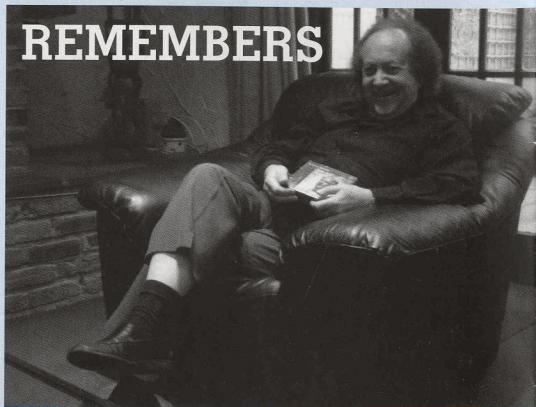


BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ'S "STUDENT" JOŠE SEREBRIER

Joše Serebrier was born in Montevideo, Uruguay, on December 3, 1938 to Russian and Polish parents. At the age of nine he began studying the violin, and he made his conducting debut when he was eleven. Today, Serebrier conducts most major orchestras around the world and has become one of the most recorded conductors of his generation, with well over a hundred releases to his name. His published compositions, many of them written at an early age, also number over one hundred. Early in his career, Serebrier was the recipient of many of music's most coveted honours. In 1956 and 1957 he received a United States State Department Fellowship to study composition at the Curtis Institute of Music with Vittorio Giannini and with Aaron Copland at Tanglewood. In 1956 he was awarded a Koussevitzky Foundation Award at Tangle-

I WAS 15 YEARS OLD, studying music in Montevideo, when the American composer Virgil Thomson spent less than 24 hours in Montevideo. He had been, besides a composer, the very influential music critic of the New York Herald Tribune. When he retired, the US State Department sent him on a conducting tour of Latin America to perform his own music. Uruguay, however, did not treat him well. It was the only country that did not invite him to perform his music. Instead, the American Embassy arranged for him to give a lecture. It was a very rainy day, and the only people that came to his lecture were myself and my parents. He was so upset not to have an audience that in the middle of his talk he simply said: „This is impossible, good-bye!”, and walked out. The Ambassador duly apologised to us, the only people in the auditorium. I had brought with me a few of my compositions to show to Mr Thomson. I went backstage with my parents, introduced



Joše Serebrier in 2005, holding CD set of Martinů's music

Virgil Thomson had made a special trip to Philadelphia to show my music to Eugene Ormandy, who in turn had recommended my studying at the Curtis Institute of Music (very difficult to get into; they have only 100 students, all on scholarships). Mr Thomson then took my scores to Mr Martinů, who was the head of the composition department at the Curtis Institute. It was his decision as to whether I would be accepted at the school. Just to make sure, Mr Thomson also sent my music to Howard Hanson, the famous American composer, head of the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY. Mr Thomson also sent my music to his close friend Aaron Copland and wrote a letter to the US State Department insisting that they give me a scholarship to come and study in the US (he must have realised I did not have the funds to pay for my trip, studies, etc.). It all worked out somehow! Incredibly, I was offered a full scholarship by both Eastman and Curtis, so I had a very difficult decision to make. Yet since I admired Martinů's music so much, in the end the decision was an easy one. Also, all my family who had emigrated from Russia were living in Philadelphia, so it was like coming home. I was received by some 50 relatives I had never met before. (My father had also gone to Philadelphia, from Kiev, and his company had sent him to Uruguay to start a company.)

The most extraordinary experience was to receive personal notes from Mr Thomson, Mr Copland (who invited me to study with him in the summers at Tanglewood) and Mr Martinů regarding my studies with them at the Curtis Institute.

They were all short notes, but extremely warm. In Martinů's case, he also commented that he was told that my main interest was actually conducting, but he said „composing, when the talent is there, is more important”.

Arriving at Curtis, I immediately inquired if I could also study conducting. Curtis used to have a famous conducting teacher, Fritz Reiner (Leonard Bernstein studied there with him long before I went to Curtis). But the head of the school, the once-famous violinist Efrem Zimbalist (who was also my violin teacher), explained to me that „one cannot learn conducting... the greatest conductors never studied how to conduct... Toscanini, Sokolowski, Monteux, Beecham, they never took conducting lessons”. I complained to the US State Department, and they saw to it that I took weekly conducting lessons with the Associate Conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra, and they arranged with Eugene Ormandy for me to attend all the rehearsals. I also told Mr Zimbalist that given the situation I wanted to graduate as soon as possible, especially since Mr Martinů, who was the main reason I had come, left shortly after my arrival. Mr Zimbalist told me that Leonard Bernstein had asked them the same question when the conducting class was stopped, and he had managed to graduate within 2 years instead of the customary 4. I wanted to do the same so that I could go somewhere else to learn conducting. Mr Zimbalist said the only thing required for graduation, in composition, was to complete a Sonata, a string quartet and a symphony. Being so young – I was 17

REMEMBERS



Joše Serebrier in 1952

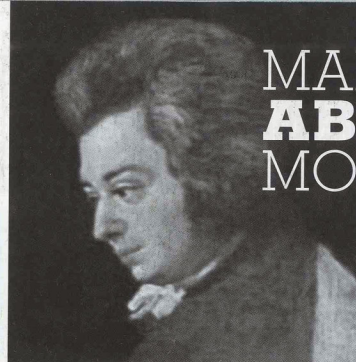
wood and in the same year a BMI Young Composers Award for his First Symphony and Quartet for saxophones. The State Department fellowship was followed by two consecutive Guggenheim Fellowships, in 1957 and 1958. At the tender age of nineteen, he was the youngest ever to obtain these awards in any field. From the time when the young and gifted Serebrier stood at the threshold of his career comes the following memoir Maestro Serebrier provided us this year.

myself, and gave him my scores. A rather brusque person, he replied: „I have no time, and my suitcase is too full already, but I will try to look at them tonight and give them to the Embassy to hand back to you”.

The next morning there was a telephone call from the airport. Mr Thomson asked if he could take my music back with him to America. Naturally, I said yes.

A few weeks later, I had a call from the US Ambassador in Uruguay. He said that

MARTINŮ ABOUT MOZART...



“...FROM AMONG MY FAVOURITE composers, Mozart has been and will always be first and foremost. With him I actually waged the greatest battles in the endeavour to approach his perfection and balancing, natural and organic and content bearing. And also a certain restraint, not to explode, control, in short: order. Nor do I in fact control my compositions myself, but am driven according to circumstance, the theme, form, etc.; I myself only perhaps bring in a certain flair and discipline...”

(Balance of Martinů's work up to 1935)

“...DVOŘÁK WAS LIKE MOZART; he never learned, he knew...”

(From a letter addressed to the Union of Czechoslovak Composers, published in Hudební rozhledy VII – 1954, issue 7, p. 267)

“...IF INFLUENCE CAN BE TALKED about, that is, at the present time, then it is Debussy, just like it formerly was Mozart (Mozart's influence continued to affect him for a long time and maybe even up to now)...”

“...The main thing for him is the set itself, not the orchestra. Thus he approximates rather Mozart's theatre and his stage works can be called chamber more than anything else...”

(From Martinů's article in New York, Spring 1941)

“...IT CAN BE COMPARED to the music of Mozart. Mozart! It was he who following his triumphal reception in Prague incited in the capital of Bohemia a feverish interest in music life. This genius had by Smetana's time left deep musical footprints. His influence is not easily detected in The Bartered Bride, in which under the Czech magic wand cane it rips and dissipates as a little stream in a river in the entirety of the work, which is exquisitely compiled and root-and-branch new, and all audiences consider it a work of the highest value...”

(From Martinů's article in Paris-Soir of 20 October 1928)

“...AT ONE TIME, PRAGUE was at the centre of world interest owing to its Mozart premieres. It comes then as no surprise that the influence of this adored composer was significant. Mozart was also the wellspring of Smetana's music; there can be no better and more beautiful wellspring for a composer of such individuality as Smetana...”

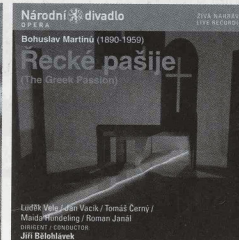
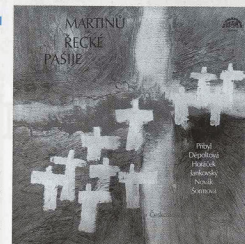
(From Martinů's article in Comœdia of 25 October 1928)

A TESTIMONY OF A TIME ALMOST FORGOTTEN

ZDENĚK ZAHRADNÍK

I RECENTLY got hold of a CD with a recording of Bohuslav Martinů's *The Greek Passion, H. 372/I*, and was really impressed by the booklet thoroughly drawn up by Mr Aleš Březina. Hence, the next time I spoke with the author of this excellent inset I could not resist, with a certain nostalgia, recollecting the fraught situation in 1981 when as a music director I was in charge of the opera's gramophone recording for Supraphon. It concerned a co-production with Czechoslovak Radio, with the condition for its implementation being the Czech version of the opera.

At that time, only the Czech version by Eva Bezděková, tailored to the era's political climate, existed. Edition plans were approved a year in advance by a "specialist" committee at the Ministry of Culture and enough to meet with their disapproval was, for example, merely an ideologically "undesirable" word in a title. Thus, for example, a recording of Rachmaninoff's liturgical songs was released under the title "Night Vigil", whereas in the case of Verdi's Quattro



pezzi sacri it was deemed necessary to omit "sacri". I cite these examples of the incredible blows Czech culture had to endure so as to give you a clearer understanding of just how difficult it was with *The Greek Passion* to interpret the text's religious passages so that the opera could be presented on Czech stages. And so in secrecy, just before the recording took place and with the assistance of the linguistically and musically adroit Richard Novák (entrusted with the role of the

priest Fotis), Mr Vilém Přibyl had for the role of Manolios to learn new texts that were closer to the original. The recording was the very first Supraphon title making use of digital technology. However, due to the lack of material for digital recording, the originals had to be transferred to an analogue carrier so that subsequently a digital recording of another important title of the "golden fund" could be made.