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Vocal creation of Tibor Frešo (1918–1987) and its use for the teaching of solo singers at pedagogical faculties

Summary

The article deals with the vocal compositions of the jubilee Slovak composer Tibor Frešo (1918–1987). We focus on vocal compositions and song cycles, which can be used in the education of a solo singer at the tertiary grade of education at faculties of pedagogy.

Keywords: Tibor Frešo (1918–1987), vocal composition, song, song cycle, solo singing, tertiary grade of education.

Introduction

In November 2018 we commemorated the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Slovak composer Tibor Frešo. His rich vocal composition lends valuable impulses to vocal education even today.

As a vocal pedagogue, I constantly strive to enrich the repertoire of my students in a way that would not only help them grow in singing technique, but also motivate and lead them to a personal interest and emotional experiencing of the lyrics. Even though it is not always easy to build a fitting repertoire for young singers, the songs of Tibor Frešo have the potential to interest them¹.

¹ The introduction of certain songs from T. Frešo can be a delightful dramatic revitalisation of a competition repertoire for solo and chamber singing in both categories (both for students of



Picture no. 1. Tibor Frešo

Foto: Magdaléna Robinsonová, Archív SND

Source: E. Blahová-Martišová, *Pripomíname si v júli (2017)*, [online], <https://operaslovakia.sk/pripominame-si-v-juli-2017/> [page visited on 15.11.2018].

Tibor Frešo

(20.11.1918 in Spišský Štiavnik – 7.7.1987 in Piešťany)

The composer was an important figure in the history of Slovak music. Along with Ladislav Holoubek (1913–1994), Dezider Kardoš (1914–1991) and Andrej Otčenáš (1911–1995), he was a representative of the next generation of Slovak modern style composers, which was constituted chiefly of the students of Alexander Moyzes (1905–1984).

Tibor Frešo grew up in an intellectually favourable family of teachers, while learning basics of music from his father. After graduating from grammar school, he continued to study at The Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava in 1934–1939 (composition – Alexander Moyzes, conducting – Josef Vincourek, piano – Anna Kafendová) and in the years 1939–1942 at Regia Accademia di Santa Ce-

music education combined with another subject and for students of music education with the focus on singing) of Študentská umelecká činnosť (ŠUČ), a competition with international participation organised by KH PF KU in Ružomberok (celebrating a 15 year jubilee in April 2019). Many of T. Frešo's instructive songs can usually be heard at an international competition Moyzesiana, similarly focused on students of education, which is regularly held at the Faculty of Pedagogy of the University of Prešov (a mandatory piece in the competition repertoire is an arbitrary children song by a native or a foreign author).

cilia in Rome (composition – Ildebrando Pizzetti, conducting – Bernardino Molinari, Antonio Pedrotti)².

His artistic and professional activities were connected mainly with the Opera of Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava, where he functioned as conductor, chief conductor and artistic director in 1953–1986. He was the first Slovak artistic director of the Opera of Slovak National Theatre (SND) in Bratislava. Contemporary critics were primarily praising his productions of Italian (especially Verdi, Puccini), Russian and Czech operas, but the outstanding artistic contribution of Frešo were his productions of original Slovak composers – he premiered the operas of Jan Cikker (*Juro Jánošík*, *Beg Bajazid*), Eugen Suchoň (*Svätopluk*) and Alexander Moyzes (*Udatný kráľ*). He would also often perform as a conductor of operas and symphonies abroad³. In 1985 he was titled as a national artist and in 2009 he was awarded with one of the highest state honours – 2nd grade Pribina's cross in memoriam⁴.

The compositions of Tibor Frešo pick up on the late-romantic and impressionistic tradition⁵, but also contain features of Slovak folk melodies. He composed musical-dramatic, orchestral, chamber and vocal pieces, many songs, instructive song cycles, choirs and choral arrangements for various choral casting, as well as original soundtracks for documentaries and feature films.

Theatrical and vocal compositions of Tibor Frešo

Theatrical compositions

The composer tried to fill the empty space in musical-dramatic composition for children by a two-act fairy-tale opera called *Martin a slnko* (*Martin and the Sun*)⁶, libretto: Branislav Kriška and Alexandra Braxatorisová (1971–72), premiere in the SND in Bratislava, (1975)⁷ and a ballet *Narodil sa chrobáčik* (*A Bug was born*), libretto: Boris Slovák (1978–79), premiere in the State Theatre in Ostrava (1982); in the SND in Bratislava (1985)⁸.

² Vide. I. Vajda, *Tibor Frešo*, [in:] *100 slovenských skladateľov*, M. Jurík, P. Zagar, (ed.), Národné hudobné centrum, Bratislava 1998, s. 96–97.

³ Vide. E. Martišová-Blahová, *Pripomíname si v júli (2017)*, [online], <https://operaslovakia.sk/pripominame-si-v-juli-2017/> [page visited on 15.11.2018].

⁴ Vide. J. Lašlavíková, *Tibor Frešo. Český hudební slovník osob a institucí* [online], http://www.ceskyhudebnislovník.cz/slovník/index.php?option=com_mdictinary&task=record.record_detail&id=1003562 [page visited on 13.12.2018].

⁵ Vide. I. Vajda, op. cit.

⁶ *Martin and the Sun* is one of the most successful operas for children written by Slovak composers, even to this day.

⁷ *Profil osobnosti: Tibor Frešo. Premiéry*, [online], <https://hc.sk/hudba/osobnost-detail/939-tibor-freso> [page visited on 9.12.2018].

⁸ Ibidem.

The most important of Frešo's musical-dramatic compositions is an operatic collage *François Villon*. An interesting fact is that the main character in this opera is dramatic, as well as the character of Villon's uncle, who comments on his life:

His music is inspired chiefly by French impressionism, as well as other composers influenced by impressionism, especially Puccini. The main contrast of the piece is formed by an opposition of triple-metric rhythms and choral sections – that is presumably to represent an idea: life-death⁹.

Vocal compositions

The usage of solo singing with piano, perhaps even orchestral accompaniment, in solo songs and song cycles is greatly represented in Tibor Frešo's work. Similarly to Strauss' and Mahler's compositions, many songs are written in both the piano and orchestral version, many are challenging in vocal technique and interpretation, demanding vocally disposed singers. The largest fraction of Frešo's chamber composition for voice is comprised of songs for soprano, understandably so, since both the composer's sister, Zita Hudcová-Frešová¹⁰, and wife, Jarmila Smyčková¹¹, were opera singers.

Frešo's typical late-romantic and impressionistic influences, a pursuit of variety and colourfulness of sound, as well as intimacy and an inclination to lyricism are all present even in this area of his composition – he reaches for quality poems and shows great sensitivity to the poetic text of Slovak and rarely even foreign poets.

In this vocal composition overview, we are stating the most important song cycles¹²:

Najkrajší sen (The Most beautiful Dream) op. 3a, cycle of five songs for soprano and piano (1938–1940)

lyrics by Pavol Gašparovič Hlbina, Emil Boleslav Lukáč and Rudolf Dilong
Movements: *Fatamorgána, Svadba, Tulák, Ticho, Ráno*

⁹ I. Vajda, op. cit.

¹⁰ Zita Hudcová-Frešová (1912–2005) – an outstanding Slovak soprano. She was a soloist for the Opera SND in 1934–1962, externally teaching singing at VŠMU and in Conservatory in Žilina. She belonged to the first generation of “trained” Slovak singers, which were the first interpreters of international and Slovak vocal pieces. She also pursued concert activities and was a propagator of Slovak music at home and abroad. (Source: M. Polohová, *Formovanie a osobnosti vokálnej pedagogiky na Slovensku*, FFPU v Prešove, Prešov 2012, p. 157.

¹¹ Jarmila Smyčková (1929) – an excellent coloratura soprano, long-time Opera SND soloist. She also taught at the State Conservatory in Bratislava. She was given the Prize for life-long work in the domain of theatre by the Literary Fond in 2007. She was the first interpret of Frešo's song cycles *Rosa* and *Piesne o sne* and the first actress of the Cold Princess in the opera *Martin a slnko*. (Source: E. Vongrej, *Jarmila Smyčková: V SND somspievalanajkrajšie role a prežila kus môjho života*, [online] <https://operaslovakia.sk/jarmila-smyckova-v-snd-som-spievala-naj-krajšie-role-prežila-kus-mojho-zivota/>, [page visited on 15.11.2018].

¹² cf. *Profil osobnosti: Tibor Frešo. Diela*, [online], <https://hc.sk/hudba/osobnost-detail/939-tibor-freso> [page visited on 9.12.2018].

Tri piesne (Three Songs) for mezzosoprano and piano (1960)

lyrics by Krista Bendová and Ján Rak

Novájar (New Spring), a cycle of six songs for mezzosoprano and orchestra (piano) (1961)

Movements: *Balada o hreslnka a vetra* (Maša Haľamová), *Sekera v lese* (Maša Haľamová), *Jar* (Maša Haľamová), *Dcéрке do pamätníka* (Ján Rak), *Rozprávka* (Krista Bendová), *Tri hviezdy* (Krista Bendová)

*Piesne o sne (Songs about a Dream)*¹³, cycle of songs for soprano and piano (1972)

lyrics by Vladimír Reisel

Movements: *Sen ojari*, *Sen*, *Sen mimoseba*, *Sen o dúhe*, *Sen o čase*

Spev o žene (Song about Woman) op. 25 for alt solo, a male part (reciting), child and mixed choir and a full-sized orchestra (1975)

lyrics by Jela Krčmeryová and Alexandra Braxatorisová

Spev o žene (Song about Woman) for voice and piano (1976)

Alfa a omega (Alfa and Omega), five songs for soprano and a small orchestra (piano) (1978)

lyrics by Vladimír Reisel

Päť piesní pre spev a orchester (klavír) na poéziu J.W. Goetheho (Five Songs for soprano and an orchestra (piano), on poetry by J.W. Goethe) (1980)

Movements: *Beherzigung*, *Die Spinnerin*, *Mailed*, *Gefunden*, *Rastlose Liebe*

Rosa (A Dew), a song cycle for soprano and piano (1985)

lyrics by P. Koyš

Movements: *Horskéráno*, *Jahôdka*, *Horskýjarček*, *Škovránok*

Compositions for children

Frešo's instructive song cycles for child singers and listeners are notable as well:

Detským srdciam (To Children's Hearts) a cycle of six songs for soprano and piano (1960) lyrics by Krista Bendová

Movements: *Uspávanka*, *Pomocník*, *Potulnýzlodej*, *Vrabec*, *Hruška*, *Motýľ*

Stupnica piesní (The Scale of the Songs) eight songs for voice and piano (1975)

lyrics by Ján Anđel.

Movements: *Na lúke*, *Boľavéličko*, *Zajko*, *Jesennépreteky*, *Na sanici*, *Kreslím*, *Večer*

¹³ The cycle was published again by Hudobný fond in 1998 on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the birth of the composer.

Zvieratká – muzikanti (Animals – Musicians), op. 29

fifteen children's songs with the accompaniment of an orchestra/piano (1977)

lyrics by Alexandra Braxatorisová

Movements: *Kolibřík* – piccolo, *Škovránok* – flute, *Slávik* – oboe, *Kukučka* – clarinet, *Sova* – bassoon, *Cvrček* – violin, *Komár* – viola, *Včielka* – violoncello, *Čmeliak* – double bass, *Koník* – trumpet, *Jeleň* – French horn, *Lev* – trombone, *Medveď* – tuba, *Slon* – drum, *Tučniak* – conductor and all the animals.

Štyri pesničky pre mládež (Four Songs for Youth) with piano accompaniment (1981)

lyrics by František Hrubín, translated by Jozef Krčméry

Movements: *Husi*, *Bocian a žaby*, *Mačky*, *Pes*

The use of the vocal piece of Tibor Frešo in vocal education

Even though the national singing schools are vastly different, there are some general ideals, which become the goal of technical training and interpretational progress. The contemporary European singing ideal used in solo concert and operatic singing expects the breath to be supported, covered, mixed, soft, loose, resonant tone with perfect vibrato and capable of changes in dynamics.

The vocal training of prospective teachers of music education for secondary schools at Slovak faculties of pedagogy focuses mainly on perfecting one's own singing technique and interpretation via a varied vocal repertoire. The future teachers of singing for children in primary art schools, who can be trained for their profession at conservatories, universities and faculties of pedagogy, should not only pursue the singer's ideal and gain a good singing technique, but also should become familiar with the methodical work with the voice and learn about vocal literature fitting for the training of students in a certain stage of education.

The vocal compositions of Tibor Frešo help to achieve the above mentioned goals, but it has quite high demands on the singers: upper vocal register, long and wide arched phrases, large leaps in melody and difficulty of intonation, rhetoricality, chromatics in vocal parts, tempo and dynamic changes etc.

13 *mp*
 Človek sa vracia a-by šiel ďalej, človek sa vracia

19
 a - by šiel ďalej. *f* Vra-cia sa k zemi, k hračke,

24
 vra-cia sa k ze-mi, k hrač-ke, vra-cia sa k mat-ke, vracia sa k mat-ke, k mat-ke a

28
 sň - ku,

The musical score is presented in four systems. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The first system (measures 13-18) features a vocal line with lyrics 'Človek sa vracia a-by šiel ďalej, človek sa vracia' and piano accompaniment with triplets and a dynamic marking of *mp*. The second system (measures 19-23) continues the vocal line with 'a - by šiel ďalej.' and 'Vra-cia sa k zemi, k hračke,' with a dynamic marking of *f*. The third system (measures 24-27) contains the lyrics 'vra-cia sa k ze-mi, k hrač-ke, vra-cia sa k mat-ke, vracia sa k mat-ke, k mat-ke a'. The fourth system (measures 28-31) shows the vocal line with 'sň - ku,' and piano accompaniment. The score includes various musical notations such as clefs, time signatures, dynamics, and articulation marks.

Picture no. 2. T. Frešo, *Sen mimoseba* (*A Dream Outside*) from the song cycle *Piesne o sne* (*Songs about a Dream*), Slovenský hudobný fond, Bratislava 1998, p. 10–11.

Ja - ho - da je bož - ský bozk

trá - - - - vy, bozk až do kr - ví, bozk až do

kreh - - nú - - cej pa - - má - - ti.

Picture no. 3. T. Frešo, *Jahôdka* (*A Little Strawberry*) from the song cycle *Rosa* (*A Dew*), Slovenský hudobný fond, Bratislava 1985. p. 11.

Considering the above stated realities, the instructive song cycles are better fitted for the training of a singer at faculties of pedagogy, which have not lost their charm even after 50 years. A priceless advantage for beginner singers is the usage of the mother language and quality lyrics dominated by joyfulness and wit – that leads not only to the interpretational advancements of the future teachers, but also multiplies the assumption that they will be able to sing with adequate expression to their students any repertoire. An acceptable vocal range, certain music forms and a smaller singing area, suited difficulty of intonation and phrasing expecting an economic breath manipulation makes the singing material an ideal instrument for vocal and methodical tutoring of future teachers in both programs of study.

The cycle *To Children's Hearts* was composed on the basis of the poetry from the anthology *Čačky-hračky* (1950), which is a book debut of Krista Ben-

dová. The author tries to explore in her poetry the comical sides of a concrete reality which the children are experiencing. She helps herself with wittiness, fantasy, artistic aggrandisement. Her verses also contain an area of psychological motivation and uncover a knowledge of children's inner life, they seem joyful, playful, direct and fresh, even though they might not always be pure and precise in language. Frešo transformed her most popular poems (*Uspávanka* – “Spinkaj, bábka maličká / ja som tvoja mamička...”, *Vrabec* – “Sedí vrabec na drôte / vysmieva sa robote...”, *Hruška* – “Spadla hruška zelená / obila si kolená...” atď.) into music, which are, in conjunction with his style (the composer inclines to closed forms, the humour in the lyrics is made more prominent by music-expressive tools) attractive till this day.

Picture no. 4. T. Frešo, *Uspávanka* (Lullaby) from the song cycle *Detským srdciam* (To Children's Hearts)

Source: T. Frešo, *Detským srdciam* (To Children's Hearts), Slovenský hudobný fond, Bratislava 1983. p. 3–4.

The unitive idea of the cycle *The Scale of the Songs* is the diatonic progression – C, D, E, F, G, A, H, C and the order of songs corresponds with this progression too. Upper vocal register, big leaps in melody, difficult intonation, oscillation between major and minor and chromatic in vocal arrangements require an experienced, vocally disposed and musical child interpret, while the lyrics are quite traditional in the choice of topic – either about the life of children, or about animals.

An interesting unitive idea of the cycle *Animals-Musicians* is the endeavour to introduce the musical instruments to children in a funny way. The animals – members of a forest orchestra – are a character metaphor for the instrument they

represent. The songs are prominent in the upper vocal register, greater vocal range, greater difficulty of intonation, changes in key, in dynamic, agogic, de-claimed passages, usage of dialogue etc.

mf

Lie - ta, lie - ta pí - ná včielka od pon - del - ka do pon - del - ka ,

mp

z ka - lí - cha ku ka - lí - chu , ne - poz - na - júc od - dy - chu .

A - by bo - lo medovníkov pre najmenších maškrt - ní - kov , včielka zberá

od rá - na sladký nektár do džbána .

Picture no. 5. T. Frešo, *Včielka* (*A Little Bee*) from the song cycle *Zvieratká – muzikanti* (*Animals - Musicians*), op. 29, Opus, Bratislava 1978. p. 18–19.

Conclusion

The works of Tibor Frešo were greatly influenced by his employment in the theatre; he was a vocally feeling composer. In the time of a real absence of compositions for children and the youth, he created artistically valuable pieces, which can attract a child spectator even today. The same applies to his vocal compositions, by which he has left for the Slovak music culture and vocal pedagogy a valuable treasure.

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Twórczość wokalna Tibora Frešo (1918–1987) i jej zastosowanie w nauczaniu śpiewu solowego na wydziałach pedagogicznych

Streszczenie

Artykuł przybliża wokálną twórczość słowackiego kompozytora Tibora Frešo (1918–1987). Stanowią ją kompozycje wokalne i cykle pieśni, które mogą zostać wykorzystane w edukacji śpiewaka solowego na wydziałach pedagogicznych uczelni wyższych.

Słowa kluczowe: Tibor Frešo (1918–1987), kompozycja wokalna, piosenka, cykl pieśni, śpiew solowy, wykształcenie wyższe.

Martina PROCHÁZKOVÁ

Katolícka univerzita v Rużomberku

Vokálna tvorba Tibora Freša (1918–1987) a jej využitie vo výchove sólového speváka na pedagogických fakultách

Zhrnutie

V príspevku sa zaoberáme vokálnou tvorbou jubilujúceho slovenského hudobného skladateľa Tibora Freša (1918–1987). Podrobnejšie sa venujeme vokálnym skladbám a piesňovým cyklom, ktoré možno využiť vo výchove sólového speváka na terciárnom stupni vzdelávania na pedagogických fakultách.

Kľúčové slová: Tibor Frešo (1918–1987), vokálna tvorba, pieseň, piesňový cyklus, sólový spev, terciárny stupeň vzdelávania.