

Fibich's "capability as a choirmaster and vocal teacher." There is no entry for Fibich in *Bedřich Smetana's Correspondents*, however, nor mention of the letter in *Bedřich Smetana and His Correspondence*. This difference is minor and does not detract from the usefulness or value of either collection. Its clarification, however, would only serve Mojžíšová and Pospíšil's objective to be comprehensive in their listings.

Although both *Bedřich Smetana's Correspondents* and *Bedřich Smetana and His Correspondence* serve a narrow audience, they pave the way for the promised critical edition of Smetana's letters, which will be a vital research tool and a welcome contribution to the field (especially if the letters are translated into multiple languages). Such an edition is long overdue, and the possibility for students and researchers alike to access a comprehensive collection of Smetana's letters will open up new possibilities for research. In the past, Mojžíšová has also mentioned the possibility of producing a critical edition of Smetana's diary (see her "State of Smetana Source Materials: 1994," in *Bedřich Smetana 1824–1884*, ed. Olga Mojžíšová and Marta Ottlová [Prague: Muzeum Bedřicha Smetany, 1995], 249). Such a publication would be an equally important and welcome contribution to Smetana studies.

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Bohuslav Martinů: The Compulsion to Compose. By F. James Rybka. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011. [374 p. ISBN 9780810877627. \$85.] Illustrations, bibliography, index.

In a recent review in these pages of Michael Crump's *Martinů and the Symphony* (London: Toccata Press, 2010; reviewed in *Notes* 67, no. 4 [June 2011]: 744–45) I noted that no monographs on the Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů (1890–1959) had been published in English since Brian Large's rather slender 1975 study of the composer. As if on cue, the appearance of a new, full-length biography has finally addressed this long-standing lacuna.

F. James Rybka's provocative *Bohuslav Martinů: The Compulsion to Compose* is destined to play a controversial role in Martinů

scholarship, owing to its central premise that Martinů suffered from the autistic spectrum disorder known as Asperger syndrome. As the author states in the preface, "We believe that Martinů is the first composer to have met the *DSM-IV* criteria for a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome" (p. ix).

DSM-IV is the abbreviation for the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Fourth Edition)*, published in 1994 by the American Psychiatric Association and covering all mental health disorders for both children and adults. In this work, Asperger syndrome gained official recognition as an autistic spectrum disorder. Since that time, public awareness and perception of Asperger's has been shaped by an increasing flurry of films, books and media attention; the syndrome has even acquired a certain cachet resulting from its association with genius-level aptitudes. Those diagnosed with it often call themselves "aspies."

If Martinů indeed suffered from Asperger's, it would help to explain some of the quirks in his personality, some of which could be seen as typical of those who are diagnosed with an autistic spectrum disorder. Rybka's claims are intriguing and he carefully builds his case with the evidence available to him. He is confident enough in his diagnosis to state that "I believe that there is so much solid evidence that Martinů had Asperger syndrome, that, to make a case against it, the burden of proof, while not insurmountable, is nevertheless overwhelming" (p. x).

However, such an identification appears ill-advised for a number of reasons. First, attempting to posthumously diagnose an individual with Asperger's, given the current complexities and controversies surrounding the accurate diagnosing of living patients, cannot lead to a conclusion of any certainty. Despite Martinů's well-documented social awkwardness and compulsive working habits, it is impossible to retroactively prove that he had a developmental disorder of the brain. Certainly we can speculate about the possibility, just as we can speculate on how spending most of his time for the first eleven years of his life in relative seclusion in the church tower of Polička may have affected his personality and music. In a recent op-ed in the *New York Times* ("Asperger's History of Overdiagnosis," 31 January 2012), psychiatrist

Paul Steinberg points out that “[s]ocial disabilities are not at all trivial, but they become cheapened by the ubiquity of the Asperger diagnosis, and they become miscast when put in the autism spectrum. . . . We can only hope that better physiological markers distinguishing between the autism-spectrum disorders and pure social disabilities can stem this tide of ever more pathologizing.”

Secondly, there is the likelihood that the term “Asperger syndrome” itself will officially cease to exist as a separate syndrome when the fifth edition of the *DSM* is published in 2013. From that point on, patients will rather be diagnosed more generally within the autism disorder spectrum. Thus the specificity of an Asperger’s diagnosis for Martinů, even if it could somehow be proven, would no longer even remain defined as such.

Thirdly, as Rybka aims to illuminate aspects of Martinů’s personality, the Asperger’s diagnosis becomes an *idée fixe* throughout the biography, providing the subtext for descriptions of incidents throughout his life as well as attempting to account for many, if not all, of the composer’s eccentricities. However, as Rybka himself admits on numerous occasions throughout the book, the evidence is not entirely clear or consistent, and while repeatedly trying to address these inconsistencies, he undermines the certainty with which he initially puts forth his diagnosis in the opening pages of the book.

The debate in the musical community over whether or not Martinů suffered from Asperger’s has already begun, as evidenced by the Wikipedia page devoted to the composer. On several occasions in past months I observed the statement that he suffered from Asperger syndrome placed prominently in the article, but recent visits have found the sentence removed. (See one of the revision history pages of the Martinů entry, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Bohuslav_Martin%C5%AF&diff=460454844&oldid=456061625, accessed 10 March 2012: “*It is outrageous, shameful, and libelous to make a pseudo-psychological claim about someone with no evidence, it sullies the reputations of people who can no longer speak for themselves by associating their names with ideas of disease and perversion.*”)

As an advocate for Martinů, Rybka is concerned with the fall of Martinů’s reputa-

tion, which began towards the end of his life and continued posthumously, and he places the blame in several areas. First, the loss of Czechoslovakia as a democratic ally once it became a Soviet satellite left Martinů without a sympathetic homeland for which to act as an advocate. Secondly, the gradual domination of serialism in the 1950s and 1960s rendered his style increasingly irrelevant. And thirdly, subsequent narratives put forth by musicologists either omitted him entirely from consideration or suspiciously regarded his exceptionally prolific output.

Rybka takes pains to correct the misconception that given his remarkable speed, Martinů must have been slapdash and his compositions uneven. Associating Martinů with Asperger’s allows the composer’s fecundity to be regarded not with suspicion, but rather as a natural product of his abnormally developed brain, enabling him to compose at an incredible rate of speed. But this raises further questions. How then are we to understand other highly prolific composers such as Mozart or Milhaud? Must they too be pathologized in order to be understood? Furthermore, as Rybka admits, savant-like abilities in music are not even typically associated with Asperger’s, and thus should be treated as a separate issue.

In addition to addressing the misconception regarding Martinů’s prolificness, Rybka laments the lack of attention Martinů’s music has received in recent years, citing such works as Alex Ross’s *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), where Martinů’s name appears only incidentally, and Richard Taruskin’s seemingly exhaustive *The Oxford History of Western Music* (6 vols. [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005]), where Martinů is not even mentioned. Rybka queried the authors about their omissions, eliciting a particularly telling response from Taruskin: “My sole criterion for inclusion was pragmatic: does this or that figure or example further the narrative and the issues that drive it? Those issues transcend personalities, although some personalities indispensably exemplify them. I know you think Martinů was such a personality. Believe me; I am willing to be convinced” (p. 342). At this Rybka expresses his frustration with the field of musicology, wherein he suspects

that “it is almost improper to question the opinions of a colleague who has published a book. Their opinions become the ‘narrative’ that Richard Taruskin alludes to . . . and are very difficult to alter” (p. xi).

Unfortunately, Rybka’s book is unlikely to change a narrative that so easily ignores or downplays Martinů’s unique contribution to twentieth-century music. Since Rybka is admittedly neither a trained musicologist nor practicing musician, he is not equipped to discuss Martinů’s music except at a very general level. There are no music examples in the book, and he appears ill at ease whenever he attempts to discuss musical features of a particular work in any detail. Thus the book cannot hope to assess Martinů’s contributions either to the music of his time (other than noting how popular it was), or to our own postmodern world. To be fair, it does not explicitly aim to do so, but statements such as the following should have been excised: “We are optimistic that Martinů’s music will be performed more frequently, because so much of it can rest securely on its sparkling tonality and excellence” (p. 343).

The main value in the book lies in the personal reminiscences that Rybka has provided. Rybka’s father František (Frank) Rybka, a former pupil of Leoš Janáček, had emigrated to America shortly before the First World War, where he pursued a musical career as an organist, choir director and cellist. He became an invaluable friend to Martinů when he and his wife Charlotte arrived in New York in 1941 after a harrowing escape from Nazi-occupied France. Their friendship would last for the remainder of Martinů’s lifetime and the two men developed a strong personal bond, spending vacations together and engaging in frequent correspondence. Rybka is therefore in a unique position to report on his father’s experiences with Martinů, as well as his own, during the course of this eighteen-year period. Those who wish to know more details about Martinů’s personal life after his arrival in America will find much to satisfy their curiosity here in the way of numerous anecdotes, previously unpublished or untranslated letters, interview excerpts, and subjective commentaries. These help to flesh out aspects of the composer’s personality that have only been scarcely evident in past biographies. Martinů emerges as a real person, complete with foibles and

flaws, which Rybka takes pains to analyze in detail.

It is unfortunate that this valuable information is buried in a larger book attempting to function as a complete biography while at the same time building a case for Martinů as a sufferer of Asperger syndrome. From the biographical perspective, for the earlier part of Martinů’s life, including his remarkable upbringing in the church tower of Polička, his studies in Prague, and his sojourn in Paris between the wars, Rybka has virtually nothing to offer that is new. His chapters dealing with these periods of the composer’s life read like ruthlessly truncated versions of Miloš Šafránek’s biography *Bohuslav Martinů: His Life and Works* (London: Allan Wingate, 1962), to which Rybka is obviously indebted, repeating wholesale some of the information originally contained therein. What has been lost from Šafránek’s original, however, is a sense of structure. Multiple headings within chapters appear randomly, wandering from one subject to another, and transitions are frequently nonexistent. Within these sections, which tend to be too brief, there is often a lack of detail, and a tendency to end abruptly, cutting off the train of thought. The sections themselves change topics for no apparent reason. To give but one of many examples, in the section in chapter 2 under the sub-heading “Charlotte Quennehen from Picardy” (pp. 57–59), Rybka begins discussing Martinů’s future wife and their first meeting as expected, but in the last paragraphs the text inexplicably switches to Martinů’s meeting Paul and Maja Sacher, and then after two paragraphs switches again to a final paragraph about Martinů’s friend Stanislav Novák’s visit to France along with Martinů’s sister Maria. These sudden shifts throughout the text make it very difficult for the reader to retain any sense of narrative.

Also, material ideally could have been more efficiently consolidated, rather than popping up at different points in the course of the book. For example, we first encounter Martinů’s mistress Roe Barstow on page 150 and then on several different pages thereafter, but we have to wait until page 194 to learn the basic information about where and when she was born in a paragraph that awkwardly backtracks. The headings themselves are not always helpful

or accurate, as on page 90, in which there are only two meager paragraphs under what one would expect to be a substantial section with the heading “The Martinů’s Final Year in Paris, 1939–1940.” These two paragraphs instead discuss the Martinů couple’s trip to Basel to hear the premiere of the Double Concerto in February, 1940.

There is also an inordinate amount of repetition throughout the book, especially with regard to the discussion of Martinů’s possible Asperger’s diagnosis. While both the introductory and penultimate chapters serve to frame the biographical portion with specific discussions of Rybka’s proposed diagnosis, much of the material is repeated unnecessarily in these two sections.

Finally, the book tends to rely on hearsay and undocumented assertions. For example, Rybka indicates the following about the Concerto for Two Pianos without citing any source: “The work was said to represent Martinů’s treacherous escape from the

Nazis, and he uses the pianos like dueling warplanes to create a whirlwind of excitement in the finale.” (p. 130) Who made the assertion about the Nazi association? Is the warplane imagery Rybka’s own fanciful invention?

While the project of this book represents an admirable undertaking, Rybka does not have enough material here, or a sufficiently convincing point of view, to justify its final outcome as a full-length biography. With the help of the documents he has at his disposal, he is able to bring to life his family’s long-term friendship with Martinů, as well as include his own thoughtful observations about Martinů and his personality. These alone would have made for a fascinating and welcome article, and interested readers will no doubt want to investigate Rybka’s work with this in mind.

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GERMANY AND AUSTRIA

Music at German Courts, 1715–1760: Changing Artistic Priorities. Edited by Samantha Owens, Barbara M. Reul, and Janice B. Stockigt. Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell Press, 2011. [xx, 484 p. ISBN 9781843835981. \$90.] Tables, index.

To those familiar with Europe’s older monarchies, like Spain and Denmark, “it seems almost axiomatic that there is only one court . . . per realm,” writes Michael Talbot in the preface (p. ix). This leads to a “monocentric” structure, a “clear-cut difference between metropolitan and provincial, centre and periphery.” This is not the case for the German territories, whose courts of “varying size and opulence” vied constantly for territory, power, and prestige. Music played a vital role in the pursuit of this prestige, from lavish opera productions in electoral Dresden to the chamber music of Württemberg-Stuttgart. The relations between them, both cooperative and competitive, are revealed in fifteen case studies, edited by Samantha Owens, Barbara Reul, and Janice Stockigt.

Each case study presents a series of temporal snapshots of the court in fifteen-year increments spanning 1715–60. The book’s tables alone make a valuable contribution to the literature—one or more, based on a

template with a standard set of rows (ruler, Kapellmeister, violins, singers, etc.) accompanies each chapter. This provides the reader with a helpful basis for comparison across the various courts. Thus the book provides a companion to composer-based studies, giving context for scholarship focusing on individual creative output.

In its useful delineation of structures, repertoires, artistic goals, and musical resources available across a range of diverse court establishments, the volume is accessible to students and scholars from other disciplines, while also providing many new insights to experts. Plentiful source material is always provided in the original language and spelling, immediately followed by an (occasionally annotated) English translation. The editors acknowledge their difficult task, for, as the historian of early modern Europe Jeroen Duindam says with respect to eighteenth-century courts, “the basis for any analysis of the court remains thin, as concrete data regarding numbers,