

novices in the field of chamber music. Indeed, the violinist Jana Vonášková-Nováková is already widely known for her recitals and for her Supraphon recordings from her time as a member of the Smetana Trio; the viola player Petr Verner was previously a member of the New Vlach String Quartet and his wife, the pianist Slávka Vernerová-Pěchočová was a member of the Kinsky Trio, known for their complete recording of Martinů's Trios on the Praga Digitals label, while the cellist Jan Ždánský has recorded Janáček's chamber works with her. In their well-planned programme, they followed Mozart's piece with a rare example of a student work by Mahler, his Quartet Movement in A minor, Op. 87. Here, with their intensely lyrical playing, they brought out the hyper-Romantic character of the music, written when Mahler was 16 and hardly typical of his later style except, perhaps, in the brief violin cadenza with its hysterical descent to the depths, here played with passion by Jana – a quality that will surely stand her in good stead as a member of the Pražák Quartet, which she has recently joined (see Newsletter No. 113, front page). After a short interval, we were treated to a strong performance of Dvořák's Piano Quartet No. 2 in E flat, in which the pianist, a former pupil of the late Ivan Moravec, succeeded in extracting powerful tones from the Embassy's rather intractable Petrof instrument. The splendid rapport between all four musicians was a delight both aurally and visually, especially their evident enjoyment of the charmingly inventive scherzo movement. Overall, the performance was refreshingly unsentimental and full of energy. The flood of rich tones filled the hall and was greeted with exceptional warmth by a packed audience. Following the excitement of Dvořák's piece, our spirits were calmed by a tranquil encore – the beautiful last part of the Adagio from the Piano Quartet in A minor, Op. 1, written by the 17 year old Suk while a member of Dvořák's composition class at the Prague Conservatoire and greatly praised by his teacher. It made a fitting counterpart to Mahler's youthful composition heard earlier. In appreciation of this inspiring evening, proving that the Dvořák Piano Quartet deserves a place in the galaxy of top Czech chamber ensembles, our Chairman thanked the players and presented a white rose to each of them.

**Patrick Lambert**

### **Czech Music at the 2015 Jerusalem Chamber Music Festival**

The Jerusalem Chamber Music Festival, now at its 18<sup>th</sup> year, is one of my yearly highlights. It is organized by the pianist Elena Bashkirova (Daniel Barenboim's wife). Each year, at the beginning of September, world famous artists and up-and-coming younger artists gather in the YMCA concert hall in Jerusalem and, over 10 days perform daily (and sometimes twice daily) concerts, many on the highest level. Each year there is a common theme, in addition to the "bread and butter" of chamber music.

This year there were two themes – Beethoven string quartets and music by European composers working in the USA. Overall, this year there were 13 concerts, and I attended them all...

For the Beethoven part – the supreme Jerusalem String Quartet played the early, op. 18 works, and the Michelangelo Quartet (Leader, the superb Michaela Martin, with violist Nobuko

Imai, and Franz Helmerston, cellist) played the Rasumovsky quartets.

The "European-American" part consisted of works by Prokofiev, Schoenberg, Zemlinsky, and Bartók, but, most importantly for me, Dvořák and Martinů and even Korngold. All, under very different circumstances, worked in the USA.

From Dvořák there was a real feast. The piano quintet was wonderfully done by Plamena Mangova – an excellent Bulgarian pianist and the Michelangelo Quartet – unforgettable (though not surpassing the same work, done about 10 years ago by Daniel Barenboim and the Jerusalem Quartet!). A collection of Slavonic Dances was played by Mangova and Sunwook Kim, winner of the Leeds competition. A moving performance of the Dumky Trio was played by Sir András Schiff, with Latica Honda-Rosenberg and István Vardai, both young(ish) and truly superb.

The string quintet op. 77 (with double bass), though, to my opinion not one of Dvořák's best works, was played very well by an ad-hoc team (cellist: Alisa Weilerstein, who recently recorded a wonderful disc of Dvořák's Cello Concerto with Bělohlávek and Czech PO), and the famous Sonatina, op. 100 by Honda-Rosenberg and Martin Helmchen, delightful.

The piano quartet op. 87 (too neglected work, lies in the shadow of the great Quintet), was performed by Helmchen, with the superb Nikolaj Znaider and Alisa Weilerstein, and the Terzetto, op. 74 (again not Dvořák's greatest, but delightful anyway) was ably played by a group of young Israeli players.

Four works of Martinů were played – very rare in Israel!

The Duo for violin and cello (H.371) was played by Latica Honda Rosenberg and Tim Park – didn't know this work – really beautiful. The Sonatina for clarinet and piano (H.356) by Shirley Brill (world class Israeli clarinetist), The Flute trio (H. 300 – a delight), and then the Nonet, one of my favorite works in the whole world. Just think that this lyrical, danceful and optimistic work was written by Martinů, dying from cancer, few months before his death.

Mahler – another composer, working in America (and Czech, of course) was represented by his *Kindertotenlieder*, movingly sung by the great American mezzo, Michelle DeYoung, accompanied by Elena Bashkirova.

Erich Korngold, though mostly Viennese, was born in Brno, and immigrated to USA before WW2. His string sextet was written in 1914, when he was just 17. It is a densely late romantic work, well written but (in my opinion), not so interesting. It was played by a team led by Michael Barenboim (son of the festival organizer). The young Barenboim is one of the sadder necessities of the festival – a not-so-great violinist, the price one has to pay for having such a wonderful yearly festival.

So, putting together huge amount of Czech works, with Beethoven quartets and host of other works (the piano quintet by Mieczyslaw Weinberg, played by Sir Andras Schiff and the Jerusalem Quartet was the true, enormous peak of the festival), made this one of the most memorable events in recent years, together with the Janáček festival in Brno from last winter.

**Gideon Flusser, Tel Aviv**