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The Rough Cordiality of the Highland Players:

Master Jožka Kubík and his Followers

The music of the Highlands (or *Hornácko* in Czech) celebrates an important anniversary in 2007; it is the 100th anniversary of the birth of *primas* and original personality Jožena Kubík. (He was born in Hrubá Vrbka on 9 April 1907. Hrubá Vrbka is one of the seven communities of the *Hornácko* area which is distinguished for its unique folklore). Kubík was a gifted self-taught musician, learning by ear at an early age; soon after, as a pupil, he learnt from local farmers and musicians, often playing with them. He was a natural who brought specific ornamentation and original folk philosophy into the Highland tradition. During his life, he was highly regarded (which was evident, because even though he was a Gypsy helping hand, he was called “master” by the school teachers and farmers). By the time he died he was admired and respected by both folk musicians, listeners, and noted scholars. Since then, he has been remembered with humour and more generally with reverence. It is by people who witnessed his music band and who learned from him and played with him, such as *primas* Martin Hrbáč, and contra fiddler, singer, and directing teacher František Okénka, also a long-time secretary of Kubík's music band.¹⁾

According to Dušan Holý²⁾, one of the most competent professionals (Holý was born in Hrubá Vrbka as well, and became a professor of ethnomusicology), Jožka Kubík was a very creative musician. He brought into the Highland melodics much of his natural *Romany*

1) Compare the narration of František Okénka in the track of the second CD of the double album *Zpívání a vyprávění z Kuželova* (published by the community of Kuželov in 2006) as recorded by Miroslav Minks, and in the Autobiography, as prepared by František Okénka for the booklet liner notes on the CD *Preletělo štáča* (Gnosis Brno, 1996), especially in the pages 7-9, and in the interview with Jiří Plocek there, pp. 12-14.

2) Holý, Dušan. „Zrod a vývoj primášské osobnosti“. CD Booklet of *Dalekonosné husle-Muzika Jožky Kubíka*. Český rozhlas, Brno 1998, pp. 15-22, especially p. 19. See also „Profil hornáckého hudece“. In Holý, Dušan: *Mudroslovní primáše Jožky Kubíka*. Editio Supraphon, Praha 1984, pp. 15-44.

melodiousness, as well as the melodic motifs of Slovakia (from the eastern Slovak Romany melodies of his army service years to the melodies of the Myjava region by his highly admired Samko Dudík). In spite of that, he was an orthodox Highland man with every one of the tones that he produced on his fiddle. While today many people follow up his ornamentation (melodic and rhythmic figures in instrumental licks) in the rhythm of the farmer's dance, Kubík taught himself as a child. He listened to his great-uncle Joža Kubík from Velká nad Veličkou, to an old farmer's string-band of the Ňorek family from Hrubá Vrbka, and most of all to the players from Velká, namely Martin Miškeřík, in whose band Kubík played from the age of 18. (Please note that the later disagreement between Kubík and the Ňorek band, which people perhaps overstressed over time, was in fact caused by the musicians who had left the Ňorek band in favour of Kubík's band, which did not please the old *primas* Ňorek. Nevertheless, Jožka Kubík himself always respected and honoured the Ňorek band from Vrbka.³⁾

Despite the fact that he was a self-taught musician, Jožka Kubík managed to play the fiddle at a very high level and continued to teach himself. He played the first fiddle with the Lipár band of Hrubá Vrbka from the age of 15; then in the mid-1930s, Kubík began to assemble his own band. It soon gained such respect that during the war in March 1943 it was possible to exclude the Romany band members from being deported to Nazi extermination camps, although only upon the degrading condition of being castrated.

Kubík was the first one in Horňácko who advocated and then permanently included the hammered cimbalom in his band (the band's cimbalom player was Kubík's brother-in-law Jožka Kýr), under the influence of Slovak and Hungarian melodics. These days the Highland bands very rarely perform without a hammered cimbalom.

3) The genesis of the controversy is depicted by Dušan Holý in the CD booklet of *Drsná pohlazení-Ňorskova muzika z Hrubé Vrbky na Horňácku* (Aton, Brno 1999), especially in his article „From the History of the Ňorek's Band“ in page 12 as follows: „The third bad period, which undermined the stability of the Ňorek's band, came in the second half of the 1930s, with the establishing of the Jožka Kubík's band. Jan Ňorek III took with difficulty the departure and fluctuation of his young disciples of the early 1930s, especially the brothers Pavel and Martin Kučera, but also Jiří Janás and Jan Mikloško; he never accepted it, and that is why from these reasons he hardened his heart against the Kubík's band.

In the after-war period, Kubík had his normal job as a helping hand, watchman and boiler attendant. This was a consequence of compulsory job attendance, which was introduced in 1948 and lasted until the revolution of 1989. Being a freelance musician was a privilege reserved for only a few. Nevertheless, Kubík hosted as a *primas* in the popular BROLN, and willingly employed his skills as a merry narrator and host both at home and as an instructor of the 'group' bands of that period in Hodonín, Myjava, Strážnice, Veselí nad Moravou, Bzenec, and Moravský Písek. Today, he would best be depicted as a popular consultant. He not only played well, but also could explain precisely what he expected from a musician, and was able to demonstrate it: lead fiddle, fiddle and viola contras, harmony fiddle, second fiddle, as well as the bass part and cimbalom line. In his declining years, he felt bad that his fingers could not move and prevented him from playing; as a real musician, he did not want to age and did not know how to age. He died on 8 February 1978 in Hrubá Vrbka and is buried at a Catholic cemetery there.⁴⁾

Unpretentious Comments from the *Primas*

Respect for Kubík's music heritage in Hornácko has lasted in undiminished measure until now – the 100th anniversary of his birthday. Nevertheless, with only a few exceptions, it has remained unnoticed: the anniversary was commemorated in two memoirs on a program of Czech Radio, in several newspaper articles, in a brief comment during the program of the 2007 Highland Festival in Velká nad Veličkou, and in the planned autumn 2007 Folk Groups Musical Instruments Festival in Uherské Hradiště. The source of surviving music recordings is totally exhausted by two albums: first it was *Dalekonosné husle-Muzika Jožky Kubíka* (Český rozhlas Brno/Gnosis, 1998), and later on the compact selection *Majstr Jožka Kubík*, produced by Aton, a small Brno company specialized in music recordings of the Highlands (Aton, Králova píseň edition, 2000).

Dušan Holý and Jaromír Nečas produced the Czech Radio selection based on an incentive from Jaroslav Jurášek. Both editors witnessed

4) See Holá, Ludmila: Kubík-Kubíkovi. Dictionary entry. In: *Od folkloru k folklorismu. Slovník folklorního hnutí na Moravě a ve Slezsku*. Strážnice 1997, pp. 63 - 65.

many radio recordings of Kubík, featuring him as a *primas* of his own band and of BROLN as well. The selection is based on archive recordings: music documents recorded on tracks in the Czech Radio Brno sound archives, studio recordings, and recordings of public performances, which in the case of Jožka Kubík's band reached a total running time of 10 hours.

Two years later, Aton used the extensive archives of narratives and dialogues featuring Jožka Kubík, which were recorded mostly by Dušan Holý interviewing Kubík and his musician colleagues; the material was originally intended for a book called *Mudroslovi primáše Jožky Kubíka* (Supraphon 1984) and was created in stages. Sound tracks of the present Aton edition intentionally follow the recording, which was included in the book. The selection includes, among others, the oldest sound recording of Kubík's band, which was recorded in the school yard in Hrubá Vrbka in 1941; a 7-minute radio recording of a set of long drawn out songs, farmer's songs and a male choir from 1972; and a unique recording of Jožena Kubík singing "Synečku z Jalubí" (Son of Jalubí): the masterful Kubík did not consider himself a singer. Aton did not succeed in publishing a new version of the attractive *Mudroslovi* by Dušan Holý because of the lack of funds. Luckily, they managed to at least release the above-mentioned CD, which originally was supposed to merely accompany the book.

The heritage of Kubík as a representative of "folk art in its original cleanness and power: unpretentious, honest, and dignified in its truthfulness" (as ethnographer Karel Plicka wrote in the above-mentioned book in the 1970s)⁵⁾ has survived in the Highlands in the lives of his followers.

The difficult fate of independent music publishers

In the long term, a publisher's profile oriented solely on traditional folk music proved to be a highly respected and rewarding activity, but a very risky business venture. It is not a coincidence that the two Brno independent publishing houses which specialize in traditional Moravian folk music had fatal endings: Jiří Plocek's Gnosis with their Moravian music catalogue, as well as Aton, which is a small family company run by

5) Plicka, Karel: A personal letter to Dušan Holý. Dated 1977. In: Holý, Dušan: *Mudroslovi primáše Jožky Kubíka*. Editio Supraphon, Praha 1984, p. 55.

Martin Holý and his parents Dušan and Ludmila Holý, who specialize in the music of the Highlands (Hornácko). They both provided a special interesting offer, but the economic success of the sales was small. In spite of the subsequent reduction of the production of both publishing houses, their releases have remained the best examples of regional music profiles, both in the quality of sound recordings and in the accompanying documents.

Of the Gnosis production that reflects the region of Hornácko, at least these CDs are worth mentioning: the profile of *primas* and singer Martin Hrbáč (CD *Hornácký hudec*, 1995), the album of headmaster František Okénka (CD *Preletěuo vtáča*, 1996), as well as a tribute to the otherwise neglected Hornácko community of Nová Lhota (CD *HCM Miroslava Minkse Pesnyčky ze Lhoték*, 1998). The list of releases of Aton begins with the album *Hornácký advent* from 1995 and introduces among others the profiles of Jura Hudeček (CD *Jura Hudeček z Velké*, 1999), Martin Holý (CD *Zpěvákovo rozjímání*, 2000), Jan Mikloško (CD *2001*), Kateřina Ďugová (CD *2003*), and of course the Holý brothers, Dušan and Luboš (CD *Žiji v písni – a Supraphon re-edition – 1999*; CD *Horela linda, linduška*, 2004, and a CD *Dušan Holý 70 – Putování s hudci*, 2003).

The real pearls of Aton are these albums: the CD *Drsná pohlazení*, 1999, devoted to Ňorek's band from Hrubá Vrbka, and a small song anthology based on written records by collector Martin Zeman from Velká nad Veličkou (CD *Teče voda, teče přes velický majír*, 1999).

The production of traditional music within a broader and commercially more balanced publishing plan proved to be more viable: it has been frequently listed in the catalogue of the Brno publishing house Indies. Hornácko has been included repeatedly since 1996 (CD *Došli sme k vám – folk choirs from Hornácko*; then the CD *Zpívání z Hornácka*, 1998, which is a beautiful documentation of solo singing of many late traditional singers from the region); among the latest releases, there is the 2007 CD *Z koreňů strom* by Petr Mička's Hornácká muzika.

Tonstudio, the publishing house of Jaromír Rajchman, produces traditional folk music in a similar way. Among some of his remarkable albums is the CD *Vánoce s Lipovjanem*, 1995; the Petr Galečka's cimbalom band CD *Moja žena smutno plače*, 1997, and their CD *Ó láska fortelná*, 2000; as well as the excellent and outstanding album of the children's band Veličánek, CD *Malučký sem já byl*, 2001.

The Highland communities as the guardians of musical heritage

In the beginning of the new millennium, the role of publishers of the music media featuring music profiles of their own regions was, almost ironically, partly overtaken by communities, that is to say, by the community authorities. In doing so, they took advantage of entering the business sphere, as well as the possibilities of promoting themselves and presenting the culture of the community via various modern media (not always CDs). The first such effort in the role of editor was initiated and produced by resident and patriot of Javorník, Břetislav Rychlík: the album *Pres Javorník malovaná dlážka - K počtě zpěvačky Anny Kománkové* was published by Community authorities in Javorník in the year 2000, as a part of the celebration of the 650th anniversary of the first [written] mention of the community. Five years later, a double album called *Hrubá Vrbka, Hrubá* followed; the community of Hrubá Vrbka published it to commemorate the 645th anniversary of its foundation. It equally features male and female choirs and lead singers accompanied by cimbalom bands of *primasi* Martin Hrbáč, Petr Mička, and Vít Prášek. For the present day Petr Mička's Highland Band, it was the very first occasion to record an album.

In 2006, there was a qualitative (as well as quantitative) shift in the way a community promoted itself, even extending to its history. On the occasion of the 600th anniversary of the first written mention of the place, the community of Kuželov published a multi-media double album called *Zpívání a vyprávění z Kuželova (1406-2006)*. It includes a tiny book in the size of a normal CD booklet; enclosed in the front cover is a music CD (featuring *Hornácká muzika* Miroslava Minkse and singers from Kuželov, including Jura Prachař, Martin Zálešák, Martin and Marie Čambala, Pavel Ďuga, and František Okénka). There is a CD-ROM enclosed in the back cover with archive recordings of Vašek Mlýnek and singers from Kuželov accompanied by the music bands of Jožka Kubík and Antonín Jančík. The CD-ROM also provides a rich supply of photographs, documents concerning the community, and precious recordings of the narration of the natives and residents of Kuželov. To keep the local style, both the book cover and the CD texts are illustrated with Kuželov folk embroidery.

The imaginary peak of publishing efforts of highland communities has been topped with this year's *Hornácké slavnosti 1957-2007* (published by the community of Velká nad Veličkou), a multi-media

almanac in book form (in the popular size of a CD booklet) extended to three types of media. There is a CD with archive sound recordings of festival years, a DVD with film documentation of the annual Highland Festival, and a CD-ROM with historical documents such as posters, program proceedings, period photographs, and (similar to the album of Kuželov) a narrated history accompanied by music samples. Academic sculptor and *primas* Miroslav Minks, a native of Velká, produced the almanac.

For the demanding conception of the valuable document, Minks used his experience from a previous project, *Zpívání a vyprávění z Kuželova*. Nevertheless, here more materials and much work were needed. The Velká almanac includes historical essays by professionals in the textual part of the almanac (dominated by an erudite, objective and at the same time very cordial and personal essay by Dušan Holý), an almost endless flood of photographs (their historical value often far exceeding their artistic value), documents, and various sound and film recordings which follow the 50-year history of the Highlands Festival; among them an occasional meeting of friends of painter Karel Supa in his studio in Strážná hůrka, as well as a crowd of many thousands of listeners at the Horňácký stadium today. Minks and his colleagues managed to enliven the fragments of documents in a very unique way: they used the amateur silent film recording of the first year of the festival together with a professional sound recording of the same year as done by Czechoslovak Radio, just to give one example.

The very detailed work combining extended documentation, authentic sound recordings, and narrated history will perhaps be more fully appreciated with the distance of time. For now it is impressive for its attention to detail, such as the Overview of all festival years (with notes on weather and program changes) and the Overview of sound recordings from Horňácko from 1986-2007. The only things left to be desired are a look at the newspapers of the time, or a visit to various family archives... but there's no need to be a maximalist; on the 50th anniversary, the Horňácké slavnosti festival had a decent chronicle which reflects the numerous possibilities of a multi-media presentation.

The Petr Mička's Highland Band: cashing in on its legacy

The Petr Mička's Highland Band (or, Horňácká muzika Petra Mičky) followed the tradition of Hrubá Vrbka *primas* Jožka Kubík with their

debut album called *Z koreňů strom* (Indies Happy Trails Records, Brno 2007). This placed them alongside Horňácká cimbálová muzika Martina Hrbáče band, whose singer and *primas* Martin Hrbáč, a self-taught musician, is a direct disciple of Kubík.

Actually, this is not the very first album of the band: as was stated above, the band performed almost in the same line-up on the double album *Hrubá Vrbka, Hrubá*, which the community of Hrubá Vrbka released to commemorate their anniversary in 2005. However, here the band serves as an accompaniment to selected lead singers of the Hrubá Vrbka male and female choir. Of the members of Mička's own band, the chance to present themselves was given only to Hrubá Vrbka natives Petr Chovanec and Martin Drlík. The Mička band also played the role of music support on an album of vocal choirs from Kozojídky (CD *Tá kozojídkská cesta*, 2006), published by the community of Kozojídky.

So the project *Z koreňů strom* (A Tree from its Roots) is really the first profile album in the 8-year long history of the musical union which gathered singers with long-lasting previous experience in the numerous bands of the region (such as the above-mentioned Martin Hrbáč band and Miroslav Minks band, as well as the traditional ensemble of Veličánek, including Mladá Velička). The members of the band share one main interest: instead of rehearsing in the backstage of cultural centres, they prefer to play live: in pubs, at festivals, during Carnival and Easter processions, and special “nights with musicians” – after the official program of a folklore festival is over.

Among the merits of the successful album is the remarkable selection of the unworn repertoire of songs and tunes (with two guest female singers), and the composition of the album, which presents a symbolic homage to the male singing of the region, both lead and especially choir. Traditionally, there were not only good instrumental players and lead singers in highland bands, but high quality and harmonizing vocal choirs too: the Mička band abundantly fulfils this tradition.

This is evident in the opening set of farmer courtship songs in the brother duet rendition of Petr and Aleš Mička, as well as in the final set of festival songs in a solid choir performance of musicians, interrupted occasionally by lead singers in the style of a pub music session. No traditional highland song and dance rhymes have been omitted: there are long-drawn-out songs, farmer's songs, old-fashioned songs and recruiting song, as well as typical regional song topics such as drinking, recruitment, festival songs, mocking bachelor and love songs, and the

popular quarrelling songs.

The custom of ordering songs has been noted in an excellent way. Singers (and not only from Hornácko) order songs in front of the band; here the custom is evoked by a ‚prolonged‘ final decoration (which in fact is a stimulus for pre-singers to pay the musicians), as well as in a natural everydayness of Highland religious belief, of both Catholic and Evangelic rite: for instance in understanding love and common life as the God's will. A return to the roots, so precious in the contemporary progress of the decay of folk culture generally and musical especially, is in Mička's band evident not only in the animated musical tradition of *straich*, that is including the flugelhorn, trumpet, and trombone in a string band; it is mostly evident in their performance style. Luckily, their style remained unmarked with the academism of an official music training, which would aim at perfect intonation and steady rhythm; this is why a trained band, despite the folk roots, frequently loses natural liveness, which is replaced by stiffed rigidity and flavourless sterility, wiping any unique irregularity.

The Petr Mička's Highland Band has remained rustic in the very sense of the word: they are raw, natural, and open, anxious to please the atmosphere and energy of the moment. They have completely resigned on slickness (like the very few of the region, unfortunately), and have stayed in touch with the unpretentious, old-time musicianship of their band predecessors from the Ňorek family farmers, Kubík family blacksmiths and cobblers, as well as good singers, and musicians of their own ancient Highland families. They honour their musical roots naturally, that is very simply, almost unwittingly, but properly: they have deeply grown into the region's traditions, and have animated these traditions anywhere it is possible and necessary.



*Jožka Kubík as featured in the documentary movie *Majstr*; directed by Rudolf Adler (1973).*



*Martin Hrbáč and his Highland Cimbalom Band, 2006.
Photo by Helena Bretfeldová.*