

Jaromir Weinberger



Weinberger photo © Boosey & Hawkes archive

“At the conservatory I have a very talented pupil from Prague: Bohemian – but also hereditarily predisposed with the Bohemians’ terrific sense of tone color. I gladly put up with such hereditary predisposition!”

(Max Reger about Jaromír Weinberger in a letter, dated 22 December 1915, to Adolf Wach, one of Felix Mendelssohn’s son-in-laws)

Whoever wants to understand Jaromír Weinberger’s overwhelming success at the end of the 1920s only has to reach for a CD with the Polka and Fugue from Schwanda the Bagpiper, for example, in the interpretation by Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra: the melodies and rhythms of the pupil of a pupil of Dvorák, Bohemian, innately musical, catchy. That’s the one thing. On the other hand, one hears an intellectually elaborated and yet spontaneously effective technique of orchestral writing that is reminiscent of his teacher Max Reger’s Mozart Variations. Some ten years after the opera from which these two orchestral pieces are taken, he composed, already in French exile, the orchestral variations on Under the Spreading Chestnut Tree, which were then premiered in the USA and that, on the one hand, seem obliged to the same model and also to Johannes Brahms, but, on the other hand, also to the tonal horizon of the large city, the revue, and the sound film. Like the other variations, the seemingly “academic” fugato finale is also joined here to the previous movement by an unusual piano solo, as if a pensive bar pianist were improvising in between.

With none of his later stage works was Weinberger able to repeat the huge success of Švanda dudák, the strikingly folksy and yet anything but old-fashioned opera that makes enormous demands on the performers. It is not a “comic opera” for light voices and a mere municipal theater orchestra. The great conductors of the time, such as Erich Kleiber and Clemens Krauss, stood on the rostrum. It is significant that Weinberger was particularly acclaimed by the German public of the Weimar Republic, that is to say, in a heady phase between the stiff imperial era and the culturally narrow-minded, dull “Third Reich.” That is why he was also to write the operetta Frühlingstürme (“Spring Storms”) for Berlin’s Admiralspalast, as the Lehár of a new era, so to speak, an era that was to begin a few days after the premiere in January 1933, albeit in an entirely different manner, and that was initially to drive Weinberger out of Germany, then out of Austria and Czechoslovakia,

and ultimately out of Europe. Beside the retrospective melancholy – for example, in the grand romance “Du wärst für mich die Frau gewesen” (“You would have been the woman for me”) for Richard Tauber as the Japanese officer and abjuring lover – one also hears in the music of Frühlingstürme the snappy asphalt rhythms of the buffo couple, “Nimm mich nach China mit, ins Reiche der Mitte” (“Take me with you to China, to the Middle Kingdom”), where there were allegedly none of all those things that were so disturbing at that time in Germany. The libretto, written by Gustav Beer, was namely quite “political.”

In 1937 Weinberger finished his last stage work, the opera Wallenstein, which was premiered in Vienna in the German translation by Max Brod. The original Czech libretto, like that of Švanda dudák, was written by Miloš Karel, only this time the subject was not a fairytale-like legend, but a multi-part historical play, a classic by Schiller that was unwieldy for musical theater and anything but obvious as an opera plot. Nevertheless, Weinberger succeeded in composing a fanciful score and vocal roles with audience appeal; with ease he wrote melodies that under other political circumstances would surely have established the story of the Bohemian commander on the opera stage. But Austrian chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg, to whom the opera is dedicated, already had no chance against the National Socialist pressure from Berlin.

Just after his arrival in the USA, Weinberger described himself in an article for Musical America (10 February 1939) as “a composer of the past ... the time in which we are living, has nothing to say to me.” And yet, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, one can perhaps recognize the Europe of Weinberger’s time more clearly in his works, as recent performances of Wallenstein prove, than in those of many of his contemporaries.

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OPERAS

The Beloved Voice

(Milovany Hlas / Die geliebte Stimme)

1930

3 hr

Opera in three acts

Text: Libretto by the composer after the novel by Robert Michel (Cz,G)

Major roles: S,2M,A,3T,hBar,Bar,B;
minor roles: 2T,B; chorus; children's chorus;
3.2(II=corA).2.2-4.3.3.1-timp.perc:cym/BD/3tgl/carillon/tam-t/glsp/SD/xyl-cel-2harp-ma
nd-strings

World Premiere: 28 Feb 1931

Munich, Germany

unknown

Availability: World excluding USA

The Outcasts of Poker Flat

(Lide z Pokerflatu)

1932

3 hr

Opera in five acts

Text: Libretto by Milos Kares after the short story by Bret Harte (G)

2S,A,2T,Bar,B,4speakers; chorus
3(III=picc).1.corA.2.ssax(=asax).tsax.2(II=dbn)-4.3.3.1-
timp.perc-pft-harp-banjo-org-strings

World Premiere: 19 Nov 1932

Brno, Czech Republic

unknown

Availability: World excluding USA

Schwanda the Bagpiper

(Svanda Dudak / Schwanda, der Dudelsackpfeifer)

1927

1 hr 55 min

Folk opera in two acts

Text: Libretto by Milos Kares (Cz,G)

Major roles: dramS,heldT,Bar; minor roles: dramM,B;
small roles: 5T,2B; chorus;
3(II,III=picc).2(II=corA).2(II=bcl).2(II=dbn)-4.3(=bugles).3.1-
timp.perc(3): tgl/cyms/SD/BD/tam-t/tamb/xyl/glsp/carillon-2harp-cel-org-
strings;

Reduced scoring: 2(II=picc).2.2.2-3.2.2.0-timp.perc:3tgl/cyms/BD/SD/t
am-t/susp.cym/xyl/tamb/chimes/t.bells-org-cel-pft(ad lib)-strings

9790202519356 **Libretto (German)**

World Premiere: 27 Apr 1927

National Theatre , Prague, Czechoslovakia (former)

National Theatre, Prague

Conductor: Otakar Ostrcil

Availability: World excluding USA

Wallenstein

(Valdstejn)

1937

3 hr

Musical tragedy in six scenes

Text: Libretto by Milos Kares after Schiller; German translation by Max Brod (Cz,G)

2S,5T,Bar,2BBar,3B; chorus;
3.2(II=corA).2(II=bcl).2(II=dbn)-4.3.3.1-timp.perc-harp-strings

World Premiere: 18 Nov 1937

Operntheater, Wien, Austria

Dr. Lothar Wallenstein, director; Alfred Jerger (Wallenstein) / Fred Destal (Octavio) /
Friedrich Ginrod (Max) / Esther Réthy (Thekla)

Conductor: Wolfgang Martin

Availability: World excluding USA

FULL ORCHESTRA

The Beloved Voice

Overture to the Opera (Die geliebte Stimme)

1930

9 min

for orchestra

3(III=picc).2(II=corA).2.2-4.3.3.1-timp.perc:tgl/cyms/BD-harp-cel-strings

Availability: World excluding USA

Christmas

1929

20 min

for orchestra

3(III=picc).2.corA.2.bcl.2.dbn-4.3.3.1-timp.perc:glsp/t.bells/
cowbells/cyms/tam-t/tgl/BD-2harps-cel-pft-organ-strings

Availability: World excluding USA

Overture to a Marionette Play

1924

12 min

for orchestra

3(III=picc).2.2.2-4.3.3.0-timp.perc:xyl/cyms/tgl/SD/rattle-harp-cel-
strings

Availability: World excluding USA

Passacaglia

1931

30 min

for orchestra

3.3.3.3-6(4).4(3).4(3).1-timp.perc:t.bells/cyms/BD-organ-strings

Availability: World excluding USA

Prelude and Fugue on 'Dixie'

1940

5 min

for orchestra

3(III=picc).2.2.2-4.3.3.1-timp.perc:tgl/tam-t/SD/glsp/cym/BD-harp-
organ(ad lib)-strings
stage band(ad lib):2hn.2tpt.2trbn-perc:SD

Availability: World excluding USA

FULL ORCHESTRA 3

Preludes religieux et profanes

1954

39 min

for orchestra

3.2.2.2-4.3.3.1-timp.perc:tgl/tam-t/cym/BD/sleigh bells-harp-strings

Availability: World excluding USA

Schwanda the Bagpiper

Furiant

1927

3 min

3.2.2.2-4.3.3.1-timp.perc:cyms/tgl/SD-harp-cel-strings

Availability: World excluding USA

Schwanda the Bagpiper

Overture

1927

3.2.2.2-4.3.3.1-timp.perc-2harp-cel-strings

Availability: World excluding USA

Schwanda the Bagpiper

Polka and Fugue

1927

11 min

3(III=picc).2.2.2-4.3.3.1-timp.perc:t.bells/cyms/tgl/BD/SD-harp-
organ(ad lib)-strings

Availability: World excluding USA

Schwanda the Bagpiper

Suite

1927

23 min

3.2.2.2-4.2.3.1-timp.perc:xyl/cyms/tgl/BD/SD-harp-cel-strings

Availability: World excluding USA

Six Bohemian Songs and Dances

2.2.2.2-4.2.3.0-timp.perc:cym/tam-t/tgl/SD/BD-harp-cel-strings

24 min

Availability: World excluding USA

FULL ORCHESTRA 3

Song of the High Seas**1940**

10 min

for orchestra

3(III=picc).2(1).corA.2.bcl(ad lib).2.dbn-4.3.3.1-timp.perc:cyms/
tam-t/BD-harp-organ(ad lib)-stringsAvailability: World excluding USA

Under the Spreading Chestnut Tree**1939, rev. 1941**

12 min

Variations and Fugue on an Old English Tune

3(III=picc).2.2.2-4.3.3.0-timp.perc:SD/cyms/BD-harp-pft-organ pedal
(ad lib)-stringsAvailability: World excluding USA

Wallenstein**Suite****1937**

20 min

3.2.2.2-4.3.3.1-timp.perc-2harps-cel-pft(ad lib)-organ-strings

Availability: World excluding USA

CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Overture to a Knightly Play

1931

10 min

for orchestra

1.1.1.1-2.2.1.0-perc:bells(ad lib)/tgl/tam-t/SD/cym-pft-harmonium-strings

Availability: World excluding USA

CHORUS AND ORCHESTRA

The Beloved Voice

Bosnian Rhapsody

1930

20 min

for soprano solo, chorus, and orchestra

Text: the composer, after the novel by Robert Michel (Cz,G)

2.picc.2.2.2-4.3.3.1-timp.perc:glsp/cyms/tgl/BD-2harps-cel-mandolin-strings

Availability: World excluding USA