

## **Music-related and other Memories**

### **School days (1951 – 1968)**

We had a grand piano at home which my Mother used to play occasionally; her favorite composer was Chopin, but she was able to play any music at sight. (Many years later, when I had mastered the viola, we even played the Viola Concerto by B.Bartók). When I attended the first school classes, an instructress was coming to give my two older sisters piano lessons. My sisters called her “duck” and neither of them wanted to play first. Once the “duck” came and a chase begun. The older of my sisters, Lída, fell over and broke her arm. Seeing such scenes I wished to play another instrument. My mother brought me to Model Musical School at Voršilská Street in Prague 1 and I was enrolled to the violin class of Mrs.Zdeňka Křížová. Prof. Křížová was an older lady; she was one of the last pupils of the legendary educationalist Otakar Ševčík.

The beginning was promising – there was a friendly atmosphere in the school and at school concerts some performances were passionately applauded. I was especially fascinated by lessons of ensemble playing, which were lead by Prof. Jan Faust. We rehearsed all the details, including sitting at the front of the chair and holding the bow vertically to prevent its breaking. We studied a composition for 4 violin voices and piano by our professor; although I played the 4<sup>th</sup> voice, I could play all the voices by memory. Occasionally we took violins out of the cases and played spontaneously without a conductor. Finally, there was a concert in Smetana Hall. I had my leg broken and I played with a plaster.

Later on, we advanced to an orchestra led by pensive Prof. Lidmila. We studied greater compositions, but their preparation often lasted rather long. I remember the cantata Vernal Song by Lidmila that we called “Vernal Roar”. Prof. Lidmila was incessantly smoking which obviously was fatal for him; during preparation of the “*Unfinished Symphony*” by Schubert he began to cough and he died of cancer within a month. The Symphony was then “finished” under a Conservatory professor with the help of former pupils. The atmosphere in the school was later marked somewhat by the professors’ rivalry and maybe also by politics.

After the successful beginning I began to have technical problems in practicing solo-pieces; it might have other causes besides my clumsiness<sup>1</sup>. Finally, I was rescued by changing the violin for viola. The viola was especially demanded for orchestra. I could go back to the basics of violin technique and appreciate music itself. For several years on I practically led the viola section of orchestra, as talented pupils were not interested in viola. During the years however, I got a little tired... It was only when I was 20 and I was already studying the 2<sup>nd</sup> class of the Technical University, when I entered the class of Prof. Jan Kratina. He taught me a much more effective playing technique. He explained to me the fundamental principles, so I could check myself and I played a quite different way in a short time. We studied compositions by Campanioli, Fiorillo, J.S.Bach, P.Hindemith and a contemporary Hungarian composer D.David. Together with my class-mate Arno Záruba<sup>2</sup> we studied Concerto for 2 violas and orchestra by A.Vranický. Our professor also promised us the study of *Harold in Italy*, which is the principal romantic work with solo viola, and the Chacona by J.S.Bach, but there was too little time. Maybe, I could have become a professional violist if I had been able to practice more and there weren’t some problems around<sup>3</sup> that weighed me down.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. I was tall and the violin was too little for me

<sup>2</sup> Who later committed suicide

<sup>3</sup> E.g. too strict conditions in our family

During the last year of my studies (i.e. 1967-8) I entered *Brix Academic Ensemble* which mostly performed early music<sup>4</sup> in St. Nicolas Church. The conductor was Jiří Portych, my former schoolmate from Voršilská Street. There was a mixed-voice choir and an orchestra composed of Music Academy and Conservatory students and amateurs. There were distinguished soloists performing with us. At our concerts the church was crowded. At Christmas 1968, during my military service, I performed with Brix Ensemble for the last time; it was Czech Christmas Mass by J.J.Ryba.

### **Serving in the Army (August 1968 –July 1969)**

I fell in the army in Brno on August 1968. It had been my wish to serve far away from home. It was a “hot” summer, full of political events. I took my viola with me; it turned out to be especially useful when we were confined in barracks after the Soviet invasion – I could enjoy myself and the others by playing pieces of classical music and popular songs. When the atmosphere after the invasion calmed down, I was commanded (against my wish) to teach “military education” at The Chemical Engineering College in Prague<sup>5</sup>. This teaching practice was very useful for me many years later, when I worked as a teacher. Under the influence of my father I had never had a positive attitude to military matters; however my attitude changed under the influence of the officers I was serving with. They supported the new political development (even after the invasion) and were quite devoted to their work.

On winter holidays I spent a month at Liberec for a practice at a regiment. I often visited my granduncle Jiří Šíma<sup>6</sup>, who lived there. In the leisure time I went skiing in *Jizerské hory* Mountains. Once I set out across the whole crest to Hejnice; I turned back late at night, in the moonlight. In July, at the end of my service, I came to Liberec again with my students. There was a military training course taking place and I was the commander of a provision troop. The Americans were just landing on the moon. The students in my troop had almost a model attitude to military service and the training was going on in a friendly atmosphere.

I have to mention that population was at friendly terms with the army those times. Soldiers were helping at farms and constructions where necessary and drivers willingly took hitch-hiking soldiers in cars. In our barracks in Brno we used to climb to a swimming-pool that was behind a fence and it was tolerated. When I walked in the city in my uniform, children used to speak to me: “Soldier, give me a badge!” I felt a little puzzled.

The Soviet invasion had broken the Czechoslovak Army’s spirit. After the screening that took place after 1970 the basic officer’s cadre left. The new recruited officers were not so motivated and swindled. At some regiments a dull chicanery took place. I was called to several military exercises, the last time in 1984, during the incident caused by the shooting down of a South Korean airplane. Most of my colleagues – reserve officers got befuddled in a pub daily.

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<sup>4</sup> I remember music by Caldara

<sup>5</sup> Vysoká škola chemicko-technologická

<sup>6</sup> His brother Josef Šíma was a painter, who lived in Paris

## Rožnov pod Radhoštěm (1970 – 1978)

After one year's study stage at the Institute of Macromolecular Chemistry ČSAV in Prague (I recall it with mixed feelings) I joined TESLA Rožnov Electronic Works situated at a small town (of 10 000 citizens) in the middle of Walachia (northern Moravia), characterized by a hilly landscape, many wooden houses of logs and conservative traditional customs. There was a huge factory developing a new branch of industry, which was built during the 50's and 60's. The factory employed people from a wide neighborhood; there were about 6000 employees. There were rich cultural activities in the town – 2 theatre ensembles, 2 folklore groups (with dancers and a dulcimer band), a brass band etc. It was not difficult to find musicians for a string quartet among so many highly qualified people. I came in August, our quartet met first in September, and we kept regularly rehearsing for 5 years. We started with adaptations of traditional songs and worked ourselves up to *Preludium and Fuga* by W.A. Mozart. In addition to some solo performances we participated in performing masses at Dolní Bečva, especially at Christmas; several times we performed the popular *Czech Christmas Mass* by J.J. Ryba there. Three of us were also members of *Folklore Ensemble Radhošť*.<sup>7</sup> The ensemble preserved the local cultural traditions and it also represented the factory at various events, mostly of political nature – official visits, caucuses of Militia etc. When we set out for a tour, there always was a political officer to supervise our program. After the year 1968 some texts were banned. For example, in the “Spinning Party” dance sequence we had to leave out the words:

*“We'll drive out all the spectres that frighten us at night,  
The whole the land will be joyful, the whole the land will be ours”*

which were considered too dangerous.

For Christmas mass we took on more musicians to our quartet and we rehearsed at the Cultural Club; once a colleague-musician from Radhošť Ensemble heard us and he resented that we played religious music (it was the Czech Christmas Mass by Ryba); performing in a church was considered as politically undesirable. We had to promise him to stop... In winter 1971 we were commanded to perform for Soviet troops at Frenštát. I took a draught of alcohol for courage and refused to go; although I was the only to do that, it was still acknowledged by the others.

Our *dulcimer-band* of the Radhošť Ensemble played almost everything by memory, only some dance-sequences were written in a score. We played each song in various keys, usually in the fourth cycle (i.e. D-G-C-F...). There were two woman singers, but sometimes the band sang as well. That was my trouble – they were too loud so I couldn't hear myself; moreover, I often didn't know the text. Once I found out that my voice went bad, so I stopped singing altogether. I only started singing again when I was in Piešťany – we used to have Sunday duties in the factory there and one could sing there enough and to spare.

I had to play “contra”, i.e. the rhythmic-harmonic accompaniment on the viola. It needed a good musical hearing, but the classical violin technique was ballast there. Sometimes I preferred to hold the instrument on the breast in the “gipsy”-position. I alternatively played “contra” and improvised.

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<sup>7</sup> Radhošť is a mountain near Rožnov, spun around with old pagan traditions

Our cellist, Jaroslav Bém, who played in both the quartet and the dulcimer-band, and who was also a skilled accordionist and pianist, introduced us to ThDr. Vilém Hýbl, vicar of the Czechoslovak-Hussite Church, of which he was a member. Dr.Hýbl was an experienced chamber-music player and former conductor of Walachian Symphony Orchestra. Although his vicarage was at neighboring Valašské Meziříčí, he used to serve the holy mass at an evangelic church at Rožnov, located at a park next to Walachian Museum. Jaroslav was his organist. Once we were invited to play at the mass with him. It was on March 7<sup>8</sup>, there was still snow all around. There were 7 people at the mass – the priest, the verger (an old lady), one believer and 4 musicians. Mr.Hýbl told a joke about a priest who served a mass in an empty church: there was a slater on the roof who started to believe in God. ... Our quartet played “*Oh my little son ...*,” the beloved song of T.G.Masaryk and “*Ave Verum Corpus*” by Mozart. The vicar gave a long lesson, proving the existence of devil. After the mass, the vicar expressed thanks to us but noted that Czechoslovak Church doesn’t recognize the virginity of Mother Maria.

Our quartet met weekly for five years. It was probably our activity that inspired dr.Hýbl to re-establish the Walachian Orchestra. Finally, he only established a string quartet at Valašské Meziříčí, for which he attracted our cellist away; our quartet thus ceased to exist. I was later invited to play with them the 2<sup>nd</sup> viola in the string quintet. We performed compositions by Mozart, Beethoven and also the demanding quintet by Dvořák; in one of its movements both the violas are playing a melody which should have been the American National Anthem (7 flats!). There were experienced players there; still the rehearsals were marked by the vicar’s unbalanced temper. He loudly gave various instructions so we didn’t hear the music; but mostly he bullied the prime violinist Tonda V., whose voice he used to play. Tonda played perfectly, but he sometimes got lost. Their dialogue sounded like this:

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 - “*Doctor, I thought, that ....*”  
 - “*One shitted himself while thinking*”

After such kind of words Tonda sometimes stood up and wanted to leave. Dr.Hýbl had to keep calming him until the end of the rehearsal; he wouldn’t survive without Dvořák. Once Tonda didn’t come. The vicar took 1<sup>st</sup> violin and I had to play the American Quartet at sight. There were only two cases when the rehearsal went on in good humor: when the vicar’s son got married and after the vicar’s journey to Soviet Union. After I moved to Slovakia, I sometimes visited Tonda and we performed duos for violin and viola by Mozart; Tonda played them perfectly. I have never since met such a good partner for this piece.

Dr.Hýbl also was an indulgent beer-drinker. He was a frequent visitor to a restaurant that stood at a place where a chapel of his church should have been built. Once a visitor came to his table and asked (in Walachian dialect): “*Hey, gaffer, may I take a seat beside you?*” The vicar blushed and shouted to the whole restaurant: “*I am no gaffer, I am a doctor!*”

I met Dr.Hýbl last during one of my visits of Rožnov when I lived in Slovakia. We met in the bus. The vicar went to Rožnov to serve a memorial mass on July 6<sup>th9</sup>, accompanied by an old man, who was (as the vicar told me) about 90. Then I got a glimpse of him in a restaurant and then in the evening, as a man was leading him to the railway station; the vicar was hardly able to walk. My friend saw him later on in hospital: Mr.Hýbl was so emaciated that he could hardly recognize him.

<sup>8</sup> The birthday of T.G.Masaryk (\*1850), the first Czechoslovak president; it used to be a state holiday

<sup>9</sup>The anniversary of burning Jan Hus on the stake in 1415

Once I played the viola in a band accompanying an amateur theatre ensemble. We were giving the operetta “Slovakian Princess” by R.Pískáček in several towns and villages in the region, altogether about 8 performances during the season. Everywhere the house was full and people enthusiastically applauded. The conductor was Mr.Tvarůžek, a legendary bandmaster of *Rožnovanka* brass band. As he was getting well on in years, he sometimes fell asleep. However he prompted us to start playing all at once, so that people could notice that something happened. The resulting effect of the performance wasn’t even disturbed by some technical slips: sometimes the pianist was playing on his own, not regarding the conductor; the singers differed up to one measure over the band or became lost. The musicians always governed the situation in some way.

Two years later Mr.Tvarůžek unexpectedly died. There were about 10 brass bands in the funeral procession that was about one kilometer long.

I met one of the amateur actors about two years later and he told me that their ensemble didn’t play any more. They played without any fee, only for dinner and lemonade. And they also wanted have a coffee paid for, which was not understood.

### **Piešťany (1978 – 1984)**

*There were three of us. We played a quartet. My brother and me.*

*- Do you have a brother?*

*No, why do you ask?*

In November 1978 I entered the Department of Physical Electronic of the Slovak Academy of Science in Piešťany, Slovakia. The Department closely cooperated with TESLA Piešťany Works. I was exhausted after the adventures I experienced in Rožnov. However, in the friendly, tolerant environment that governed here I soon recovered. We were housed in a wooden dormitory next to the TESLA factory. I took a violin there and we tried to produce some music. Later on I got acquainted with Eugen Okénka, who was the chief of the mask-design group. Eugen was from a mixed Slovak-Hungarian family and his wife was from Moravia. They had 6 children. Eugen studied in Prague and played the violin there in a student orchestra. We found another two players – Juraj and Peter (both were students) and started to play string quartet. At the first rehearsal, we tuned up the instruments, sat to the stands and Eugen said: “I am your coach”. He was the oldest of us, after all. However, after a few times we saw that Eugen didn’t keep time. He was out of practice and apparently had never played chamber music. At the next rehearsal we were only three and then we played duos for violin and viola. We tried to play the demanding duos by Mozart (that I used to play with Tonda), but finally I was dismissed. Eugen got a recording of the viola sound, played by a Music Academy student and played with the tape.

Nevertheless, we continued to perform together in a church on holidays. The organ was played by nun Petra, who also coached a girls’ choir. We got a cellist, a music teacher Martha; she had to enter the church secretly. I also started to play the violin in a piano-trio with Marta and a retired piano-teacher, Mrs.Rádyová. It went quite well. Later on we started to play with Eugen a string trio; Eugen already kept the time, probably he had practiced. Once we performed the whole evening at an informal dinner for guests from GDR (East Germany).

Eugen brought me several times to his native town Hurbanovo, where most people spoke Hungarian. He had a modern family house there, but it was empty – his family didn’t want to move there. Eugen housed a middle-aged man there, his god brother. He was an inadaptable

man who avoided any work and had even killed Eugen's violin teacher. They lived together in a poorhouse and the god brother mixed glass in his food.

This man filled Eugen's house with various (mostly stolen) lumber: there were 4 bicycles, partly rotten melons and books – even the textbook of Marxism-Leninism. Swarms of flies were everywhere. Eugen made a fire outside and started to carry flammable things to it; but his god brother did just the opposite – he was taking the things from the fire and carrying them into the house. It was funny. In the end Eugen took the violin and the man accompanied him by drumming on the window.

Piešťany was a spa-town and there was a Military Sanatorium there. Once there was an excellent violinist there for treatment, col. Rudolf Mánek. We put together a string quartet together with two music teachers from the local school. Mr. Mánek gave a concert for other patients and we performed a quartet by Borodin. After Mr. Mánek left I continued playing with teachers, but the true music disappeared – it left together with col. Mánek.

When I was working in Prague and at Slušovice in the years 1984 – 1989, I had my permanent address in Piešťany and I stayed there most weekends. During the revolution in November 1989 I brought some placards from Slušovice and we posted them in Piešťany together with Juraj (the violinist and mathematician). We also took part in a great demonstration in Bratislava. Eugen visited Prague with his whole family and presented president Havel with a big bunch of flowers. However, Slovak nationalists began to show their teeth little a little and everything had changed. There were some pamphlets appearing everywhere proclaiming e.g. that Czech people didn't properly take care of the Slovak part of the pipeline, or that Slovakia had nourished Czech people<sup>10</sup>:

*Dance and rejoice  
Slovak youth!  
You won't any more feed  
The lazy Czech swine!*

At once I became a foreigner there. Tesla Piešťany (where I had many friends) went through several transformations during a short period and many people were dismissed. Eugen was the deputy director for business. He was sacked as well. But he wasn't caught off guard: he got a Mozart-like costume (including a wig) and went to the American Embassy in Prague for visa. He had to play the violin for Madam Ambassador to prove his desires. In a short time I got a photo from him, taken at a petrol station: he was standing in his costume with the violin at an inscription: "*Czech violinist from Prague...*" with a drawing of a bottle of wine. Later on he sent me a visit card from an Italian restaurant with a notice "*Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is visiting our restaurant on Monday....*" Eugen stayed at a homeless shelter (he said it was like a hotel) and he played every morning for the other guests. So he had the accommodation free. He also sent me a poem by a homeless woman Kathy dedicated to Eugen for his music:

*If I asked you to walk with me  
Would you go all the way to the sea  
If I begged you to hold me tight  
Would you hold me all the night?  
If I need you to be here,  
Would you stay near?  
Would you do this for me?*

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<sup>10</sup> In reality it was quite absurd; for the whole post-war period of Czechoslovakia the national income was re-distributed for the benefit of Slovakia ("money-pipeline")

Eugen also performed for old and deaf people, who perceived the music by touching the instrument. Once Eugen was playing at a private party when he had a light stroke; the violin fell from his hands. He had to return home to Slovakia into his wife's care.

I visited Eugen after he came home. He didn't play the violin any more. I repaired a bicycle for him and he acquainted me with two interesting people. One of them was a retired German physicist who played the viola in a unique way: he improvised the music by heart and it sounded like Caprices by Paganini. This highly-educated man however suffered from persecution mania: he was persuaded that the German secret police were shadowing him... The second man of interest was an inventor of a "*perpetuum mobile*" that he had in a shed in his yard. It was a large wooden wheel, 2m in diameter, with several mechanisms attached. The rotating wheel lifted sand from a heap to the top of the shed; the sand was then falling on the blades and returned to the ground. The wheel was driven by a motor which was fed from the power distribution network. In addition, the wheel drove a generator which loaded an accumulator battery. The inventor believed that the whole machine produced energy and it could solve the energy problem in the desert. There had allegedly been many journalists interviewing him. I tried to suggest that he measure the consumed power (or energy), he somehow didn't want to understand.

Eugen tried to study the theory of relativity and he wrote "*Letters to Albert*" where he criticized this Einstein's theory. However then he had another stroke and he was laid up limp in bed. A year later our German friend called me to come, saying that Eugen is going to die. When I visited him, he was nothing but skin and bones and he hardly recognized me. His wife nourished him as a child. I wanted to play one of the Hungarian songs that he taught me, but his wife didn't wish that. She said she was grateful for every moment he slept. I understood her words fully a few years later when I cared for my father.<sup>11</sup>

## **A Worldwide Net of Chamber Music**

The Czech Early Music Society was established by Prof. Miroslav Venhoda in the early 80s. I became its member while I was still working in Piešťany. Early music became very popular thanks to flutist Milan Munclinger and his ensemble, who gave a series of concerts "*J.S.Bach and his time*" in Prague for many years. Munclinger opened every concert with a witty speech; they played in "authentic way" on mostly modern instruments. In contrast Venhoda's ensemble played on original, mostly forgotten instruments. The Society organized the Summer Schools of Early Music; originally it took place in Kroměříž, then it was moved to Valtice (Southern Moravia) where it is still organized every year.

I first attended the 2<sup>nd</sup> Summer School at Kroměříž that was held shortly after Prof. Venhoda's death and later on I attended this undertaking regularly. The School originally had not only musical, but also spiritual content. The participants constituted a fraternal society and every day started by singing the Gregorian Chant. The instructors didn't bear themselves as demi-gods but they spoke to the participants on an equal footing. The accommodation was quite modest – we slept in a gym on mats. In the evening we went out to the square where we played and sang together. There were also some foreign ensembles taking part. It was impressive when we were singing spiritual music at posters with communist ideology. This spiritual dimension has somehow petered out during the time; the performance is now preferred. The students are practicing to be the best and there is no time left to meet friends and enjoy music.

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<sup>11</sup> My father died in June 2008; he was 96 years old.

Summer School brought me to choir singing and Gregorian Chant. I could start here on a blank page without any reminiscence. But it also brought me, indirectly to the viola d'amore, which was the instrument I only knew from my father's narration. And finally to *Amateur Chamber Music Players*, an international society (its head-office is in New York).

The word "amateur" doesn't mean a "dilettante" here – it may even be a top professional. It means the one who plays music to enjoy oneself and share that with others. ACMP members rate their level themselves according to specified criteria. Every other year ACMP publishes the Directory – separately for USA and other countries. There are some dues to be paid, but it was forgiven for members in poor (e.g. East-European) countries.

I was an ACMP member in the period 1990-2005. For a few years I represented the Czech Republic in the International Advisory Council. There were many interesting rendezvous during that time. Shortly after I filled-in and posted the application form, an English pianist appeared; we played some pieces for violin and piano, including the Spring Sonata by Beethoven. It was at my parents' flat, shortly after the Velvet Revolution. Later on I used to regularly play string quartet with another ACMP member, Mr.Fähnrich, in whose house chamber music had been played since his grandmother's time, who studied piano with Antonín Dvořák. Among our foreign visitors I well remember an American cellist who stopped here on her journey around the world. She presented us with a CD, on which her son and daughter play the piano quintet by Dvořák with Czech pianist Rudolf Firkušný. We also played with Mrs.Sonia Letourneau, an Australian violinist and conductor, who stayed at my parents house.

## **Cycle Tour in Holland and Germany**

My first job after the Velvet Revolution was guiding foreign visitors at Memorial Terezín (Theresienstadt), a former Nazi concentration camp. As soon as I saved enough money, I set off for a bicycle tour across Holland and Germany combined with playing chamber music. A travel agency took me and my bicycle to Amsterdam. I was roaming around, but the musicians were not at home. So I rode to the coast and stayed overnight in a camp. As the weather was extremely warm, I only took a sheet sleeping bag to save on the load. However the night was rather cold and I was shivering all the night; it was the same every night, except for two when I was invited to stay. I went down the cycle way along the coast. It passed across sand dunes and I could only watch the sea sometimes. On the left, there was a fenced protected area. I remember several friendly meetings at the resting places. Only once I could afford to swim in the sea – I had to hurry to be in time. The water was rather cold. In The Hague I slept in a camp and in the morning I set off to look for Mr.Rjikmans, my host. He lived in a little alley that wasn't on the map; the search took me two hours. Mr.Rjikmans brought together a string quintet with two violas. I had always played 2<sup>nd</sup> viola in such ensemble and now I was to play 1<sup>st</sup> viola.<sup>12</sup> My host had prepared a peculiarity for the beginning: a quintet by Joseph Haydn where the 1<sup>st</sup> viola was almost unplayable; after a few vain attempts we had to change parts and Mr.Rjikmans took 1<sup>st</sup> viola for this piece. Then we went through the common repertoire (Mozart, Beethoven) and also attempted to play Dvořák that was unknown for them; we managed it all except for one repeat. Finally we had a chat at the table. It was getting dark when I set back for the camp. I arrived there after the closing hour and the receptionist wasn't there; luckily some campers remembered me.

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<sup>12</sup> Of course, I had to play on a borrowed instrument; I couldn't carry a viola on the bicycle

I went on along the coast up to The Hook of Holland and turned inland. After a while I had another musical rendezvous: I played the duo “Für zwei obligaten Augengläser” by Beethoven with a professional cellist. After crossing the Dutch-German border I got on the train and continued along the Rhine. In Mönchenglabbach I stayed with a pharmacist; I played there some Beethoven string trios with two ladies – music teachers. The rest of my tour along the Main and the Donaukanal was nice but my overloaded bicycle broke down; I had to get on the train. At the border I however had to get off again and ride on my wrecked bicycle through the shabby border region in the night weaving in and out among trunks...

I also had a rendezvous on my business trip to Hungary in 1994. I visited a musical family there, who lived in a large block of flats in Budapest. The father was a professional musician and translator. A cellist came there to complete the quartet. They had two nice girls. I even found two violas d’amore there – there is a viola d’amore solo in some Hungarian opera.

## Blonay

In October 2000 I took part on a session of the International Advisory Council at Blonay in the French part of Switzerland. I traveled by train and arrived late in the night. For the rack railway train I had to wait nearly one hour and I was the only passenger. In Blonay I had to ask for Hindemith Centre, where it took place. The meeting was naturally in English but at the table we had to speak French – so I didn’t speak much. At the session, each member had to speak about the conditions for playing chamber music in his country. I said that there were relatively good conditions for amateurs under the communist rule even though culture was sometimes misused for politics. After “The Velvet Revolution” some people became rich by by-passing the law. One cannot expect that these people would donate to culture. On the other hand teachers, who are the bearers of culture, fell to the bottom of society.

My speech produced some embarrassment; one man asked me about something with disbelief. In contrast, the Rumanian member spoke about “the paradise of culture” in his country since ancient Rome<sup>13</sup>. I also met a representative of Slovenia. We played some music (I played 2<sup>nd</sup> viola in a quintet by Brahms) and there was an excursion in the Alps. The countryside was too civilized to my taste, there was no wild nature seen in the mountains. Nevertheless most of all I enjoyed the 12-hour traveling from Prague to Blonay; there were nice and intelligent people on the train and we chatted all the way. The rowdies apparently travel by car.

In August 2003 I spent a week in Wales. It was in a region where Welsh language is generally spoken and also all inscriptions are in Welsh. My host was a retired pharmacologist, who had worked in USA. He was an excellent pianist and cellist. I took the viola d’amore with me; as I went by air, it was necessary to carry it without a case, only wrapped in a cloth, the bow separately<sup>14</sup>. However I mostly had to play the violin and an extremely long “upright” viola, which is designed for playing as a cello. I also took part in a rehearsal of a local amateur orchestra. There was a German couple and some local people playing with us. Finally we performed the Trout Quintet by Schubert.

## The Manhattan String Quartet

In November 2002, shortly after the terrorist attack in New York, there was a chamber music master course taking place in Prague, “Dvořák in Prague”. The coaches were the members of the Manhattan String Quartet. There were exclusively American students and the course

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<sup>13</sup> I traveled across Rumania in 1970; the people in the mountain area were extremely poor.

<sup>14</sup> On my way back the airport guards inspected the bow for a long time to see if it wasn’t an arm

included playing together with Czech musicians. The partner on Czech side was *Heroldův klub*, a Prague club of amateur chamber music players. As I was out of practice that time, I hesitated at first. The playing took place in the hotel where the participants stayed – probably for safety reasons. I was sent to a group coached by the 2<sup>nd</sup> violinist; apart from him there were two young ladies, playing the violin and the cello. We first played a few quartets that I had brought – Komzák, Borodin, Mysliveček. They were much better than me. Then another cellist came and the well-known C major Quintet by Schubert appeared on the stands. I knew it very well from listening but I had never played it. I was going to give up and leave. They persuaded me to stay, which gave me some encouragement; I warmed up gradually and we mastered it all. On the same day we were also invited to a concert of the coaches.

I finished my membership in ACMP in 2005; I had run out of vigor. My membership in the International Advisory Board had been finished earlier; probably due to my speech in Blonay that might have been misunderstood.

### **You'll never Step in the same River**

I had a friend living in Prague who collected musical instruments and played in several amateur ensembles. I bought several nice instruments from him; one moment I had several violins and violas, 3 celli and a double bass<sup>15</sup>. Unfortunately, I had to sell most of them because I couldn't keep them safely; my apartment was in a block of flats and it was very dry. When moved to Prague in 1984, Mr. Boreš sent me to some amateur orchestras. However I was accustomed to playing chamber music, so I preferred to sing in a choir.

In 1988 I moved to Moravia to enter the famous *Cooperative Farm Slušovice*. The economy of this progressive farm was based on market principles; this enhanced the importance of the local parish priest, who was a Salesian. He organized several activities directed mostly to youth: a singing choir, dancing lessons, 1<sup>st</sup> Holy Communion, taking a video about St. Agnes (who was being canonized at that time) etc. I sang there in the choir and occasionally played the viola with the organist. The hectic events in 1989 put these cultural activities aside.

### **Hiking and Singing**

My school days were rather marked by peculiar weekend farming of my parents at a lonely house at Davle, south of Prague.<sup>16</sup> We used to go there in an overcrowded train. There were many young hikers on the train who were playing camp-fire songs and I envied them their freedom. Many of the songs were about horses; my father didn't like songs about horses, I didn't know why.

There was a specific traditional brass music in this raftman's region<sup>17</sup>. A well known composer of popular song Antonín Borovička lived at Davle and his brass band accompanied funeral processions to the cemetery at St Kilian church. Today lots of cars are rushing there.

Secondary-school students were regularly sent as hops-picking teams to farms. We had obligatory skiing courses in the mountains at the college and privately we organized canoeing expeditions on holidays. All these were opportunities for singing camp-fire and other popular songs.

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<sup>15</sup> I had some extra money for my invention

<sup>16</sup> A lot of work with little effect; I was sick every Monday

<sup>17</sup> E.g. the song „Roll out the barrels“ by Vejvoda comes from this region

In 1963 the borders were opened and tourists from the West were arriving<sup>18</sup>. On the other hand we could take part in international work-camps both in our country and abroad. We sang traditional songs of various nations there; later on the songs of Beatles became popular. At the same time university students established a hiking movement – *the Student Path*. The participants of a Path were hiking in groups across an attractive region “from pub to pub” singing and making pranks. I took part on two Paths during my studies. After the year 1970 the Path movement had to be renamed to the Academic Hiking Club (TAK). I returned to these activities in 1984, when I turned back to Prague. It was an oasis of freedom in those times. The Path movement still exists – but one-time students have become pensioners. In the sixties the participants sang traditional and patriotic songs; now every group has a songbook of their own.

I used to take the viola or the guitar to the Path with a mixed success. After 1989 the onset of capitalism turned everything upside down: one became a rich renter, the other a poor teacher. The ethos has changed. Nevertheless the tradition has survived.

During my studies I bought a guitar and learned the basic chords. My first song was “Greenfields” both in English and Czech versions and I sing it even now. Playing the guitar showed out to be very helpful when I began to teach.

## The Viola d’Amore

My father was a lawyer and he worked at the Ministry of Finances. He often told us about a colleague of his who played the viola d’amore for his colleagues’ amusement; he performed at various parties and meetings<sup>19</sup>. I had never heard the viola d’amore in practice.

When I entered the Early Music Society, I heard people play various historical instruments: lute, hurdy-gurdy, viola da gamba... When I read an article on the viola d’amore by František Slavík<sup>20</sup> in the Society Newsletter, I went to Brno to visit him. I was mainly attracted by the possibility of chordal playing on the instrument<sup>21</sup>. The principal problem was to get the instrument – I had no spare money that time. Finally Mr.Slavík sold me his second instrument.

I often visited Mr.Slavík and was in regular contact with him until 1997<sup>22</sup>. But he never taught me – he referred me to Mr. Jiří Šimáček, a concertmaster of National Theatre, who performed on the viola d’amore in Prague. My contacts with Mr.Šimáček were sporadic, but it had an interesting effect: it stimulated me to translate. I translated his article about the viola d’amore in English for ACMP members and it had brought some interest<sup>23</sup>. Mr.Slavík asked me to translate his *Compendium of the Viola d’Amore* (written in German) in English. It was a challenging work and it took me about 2 years (in addition to my teaching at the Training Centre). The work included 60 pages of text, tables and musical examples; there were also original compositions by the author: the *Daily Study Tables* and three *Concert Preludes*. The

<sup>18</sup> People could see that the propaganda about the poverty in capitalist countries told lies

<sup>19</sup> He was dr. Čeněk Burkoň, a man with a moving life: once a personal secretary of minister, he had to work as a switchman. At last he came to the Ministry of Finances as a philatelic expert.

<sup>20</sup> F.Slavík (1911-1999) was an expert in the field of thermics of silicates. He studied the violin and viola d’amore at Prague Conservatory, pupil of Rudolf Reissig. Composed music for viola d’amore and wrote many articles in the field of musicology.

<sup>21</sup> Viola d’amore has 7 playing strings (usually A-d-a-d1-f#1-a1-d2) and 7 sympathetic (resounding) strings. The body has the form of old viols. For viola d’amore composed eg. K.Stamic, A.Vivaldi, P.Hindemith, L.Janáček

<sup>22</sup> There was a big flood in Moravia that year; Mr. John Calabrese just performed at Hukvaldy (Janáček Festival) and at Slavkov (Austerlitz) and I heard his concert there; Mr. and Mrs. Calabrese also succeeded to meet Mr. Slavík in Brno. At Hukvaldy he performed “*Intimate Letters*” by Janáček with Kubínovo kvarteto.

<sup>23</sup>Some of the author’s statements were however criticized by Mrs.Ronez-Kubitschek

Italian virtuoso John Calabrese called it the “bible” of viola d’amore. I presented the work at the Viola d’Amore Society Congress at Michaelstein in 1996.

At this Congress I first met Prof. Jaroslav Horák<sup>24</sup>, a soloist and chamber music player on the viola d’amore. Shortly before that he became a widower. I started to visit him regularly. Professor told me some stories – how he entered the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, about their legendary conductor Václav Talich and about their tour to Switzerland where they met Rafael Kubelík.<sup>25</sup> R. Kubelík gave each orchestra member a medal, however the expedition leaders ordered to hand them over; Mr. Horák was the only one who retained it.

Mr. Horák was a staunch royalist and he often said “*Democracy is bad*” (and he might be right). He established with some other orchestra members an early music ensemble *Pro Arte Antiqua*. His cooperation in a duo with the double-bass player František Pošta was a unique one<sup>26</sup>. At the end of his life, Prof. Horák turned back to his early compositions and composed some pieces for viola d’amore and other instruments.

Several times I presented myself as a viola d’amore player at the “Czechoslovak New Year’s Eve” at Strání on the Moravian-Slovak border. I played in a jam-session with a traditional local band there.<sup>27</sup> I have also played a traditional garden party of the Academic Hiking Club (TAK) in Prague at the beginning of summer, on June 21.

When I was teaching at Litoměřice (North Bohemia), I got to know about Miroslav Velišek, who performed at many churches and castles in this region with his trio. They mostly played arrangements of classical pieces for voice, viola d’amore and organ. Mr. Velišek composed several pieces for viola d’amore solo, recorder ensembles etc. We often met in Prague and played some new arranged (or composed) pieces. In 2005 Mr. Velišek was assaulted in front of his home in Teplice; he was knocked insensible and was seriously injured. After leaving the hospital he gave his last concert.

## Guiding, teaching and singing

In spring 1990, when the revolution was over, I started to look out for a job at my existing places of work – Piešťany and Slušovice. I saw no prospects there. I decided to turn back to Prague; I still had a small room at my disposal in my parents’ flat. I enjoyed the atmosphere of liberty and looked around what to do. For a while I stayed at our lonely house at Davle and worked in the forest. Then I replied to an advertisement of the National Memorial Terezín<sup>28</sup> who were looking for foreign guides. I guided in English at first, then also in German. It was an interesting job, though a little sad. I would meet people from various countries, including the survivors who told about their experience. Once I was embarrassed when a Dutch group collected money to tip me; gradually I got as much in tips as my official income. It permitted me to buy a new bicycle and I set off for a tour (see above). However I sometimes got tired after completing several “rounds” in the former Nazi Ghetto; one round took more than one hour. I always tried to match my explanation to the visitors – there were students, families, old people... I often felt myself as a worn gramophone record. My colleagues (mostly women) did it another way – they recited their explanations like actors in the theatre, which was much more economical. “*If two people do the same, it isn’t the same*” says the proverb.

<sup>24</sup> Jaroslav Horák (1914-2005), violinist in Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and professor at Prague Conservatory

<sup>25</sup> Rafael Kubelík, son of violinist Jan Kubelík was the conductor of Czech Philharmonic Orchestra after 1945 and he emigrated in 1948

<sup>26</sup> According to one critic “*Pošta’s bow was like Tizzian’s brush*”.

<sup>27</sup> It was this folkloristic region that inspired Janáček for composing his opera *Jenufa*

<sup>28</sup> Terezín (Theresienstadt) used to be a fortress; there was a prison and Jewish ghetto during WWII.

A colleague of mine conveyed an offer to me to teach English at the *Litoměřice Grammar School*<sup>29</sup> and I took it as a challenge. I also had to teach German, which I didn't master too well. The school-year was beginning and I had to teach 7 courses and each course was using a different textbook. I was flooded with information – names of students and colleagues, the subject matter, etc. It looked hopeless. What finally helped me – was singing and the guitar. I reduced the subject matter and if I wasn't able to prepare for the lesson, I taught English and German songs. It was accepted by both the students and the headmaster except for one course – the privileged “language” class. These students were rather bold; fortunately they were taken over by an American teacher later on. As a supplementary matter I was using the modern translation of the Bible and some literary works, including Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde. I also worked out my own summary of English grammar. In the German courses I concentrated on the three most difficult parts of grammar: the *Rahmenkonstruktion* of sentence, declination of adjectives and past tense (Preterit, Perfect). I also taught priesthood novices at the Theological Convict and I sang in the Teachers' Choir.

The teacher's pay was very low – I was an unqualified teacher; the headmaster provided me a room free so I stayed in the school.

I was very exhausted at the end of the school-year. I turned back to guiding at Terezín. In the meantime the conditions had however changed: there were less visitors and it was difficult to stay overnight – the dormitory where I had stayed was closed and the camp was full of gypsy prostitutes (from E15 Highway), who were making noises all the night.

After some hesitation I entered the Educational Training Centre<sup>30</sup> at Vysočany District in Prague. In addition to languages I also taught my profession – electricity and physics. It was much easier for me – I didn't need prepare so much. There was an experienced deputy headmaster, Mrs. Hromířová who took care of the harmony among teachers – it positively influenced the behavior of pupils. There were still good pupils in the school at that time; in the years to come power electricity ceased attracting young people and the quality of the pupils decreased.

Once I took my viola with me to the school and I started to prelude in my room when I was waiting between my lessons. When I finished the Preludium by J.S.Bach, I heard applause behind the wall. My colleague – a math teacher – then told me that it was nice, but she couldn't teach while I was playing.

When Mrs. Hromířová retired, the conditions in the school became worse. There was an active trade-union organization of teachers in the school and they often criticized the headmaster. Finally a matching of force took place, the headmaster won and the “rebels” had to leave the school. I was rather disappointed and tried out my luck at other schools – The University of Agriculture, a nursing college, a technical college. In 2002 I turned back to Vysočany. I was accepted for teaching part-time there with a promise that I could continue to teach in the next school year. I mostly taught English. There was a friendly atmosphere among the teachers of languages. We often sang in our room with the guitar and sometimes we turned back to Russian songs that we used to sing in our school days. Once I stood in for somebody and I sang a Russian song to the students – these pupils hadn't already learnt any Russian. It had a great success and one boy asked me to sing the Russian (Soviet) national anthem. Why not – I sang one strophe with the pathos of those times; I was then asked to sing the *Internationale* as well. I sang it and I explained the students that this (originally French) song was the first national anthem of the Soviet Union...

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<sup>29</sup> town Litoměřice (Leitmeritz) lies about 5 km away from Terezín

<sup>30</sup> Originally Apprentice Training School

A few weeks later I read in the newspaper that our school is looking for a teacher. I began to guess something. When I was saying goodbye to the deputy headmaster at the end of the school year, he told me: “Colleague, you have a **nonstandard** teaching method!” Well – one has to respect the standards. Long live democracy and liberty!

After holidays I continued to teach at the same Technical College, where I studied 40 years earlier. But that is another history...