

## PERSONALITY OF JAN PEŠAT IN THE MUSIC-EDUCATIONAL REALM OF SILESIAN OSTRAVA AND VÍTKOVICE FROM THE 1910S TO THE 1940S

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**Abstract:** The study deals with the personality of Jan Pešat (1892-1974) in the music-educational area of Silesian Ostrava and Vítkovice from the 1910s to the 1940s. It generally specifies the key activities forming a comprehensive profile of Jan Pešat; the principal core, however, consists of his music-educational activities in Silesian Ostrava and Vítkovice between 1915 and 1945.

**Keywords:** Jan Pešat, history, music education, music, culture, Ostrava

### 1 Introduction

The development of regional music culture is closely connected with distinctive personalities of the particular place. Our study focuses on Jan Pešat (1892-1974) and his music-educational activities, which he pursued from the mid-1910s to the end of World War II. Pešat continued carrying out his music-educational activities after 1945, too, but the following study only concentrates on the period of time from 1915 to 1945 as the archival materials and music-educational scope of Jan Pešat's activities are abundant.

Jan Pešat was a person who naturally combined various activities – music education, choir leading, conducting and music-publishing activities (Pešat's music-publishing activities especially focused on reviews of the music scene in Ostrava).

### 2 Life (1892-1974)

Jan Pešat was born in Mariánské Hory on 24 November 1892. He attended the local lower primary school between 1899 and 1905 and then the higher primary school (1905-1909). Pešat's personality developed in terms of music very remarkably between 1909 and 1913 when he studied at the teachers' institution in Silesian (Polish) Ostrava. His teachers were Rudolf Wünsch (1880-1955) and Edvard Rund (1879-1931), major personalities of the music education in Ostrava. Edvard Rund, in particular, developed young Pešat's violin skills.

As far as Wünsch's and Rund's music-educational activities are concerned, we can especially emphasize their orientation towards choir singing and orchestral playing, which was reflected not only in programmes of institutional academies and concerts but also in other occasional events. For example, on 4 October 1907 students of the teachers' institution gave a singing performance during the Holy Mass in Hrušov on the occasion of commencing lessons at the newly established primary school of Maticе školská.<sup>1</sup> According to Mazurek, both Rudolf Wünsch and Edvard Rund allowed Jan Pešat to gain his first valuable practical experience in the area of conducting and choir leading.<sup>2</sup> In July 1913 Jan Pešat passed the graduation exam at the Silesian-Ostrava institution and started to work as a teacher at lower primary schools in Mariánské Hory and Moravian Ostrava; in the 1920s and 1930s he also worked at a higher primary school in Hrušov; in Zábřeh nad Odrou he also worked as Headmaster of the local higher primary school.<sup>3</sup>

His artistic and teaching activities were interrupted by World War I, which Jan Pešat spent in the Balkans and later also in Vienna. Both the Balkans and Vienna were extremely important for Pešat in terms of music and culture. In the Balkans, Pešat met

his future violin teacher Jindřich Feld and in Vienna he was a frequent visitor to the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, which inspired him for later studies under the supervision of conductor Paul Graener.<sup>4</sup>

After the end of World War I, Pešat passed a state examination in violin playing in Prague on 29 October 1918. Pešat was involved in violin playing and strived to improve in this area later, too (1919-1925); in this period of time he studied with the above-mentioned teacher at the Prague Conservatory, prof. Jindřich Feld. Besides playing the violin, he also studied conducting with prof. Jaroslav Krupka at the Prague Conservatory.

In the area of specialized music education of Silesian Ostrava and Vítkovice Jan Pešat was active in the Zábój Singing Association Music School in Silesian Ostrava (later Rund's Music School of Zábój Singing Association) and the Metalworkers' Music School in Vítkovice (later Dr. L. Janáček Music School). Specialized music education and its establishment in Ostrava were also connected with Pešat's artistic activities as a conductor and choir leader. Jan Pešat presented himself as a conductor in the Orchestra Association in Vítkovice from the 1920s. Especially in Smetana's year 1924 "achievements that the Orchestra Association accomplished within the celebrations of Smetana's year 1924 improved the artistic reputation of the orchestra and, at the same time, increased its music-educational importance. The association actually wanted to serve all social levels, make both young and adult listeners of especially workman's backgrounds aware of good music and educate them in this area."<sup>5</sup>

In the 1930s workmen's singing ensembles started to develop dynamically in the cultural space of Ostrava. In 1933 Jan Pešat became the leader of the Singing Choir of the Workmen's Gymnastic Union Vítkovice I. According to Mazurek, the choir ensemble especially consisted of factory workmen, with whom Pešat interpreted not only choir arrangements of folk songs, but also included in the dramaturgy more demanding choir compositions by P. Křížkovský, B. Smetana or J. B. Foerster. The choir ensemble gave rise to the Janáček Workmen's Singing Organisation in Ostrava in 1935.<sup>6</sup>

Besides the artistic (choir leading or conducting) and music-educational activities, the comprehensive personality profile of Jan Pešat also includes music reviewing articles and critical essays focusing on contemporary productions of art music in Ostrava. Czech music reviews developed especially in 1918 in association with the independent Czechoslovak state being constituted. Eduard Marhula, František Mít'a Hradil, Josef Schreiber and Milan Balcar were the most distinctive music critics and publicists in the inter-war environment of Ostrava. Jan Pešat became a journalist specializing in music for *Duch času*. The number of Pešat's critical essays is remarkable – 370 articles, which dealt with the issue of professional and amateur music productions, concerts, operas and light operas, were published between 1925 and 1938. The contribution of Jan Pešat in the area of music publishing lies especially in the broad topical scope of reviews focusing on the culture of Ostrava and in their increased number.<sup>7</sup>

Until the end of the 1950s he worked as Headmaster of Vítkovice Music School. Jan Pešat died in Opava on 9 October 1974.

<sup>1</sup> *První zpráva c. k. ústavu na vzdělávání učitelů v Polské Ostravě za dobu od šk. roku 1905-06 do šk. roku 1908-09*. Polská Ostrava 1909.

<sup>2</sup> Mazurek, J.: *Jan Pešat (1892-1974). Příspěvek k dějinám ostravské hudební výchovy 20. století*. Ostrava: Repronis, 2002, p. 8. ISBN 90-7329-007-3.

<sup>3</sup> Dunátová, D.: *Zasloužilý učitel Jan Pešat*. Diploma Thesis. Ostrava: Pedagogical faculty in Ostrava, 1973, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> The same source, p. 28; Mazurek, J.: *Jan Pešat (1892-1974). Příspěvek k dějinám ostravské hudební výchovy 20. století*. Ostrava: Repronis, 2002, p. 8. ISBN 90-7329-007-3.

<sup>5</sup> Mazurek, J.: *Jan Pešat (1892-1974). Příspěvek k dějinám ostravské hudební výchovy 20. století*. Ostrava: Repronis, 2002, p. 19. ISBN 90-7329-007-3.

<sup>6</sup> The same source, p. 27-28.

<sup>7</sup> The same source, p. 29-30.

### 3 Music-Educational Activities

We can find the music-educational activities of Jan Pešat especially in the area of specialized music education, which started to develop in Ostrava in the 1890s through the Academic Music School and Musik-Bildungs-Anstalt. Pešat performed his music-educational activities in two school institutions, which soon achieved a good reputation thanks to their high quality. These were namely the Zábój Singing Association Music School in Silesian Ostrava (later Rund's Music School of Zábój Singing Association) and the Metalworkers' Music School in Vítkovice (later Dr. L. Janáček Music School).

#### 3.1 Zábój Singing Association Music School in Silesian Ostrava / Rund's Music School of Zábój Singing Association

Opening of the Zábój Singing Association Music School in Silesian (Polish) Ostrava was approved in 1908.<sup>8</sup> Many patriotic personalities contributed to establishment of the music school, too, e.g. Josef Mojžíšek (a collector of folk dances from the region of Těšín), Ludvík Chrostek (school headmaster), Antonín Záškodný (a long-standing chairman of Zábój Singing Association), and school inspectors (Šimon Němec, Karel Kapička).<sup>9</sup> During World War I it continued carrying out its teaching activities, which took place in the literary school in Baranovec, Hladnov, and later in the old and new town halls of Silesian Ostrava.<sup>10</sup>

Jan Pešat, a pupil of Edvard Rund (playing the violin, orchestra and chamber playing, 1915-1938), started to work as a teacher in 1915.<sup>11</sup> "Teacher Jan Pešat, an ex-pupil of Headmaster Rund, followed in Rund's footsteps, and in the spirit of his teacher, he did very well and thus became the second main official and educator of the institution."<sup>12</sup>

Pešat's praiseworthy music-educational activities focused on teaching to play the violin, orchestra and chamber playing, which manifested itself in the music-organisational area, e.g. preparation and realisation of school celebrations on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Bedřich Smetana in 1924. Pešat also prepared concerts devoted to other personalities of European art music, e.g. on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Ludwig van Beethoven in 1924. According to Mazurek, Pešat achieved remarkable results at the Silesian-Ostrava music school; he contributed to preparation of school events and applied his own artistic and pedagogical knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

Jan Pešat stopped teaching in 1938.<sup>14</sup> "The Board of Trustees of Zábój Singing Association Music School in Silesian Ostrava regrets you surrendering your post as a violin teacher at this school and expresses (...) thanks and recognition for the work you have done at this school for the benefit of the pupils, school and music art for the period of 23 years."<sup>15</sup> "You were the main support to our music school for almost a quarter of a century;

there was no school event you did not actively participate in as an excellent teacher, conductor and organiser."<sup>16</sup>

#### 3.2 Metalworkers' Association Music School in Vítkovice / Dr. L. Janáček Music School

The Land Political Administration approved of establishment of the Metalworkers' Association Music School in Vítkovice on 15 September 1922. According to František Mířa Hradil, establishment of the music school in Vítkovice was important in terms of the history of the music education of workers, and mainly the above-mentioned school institution was the only facility of that kind in the independent state.<sup>17</sup>

On 21 June 1923 members of the Board of Trustees of the Vítkovice music school met the national music schools inspector, prof. Antonín Hromádka, in the National House in Moravian Ostrava. Prof. Hromádka "pointed out the necessity of proper location of the music school and thus the possibility of due development of music education of the town and its surroundings." In addition, Hromádka (in agreement with the Minister of Education and National Enlightenment) expressed his positive opinion concerning the previous promising development of the music school, "which was founded thanks to workmen's work and funds, which is an absolutely extraordinary and unique phenomenon in Europe."<sup>18</sup>

After Eduard Marhula, Headmaster of the Music and Organ School of Matice školská in Ostrava-Mariánské Hory, died in 1925, F. M. Hradil had to focus intensively on development of the school in Mariánské Hory, where he had worked as a teacher since 1919, and thus could not adequately participate in preparatory work related to construction of a new school building.<sup>19</sup>

"As, however, his further music and music-pedagogical activities had been very numerous and required considerable work commitment, (...) he resigned from the post of Headmaster and Jan Pešat was appointed to replace him."<sup>20</sup> The school Board of Trustees elected Jan Pešat Headmaster on 18 August 1926. In its organisation activities, Pešat focused on systematic promotion of results of the pupils of the Vítkovice music school within demanding pupils' and teachers' concerts.<sup>21</sup> Such promotion was necessary for the existence of the school as the number of pupils stagnated in the mid-1920s.

Development of the Vítkovice music school was limited due to space, and therefore "it was necessary to take a radical step in the form of construction of a new school building (according to a design by architect Bohuslav Fuchs from Brno)".<sup>22</sup> "Pešat approved of this solution, which was risky in terms of finance, and the hard work of all people engaged gave rise to a modern and purposeful school building, the opening of which on 8 September 1935 confirmed that the school modernization that Pešat had commenced had been the right decision."<sup>23</sup> The Vítkovice music school started to operate under the new name of the Dr. L. Janáček Music School.

The pedagogical personality of Jan Pešat was connected with the Metalworkers' Association Music School in Vítkovice / Dr. L. Janáček Music School especially in the area of violin playing, in

<sup>8</sup> 70 let lidové školy umění ve Slezské Ostravě, ulice 28. října 4, 1907/08-1977/78. Ostrava, 1978.

<sup>9</sup> 60 let lidové školy umění ve Slezské Ostravě, Archive of the Town of Ostrava.

<sup>10</sup> Kronika hudební školy pěveckého spolku Zábój ve Slezské Ostravě, Archive of the Town of Ostrava.

<sup>11</sup> There is a contradiction concerning the date of beginning of Jan Pešat's work at the Silesian-Ostrava school: 1914 see Mazurek, J.: *Jan Pešat (1892-1974). Příspěvek k dějinám ostravské hudební výchovy 20. století*. Ostrava: Repronis, 2002, p. 19. ISBN 90-7329-007-3 versus 1915 see *Kronika hudební školy pěveckého spolku Zábój ve Slezské Ostravě*, Archive of the Town of Ostrava; there is also a contradiction concerning the date of termination of Pešat's activities: 1939 see *70 let lidové školy umění ve Slezské Ostravě, ulice 28. října 4, 1907/08-1977/78*. Ostrava, 1978, p. 31 versus 1938 in later correspondence between Jan Pešat and the Board of Trustees of the Rund Music School of Zábój Singing Association in Silesian Ostrava.

<sup>12</sup> *Kronika hudební školy pěveckého spolku Zábój ve Slezské Ostravě*, Archive of the Town of Ostrava.

<sup>13</sup> Mazurek, J.: *Jan Pešat (1892-1974). Příspěvek k dějinám ostravské hudební výchovy 20. století*. Ostrava: Repronis, 2002, p. 11-12. ISBN 90-7329-007-3

<sup>14</sup> See the letter of Jan Pešat to the Board of Trustees of the Rund's Music School of Zábój Singing Association in Silesian Ostrava of 10 January 1938, Archive of the Town of Ostrava.

<sup>15</sup> See the letter of the Board of Trustees of the Rund's Music School of Zábój Singing Association in Silesian Ostrava to Jan Pešat of 10 February 1938, Archive of the Town of Ostrava.

<sup>16</sup> See the letter of the Board of Trustees of the Rund's Music School of Zábój Singing Association in Silesian Ostrava to Jan Pešat of 12 February 1938, Archive of the Town of Ostrava.

<sup>17</sup> Hradil, F. M.: *Hudebníci a pěvci v kraji Leoše Janáčka. Paměti a dokumentace*. Ostrava: Profil, 1981, p. 107.

<sup>18</sup> *Visitors' Book of the Metalworkers' Association Music School in Vítkovice established in 1922/23*, Archive of the Town of Ostrava.

<sup>19</sup> Mazurek, J.: *Jan Pešat (1892-1974). Příspěvek k dějinám ostravské hudební výchovy 20. století*. Ostrava: Repronis, 2002, p. 12. ISBN 90-7329-007-3.

<sup>20</sup> Steinmetz, K., Mazurek, J., Kusák, J., Olšarová, P.: *Ostrava hudební. Vývoj hudební kultury jednoho města v posledních 160 letech*. Ostrava: University of Ostrava, Pedagogical Faculty, 2014, p. 59. ISBN 978-80-7464-664-5.

<sup>21</sup> The same source, p. 59.

<sup>22</sup> *Lidové noviny*, 29 June 1938.

<sup>23</sup> Steinmetz, K., Mazurek, J., Kusák, J., Olšarová, P.: *Ostrava hudební. Vývoj hudební kultury jednoho města v posledních 160 letech*. Ostrava: University of Ostrava, Pedagogical Faculty, 2014, p. 59. ISBN 978-80-7464-664-5.

which he applied the method of Otakar Ševčík, which he innovated with his own tried-and-tested elements and procedures.<sup>24</sup>

Didactically, he especially focused on active violin playing through solo chamber and orchestra concert productions.<sup>25</sup> Pešat informed Vítkovice teachers about inclusion of "the study work, especially in Ševčík's work *Škola houslového přednesu*, which is available to teaching staff in the library,"<sup>26</sup> which is proof of support of Otakar Ševčík's methods. Besides Pešat, also František Lettovský was a competent violin teacher.

We can find evidence of holding the so-called lecture cycles since the mid-1930s. Their primary goal was to acquaint the public of Ostrava with major personalities of the music culture of Ostrava. The content of the individual lectures focused on the area of music historiography, music theory and music pedagogy. Jan Pešat also considered the possibilities of preparation of potential students of conservatories and teachers' institutions and offered students optional lessons in music theory and music history from the academic year of 1937/1938 onwards.

During the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the Vítkovice music school organised concert events trying to strengthen the national awareness and relation to national values during the brutal Nazi occupation. Besides common lessons, the Vítkovice music school also organised courses for conductors and choir leaders of music and singing associations, courses for preparation for graduation exams from teachers' institutions or for home sciences teachers, and courses for preparation for conservatory pedagogical academies admission examinations. The school also concentrated on music pre-education courses for children up to the age of nine.

Headmaster Jan Pešat tried to maintain the development continuity of the school, which began in 1935. Together with the school board, he considered preparation of construction of a concert hall by the music school. "Realisation of such a work would complete the long-standing efforts towards a dignified facility of music art in Moravian Ostrava – Vítkovice."<sup>27</sup> Pešat manifested his artistic and organisation qualities when promoting the Vítkovice music school within the cultural environment of Ostrava, e.g. the Vítkovice music school orchestra gave a performance at the Czech Radio station in Moravian Ostrava on 30 December 1940,<sup>28</sup> the school orchestra also gave a concert on 22 June 1941 (we can consider this performance a contribution to celebrations of the 150th anniversary of W. A. Mozart).<sup>29</sup>

In that period of time, we can mention the engagement of the Vítkovice music school in the area of music education and popularisation activities, which is documented by the contemporary press (*Národní práce*, *Moravská orlice*).

#### 4 Conclusion

Jan Pešat was a remarkable personality in the artistic and music-educational areas in Ostrava not only in the monitored period from the 1910s to 1920s, but also after 1945. He especially contributed to development and modernization of specialized music education in Silesian Ostrava and Vítkovice.

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#### Primary Paper Section: A

#### Secondary Paper Section: AM, AL

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<sup>26</sup> Record of regular and classification meeting of teaching staff of the Dr. Leoš Janáček Music School of 21 January 1942, Archive of the Town of Ostrava.

<sup>27</sup> Record of final and classification meeting of teaching staff of the Dr. Leoš Janáček Music School of 29 June 1945, Archive of the Town of Ostrava.

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