

Un perfetto cortigiano Kryštof Harant



Aegidius Sadeler (1570-1629): Christophorus Harant baro de Polzicz et Bezdruzicz et in Pecka, ante 1608, engraving, in: *Putování...*, Prague 1608

Kryštof (Christophorus) Harant of Polžice and Bezdružice undoubtedly ranks among the most renowned figures of pre-White Mountain Bohemia, particularly due to his active role in the Bohemian Revolt of 1618–1620, for which he, along with twenty-six other lords, knights, and burghers, paid with his life on Prague’s Old Town Square. On Monday 21 June 1621, Czech history prematurely lost not only a prominent nobleman and politician but also a writer and musician – a man embodying the ideal of a Renaissance aristocrat. From a musicological perspective, he possessed an exceptional and compelling quality, mainly due to

the fact that we know disproportionately more about Harant’s life than about his contemporaries among Bohemian “professional” composers. Despite the losses and historical upheavals, a fragment of Harant’s musical output has survived, allowing us a clearer idea of the sound world of his work compared to other composers of the Bohemian Renaissance.

The Life of Kryštof Harant

Kryštof Harant was born in 1564 (the exact date is unknown) at Klenová Castle, located near Klatovy. He was the first child from the fourth marriage of the Catholic knight Jiří (Georgius) Harant (d. 1584) with Marianna of Janovice (d. 1587). A significant period in Kryštof’s life was his stay at the Innsbruck court of Ferdinand of Tyrol (1529–1595), where he was sent by his father to acquire an education in 1576. At Ferdinand’s Ambras Castle, he arrived at the age of twelve and, over the next eight years, became intimately acquainted with the rich cultural and social life of the Tyrolean court as a page. The court’s splendour was enhanced by musicians and composers such as Wilhelm Bruneau (d. 1584), the court chapelmaster; his assistant and tutor of the choirboys, Alexander Utendal (1530/40–1581); Johannes Flori (active 1555–1598); Jacob Regnart (1540/45–1599); and Franz Sale (c. 1540–1599). All of these individuals could have influenced the development of Harant’s compositional skills, though unfortunately, tangible evidence of this is lacking. Harant was not the only Bohemian to appear at Ambras. Ferdinand of Tyrol maintained fairly lively contacts with the Bohemian nobility from his time as governor in Prague between 1548–1567 and continued to cultivate his warm relationship with Bohemia even after returning to Tyrol.

In 1584 – at the age of twenty – Kryštof Harant returned to Bohemia. The impetus for his return was the death of his father, Jiří Harant, whose estate and family heritage he now needed to take over and manage. From a vibrant cultural centre, Harant thus returned to the provincial environment

of the West Bohemian countryside, where he married Eva Černínová of Chudenice, started a family, and lived a few peaceful years like many other members of the knightly class. A turning point came, however, in 1593. After more than two decades of relative peace, a protracted military conflict broke out between the Habsburg and Ottoman empires, known as the “Long Turkish War”. Kryštof Harant decided to gain experience on the battlefield in Hungary. In this respect, he did not deviate from the customs of the time, as military experience was a desirable addition to a young nobleman’s résumé, potentially opening doors to a court career in the future. Kryštof Harant was in his fourth year on the battlefield when he received news of the death of his wife, Eva Černínová of Chudenice (d. 1598). Harant decided to return home, where two orphans – Lidmila Kateřina and Vilém Humprecht – awaited him. However, he entrusted both children to the care of his relatives and, together with Heřman Černín of Chudenice (1576–1651), embarked on another adventure: a journey to the Holy Lands. Harant vividly described this dramatic journey, which lasted from the spring of 1598 to early the following year, in his travelogue *Putování aneb Cesta z Království české do města Benátek... (Pilgrimage, or a Journey from the Kingdom of Bohemia to the City of Venice...)*, published in Prague in 1608.

After returning from the Holy Lands, Harant lost both of his children within a short span of time in the autumn of 1599. Despite these personal tragedies, fortune also smiled upon him, as he was accepted into court service the following year, initially serving as chamberlain and, from 1607, as an imperial councillor. His social rise was further marked by his elevation to the rank of nobleman in 1603. That same year, Kryštof Harant married again, this time to the wealthy widow Barbora Škopková, through whom he gained half of the estate with Pecka Castle in eastern Bohemia, and with whom he had a daughter, Rozina Alžběta. The marriage was short-lived, however, as Barbora died unexpectedly in 1607. Two years later, in the politically turbulent year of 1609, Harant was married for the third and final time, to Anna Salomena Hradištská of Hořovice (d. 1632). This marriage yielded four children – sons Jan Vilém, Leopold Jiří, Vilém Rudolf, and the youngest daughter Sybila.



Kryštof Harant z Polžic a Bezdržic: *Putování aneb Cesta z Království českého do města Benátek, odtud po moři do Země svaté, země Júdské a dále do Egypta a velikého města Kairu, potom na horu Oreb, Sinai a Svaté Panny Kateřiny, v pusté Arabii ležící, na dva díly rozdělená...*, Prague 1608 (title page)

The death of Emperor Rudolf II at the beginning of 1612 ended Harant’s career as a loyal courtier, who had remained faithfully by the emperor’s side until the end. It is, therefore, not surprising that the doors to courtly service under Rudolf’s brother and successor, Matthias, remained closed to Harant. He withdrew into seclusion, from which he was briefly drawn out by a diplomatic mission to Spain, undertaken from January 1614 to early 1615. Harant embarked on this mission accompanied by Oldřich Desiderius Pruskovský, another former chamberlain of Rudolf, to return the Order of the Golden Fleece, which had been conferred upon the emperor in 1585. Shortly after returning home, a significant change occurred in Harant’s life – he converted to the Protestant faith. The motives for this decision are obscured by a lack of direct sources. It seems, however, that his reasons were rooted not in a personal spiritual crisis but rather in an unfulfilled desire for social advancement. Under this influence, he actively participated in political affairs during the Estates Uprising of 1618–1620, a decision that would soon prove fatal.



Prague execution, engraving, 1621

melicum by composer Friedrich Weissensee (ca. 1560–1622). This print, along with its manuscript addition, was donated in 1610 by the musician Mattheus Roth to the Bernardine church in Wrocław, hence the mass is usually dated before 1610. However, the composition is likely older, as the paper on which it is written can be dated to the 1590s.

The mass attracted the attention of Czech music historians as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, when Zdeněk Nejedlý (1878–1962) transcribed it in Wrocław and published his score in instalments in *Časopis Musea Království českého* (*Journal of the Museum of the Kingdom of Bohemia*) in 1905 and 1906. With this editorial effort, Nejedlý preserved Harant's composition in its complete vocal form. During World War II, the Wrocław municipal library suffered several calamities. As a result, part of the original collection was completely destroyed, part remained in place, and other parts of the collection began to appear elsewhere in Europe decades later, either as a result of the evacuation of the German population ahead of the advancing Red Army (Berlin) or through post-war looting by the victors (Moscow). In this

way, only three of the eight original partbooks of Weissensee's collection survived – the tenor, bass, and *septima vox*, with only the first two transmitting Harant's mass setting.

The remainder of Harant's compositions are predominantly motets. The first of these is linked to his aforementioned pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which lasted from the spring of 1598 to early 1599 and was extensively described in his travelogue. A six-voice motet, *Qui confidunt in Domino*, is printed at the end of the first part. In it, Harant set to music the first two verses of Psalm 125 (124): "Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides for ever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people, from this time on and for evermore." Harant describes the genesis of the motet as follows: "When we rested in a monastery in Jerusalem after our pilgrimages and walks to the holy places, we often sang all sorts of beautiful motets and pieces in four and five voices with the monks, some of whom were good musicians and cantors (...). This inspired me to compose a motet on the text of Psalm 124, which particularly occupied my mind

It is now appropriate to ask how Kryštof Harant acquired his compositional skills. As previously mentioned, Harant stayed at the court of Ferdinand of Tyrol in Innsbruck as a page from 1576 to 1584. This stay is generally considered the basis of his musical education. At that time, the Flemish composer Alexander Utendal served as vice-chapellmaster at the court, where he was responsible, among other duties, for educating boys not only in practical music-making but also in the basics of composition. Scholars see this as the key influence leading to Harant's own compositional activity. To illustrate, let us cite Zdeněk Nejedlý's monograph *Kryštof Harant z Polžic*, published on the 300th anniversary of Harant's death, in which the author writes: "Archduke Ferdinand's court was especially distinguished by its music ensemble, which the archduke had already established in Prague and then brought to Innsbruck, where he expanded it even further. And this was Harant's primary music school. (...) [Alexander] Utendal was therefore undoubtedly Harant's main teacher, for it would have been impossible for Harant, if he studied music there, not to have been trained at the school of this master (...)." The music historian Jan Racek (1905-1979) largely draws on this compelling assertion by Nejedlý.

The idea of Harant's musical education under the guidance of Alexander Utendal is quite logical and generally sound, though it has thus far been based mainly on general conjecture, without support from a comparison of their respective works. Only recently, with the availability of digital facsimiles of manuscripts and printed sources of sixteenth-century polyphonic music, it is possible to examine the characteristics of works by Alexander Utendal and other composers associated with the Innsbruck court in more detail. In modern editions, this body of work has been only partially published.

It is also important to remember that Kryštof Harant came of age in Innsbruck as a page, not as a choirboy, so we cannot definitively determine the true extent of his musical training at that time. Alexander Utendal was not the only composer Harant may have encountered as a youth in Innsbruck; he may have been influenced by multiple musical figures. However, it can be said that his stay in Innsbruck must have been a major source of inspiration that he drew upon for the rest of his life. From a musical perspective, he could not have found a more stimulating environment anywhere else.

In the decade that followed his return home, Harant absorbed these influences and later applied them

in his musical compositions. During his involvement in the Turkish campaigns (1593-1597), it is hard to imagine him focusing intensely on composition. After this Turkish venture, Harant undertook his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, then built his career at the court of Emperor Rudolf II, where he likely had little time for artistic pursuits. Thus, the question remains as to when Harant's musical works were created. In light of the dating of the manuscripts containing his works and the context of the printed compositions, it seems that - except for the motet *Qui confidunt in Domino* - they belong more to the second half of the 1580s and early 1590s, suggesting that his career at the imperial court did not play a significant role in his artistic development.

Harant's music revived once again

In the introduction, we highlighted Kryštof Harant's prominent place in both historical and musicological discourse. Although numerous articles, editions, and monographs have been devoted to his unique personality, questions and unresolved issues surrounding his compositional technique still remain. Last year's 460th anniversary of the composer's birth was therefore a fitting occasion to reopen the debate on his compositional artistry.

The first step in this discussion must be a new critical edition of Harant's compositions, which was recently presented nearly seven decades after Jiří Berkovec's collected edition (1956). In contrast to Berkovec's precedent, we are not publishing single-voice fragments in edited form but rather as facsimiles only. The order of compositions reflects our perspective on the dating of each work, with the Mass ordinary setting placed last - not only due to its significance and scope but also because we are leaving the question of its exact age open for now. May the new critical edition, published with the financial support of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic and the Foundation UDI Group, serve both music historians and performers, allowing them to study and admire the captivating beauty and mastery of Harant's music, which, even more than four centuries later, has lost none of its impressiveness.

Translated by Scott Lee Edwards