The Contribution of PhDr. Irena Janáčková to Czech Music and Music Documentation

Certainly, it is not often that a whole century is filled with the life of one person. In this case it is like that – the recently passed 20th century can be considered, without exaggeration, for a century of the life and active work of PhDr. Irena Janáčková. She was engaged in choir singing, playing piano including the theory and pedagogy of both disciplines, in music ethnography and especially in music documentation. At certain periods of her long life, the individual professions varied, one prevailed over the other, and most of all they continually expanded and developed, sometimes even despite of ill fortune and unwelcome external circumstances.

The activities of Janáčková in the 1940s comprise also professional education. Right in 1945 she enrolled in music science at the Philosophical Faculty, Charles University, Prague, however she had to leave university in 1949 after ill-fated vetting, because she belonged among the supporters of musicologist Josef Hutter, the fearless opponent of then omnipotent Zdeněk Nejedlý. Temporarily, she even had to teach non-musical subjects at a primary school. She achieved a doctorate degree at the Pedagogical Faculty, Charles University, as late as in the early 1970s, her dissertation treated the theme of popular song in the Kladno region.

Between 1950 and 1958 Janáčková worked as an assistant professor at the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, Prague, where she was engaged theoretically and practically in the problems of collecting and documenting folk songs. Music folklore was among her life-time intensive interests. Janáčková ideally took advantage from her experience in choir singing. Her work reflects both interests with special emphasis on folk song and choir singing in Kladno and its region, as well as in the regions of Eastern and Southern Bohemia. She published many articles, papers and essays in both specialized journals and other periodicals (for instance Český lid, Gramorevue, Hudební rozhledy, Hudební věda), part of them remained in the manuscript form.

It is particularly the title Jakub Jan Ryba o svém životě [Jakub Jan Ryba about His Life] that is worth mentioning among her published works. It is Ryba’s own biography that Janáčková translated from German, prepared for press, provided with numerous notes and explanations and published as a book in 1946. Her manuscript inheritance include mainly more extensive essays, like Mozart a jeho první pražští vydavatelé [Mozart and His First Prague Publishers], finished approximately in 1980 and intended for Hudební věda journal, Sborový zpěv na Kladně [Choir Singing in Kladno] and Sborový zpěv na Kladensku [Choir Singing in Kladno Region]. The Československý hudební slovník osob a institucí [Czechoslovak Music Dictionary of Persons and Institutions] (Praha 1963) also mentions her work Rakovnický kancionál Johanny Rejčkové z roku 1594 [Rakovník Hymnal of Johanna Rejčková from 1594].

We cannot omit professional scientific activities of Irena Janáčková. Among them it was mainly her inventory and bibliographic work that prevailed for her whole life. While for
many a musicologist making lists and bibliographies is felt as an obligatory and unpopular work at the beginning of a career, which used to be left behind soon, Janáčková richly developed and fulfilled this effort in her blessedly long retirement age. Let’s recall that after retirement in 1958 she continued to collect popular songs for the then Music Department of the National Museum in Prague, today’s Czech Museum of Music, in the 1960s she worked externally for the Union Music Catalogue of the National Library of the Czech Republic, and until her 80s she worked for the National Library’s General Catalogue.

In the late period of her life Janáčková focused her research and efforts on completing detailed records of Prague music publishers and editors, in historical aspects she was interested in the wide period of the National Revival. Her works from this period deal with Prague editions of works by composers Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (W. A. Mozart a pražští vydavatelé jeho díla [W. A. Mozart and First Publishers of His Works] in Gramorevue, 1977, No. 11; W. A. Mozart a první vydavatelé jeho díla [W. A. Mozart and First Publishers of His Works] in Hudební rozhledy, 1987, No. 10) and Václav Jan Tomášek (Pražští vydavatelé V. J. Tomáška [Prague Publishers of V. J. Tomášek] in Hudební věda, 1981, No. 2). Janáčková’s life’s work both in scope and in depth is the work Marco Berra. Nakladatel hudebnin v obrozenské Praze [Marco Berra. Music Publisher in Prague of the Czech National Revival]. Its extensive edition is revised and prepared in the Music Department of the National Library of the Czech Republic. Unfortunately, it will come out in memoriam.

Irena Janáčková lived almost to enjoy her respectable jubilee of birth – however, she suddenly left her work and this world on 10 December 2000 at the blessed age close to one hundred years.

Julius Hůlek

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