

Vojtěch Spurný

One of the most versatile Czech musicians of his generation, Vojtěch Spurný studied at the Paris Conservatoire in František Malotín's flute class and in Ilja Hurník's piano class. In 1986 he enrolled at the AMU Academy of Performing Arts in Prague where he studied opera direction under Ladislav Štros, conducting under Radomil Eliška, Jiří Chvála, Eduard Fišer and František Vajnar, and harpsichord under Zuzana Růžičková. He also attended lectures in acting and the spoken word under Vítězslava Waldová-Fryntová at the People's Conservatory. After a brief study stay, he began studies in 1994 at the Utrecht Hoogeschool de Kunsten where, under Siebe Henstra, he studied harpsichord and historical interpretation of early music, graduating with the *Uitvoerend Musicus* diploma. He went on to broaden his studies further with master classes with Johann Sonnleitner, Helmut Rilling and Kenneth Gilbert.

Vojtěch Spurný took up his first engagement - with the Prague Chamber Opera - in 1985 while he was still studying, and subsequently with the Prague National Theatre in 1991 as assistant conductor and producer, working with David Radok in productions of *Don Giovanni* and *The Magic Flute*, and with the conductor Bohumil Gregor in Janáček's *Katya Kabanova* and *The Makropulos Affair*. His professional opera-conducting debut came when he stood in at short notice for a performance of Smetana's *Bartered Bride* with the National Theatre on tour in Bratislava.

While still completing his studies, Mr. Spurný also began working with Czech symphony and chamber orchestras, including the North Bohemian State Symphony Orchestra in Teplice, the East Bohemian State Symphony Orchestra in Hradec Králové, the South Bohemian Chamber Philharmonic in České Budějovice, the Prague symphonic players' chamber orchestra, the Prague Chamber Orchestra, the Prague Chamber Philharmonic, and others where, in addition to conducting, he also performed as a piano soloist. He has close ties with the Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic in Zlín, with whom he has conducted a whole range of concerts since 2006 in a repertoire from the 17th to the 20th centuries. These have included the Czech premiere of Thomas Selle's early figural Passions, Dvořák's Cello Concerto performed by Mischa Maisky, Ryba's Czech Christmas Mass presented in its original version, and a concert in his own right on a jazz and ragtime theme. Our subscription concerts have also featured works that he himself has composed, including one dedicated to the orchestra members - his *Sinfonia Concertante* for violin, oboe, cello, bassoon, piano and orchestra.

From 1999-2009 Mr. Spurný worked as a conductor, pianist, harpsichordist and stage director with the Czech Chamber Philharmonia, with whom he produced a number of very successful CDs of Czech music of the Classical period, and gave a series of concerts in this country, Austria, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Greece. The recordings, which were very well received by both the public and professional critics, premiered several works by largely unknown composers and resulted in the orchestra being invited to take part in the 2009 Prague Spring international music festival. In that same year Vojtěch Spurný became co-founder and artistic director of the Ensemble 18+ chamber orchestra with whom he has focused on presenting mainly 18th century music, with particular reference to Czech composers such as Břich, Linek, Dušek, Vaňhal, Rejcha, Vranický, Gassmann and others. The orchestra's first CD called "Symphony Reloaded" featured the first recordings of symphonies by F. X. Richter, F. A. Rosetti, J. Mysliveček, J. Bárta and A. Kammel, and the ensemble went on to make a name for itself with the public and professional critics by presenting a series of subscription concerts featuring many new elements in

stage direction and interpretation. Many renowned Czech soloists have performed with the orchestra including the violinist Gabriela Deméterová, the clarinettist Ludmila Peterková, the soprano Kateřina Kněžíková, and the flautist Jan Ostrý. In his work with Ensemble18+ Spurný uses the insights and principles of historically informed performance which he applies to modern instruments, resulting in the orchestra's unique sound and the defining elements of its performance such as phrasing, articulation, ornamentation, its distinctive feel for the work, and leading the orchestra from the harpsichord.

Concurrently with his conducting, Mr. Spurný began to make successful inroads into opera direction while still completing his university studies, and in 1988 and 1990 he staged one-act operas by B. Martinů at the DISK theatre, in 1990 Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, and in 1991 the world premiere of Benda's *Barber of Seville*, in which for the first time he combined the role of director and conductor. In 1992 he stage-directed Gagliano's *La Dafne* for the Valtice Castle Summer Baroque Festival, and Lortzing's *Die Opernprobe - The Opera Rehearsal* - for the Young Smetana Festival in Litomyšl, the opera being recorded by Czech Television. In 2000, Mr. Spurný directed the Czech premiere of Jacopo Peri's *Euridice*, the first musical drama to survive to the present-day, at the historic Castle Theatre in Litomyšl where, in the role of both director and conductor, his collaboration with the choreographer Petr Tyc resulted in a fusion of modern choreography with historically informed performance.

Vojtěch Spurný's international career began as an opera conductor. In the 1996-1997 season he took up an invitation from the Gothenburg Opera to stage Rossini's *Il viaggio a Reims*, which was hailed by the critics as one of the best premieres of the last 20 years. In 1998 he was in charge of the musical preparations and production of Gluck's *Alceste* for Arnold Östman at the Drottningholm Palace Theatre, and in the 2000-2001 season he was again invited by the Gothenburg Opera to stage Rossini's *Barber of Seville*, in a production very well received by the public and the critics. In 2002 he made his debut at the Oslo Opera in Norway with the Scandinavian premiere of the composer Trygve Madsen's new opera *Circus Terra*.

From 1999-2004 Vojtěch Spurný was permanent conductor at the Prague State Opera, and in the 2002-2003 season its artistic director. During his time there he staged or produced new versions of eight operas, some of them in their Czech or world premieres (Rossini - *The Turk in Italy*, Mozart - *Così fan tutte*, Zemlinsky - *Es war einmal*, Martinů - *The Soldier and the Dancer*, Mozart - *Don Giovanni*, Gazzaniga - *Don Giovanni*, Madsen - *Circus Terra*, Joplin - *Treemonisha*). The staging of Joplin's opera, in particular, was an important event in the 2002-03 Prague opera season and was highly acclaimed both by the Czech and foreign critics.

A defining specialism of Vojtěch Spurný's work is early music, especially the historically informed performance of music of the Baroque and Classical periods. He is the founder and artistic director of the *Musica Salutaris* baroque instrument ensemble, which he has taken to many early music festivals, and he has staged the Czech premieres of many previously unknown compositions. Particular acclaim was won by their performance of Scarlatti's oratorio *Agar et Ismaele Esiliati* at 'The Old Testament in Art' festival in Prague in 1995, and three years later by the Czech premiere of Scarlatti's oratorio *La Giuditta*, and also oratorios by Luigi Rossi and Giacomo Carissimi at the Festival of Springtime Music in Prague in 1999. In 1998 Mr Spurný staged Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* with the *Musica Salutaris* group in collaboration with the

director A. Pitínský at the Municipal Theatre in Plzeň in a production voted by the critics as "1998 Production of the Year". The performance was reprised 26 times, including performances on foreign tour. A similarly sparkling event was his Czech premiere in the year 2000 of J. Peri's Euridice at the Castle Theatre in Litomyšl.

Vojtěch Spurný is also intensively involved in concert performance, not only as a player of period keyboard instruments (as a harpsichordist he has been successful at international competitions in Prague and Bruges), but also on the quarter-tone piano. He is also a sought-after chamber musician. He has recorded an extensive selection of Telemann's "Harmonischer Gottesdienst" cantata cycle for Czech Radio, a complete performance of Dušek's sonatas for harpsichord and also for the hammer piano, harpsichord and clavichord, and the complete sonatas and sonatinas of J. A. Benda. As a harpsichordist, organist and stage director he has co-produced the "Natus est Jesus" CD of Christmas music of the 17th and 18th centuries, and as a hammer pianist he performed on the "300 Years of the Piano" CD, which documents unique period instruments from the collections of the Czech Museum of Music. As a quarter-tone pianist he has taken part in a complete performance of the violin works of A. Hába. His recording "Masters of Czech Baroque and Classicism" (with works by Brixli, Linek, Koželuh and Rejcha) for BMG Czech Republic, in which he conducts the Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra from the harpsichord, was nominated for the Harmonie magazine's recording of the year prize for 2003 in the category of classical music of Czech provenance.

At Czech Radio he was the expert editor in the critical edition of Tomášek's second piano concerto Opus 20, and recently he was also the editor of a recording of Jakub Jan Ryba's Czech Christmas Mass.

Vojtěch Spurný also teaches - he is an expert associate in the harpsichord department of the Prague AMU Academy of Performing Arts (basso continuo, baroque music interpretation, harpsichord literature, chamber playing), and in 1991-2009 he also gave masterclasses at the Ticino Musica festivals in Switzerland (harpsichord, piano collaboration, opera course, opera study guidance).

Vojtěch Spurný has worked for many years with the leading Czech mezzo-soprano Dagmar Pecková, with whom he has performed on several occasions as pianist or conductor at the podium or at festivals both in this country and abroad (FOK, Prague Spring, Autumn Strings, Smetana Festival in Litomyšl, Stadttheater Bern, Stadttheater Kassel, Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde Wien, Ludwigsburger Schlossfestspiele, Carinthischer Sommer, etc.). They have also worked together in singing masterclasses at the Schleswig-Holstein Musikfestival.

Another area of Vojtěch Spurný's work is in helping to make music more accessible to the public through his appearances on radio and TV in the form of scripted sequences, articles, features and live appearances.