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MARTINŮ'S PIANO SONATA: Rediscovering A Mid-Twentieth-Century Masterworkⁱ

by Erik Entwistle



Bohuslav Martinů

It was thanks to the Ernest Bloch Anniversary Year (see Issue #87) that your editor's attention was first drawn to another largely unsung genius of the first half of the 20th century: Bohuslav Martinů, last in the royal line of Bohemian composers, who also died in the selfsame year 1959. And the coincidences don't end there! Both these great composers left but a single sonata as their only major work for piano in this form; both had to face years of exile in America, despite their unparalleled success there, as a result of political persecution – Bloch by the Nazis, Martinů by the Communists – with both returning, when they could, to seek solace in the Swiss Alps, where Martinů was to die. Hence one of my happiest experiences of the past year was learning his Piano Sonata (1954) in preparation for my time in Prague last June as chairman of the international jury of the first-ever European Union Piano Competition (see Issue #88) and of the EPTA European Conference which succeeded it, which was dedicated to the memory of Martinů. That being so, I was proud to perform and lecture on the Sonata for the latter and to do the same subsequently for the Oxford Philomusica International Piano Festival and the EPTA UK Conference in Chetham's School Manchester before giving a final performance of it as part of a Memorial Tribute to the late Carola Grindea at the Church of St Martin-in-the-Fields last September. So you can see how keen I was to pass on my enthusiasm and proselytize for this remarkable work among my fellow-pianists, who can only gain by taking it into their repertoire! In the course of my researches, I had the good fortune to stumble on the following analysis of this sonata (to my knowledge the only one of its kind in English!) by the eminent pianist and Martinů-authority Erik Entwistle (who has moreover recorded it on SUMMIT), which describes more tellingly than any words of mine the many fascinating features which make of it such a sovereign work of its kind.

Handel, Haydn and Mendelssohn may have received their due in this 2009 anniversary year, but there is another figure from the more recent past whose musical legacy also demands our attention: Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1959). After the death of the Czech composer fifty years ago, his music suffered neglect and its status has been uncertain. Today the composer's star is on the rise again as his music continues to make its way back to the concert hall with more and more frequency.

Despite this recent return to favour, there seem to be as many different perceptions about Martinů's music as there are numbers of compositions in his extensive catalogue of works. Perhaps this is a result of the sheer volume and stylistic variety of his music, which is itself a reflection of the times and places in which he lived. His unique birth atop a church tower in a little town on the Bohemian-Moravian border, his residence in Paris during the heady 20s and depressed 30s, his flight to

America as a World War II refugee, and his last years spent in exile from his beloved Czech homeland all point to a life of instability and isolation, and all impacted significantly on his music. Yet despite a lifetime of extraordinary vicissitudes, Martinů succeeded in creating one of the most recognizable musical voices of the twentieth century, and one that is often powerfully communicative. Martinů's piano works occupy a special place in his catalogue, not necessarily because they constitute his most significant body of works, but rather because they capture the quintessence of his style. Martinů, like Stravinsky, composed at the keyboard and this clearly influenced his compositional thinking. Prominent piano parts in his symphonic, operatic and chamber works confirm the piano's importance, as do the large number of solo or duo concertos. As the great Rudolf Serkin asserted about Martinů's piano works,

His writing for the piano

purely instrumentally was masterful. He expressed exactly his musical ideas through the piano. His piano works are not easy to play, but there is not one awkward spot in any of his piano works known to me.ⁱⁱ

In light of Serkin's assessment it is not surprising that much of the solo piano music makes for wonderful pedagogical material. Perhaps best known in this vein are the three books of *Loutky* ("Puppets"), but many other short cycles of varying difficulty are suitable for teaching and public performance. On the other hand, Martinů composed only a pair of extended, highly demanding concert works, one of which, the wartime *Fantasy and Toccata* (1940), was a gift to Rudolf Firkusny who proved a lifelong champion of Martinů's works. This was followed much later by the single piano sonata from 1954, dedicated to Rudolf Serkin, which will be the focus of this study. Martinů's piano sonata was the

composer's final grand musical statement for the piano. It was completed in December, 1954, but his connection to Serkin dates back to the 1930s, when the two first became acquainted in Paris.ⁱⁱⁱ Martinů apparently promised at that time to write a piece for Serkin, but for unknown reasons nothing was forthcoming. After the war, renewed contact with Serkin must have encouraged Martinů to at last begin the work.

During the period of the sonata's composition Martinů and his wife Charlotte lived in a small cottage in the hills above Nice. The composer's biographer Miloš Šafránek described this time in Martinů's life as "a sojourn of idyllic peace and sunshine"^{iv}, and the tranquil surroundings must have provided a welcome relief from the concrete and skyscrapers of New York City. The sense of space afforded by the cottage's remarkable vista of the bay and city below might well have reminded the exiled Martinů of his childhood spent in the little room atop the church tower of Polička, over one hundred and fifty steps above the ground. Creatively this was a particularly productive time, with the composer completing an impressive body of works alongside the sonata: *Mirandolina*, *Hymn to St. James*, *Petrklič*, *The Mount of Three Lights*, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *Frescoes of Piero della Francesca*, the *Oboe Concerto*, and *Otvírání studánek*.

Work on the piano sonata began on November 26, 1954 and the piece was finished three weeks later on December 16th. One day before completion, Martinů sent the following letter to the Serkin family home in Brattleboro, Vermont, unsure of the pianist's current whereabouts. He also expressed doubt, in typical broken English, about whether Serkin would be satisfied with the new work:

My sonata is near the end and I do not know what to do with, where to send it. I have no address of Rudy and I am not sure if he still would like to have it and if he would have the opportunity to play it, so I am troubled and also am especially if he will like it, it is really extremely difficult

to add something good to his tremendous repertory of masterpieces, so I am uneasy to come with my Sonata, you know how one could feel and that's exactly how I feel. Will you see him these days or is he on the opposite side of the earth. Tell him if you do not like it that I will not be vexed and if he tell frankly that it is not what he imagines and what he need really for his purpose and if it wouldn't give him a real pleasure to play and to like it so it would certainly be better to tell me *et je ne serai pas fâché du tout*.^v

Fortunately for Martinů, Serkin indeed proved interested in the sonata. Serkin visited Martinů in Switzerland in the summer of 1957 to play the sonata and discuss the work.^{vi} The pianist's personal copy of the manuscript, now housed at the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel, provides testimony to their meeting and contains a number of interpretive suggestions, as well as changes in the dynamic markings and even notation, in the composer's hand.^{vii}

Serkin's performance in Carnegie Hall in December of 1957 was attended by Harold Schoenberg, who later wrote a decidedly mixed review in the New York Times:

Rudolf Serkin, who generally confines himself to the piano music of the German and Viennese masters, came up with a novelty in his Carnegie Hall recital last night. He played the first performance of Bohuslav Martinů's Sonata No. 1. Of course, where Mr. Serkin goes, Bach, Beethoven and Schubert are not far behind. Last night Mr. Serkin also included the three on his program, with Bach's "Italian" Concerto, a pair of Schubert Impromptus from the Op. 142 set, and Beethoven's "Hammerklavier" Sonata. An imposing program, a difficult one to sustain and a real endurance contest. Mr. Martinů's new sonata is a virtuoso piece - a large-

scale, three-movement work, slightly under twenty-two minutes in length, written in the composer's typically international, neutral style. The harmonic idiom tends toward conservatism, the melodies toward something teetering, but never exactly falling, into ____^{viii}. It is almost as if the composer were afraid to get seriously involved, emotionally, with his material. Most of the interest came from some very inventive pianistic layout, especially in the 'tremolando' second movement. The composition calls for some exceptionally powerful sonorities, and these Mr. Serkin delivered with his usual strength. But on the whole it cannot be said that it was one of the distinguished pianist's better nights.^{ix}

Despite enjoying one of the best possible venues for a premiere and being performed by one of the world's most renowned artists, Martinů's piano sonata experienced a debut that was not entirely auspicious, at least according to Schoenberg. Nevertheless, Martinů was appreciative of Serkin's efforts, and Serkin for his part kept the work in his repertoire at least until the summer of 1959, when he performed it at the Marlboro Music Festival on July 5th.^x

Schoenberg's reservations raise interesting questions. His description of the work as "neutral" in style, and of Martinů's reluctance to get involved emotionally with his material, is puzzling. What does it mean to write in a neutral style? How does a composer writing in the 1950s get seriously involved, emotionally, with his material? Is it by writing in a patently romantic style? One wonders how much of this criticism can be attributed to Serkin's interpretation on that particular evening, as well as Schoenberg's own predisposition toward Martinů's music. Did Schoenberg, or even Serkin, simply get it wrong? Or is the sonata one of those works that needs several hearings in order to be appreciated? I would like to argue that the sonata is in fact one of the composer's

most compelling works, and that far from being neutral in tone, the work is deeply felt and fully characteristic of Martinů's distinct musical idiom.

The context for such an argument must necessarily include a more detailed discussion of the sonata's style and content, along with a consideration of this particular period in Martinů's career, one that saw the introduction of new elements, or emphases, into his compositional aesthetic. With the completion in 1953 of his sixth symphony or *Fantaisies symphoniques*, Martinů proclaimed to his biographer Miloš Šafránek, "I am going to go in for fantasy."^{xii} By this Martinů signified a freer approach to composition in which the formal aspects were subjugated by the impulsive ideas of his imagination. Indeed, the composer himself described the three movements of the *Fantaisies symphoniques* as "without form". As Šafránek rightly points out, subsequent Martinů works pursue this vein of musical fantasy, including the piano sonata:

Not even the sonata for piano from the following year, his first work of this kind has the prescribed 'geometrical' form, but is a fantasy, a meditation, as are also his later symphonic poems, *The Rock* and *Parables*, provided with literary mottos, and his *Fourth Piano Concerto*, entitled *Incantation*.^{xiii}

Šafránek's assessment of the sonata, however, is somewhat off the mark. The "fantasy" element, while significant, functions within traditionally structured frameworks in each of the movements, which are hardly "without form." In the first movement, use of fantasy is most evident in the freely unfolding motivic variations within the sonata structure. In the second movement, several distinct episodes of fantasy punctuate a form reminiscent of theme and variations. In the finale, which shares structural characteristics with the previous two movements, passages in fantasy vein are transitional in nature and serve as structural links.

Examining the sonata as a whole, the tonal framework is clearly delineated and in large part

classically conceived. The first movement establishes E-flat major as its tonal centre, the second movement is in the dominant minor, while the finale, beginning once again in E-flat major, finishes with a coda in E major. This progression of an ascending semitone in the finale is actually an important part of the sonata's overall design and has its origin in the first movement. Specifically, the leap of a minor ninth announced in the opening bars (E-flat to F-flat) encapsulates the overall tonal progression of the piece. This fundamental dissonance between the two tones establishes an initial conflict that is explored in all three movements until being resolved by the breakthrough of E major in the closing bars of the finale.

Martinů underscores this fundamental conflict by beginning all three movements with an octave sonority followed by the minor ninth dissonance. The musical ideas themselves are quite different, but all display this basic tension between consonance and dissonance in a seminal way:

Poco Allegro



Moderato (Poco Andante)



Adagio



Beginning with an examination of the piano sonata's first movement, I have taken as a model Martinů's

own analysis of his fourth symphony, which the composer provided for concert programme notes.^{xiiii} The opening bars of this work, composed in 1945, bear a striking resemblance to the opening of the sonata. Rhythmically they are virtually identical, differing only by the extra semiquaver in the symphony. In the symphony, the brief opening gesture, comprising four quaver beats, is balanced by more active semiquavers into the second bar. Martinů referred to these short musical ideas as contrasting "cellules"^{xv}, one lyrical and the other rhythmic:

I. II
Flutes
Violins I



In the sonata there is a similar process at work, but rather than being diatonic, the "cellules" are primarily chromatic. The opening cellule, with its intensely felt upward leap of a minor ninth, is balanced by the two separately slurred, falling semiquaver figures constituting the second cellule. The rise and fall in tension is further reflected in the hairpin crescendo and decrescendo markings in the score. Thanks to the upward leap, dissonance and surging dynamics, this gesture is one of the most dramatic opening gambits in Martinů's *oeuvre*, and completely different in effect from the gracious opening of the fourth symphony:

Poco Allegro



In the fourth symphony, Martinů first develops the two cellules separately before, in the composer's words, "resolving" them later in the movement. Indeed, the two cellules are orchestrated differently in the opening bars in order to help establish their separate identities. The sonata's two cellules, on the other hand, are much less discreet musically and constitute a single musical gesture that forms the basis for the rest of the movement.

Throughout the first movement

Martini demonstrates his penchant for motivic (or cellular) development, but perhaps even more striking is this movement's emotionally charged quality. The patently romantic style is surely a nod towards the dedicatee Serkin and his renowned artistry. The music has grandeur and sweep, and the pianism derives from the romantic tradition echoing Brahms and Rachmaninoff, if somewhat tempered by the rhythmic quirkiness typical of Martini's highly syncopated style. The score utilizes dotted barlines and the 3/8 time signature is given in parentheses, since Martini moves in and out of the time signature by adding extra notes and employing *hemiola* effects. The resulting music has a fluid forward motion enriched by frequent, unpredictable rhythmic shifts.

The form adheres quite strongly to sonata principal, with discernible exposition, development, recapitulation, and coda sections. These are all marked by prominent cadences in the score that are otherwise rare:

First Movement

Exposition (1-61)	[Eschig score, pp.1-4]
Development (62-146)	[score, pp.4-7]
Recapitulation (147-198)	[score, pp.8-9]
Coda (199-228)	[score, p.10]

The two groups forming the exposition are marked by a contrast in character, another clear nod to tradition. The first is agitated, comparatively dissonant, emphasizing chromatic melodies, and cast in primarily *forte* dynamics, while the second group is calmer, more frequently diatonic, and mainly *piano*. The beginning of this second group is remarkable in several respects, as Martini toys with the expectations of the listener. Withholding for the moment the expected harmonic modulation, Martini retains the tonic key, which is now much more firmly established after a forceful cadence. Instead of tonal polarity, Martini is apparently more concerned with the contrast between harmonic stability versus instability. Further signaling the arrival of more stable music, the two hands are rhythmically united for the first time. The repeated three-note pattern is a rhythmic

fragment of the second cellule. The right hand outlines the first three pitches from that cellule, now reordered. The minor ninth interval of the first cellule is inverted, with the lyrical melody outlining a major seventh, and for the first time the E-flat tonality is no longer being continuously destabilized:



This "second group" does eventually modulate to the dominant of B-flat, but only at the very end of the section. As seen in the example below, the dominant emerges rather unexpectedly from a polytonal passage in semiquavers - typical of the harmonically restless or ambiguous transitional passages employed by Martini in this work. With the music now finally at the dominant, B-flat is pitted against B, first gently with a *piano* variation of the work's opening two bars, and then more insistently with bitonally clashing B-flat and B-minor chords. Of course, this is a reflection of the initial E-flat/F-flat conflict that introduced the exposition:



The development, working with material from the two cellules, also explores the conflict between relative dissonance and consonance set up in the exposition. Throughout its course the music gradually builds in intensity. It is in two sections, each with separate *fortissimo* climaxes, and these are the only occurrences of this dynamic in the movement. The first (mm. 62-94) could be described as pandiatonic or freely tonal. In general, the crotchet and quaver note patterns are derived from the first cellule, while the semiquaver patterns can be traced to the second. Here, Martini's use of so-called fantasy comes to the fore as the motives are combined and manipulated in imaginative ways - an expected occurrence in the development section of a sonata. The music gradually builds to a triumphant climax utilizing one of

Martini's favourite cadences, consisting of scale degrees 5-4-3 over a dominant-tonic harmonic progression:



The second section, marked *vivo*, returns to the comparatively dissonant manner of the first part of the exposition, exploring the minor ninth interval as well as its inversion, the major seventh, in percussive, toccata style. Perhaps not coincidentally, the four pitches in the initial *vivo* bar form the same pitch class as the notes present in the opening two bars of the sonata (0,1,8,11):



Rhythmic variants of the two cellules emerge amidst the relentless semiquaver motion that follows:



cellule 1



cellule 2

The climax, another rhythmic variant of cellule one, features a forceful, dissonant chord with both major seventh and minor ninth sonorities against dominant B-flat octaves, and marks the dramatic high point of the movement:



As is often the case in Martini's works, the recapitulation is a shortened version of the opening, in this instance with some reordering and omission of previously stated materials. The agitated first group is especially cut short, and Martini proceeds more quickly to the second group, downplaying the earlier contrast between the two. Of course, he has no need to rewrite this material in the tonic since it already displayed that characteristic in the exposition. After the literal repeat of the initial portion of the second group, some of the *agitato* music from the first group, previously omitted, suddenly appears, acting as a transition to the coda. This final page recalls the second, more dissonant part of the development section, but is now marked *pianissimo* and *molto vivo*. The final cadence on E-flat, emerging unexpectedly from the busy texture, leaves an open-ended feeling and strongly lacks resolution. Recalling earlier textures, but now harmonically resolved, the rhythms of both cellules simultaneously undulate within the tonic chord, while upward melodic leaps recall the tender music of the exposition's second group.

The second movement of the sonata is the longest of the three, and represents a period of meditation and relative rest between the more agitated outer movements. As opposed to the first movement's sonata structure, the second movement is more freely conceived, consisting of three basic components. First, as mentioned before, is the presence of a theme and variations. The main theme in B-flat minor, featuring a prevalent dotted rhythm, is varied twice in the course of the movement and also twice repeated in its original form, thus closely resembling a rondo treatment as well. This relatively long-breathed diatonic melody is a marked contrast to the motivic churning prevalent in the first movement:



A second component consists of rapid, cloudy trills, whose execution recalls the sound world of the cimbalom, popular not only in Hungarian folk music but Moravian as well. These trills introduce the movement aggressively in both hands, separated by the minor ninth, and later accompany the principal theme (see the previous example). At the beginning of the movement a *rubato* effect is achieved through the subtly varied lengths of the *tremolandi*, an imaginative detail that adds to the rough, unpolished sound of this passage.

The third aspect comprises several episodes written in Martini's so-called fantasy vein, only one of which is repeated later in the movement. This fantasy element allows the composer to depart on imaginative flights of fancy, marked by sudden mood changes, while the recurrences of the principal melody provide the more stable structural points. A good example is the first such episode, featuring bell-like sonorities sounding in a veiled, impressionistic texture. Perhaps it is a distant recollection of the bells from the Polička church tower where Martini was born, for the bells strike exactly twelve times (the example shows only the first eight). This material emerges rather unexpectedly and is never heard from again, serving to momentarily redirect the musical argument and lead the listener into an unexpected realm:



Martini explained this approach to composition, which is characteristic of many of his works written in the 1950s. He described the process as "partly... not relying so much on the theme, but more on fantasy, and partly... not exploiting the theme to the limit, that is, I do not squeeze it dry in variations till there is nothing left of it but a husk. So when I feel that the theme has been made use of I start something else, with a little fantasy, however, the shape changes considerably (which causes the critics trouble), but that does not mean that there is no shape."^{xv}

The second movement of the sonata clearly demonstrates this technique. Each occurrence of the principal theme is separated by episodic passages, just as Martini described the procedure to his biographer Šafránek. The overall form of the movement is outlined below, with *T* representing the cimbalom-like trills, *P* the principal theme, and *F1-4* the episodes. Although the movement is sectionally oriented, there is an extended development of the trills which leads to the movement's climax. Here the influence of Debussy can especially be discerned, and in this passage Martini wrote the words *pedal* and *color* in Serkin's copy of the manuscript (the printed score, like the original manuscript, lacks pedal indications). Labeled *T'* in the outline, this music is also the most extended episode:

Second movement

T	(1-15)	
>P	(15-21)	
F1	(21-36)	
>P'	(36-42)	
F2	(42-63)	
>P''	(63-69)	
F3	(70-89)	
T	(90-104)	>P= principal melody (with 2 variations, >P' and >P'')
>P	(104-110)	
F4	(110-127)	
T'	(128-155)	T= trills (with development, T')
F3'	(155-180)	F1-F4= episodes ("fantasies")
>P	(180-189)	

The dissonant conflict between E-flat and E, left essentially unresolved at the end of the first movement, enters a less urgent realm in the second, but it still functions as an important undercurrent. This is most obviously observed in the opening trills, which are based largely on semitones, both vertical and horizontal. The trills have a disquieting effect, while the episodes are mostly reflective in character. But it is the movement's principal theme that lingers in the memory of the listener, with its unsettling *tremolando* accompaniment. After a final statement of the melody, once again in the tonic of B-flat minor, a half cadence leaves the movement unresolved.

As might be expected, the finale brings resolution to the tonal conflict set forth in the first two movements of the sonata. Like the first movement, there are echoes of sonata form seen in the finale's development section and shortened recapitulation, and as in the second movement, the mostly sectional structure includes important introductory material, in this case an *Adagio* in two halves of markedly different character that appear separately and are varied later in the movement. This is the only music in *adagio* tempo in the entire sonata, and the music suggests an anguished prayer. Once again, the very basic idea of dissonance versus consonance is being dramatized musically. The opening defiantly proclaims E-flat in bell-like octaves against harsh dissonances, finally reaching a cadence on the E-flat major triad. The second half of the *Adagio* is triadic; this more introspective passage sounds like a chorale, a moment of meditative calm before the relentless music which follows:



The *poco allegro* section which follows begins with a toccata-like theme in dotted march rhythm (labelled 'A' in the outline below), a rhythmic reminiscence of the second movement's principal melody. In the right hand, E-flat is once again set in relief against E. The minor second sonority is obsessively present in this and all of the remaining sections, reminding the listener of its importance and giving the finale the most consistently dissonant and harmonically complex music of the three movements.



Foreshadowing the tonal progression to come, the agitated unison music that follows (labelled 'B' in the outline) actually begins in E minor, but any sense of tonal stability is soon lost in a flurry of notes:



Here the E minor tonality is merely part of a long transition to the dominant key area of B-flat. The modulation to the dominant takes place not during the second 'B' theme but at the end of the fantasy episode that follows, which functions as a transition. After a variant of 'B' in the dominant, the development now ensues, and the dissonant march is gradually transformed into a stylized polka of Smetanian gaiety (and strikingly reminiscent of that composer's *Souvenir of Pilsen*). The polka is a familiar and favourite device of Martini, especially in his finales,

and this exuberant, diatonic music provides welcome relief:



However, the polka soon disintegrates into a second 'fantasy' passage that again acts as a transition, now to recapitulations of the second half of the *adagio* music and the march. The B section returns, now insistently *forte* rather than the original *piano*, and instead of losing its tonal identity as it did before, there is a dramatic affirmation of E minor, after which the coda in the parallel major provides a forceful conclusion to the sonata.

As can be seen in the outline of the finale below, the fantasy episodes, as in the second movement, function as passages of a transitional nature, in this case quite virtuosic, providing contrast while connecting the more thematically defined sections within the structure. The sonata form is skeletal and treated very freely, especially with regard to the harmonic structure and the progressive tonality, but the major signposts are still visible. The movement could be outlined as follows:

Third movement

Exposition: I (1-11) - A (12-25) - B (26-38) - F1 (38-51) - B' (52-60) [score, pp. 24-27]

Development: I' (61-67) - A' (68-79) - F2 (79-103) [score, pp. 27-29]

Recapitulation: I'' (103-115) - A (116-128) - B (129-136) - coda (137-158) [score, pp. 29-32]

I= slow introduction (in two halves, later separated as variants I' and I'')

A= dotted march theme (with development, A')

B= contrasting idea (with brief development, B')

F1-F2= fantasy episodes

In the sonata, Martini's most extended solo piano piece and clearly a serious work, the composer strove for a balance between intellectualism and emotionalism, form and fantasy. Generalizing the musical content itself, it would not be inappropriate to interpret the sonata's largely dissonant language as a metaphor for conflict and struggle at the artistic or human

level, considering that Martinů often spoke of his aesthetic in these terms. The fact that the work concludes triumphantly in a major key after so much internal struggle reflects the essential optimism at the core of the man and his music. As the sonata amply demonstrates, this is hardly a naïvely simple or unthinking optimism, but one that is hard-won and manages to persevere in the face of adversity. There is of course a tangible connection here to Martinů's own life experience.

The compositional aesthetics reflected in Martinů's piano sonata can be assessed with greater perspective today than was the case at the time of his death fifty years ago, and in light of the recent surge of interest in Martinů it is apparent that the composer's rich and varied musical legacy has much to offer our post-millennial world. Modern music has since witnessed a backlash from the self-imposed limitations of serialism that rose to prevalence as a compositional methodology in the final decade of Martinů's life. In an era in which serialism held sway, with its promise of achieving ultimate compositional control, Martinů resolved instead to loosen the reins and allow his imagination to carry him in new directions, in effect pursuing a path in direct opposition to the artistic climate of the day. In conclusion it is fitting to ponder the composer's own thoughts on experiencing a musical work:

“...analysis can only give a meagre outline of the design and structure of the opus. It can in no way portray for us the essence of the work—which is the thought and emotion which permeate it—because this essence depends on more intangible factors than its melodic, harmonic and rhythmic structure. The structure of a work is a fixed and definite thing, while its spirit is vital and active. At the very moment when the work is first performed, its soul is revealed as a ceaseless, creative element. Not through mere analysis, but only through a sensitive approach to the

composition, that is, by actual communication with it, participation in it, and execution of it, by engraving it upon one's memory, and by making it an integral part of one's mental processes, can this soul be actively and plastically realized.”^{xvi}

About the Author:

Pianist and musicologist **Erik Entwistle** has devoted much of his performing and scholarly efforts to the music of Czech composers. His writings on Martinů, Weinberger, and Janáček have been featured in the *New York Times*, the *Opera Quarterly*, and *Slavic and East European Journal*. He has released two recordings of solo piano and chamber music by Martinů on the **Summit Records** label. He is currently co-editing a book devoted to the Czech composer Vítězslava Kaprálová.

Footnotes

i This is a revised version of the article “Form and Fantasy in Martinů's Piano Sonata,” from a collection of essays on the composer entitled *Martinů's Mysterious Accident: Essays in Memory of Michael Henderson*, edited by Michael Beckerman and published by Pendragon Press in 2007.

ii The letter is dated February 25, 1976, from the Serkin family archives. The letter goes on to say: “As a human being he was full of warmth, tenderness and generosity. To me he was always wonderful. I loved him as a true friend.” I am grateful to Steven Lehmann for providing copies of the Serkin correspondence appearing in this article. Mr. Lehmann, Humanities Bibliographer at the Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania, has written a biography of Rudolf Serkin (*Rudolf Serkin: A Life*) published in the spring of 2003 by Oxford University Press.

iii Martinů indicated this in a letter to his family in Polička written at the time of the sonata's composition. See Bohuslav Martinů, *Dopisy dom*, ed. Iša Popelka (Prague: Mlada Fronta, 1996), 143-144. The letter is dated December 5, 1954.

i Miloš Šafránek, *Bohuslav Martinů: His Life and Works* (London: Allan Wingate, 1961), 294.

v From the Serkin family archives.

v Šafránek, Martinů's biographer, erroneously describes the meeting as taking place in the summer of 1958. See Šafránek, *Bohuslav Martinů*, 319.

vi I am grateful to the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel for granting me permission to examine this manuscript, and to Aleš Březina for confirming the composer's handwriting in the numerous suggestions marked in the score. The published score by Max Eschig, although apparently proofed by Martinů, contains numerous errors and does not

account for the suggestions and changes authorized by Martinů during his meeting with Serkin. My recording of the sonata, on a CD of Martinů's piano works released in 2004 by Summit Records (DCD 407), is based on an examination of this manuscript.

vi The final word did not make it into print due to a typesetting error. I spoke with Harold Schoenberg on January 27, 1998 and asked him to recall the missing word. He indicated that ‘dissonance’ seemed most likely and authorized its inclusion.

i Harold C. Schoenberg, “Serkin Introduces a Sonata by Martinů,” *The New York Times*, December 5, 1957, Section I, p.46. The remainder of the review continues:

Perhaps the impossible weather smuggled into his piano, for one does not previously remember from Mr. Serkin the type of harsh, clangorous attack present last night. Everything seemed to be pitched two [*sic*] loud, even the F minor Schubert Impromptu, which is certainly not so stormy a work as Mr. Serkin made it out to be.

Mr. Serkin even smudged portions of the “Italian Concerto,” something he almost never does in this work. His conception of the Beethoven “Hammerklavier” was titanic, as indeed it must be if the work is to emerge with any of its architecture. Here again, however, Mr. Serkin seemed to have trouble controlling the mechanism of his instrument. Nevertheless, there were moments to the performance one will not easily forget. The hushed atmosphere of the slow movement, with the pianist taking just the proper amount of liberty with the meter, was interpretive art at its highest. And the savage attack on the chains of trills in the fugue were more than merely exciting: they were hair-raising.

It may be that the movement is unplayable on a modern grand piano, but Mr. Serkin made us forget physical limitations in the blazing light of fervent belief coupled with what is, after all, one of the grandest styles before the public today.

H.C.S.

x The rather unusual programme at the Marlboro Music Festival included the Sonatina from Cantata No. 106 and two movements from the *Brandenburg Concerto No. 3* by Bach, Martinů's sonata, and, following intermission, Brahms' Horn Trio.

x Šafránek, *Bohuslav Martinů*, 272.

xi Ibid.

xi Louise Beck, “Symphony No. 4: Bohuslav Martinů.” Programme for the Philadelphia Orchestra, Eugene Ormandy, conductor, December 11, 1945. Beck provides a short introduction to Martinů's analysis of this work.

xi Martinů favors the term “cellule” over “motive”, though the intended meaning seems to be the same. In *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, a cell (or in this case its diminutive form) is defined as “a small group acting as a unit within a larger organization”.

x Šafránek, *Bohuslav Martinů*, 312.

xv Bohuslav Martinů, in Louise Beck, “Symphony No. 4: Bohuslav Martinů.”