	1897
Fall of Arkun	1899

I do not know these works and, therefore, cannot comment on them, other than to state that some of these works did have success. There are also melodramas, some for narrator and piano. There are many songs and some choral and liturgical works including a Missa Brevis.

The Symphony no 3 of 1898 is, to begin with, a very fine work. The trio of the third movement seems to be a minor setback and the finale has a rather silly theme and style although one can call it humorous. I find the finale of Beethoven's Symphony no 2 equally distracting.

Fibich died on 18 October 1900.

I hope that there is sufficient words in this brief article to encourage interest in this composer.

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