

Preface:

24 Preludes and Fugues on themes from Czech folk songs for pianoforte

The *24 Preludes and Fugues* by Milan Iglo (born in 1933) combine two of his favourite sources of inspiration – Bohemian and Moravian folk song, and contrapuntal invention. To this must be added his profound love for subtle and exquisite harmony, and his sensitivity to pianistic colour. They also testify to his quirky penchant for creating series of delicate miniatures for the pianoforte that ultimately build up into *tours de force* of monumental scope. Other examples of this are his delightful *Abeceda* (“The Alphabet”, a set of twenty-four short pieces inspired by the Morse code for each letter of the Latin alphabet, completed in 1965 and published by Panton/Schott in 1969), the still unpublished *Zoologická zahrada* (“The Zoo”) of 1958 (where each miniature charmingly represents a zoo animal), and his set of no fewer than 250 *Preludečka* (“Tiny Preludes”). Musical puzzles have always attracted Milan Iglo, and spurred him on to originality and inventiveness. His mastery is deployed with an unerring sense of naturalness, lightness of touch, warmth of musicality, wit and gentle humour coupled with a sense of poignancy. These qualities invariably accompany the ingenuity and resourcefulness so abundant in the *24 Preludes and Fugues*.

The *24 Preludes and Fugues* were composed over a period of several decades. The earliest of the fugues was composed in 1962, when the composer was still a student of composition in the class of Pavel Bořkovec at the Prague Academy of Performing Arts. Iglo recollected that when the first Fugue was played to František Maxián (1907–1971), piano professor at the Academy, Maxián reacted by urging him to remove “kudrlinky” (virtuosic flourishes) from its concluding section and to maintain simplicity – advice that Iglo heeded. He proceeded over the years to compose further fugues, and most of the preludes were added later. It was not until 1998 that the composer decided to make a complete cycle of Preludes and Fugues, arranging them as a set. In the composer’s manuscript even Fugue XXIII, which follows on *attacca* from its Prelude, bears the date of completion of 16 March, 1998, whilst the Prelude was completed later, on 30 June, 1999. Yet each prelude exhibits an uncanny sense of cohesion with its own fugue; this has been achieved through various subtle means. For instance, one often finds that a prelude incorporates fragments of melody from part of the same folk song that provides the subject for the ensuing fugue. This affords both a subtle sense of connection as well as needful contrast between the two.

The themes for the Fugues were drawn by the composer from well-known Czech folk songs; some he obtained from various song-books, whilst others he was

able to recall from personal experience, having known and sung them himself since his childhood.

We note that some of the Fugue themes in this collection were used by Milan Iglo at various times elsewhere in his *oeuvre* also, not least in his works for choir and for string orchestra. For instance, Iglo used the theme of *Ej, láska, láska* (No. I in the present volume) in his *Variace a fuga pro malý smyčcový orchestr na téma národní písně* (“Variations and Fugue for small string orchestra on a folk song theme”) of 1978. The same theme also appears in combination with *Kukačka kuká* (No. VII in this set) as part of the *Řetízek národních písní EJ, LÁSKO, LÁSKO pro smíšený sbor* (“Chain of folk songs EJ, LÁSKO, LÁSKO for mixed chorus”) of 2012. *Kukačka kuká* also appears in a much earlier (but undated) arrangement for mixed choir and soprano solo, under the title *Obět dívčí* (“A Girl’s Sacrifice”). Finally, the composer returned to *Sluničko za hory zachází* (No. XXIII) in 2010, making a fugal arrangement for mixed choir (which was performed in Prague and in Paris by the Charles University Chorus under Haig Utidjian shortly thereafter). *Zahučaly hory* (No. V), *Šly panenky silnicí* (No. XX) and *Muzikanti, co děláte* (No. XXI) also feature in the composer’s *Tři dvojpísně a jedna fuga* completed in 1967 – with each of the three partsongs superimposing two folk songs over each other.

It is interesting to compare and contrast the composer’s treatment of the same themes on each occasion. For instance, the treatment is entirely different for *Sluničko za hory zachází* in each case. Yet the fugue is musically identical in the case of *Šly panenky silnicí* – where the two-part piano fugue in No. XX subsequently came to be sung by a mixed, four-part choir – with sopranos alternating with altos, and tenors alternating with basses, in lieu of the octaves in the piano version.

In sum, the melodies of Czech folk songs thus appear to have inspired Iglo and permeated his *oeuvre* throughout the period in which the *24 Preludes and Fugues* were composed, and thereafter.

Editorial procedure

The source consisted of material photocopied from a bound volume made available by the composer to the editor, comprising a combination of manuscript items in the composer’s own meticulous hand (Preludes III–X, XIV, XV–XXIII; Fugues VII, IX, XXII) and a number of items that had already been provisionally type-set under the composer’s supervision by his son Marek in previous years (Preludes I, II, XI–XIII, XXIV; Fugues I–VI, VIII, X–XXI, XXIII, XXIV).

The editorial task was greatly facilitated by the personal involvement of the composer himself, and that of his son, the pianist Marek Iglo. Items consulted upon included the addition (by analogy) of slurs, phrase-marks and staccato dots; the correction of a very small number of minor slips; and the clarification of a small number of potential ambiguities in the original. This included (for instance) specifying the exact point where this or that phrase-mark starts and ends; and establishing whether a particular dynamic change takes effect from this or that point, and whether or not it pertains to one hand or both.

For the present edition the composer re-examined his work and took the opportunity to make some rare and very minor revisions. This generally did not exceed the modification of the odd note, or the adoption of an enharmonic equivalent. This edition does not include features of any earlier version, and represents the composer's final views alone. (Thus, for instance, the right hand in bar 4 of Prelude XI had "laissez vibrer" ties into bar 5 in the original source, which were subsequently removed; they have accordingly not been included in this edition.) The final result was checked by both Milan and Marek Iglo, and the final proofs of this edition were approved by the composer.

In the composer's manuscript note stems are oriented by voice, irrespective of pitch. We have standardised these for ease of reading, with the composer's agreement, even if this means that at times the performer needs to devote a moment's thought to establish whether a lone voice in the right hand is soprano or alto, or, in the left hand, tenor or bass. However, care has been taken to maintain clarity on the identity of the individual strands of the texture, and rests have been inserted wheresoever uncertainty might arise (such as when, for instance, a tenor entry alternates with that by the bass). We have punctiliously preserved the composer's choices in variously connecting the stems of adjacent quavers, both within and across bar-lines. Iglo's usage has implications in terms of rhythmic approach and articulation, and we are convinced that in this respect the visual appearance of otherwise equivalent notation has a distinct psychological effect on the player.

In general, verbal instructions such as *cresc.*, *dim.* and *rit.* apply over a span of several bars, even in the absence of the supplementary words *poco a poco*. But much is left to the performer's own musical judgement and discretion. Thus, for instance, the *rit.* of bar 44 in Prelude XI extends in its effect until the *Tempo I* in the second half of bar 45; but it is up to the interpreter to choose whether to slow down progressively to achieve *Tempo I* smoothly – as opposed to slowing down to a somewhat slower tempo and then resuming *Tempo I*.

However, an interesting feature that contrasts with the above is the composer's adoption of "terraced dynamics", whereby we often find changes in dynamic occurring in a stepwise manner without gradual growth – at times resulting in an effect that may be reminiscent of changes in registration in organ music (Prelude VIII is a good ex-

ample of this). But there is no doubt that the writing is pianistic, and it behoves the performer to evoke changes in colour in a pianistic manner, making full use of a beautiful palette reflecting the veritable kaleidoscope of fleeting harmonies. Rendering full justice will not always be easy, requiring true independence of parts, not least in terms of articulation.

In Fugue VIII the composer has employed accents nested in parentheses. These are not to be taken at face value, but are intended merely to render obvious the beginning of the theme, shifted as it has been from the beginning of the bar to the second or third beats (see, for instance, bars 72–75).

The composer's fingering has been included in this edition, due to the important information that it embodies. The composer himself was an accomplished pianist and dedicated teacher. Though he does not consider his fingerings mandatory, they do often present ingenious solutions, the motivation being to preserve the legato line and the clarity of the part-writing. By the same token, we have reproduced his indications of some instances where in mid-phrase the "other hand" may take on one or more of the notes in the current part. The composer has been more generous with such guidance in some instances than in others; no attempt has been made to supplement it through the addition of any further indications.

The words of the folk songs have been preserved exactly as the composer chose to reproduce them in the score (typically including a single stanza), since they reflect the form in which the composer drew his inspiration. As these texts often hold the key to the atmosphere of each prelude and fugue, as well as furnishing the fugal subject, we have provided informal, editorial English translations of the texts cited by the composer, for the benefit of those unfamiliar with the Czech language and its various regional dialects.

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Haig Utidjian
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