

## Three Anniversaries and Three Journeys to the Reflection of Folk Culture Roots

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The theme of the colloquy this year is vague enough and broad as well. Discussing the search for roots, anybody can understand it in his or her way: personal roots, family roots, national roots, human roots in general, but also cultural roots and more specific, the roots of folk music. Ontological inquiry about the sense of human beings and their striving for development from here to there is a significant sign, or better, a characteristic feature and the proof of human self-consciousness. The tradition of such questioning has been as old as the history of thinking. The subject of such questioning varies as well; we are mainly interested in 'what were the people in previous generations like', and how much we know about them, and, consequently, about us.

The subtitle of the colloquy, the road uninterrupted, has inspired me to think about three distinctive personalities from different generations and environments, whose work, related to folk music and folk traditions in general, I have been observing for some time. They share the same features: their work is both the conscious and unconscious search for and exploration of their own roots; most of all, it can be perceived as a continuous and natural clearing the overgrown, forgotten, and underestimated paths and roads toward ancestors and their approach to local musical traditions.

### **Folk Costume and Folk Song as a Natural Part of Everyday Life (Anna Kománková, b. 1928, Javorník nad Veličkou)**

Anna Kománková, an outstanding singer, who turned eighty in May 2008, has been a living and respected legend of the folk song of her region for folklorists as well as her contemporaries and followers in her native Javorník, a small community in the foothills of Bílé Karpaty at the very borders of Moravia and Slovakia. She has been not only a witness and deep source of the repertoire of songs, and a looked-for solo singer of



the hilly region of Hornácko, but also a long-term consultant for the female choir from Javorník. In 2007, in spite of her health problems, she also proved to be a valid member of the choir: both at the *Javornické zpívání*<sup>1)</sup> festival and the *Hornácké slavnosti*<sup>2)</sup> festival. By the way, the women of Javorník renewed their choir in the spring of 2000 just at the initiative of Anna Kománková. The crucial point was the recording of the album *Přes Javorník malovaná dlážka*.<sup>3)</sup> [A Painted Road across Javorník].

Anna Kománková, a living song almanac of her region, has ranked herself side by side other outstanding personalities and bearers of traditional folk culture, just like Marie Procházková (1886-1986) from Strážnice, Alžběta Končítiková (1913-1999) from Strání, and Zdeněk Kašpar (1925-2003) from the Valachian Velké Karlovice. These folk singers, who guarded folk songs inherited from ancestors, used the folk costume not as a festive dress; it was an everyday part of their existence and ordinary workday, a fulfilment of everyday rituals like working in the fields, doing household tasks, and addressing God. Anna Kománková has been living in a similar way today: she has sown her daily dress herself, and decorated it with embroideries. To her, singing is natural to her as it was and is for her family: she used to sing at work, at rest, in the festive time, and in church. Apart from the singing, she manages and develops another job of a folk artist: she herself is a connoisseur and respected designer of the folk costume embroidery in Javorník, as well as an excellent embroider.

In 2000, in an interview with Břetislav Rychlík, Anna Kománková commented [in dialect] on her attitude to folk songs and singing: "I've been attracted to singing since childhood; I followed women from house to house at sowing and spinning. How the old women could sing! I would sit down in a bed among cushions and duvets, and observed them and listened to them. When I was older, in the evenings the boys used to walk down the community and sing, so I would sit in my window and listen to them. I've been singing ever since. If I'm sad, I sing sad songs, if I'm happy, the songs are happier."<sup>4)</sup>

1) Singing in Javorník. A music festival organized by the community of Javorník at their football grounds on July 12, 2008. The performers included male choirs from Lužice, Buchlovice, and Javorník, and female choirs from Lanžhot, Dolní Dunajovice, Ježov, and the Female Choir from Javorník featuring Anna Kománková.

2) For the 2008 *Hornácké slavnosti* [The Highland Festival], Martin Soviš prepared a one-hour programme devoted to the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Anna Kománková, called *Anička Travelled the Wide Field* [Chodila Anička po širokém poli]. (Friday July 18, Hornácký stadion, 8 p.m.).

3) See Vrba, Antonín "Javornický ženský sbor nezpívá podle not, ale podle uší ...". [The Female Choir from Javorník Does Not Sing by Notes, but by Hearts...]. *FolklorWeb.cz/Články*, May 31, 2008.

4) Rychlík, Břetislav. "Rozhovor s Annou Kománkovou" [An Interview with Anna Kománková]. Liner notes to the CD *Přes Javorník malovaná dlážka. K počtě zpěvačky Anny Kománkové*. OÚ Javorník, 2000.

The approach of Anna Kománková to folk tradition generally, and to the folk song especially, can be seen in the fact that she has never become a popular star (not even for a while) unlike her contemporaries from other regions, like Jarmila Šuláková, Vlasta Grycová, and Věra Příkazská. Kománková was a frequent guest of local bands. She sang with the Martin Hrbáč Highland Cimbalom Band, with Hradišťan (in the days of its legendary leader Jaroslav Staněk), and with the Samko Dudík Band from Myjava. She also did several radio recording sessions with BROLN in Brno. Most of all, she performed at home in the Horňácko region, especially in its Highland Festival.<sup>5)</sup>

Nevertheless, Anna Kománková gained public appreciation even though it was very late in her life: in 2000, the community of Javorník published her solo album called *Přes Javorník malovaná dlážka* (the producers were Dušan and Martin Holý from the music label Aton, and Břetislav Rychlík). She also holds a special entry in the multimedia almanac *Horňácké slavnosti 1957-2007* [The Highland Festival 1957-2007],<sup>6)</sup> and in April 2007 she won the FOSKAR award in the category of the Singer (Male/Female) by the Folklore Academy for 2007. In 2008, her life and work were captured in a book and a CD called *Těžko temu kameni Anna Kománková – zpěvačka z Javorníka na Horňácku* by Dalibor Tureček and Lubomír Tyllner.<sup>7)</sup> The book was part of the Academy of Science project The Bearers of Tradition.

These days, she cannot rely on her body that much, but her memory still has been in a perfect shape. On request, Anna Kománková is able to sing all known stanzas from quite a few minute long ballads. As she recalls, she has learned to sing from her neighbours at community gatherings, from her aunt and both grandfathers, and later on from her mother-in-law as well. There were many other occasions to learn folk songs, such as various holidays throughout the year (weddings, the harvest festival, the carnival, and the Easter parade), and events like Saturday night dances. Anna Kománková represents the type of a folksinger which would be approached by the collectors like František Sušil and František Bartoš in the past, or recorded by Leoš Janáček. In Anna Kománková's family, the song tradition is carried on by her son in law Jan Kománek (born 1951) and his children. For Anna Kománková, a living legend of her family and region, the goal is to preserve the heritage of her ancestors so that it is not forgotten.

5) Tureček, Dalibor, and Lubomír Tyllner. *Těžko temu kameni. Anna Kománková – zpěvačka z Javorníka na Horňácku*. [A Hard Life of the Stone. Anna Kománková – the Singer from Javorník in the Horňácko Region], Etnografický ústav AV ČR: Praha, 2008, pp. 32-34.

6) *Horňácké slavnosti 1957-2007*. [The Highland Festival 1957-2007]. Multimedia almanac (CD, DVD, CD-ROM). Edited by Miroslav Minks. The community of Velká nad Veličkou, 2007.

7) Tureček, Dalibor, and Lubomír Tyllner. *Těžko temu kameni. Anna Kománková – zpěvačka z Javorníka na Horňácku*. [A Hard Life of the Stone. Anna Kománková – the Singer from Javorník in the Horňácko Region], Etnografický ústav AV ČR: Praha, 2008.

**Film Documents as Reflections of the World which does not Vanish, and Good Natured Studies of a Character of the Highland Man (Břetislav Rychlík, b. 1958, Brno/Javorník nad Veličkou)**

A scriptwriter and director Břetislav Rychlík follows the life and events in the land of his ancestors systematically and truly through his film documents. He remembered the legendary band leader Kubík and his heir and follower in the film *The Heritage of the Long-range Fiddle of Jožka Kubík*. Rychlík's document *One Year*<sup>8)</sup> followed the contemporary simple life of seven old men rooted in the White Carpathian



Mountains, who were born back in the days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The film won the Grand Prix at the festival of documentary films in the Polish Krakow as well as the international prize Vox Humana for 1999. Ten years later, Rychlík came with a loosely-based sequel called *Poslední dva* (The Last Two); in the latter, he observed, with a distance, the final years of the lives of two musicians in their 90s, Jan Miklošek and Tomáš Majtán. Even the pre-premiere of Rychlík's new film, *Kdy přestanem bláznit* (When Do I Stop Clowning?),<sup>9)</sup> was staged symbolically in his "home", in the House of Culture in Velká nad Veličkou, an official centre of the social life of the region. As expected, the premiere gained huge attention of the inhabitants of the community and its surroundings. Many of them acted in the film as well. They rightly became the film's first reviewers, commentators, and critics.

It is perhaps just a coincidence that the plot of Rychlík's film symbolically restores a 30-year old idea of a singer songwriter and a script writer "with a degree" Vladimír Merta. The author was then so inconvenient to the [Communist] regime that his film *Opera ve vinici* (An Opera in the Vineyard)<sup>10)</sup> (1981) was directed and destroyed by Jaromil Jireš. In the film, folk musicians and amateur

8) *Jeden rok*. [One Year]. Documentary film. Story, script, and directed by Břetislav Rychlík. Camera by Karel Slach. Made by TV Studio Brno in cooperation with Plum Production. (The Film and Sociology Edition), 1999. Total length 57:06 minutes.

9) *Kdy přestanem bláznit* [When Do I Stop Clowning?] (*On Janek Drinovsky, or: Never Cut a Button off the Jacket*). Documentary film. Story, script, and directed by Břetislav Rychlík. Made by TV Studio Brno, Centre for Documentary and Music Work of the Czech TV, in cooperation with Plum Production, 2008. Total length 56:56 minutes.

10) *Opera ve vinici*. [An Opera in the Vineyard]. Film. Story (and directed originally) by Vladimír Merta, directed by Jaromil Jireš. Made by Film Studios Barrandov, 1981. Total length 90 minutes.

actors from Moravia (Jireš located the story into the Lowlands) rehearse a folk drama with songs by a local author (based on the real character of the song writer František Hřebačka aka Fanoš Mikulecký). For all those involved in the shooting, it was the event of a lifetime. Unfortunately, the rough story by Merta turned into a black and white melodrama with Jireš. Luckily, Břetislav Rychlík managed to capture the local folk culture much better. He chose the form of a document which he directed himself. He remained understandable and compassionate thanks to his Highland roots, but most of all, because he listened to and observed despite his light irony and detached view.

In his film, Rychlík develops a story about a rehearsal of a folk drama devoted to the anniversary of the Highland Festival celebrated for half a century on the occasion of Mary Magdalene's day. The folk drama concerned is a play called *On Janek Drínovský*. It was written in the first half of the 1950s by a revivalist, musician, and singer Martin Holý from Hrubá Vrbka, and performed first in 1955. In his document, Rychlík observes the gradual development of the script of the performance and its music, the selection of actors and musicians, and the pains in which they started to cooperate, as well as the atmosphere of programme rehearsal by individual communities involved. A witty subplot follows the search for the roots of the Highland folk legends about outlaws, and it is extended by the use of black and white archive films documenting the song and dance history of the fifty-year old history of the Highland festival.

Directors Rychlík and Havelka used only three shorter scenes of the original drama in their film play, including a dialogue of a Slovak countess Báthoryčka with a young countess Filipína, and a recruitment of a maid Betty to her services. The rest is based on the surviving outlaw music motives. The title of the document quotes a passage from the Highland song "*Muziko, muziko*" (Music, oh music, how long you will sound, sweet Virgin Mary, when do I stop clowning). The subtitle refers to the legend about an alleged public killing of Janek Drínovský from a close distance, not by a bullet, but by a metal button.

The document plays with a double symbolical meaning, especially in several levels of the confrontation of history and the present. Many actors of the folk drama continue to act at home as well (here a camera of Karel Slach would help to capture unnoticed the natural flow of events, without urging the people in the document to overplay). Rychlík himself is captured in the real time of half a year, directing the amateur actors, and commenting on the events on a film track. The record of the rehearsal is interspersed with many examples of the historical memory of the oral and written word, commemorating folk legends about outlaws on the Moravian-Slovak borderlands (and confronted with similar recent stories from the community). The viewer gets a vivid picture of the role of tradition in the life of the contemporary people in the Highland communities.

The director himself likes to confess that his roots are in the Highlands; he is also a respected initiator of the local culture. Nevertheless, he makes use of the distance of an outsider, cultivated by the urban environment and his education. It is difficult to fit both roles successfully, and problematic, but at the same time it allows Rychlík to make insightful comments as well as adequate sociological probes into a distinct community.

Typical for Rychlík, for instance, is a record of the key scene rehearsal, the dialogue of Báthorýčka (Anička Kománková) and Filipína (Broňa Zelingerová), which he confronts immediately with the recollections of the first representative of Báthorýčka, Růžena Ševečková. Similar magic can be found in the dispute about a historical credibility of the character of the outlaw Jan Drínovský; the locals tend to believe in it, the ethnologist Dušan Holý (son of the author of the drama) refuses it. Dialogues during the rehearsal, when people comment on the subtleties of the local dialect, are charming [but difficult to transfer to English]. It is also attractive to observe the ritual of changing clothes from a work dress (such as the butcher's) to a festive dress, or to observe a resurrection of a one-hundred-year-old family heritage, a home-made fiddle, in the hands of a musician Petr Mička.

In the document, Rychlík uses a variety of other themes through double vision. These are for instance historical as well as contemporary Moravian-Slovak border relations, the theme of an accidental killing in an old border ballad, or the role of the language, the standard Czech and the dialect. In one subplot, Rychlík also follows the life of one of the musicians and actors, the terminally ill Jožka Kučera.

I understand Rychlík's specific attention focused mostly on insiders, people of the middle age born in the Highlands, who play pivotal roles in the respect to traditions of ancestors and in vitalizing the cultural life in the communities. Nevertheless, as a knowledgeable viewer myself, I would appreciate two or three more confessions: of naturalised Highlanders about their journey to the hills and people there (such as from the actor and director Ondřej Havelka, and from the actor and musician Ivan Urbánek, who was featured in the main role of the document), and a confession of the representative of the fifth generation of family musicians, piano player Dušan Holý.

Rychlík's document has become a festival itself: celebrating plainly, albeit affectedly, the birth and death, the eternal as well terminal life, preserved in the memory of the contemporaries and continues to live in their followers. The message will be comprehensible even dozens of years from now. And this is Rychlík's documentary style, a style that truly reflects his approach to the cultural legacy of his ancestors.

**Music Production as a Conscious  
Development of Culture Traditions of her  
own Family and Region (Magdalena  
Můčková, b.1968, Strážnice/Hroznová Lhota)**

Following the family tradition in its approach to the folk song and respect for the folk art generally has been Magdalena Můčková (nee Uprková) of Strážnice, the grand-daughter of the famous painter Joža Uprka. There is much to follow: unlike many of his rural colleagues, Joža Uprka did not stay in Prague when his academic studies were over; he returned to his home in the Moravian Slovakia and devoted his life to true portrait painting of its folk culture and the everyday life of its inhabitants.

Magdalena Uprková-Můčková goes in the footsteps of her grand-father. As a professionally prepared folklorist, she is not an academic scholar; instead, she is an outstanding cimbalom player and a respected arranger of the folk songs of her native region of the Lowlands of Strážnice. She employs all her above-mentioned skills as the leader of the Danaj Cimbalom Band from Strážnice. Over the twenty years of its existence, she has prepared many projects for the band, not only within music.<sup>11)</sup> Her husband Pavel Můčka, himself an outstanding singer and musician, helps her a lot. He comes from the family of the Můčkas of Strážnice. Out of its excellent musicians and singers, we should mention his father Jan Můčka and his brothers František, Jaroslav, and Josef Můčkas.

Magdalena Můčková has been exploring the same musical area as her grandfather, the whole Moravian Slovakia; apart from the region of Strážnice, she fell in the love with the nearby Highlands (*Hornácko*). Joža Uprka, as the founder of the Súčov Republic,<sup>12)</sup> managed to draw to Moravian Slovakia numerous outstanding representatives of Czech and European culture of his period.<sup>13)</sup>



11) Her first two projects concern music: CD *Gajdovani*, Frelí, 1995; CD *Ve Strážnici muzikanti hráli* [Musicians Played in Strážnice], Multisonic, 1998.

12) The Súčov Republic culture association was established by the painter Joža Uprka, singer, musician and folk song collector Martin Zeman, writer, teacher, painter and graphic Matouš Beňa (his home community of Súčov on the slopes of the Highlands gave name to the association), and writer Otakar Bystřina (pseudonym of Ferdinand Dostál).

13) Uprka's invitation to or recommendation of Moravian Slovakia attracted many visitors, such as architect Dušan Jurkovič (who turned Uprka's studio in Hroznová Lhota into an Art Nouveau villa in 1904), painters Zdenka Braunerová, Hanuš Schwaigr, Herbert Masaryk, and Camille Corot, and the renown sculptor Auguste Rodin.



In 2000, commemorating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Joža Uprka, Magdalena Múčková produced a special memorial album, book and CD-ROM of songs in cooperation with another grand-daughter of Uprka, Eva Nováková. The project, which is called *Písničky z malířovy palety* (The Songs of the Painter's Palette),<sup>14)</sup> shows the painter's inner link to the world of the folk song. A fascinating musical and artistic work which makes use of a multi-genre composition have been a breakthrough deed surpassing all period habits. Apart from her expressive artistic feeling and a decisive vocal input, she introduced herself as a distinctive arranger of folk songs for the first time.<sup>15)</sup>

As her latest arrangement so far, Magdalena Múčková has produced an album of the Danaj Cimbalom Band called *Písňovou zahradou* (Through the Song Garden).<sup>16)</sup> It is a music homage to the cultural legacy of Vladimír Úlehla, naturalist, physiologist, non-professional film maker, and folk song collector, on the occasion of his 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The data track which extends the CD shows period details of Úlehla's song collections, including his handwriting. The producer also included three different local variants of the folk song "*Vyletěl fiák*" (A Bird Flew Out) (from Strážnice, Boršov, and Jasenné), to show how a theme can change according to a region.

A respect for the song legacy of ancestors, the one which asks for a modern approach, individual presentation, and further creative inspiration: this is the motto of the reflection of music tradition in Magdalena Múčková, the youngest of the three personalities discussed here.

14) CD, CD-ROM and a book *Písničky z malířovy palety* [The Songs of the Painter's Palette], Danaj, 2000.

15) Bretfeldová, Helena. "Danaj vzpomněl Uprku. Recenze CD Písničky z malířovy palety" [Danaj Remembers Uprka. A review of a CD The Songs of the Painter's Palette]. In *MF Dnes*, August 23, 2000.

16) Danaj Cimbalom Band. *Písňovou zahradou* [Through the Song Garden]. CD Extra. Indies Happy Trails, MAM619-2, 2008. Total time 53:48 minutes.