

CZ&SK SONIC

MADE BY FULL MOON MAGAZINE



Sound — Czech

Meet the Czechs & Slovaks at ESNS 2019!

CEEntral Party at ESNS

17th Thursday 17.00 – 20.00 @ OOST Club

Pop up concerts:

17:10–17:25 **Circus Brothers** - street concert

17:15–17:35 **Babé Sila**

17:50–18:10 **Lenny**

18:25–18:55 **Antonia Vai**

19:10–19:30 **Hellwana**

Hitchikers guide to the Galaxy of Czech and Slovak livemusic sector

Thursday 13:30 – 14:30 @ Artiestenfoyer

In case you ever wondered what are these two unique ESNS focus-countries had to offer for the music scene, you found the perfect occasion to get informed. A one hour music scene overview on market sizes, music genres, prices, opportunities, do-s and don'ts, access points and tactics first hand from promoters, agents, export offices.... in a non-dry manner.

Moderator: Anna Mašátová (SoundCzech/AMPromotions)

Speakers: Tatiana Lehocká (Real Something), Alexander Čerevka (Lala Agency), David Urban (D Smack U), Márton Náray (SoundCzech)

Boycott Czechoslovakia – music journey from communism to capitalism

Friday 13:30 – 14:30 @ Artiestenfoyer

Was it right for The Cure or Toten Hosen to play communist Czechoslovakia in 1988? In era where new walls are rising, come to listing our stories from the countries which were long behind the Iron curtain. Learn which miracles music can do and how it changed during democracy after 1989. Find out how musicians experience the change from a uniformed totalitarian regime to wild capitalism. Come to argue about the role of music and a healthy balance between art and industry in a time of bigger and bigger commercial monopolies.

Moderator: Rubert Vereker (DIY magazine)

Speakers: Dušan Svíba (Earth Music), Michal Kaščák (Pohoda Festival), Matia Lenická (B-Complex), Barbora Šubrtová (Metronome Festival)

SOUNDSCAPE

video mapping art show

The 100 years history of Czechoslovakia

16-17-18 th of January, 2019 between 18:00-23:00

Groninger museum - Museumeiland 1.



Arts and Theatre Institute



MINISTRY OF CULTURE
CZECH REPUBLIC



Sound — Czech

SoundCzech

What we do?

promoting Czech music abroad
connecting the Czech music sector locally & internationally
educational workshops
showcase festival representation
financial support programmes
mentoring

Where you can meet us in 2019?

ESNS
MENT Ljubljana
Spring Break
Jazzahead
Sharpe
C/O Pop
Czech Music Crossroads
Waves Vienna
Reeperbahn festival
WOMEX
MaMA Paris
Nouvelle Prague
...and more



Arts and Theatre Institute

Find out more at www.soundczech.cz
Get in touch with us: info@soundczech.cz

the split apple that remains in one piece

Spring 1984, an unknown housing estate, in the town of Zvolen. Among the many joys of the socialist educational system were the elementary school student exchanges between the various countries of the socialist block. The lucky minority got the chance to travel to the more liberal Yugoslavia, whereas the majority could try their luck by going to the USSR. We ended up going to Slovakia. A bit boring, but still better than going further east. I was eleven, maybe twelve, and I stayed with a fairly nice family, although I did not exactly hit it off with the family's son, my "counterpart". His father used to spend most of the time at home in his room, smoking and listening to relatively loud music, which seemed quite eerie to me. As the days of my visit went by, I began to find the music quite fascinating. Once, when I walked past the father's room, I dared myself to enter and ask what sort of music he kept putting on. Without taking his eyes from the book in his hands, he pulled on a cigarette and said: "Dežo Ursiny, don't talk while he's playing. If you can't keep silent, go away." I kept silent.

From today's point of view it seems hardly credible, but we, the kids from Prague, did not know much about Slovakia, despite living together in one state. During the normalization period people did not travel much, and also we looked at our "brothers" and "sisters" with mixed feelings. The "mix" consisted of many things: the images from the Slovak TV sci-fi series called "Spadla z oblakov" ("She Fell from the Clouds"), the accomplishments of the Slovak agricultural sector being endlessly eulogised by the media, and the latent sexual steaminess (frequently) oozing out of Slovak feature and television

films broadcast regularly within the strategic framework of "Slovak Mondays" by the Czechoslovak TV No. 1 channel. Those pinches of eroticism and liberty that the Slovak programmes exhaled seemed very unusual to us. Interestingly, we experienced quite a similar sensation of relaxed creative drives and attitudes when we listened to Slovak popular music.

The aforementioned albums by Ursiny (today I know the names were *Modrý vrch* ("The Blue Hill") and *Nové mapy ticha* ("New Maps of Silence"). Quite likely they started something, although it took me a while, after the first silent and enchanting encounter, to fathom the intelligent and unique music by the Slovakian genius. After all, the music was fairly complex – and not what the girls in my age group would listen to. On the other hand, they would certainly listen to Slovak hit-makers such as Banket, Robo Grigorov and others. Yes, the Czech pop production paled comparison. I certainly developed a very close and amicable relationship with Slovakia, which the Czech-Slovak split could not damage at all. To this day, I'm still feel very much at home in Slovakia. Slovakian musicians have some kind of sixth sense which enables them to plug into to present-day European-cum-World music productions and trends. It is, after all, clear and obvious from the choice of Slovakian musicians for this year's Eurosonic Festival.

"I am breaking the apple and it remains in one piece," Dežo Ursiny sang in his miniature composition *Hádanka* (Puzzle) at the end of the *Nové mapy ticha* album. Last year marked the 25th anniversary of Czechoslovakia's split into independent Czech

and Slovak states. A quarter of a century is an age in the context of popular music. Our countries in many respects differ from each other as much as they resemble each other. Yet, even after all this time, I still regard the music scenes in each country as being parts of one broad entity. Of course, both scenes have their specific qualities and it is interesting that both of them have managed to retain their specificities after those 25 years. But controversially the Czech and Slovaks are natural partners and, indeed, measures of each other. And perhaps that is why this joint issue, which you are holding in your hands, is an important step in the right direction. The Czech and Slovak representatives at this year's Eurosonic Festival make a proud and confident impression.

In the following pages, we ask each interviewed celebrity to give their personal favourite/s of all the selected individual musicians and bands. Perhaps I should also follow suit. By all means, check out the rock'n'roll charms of the solitary Lazer Viking, the incisive fragility and magic of Manon meurt, who have certainly outgrown their initially allocated shoegaze category; the genre-defying eclecticism of the Isama Zing project, or the folklore motifs embroidered on the fashionably modern coat of Katariina Málíková. It is also appropriate to point out the curiousness and diversity of the Czech and Slovak scenes. Whether perceived separately or as one unit these music scenes certainly go beyond the selected ensembles and individuals. They are both more resourceful, more pronounced, more autonomous than they may seem from the outside. Exploring them will be a great adventure. Enjoy the journey!

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sisters, brothers and a punky approach

Last year we celebrated Czechoslovakia's centenary. The Czech and Slovak Republics have existed independently since 1993. What were the key moments in Czech-Slovak music history, what are the pluses and minuses of both music scenes? To discuss this topic, I have been joined by Alexander Čerevka, co-founder of the LALA Slovak Music Export Agency, and Márton Náray, a Hungarian living in the Czech Republic, the head of Czech export agency SoundCzech, founded by the "The Arts and Theatre Institute" (ATI).

INTERVIEW WITH ALEXANDER ČEREVKA
AND MÁRTON NÁRAY
WORDS ANNA MAŠÁTOVÁ
PHOTO ONDREJ KOŠČÍK

What are, in your opinion, the key moments, in Czech and Slovak music history?

ALEX: That is a difficult question. Of course, there were the formative moments in the 1970s and 1980s, artists like Dežo Ursiny, the rock and jazz generations, the alternative music of Collegium Musicum. But, also, if we look at recent years, the really determining moment was the release of Jana Kirchner's album "Moruša" in 2013, made with the help of her husband and producer, Eddie Stevens, at the time of Jana's departure from Universal publishers. That record exploded in Slovakia and in the Czech Republic. It is interesting that Moruša contained seven, eight minute long, very complex compositions with a unique approach to songwriting and with Slavic, particularly Slovak, melodies. Speaking to music journalists, the album seemed really important to us in the sense of performance, that is to say if you feel passionate about something and you do things in a way that you believe, you can be successful with something even as complex as the Moruša project. Since that moment the Slovak alternative scene began to take off relatively quickly, it was a motivational force for Slovak artists who could see that with that kind of music they could achieve something. Of course, there is a connection with a big name, such as Jana Kirchner who brings in so much music history. We could find other moments that are historically even more crucial because they were linked to communism and the fight against it, but from the present period's point of view, I think this is exactly it.

Do you reckon that thanks to this album the Slovak scene became more attractive abroad? Is it also due to Eddie Stevens?

ALEX: Maybe yes. Eddie brought to our space a completely different type of thinking, completely "out of the box", a very innovative style of song-writing and also the actual concert performance. If you go to a Jana Kirchner concert, they do things like Eddie empties a bag full of tennis balls into the open top of a concert piano. He pays attention to so many small details, creating totally unique experiences, not only

musically but also theatrically. Now he has started working with other Slovak artists too. So yes, I think he's brought a different approach to Slovakia. It's not just him. The new generation is a bit more courageous, they don't want to be restricted by any limits, they know they can make it abroad, there has been a shift in the thinking of the younger generation as opposed to the older, more established artists. Sure all this did not happen overnight, it takes time.

Do you have any such moment in mind?

MÁRTON: I did not grow up in The Czech Republic, although I followed the events here during the revolution in 1989 and when Serge Grimaux produced the first Rolling Stones concert in 1990. To me, it was a very important message, not only politically, but also the fact that a Canadian guy living in Prague could put together such a gigantic concert. It very clearly stated that the market was open.

Then I have memories about coming here with Hungarian bands. We could name those who opened the door and showed us how strong the local scene was, people like Iva Bittová or Jiří Stivín. When Sunshine grew, around 2007, we asked ourselves how to look at the whole region, how to develop it, how to co-operate locally.

Nowadays, it is down to a number of smaller details – I am totally amazed by people from all over the world, who move to and fro and try to fit in and boost the local scene, not for the sake of their careers but because they want to do it. It's brilliant that the Czech and Slovak scenes always communicated with each other, I think it's unique. To my mind, it is indispensable to follow projects from neighbouring states, to notice what's going on and work with it.

ALEX: Perhaps I should add to Jana Kirchner two more events – the birth of the Pohoda Festival and some years later the founding of Radio FM. They both support independence, freedom and creative thinking in music. I also think they were the driving mechanism, which helped "Moruša" and other projects to be so strong.

Is it possible to detect the split between the Czech and Slovak Republics in our music scenes?

ALEX: Some people may disagree with me, but I agree with what Mišo Kaščák said, that in a way it is a pity that the two countries separated. As for the music scene, my

feeling is that no split ever happened. There are so many interconnections and circumstances that it seems to me we are one country. I also work for the Slovak label Slnko Records and we always feel so well received in the Czech Republic, by the media, the festivals and the business people. And I think it works the same way the other way round, for the Czechs in Slovakia. Not everything works the exactly same in both countries. What works in the Czech Republic may not work in Slovakia, but apart from that I see no major differences. I am glad the bonds are still strong and I hope they will stay that way and that moments like the Czechoslovak Focus may further reinforce these ties.

MÁRTON: I agree with that. I watched local events from a distance but I can imagine that as a fifteen year old boy I would have felt sorry about the separation, although I understand the national question and local patriotism. But how can you completely separate two cultures that are so closely intertwined? If I look at Belgium, with two languages and two totally different cultures, getting a Flemish band to the French area is not easy, they even have two export agencies. The Czechoslovak scene is far more interconnected. And when I look at our programmes for export support, we often don't even think of Slovakia as a foreign country, at all.

ALEX: Speaking of export, we have the same in LaLa, we do not think in terms of "including" the Czech Republic...

MÁRTON: Exactly. It is obvious the Slovak bands have no problem with playing in the Czech Republic, yet bigger media support would not be amiss. Moreover, there is a new generation just coming of age that makes me quite curious. I am interested in the opinions of people who are 20-25 years younger, their way of looking at things. They are not hampered by history.

ALEX: Slovakian students want to study in Prague. We've always been the smaller brothers who tried to go to Prague, it was the step to take. If you come from a smaller Slovak town then you want to go first to Bratislava, then to Brno or Prague. It does not work the same in the opposite direction for the Czechs, it is first to Prague, then abroad.

CONFIDENCE IS KEY

Are you aware of any drawbacks in our scenes?

ALEX: With our friends from the music scene, we always say that we would like to have more profes-

sionals for whom music is their priority and who can do music fulltime – we don't have many such people, not even musicians. Economic factors play a key role here. Of course, we all would like to have music at the very top of our career list and do it like at Longital where they decided to work only in music and to make it work. That's why we have to be open to working in other countries, mainly in the neighbouring ones, to search in them for further opportunities because to operate only in small Slovakia is financially neither feasible nor sustainable. After all, we just have to look at ourselves. We all take on twenty jobs and projects in order to survive. In the long term, the idea of working daily for twenty hours makes you go crazy. I don't know how else to answer your question, but if you ask about drawbacks my answer would be that in Slovakia you cannot live solely from music although there are occasions when it can work and it can be possible. We would like to change all that. Perhaps the solution lies in export activities and new openings; we don't have a full answer yet. Furthermore, until we get full time artists, managers and all the people that go with it – PR, agents, and the like. The scene is developing very quickly but if we compare our ecosystems with the situation in Austria for instance, then our approach is very "punk". Which is not necessarily a bad thing. When Ruud Berends did Sharpe he said it was amazing, like the Eurosonic Noorderslag twenty five years ago. I think he hit the nail on the head. Unfortunately, or fortunately, this is where we are at the moment and it is important to stay enthusiastic and strive for further growth. Because you cannot go on working like this long term.

MÁRTON: Here we have a long history list of truly brilliant and well-known musicians who became successful all over the world. Many of them are sought after as studio musicians from England to America. The drawback here is the fragmentation of the scene which, for the moment, cannot speak for itself. We try to work on it, it's a joint effort, we want to establish elementary communication, to ask what to improve and how to improve it. This should start already at school, how to build infrastructure for bands and to generate various programs. But the most important thing is the professionalization of the scene. Recently, I had a discussion with a colleague from abroad who said to me that he went

to see so many good bands and looking at them it was clear to him that they did not believe they could get a break. They were standing on stage with their heads down. They lack confidence and courage. You have to believe in what you are doing and music is a good example because it comes from deep inside. To lack confidence is wrong. I know it from my own experience. It is difficult to judge the moment when you move up a notch and get to a higher level. You keep having doubts even though you have already made it to a higher level. And that is what I would really like to work on.

How do you see the current Czech and Slovak scene?

MÁRTON: I can see that both scenes slightly differ. What we have in common is a number of experimental and bold projects that are not scared to push the frontiers. The Slovak scene is very lively. Of the bands that really impressed me, the first example is Polemic who always make me laugh and make my heart sing. They have a quarter of a century long history in the field of dub and reggae. Whenever I see them I am amazed at the amount of their hard work and professionalism. Then there are the Chiki Liki-tu-a and younger bands like Diego. I also love the music by Jimmy Pé.

ALEX: Of course I keep an eye on what goes on and what gets published on your side of the fence. Personally, I am a big fan of the Brno scene which was strong in the past and still is. The present names like Iflfoap or Acute Dose belong to my favourites. Equally, I like the initiatives by projects such as Czeching, Starter or Full Moon Forum. Of all the festivals we rate highly the programming by the Beseda u Bigbitu festival. The Czech scene does not have to worry about its future.

Is there any model of a foreign music scene or export agency that is worth following?

MÁRTON: My experience is that each export agency works differently. We have to check out all the possibilities and deal with the challenges. The Czech Fresh program is one such case. We have to evaluate what works and what does not. After all, most of the export agencies work exactly like that. It would be great to have full awareness of what goes on in the Czech music scene and also to have the first artists who really make it abroad and to help others to

make it, too. As for how the domestic scene works – I would like to see a general program that financially supports the scene. There are several projects we would like to have. One of them is the exchange of professionals, including professional evaluators since one of the main hurdles is the lack of reliable info about the scenes in other countries. Our Belgian colleagues began to build a database to share professionals who are fully knowledgeable about their local scene and who can work as advisors in other countries.

ALEX: We are often in touch with Virgo from with Estonia Music. Humanly, we are a good match but the main thing is that their work is very good, professionally and conceptually. Several of their projects – especially mentoring and recruiting new faces to the music business – are a great inspiration to us.

Which artists going to the Eurosonic Noorderslag Festival (ESNS) would you recommend?

MÁRTON: The audience should not miss any artist, it depends on whether the scene is interesting for them. If they prefer pop or dance music then Mydy Rabycad and Thom Artway. If they want something more settled and thoughtful then Floex, Ills, Zabelov Group or Manon meurt. But I think it is also good to mention projects that do not get to play at Eurosonic – Jan P. Muchow & The Antagonists, all their songs are great, or Kalle, Fvtvre or Please the Trees.

ALEX: We are very pleased with the final selection of Slovak bands for the ESNS. To us, it looks like a healthy and colourful mix of genres of new faces and more experienced ensembles. Our recommendation is to see them all. If I were to give a purely personal recommendation I'd go for Manon meurt.

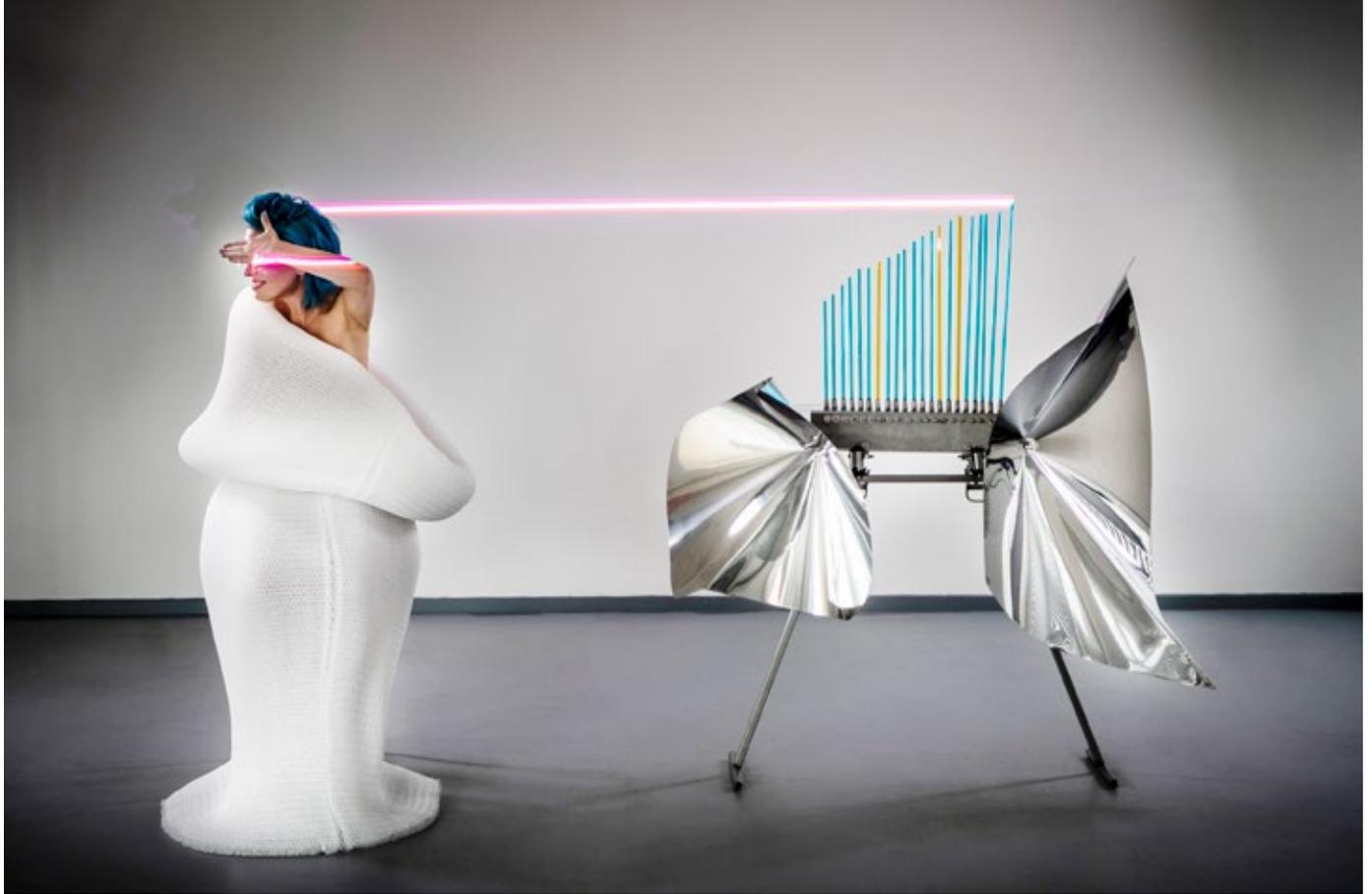
Which albums would you describe as essential from your country?

MÁRTON: Speaking of the records, everyone should have a listen to Iva Bittová, Věra Bílá or Dva.

ALEX: Of the older albums it would certainly be the "Moruše" trilogy by Jana Kirschner. From the recent crop, a very important album is also "Hrana" (Edge) by Marek Brezovsky, although I dare not predict how foreigners will react to him. From the recent production it is imperative to listen to the albums of artists who play at the ESNS.

Getting a general idea is a good start.





bohemian cristal instrument ^{CZ}

“BCI is a wild beast. It keeps surprising me what’s happened and carries on happening with respect to this project. Actually, it was an experiment right from the start and I did not expect it would get such a response. I have been on it for a year and it’s been a super fast roller coaster,” said the soul of the BCI project, Lenka Morávková, two years ago. And it was no empty waffle. The first Czech-made Cristal Baschet instrument was the result of a collaboration with the Spanish constructor and musician Martí Ruids. It was based on the legendary glass instrument made by French sound innovators, the Baschet brothers. It was first shown to the public during the International Glass Symposium (IGS) in the town of Nový Bor. Later, Lenka Morávková, a.k.a. KnofLenka, moved to the US where she scored a big success with her viral video by demonstrating the sound range of the instrument in a flowering Californian desert (viewed by over two million people). During her study trip to Los Angeles she performed there in the most prestigious Broad Club, also featured in the respected TEDx Talk, followed by gigs across Europe that

culminated in her first concert at the Colours of Osstrava Festival.

This year in June, she released her debut EP record called *Unicode*. It combines the unique sound of her glass instrument with nebulous vocals, synths and delicately minimalistic rhythms, enticing the listener into a kind of warm, indeterminate melancholy. Ambient transcendence in the digital age. One way of putting it. Playing live, KnofLenka deploys a fusion of pulsing, hypnotic levels with immersive light show, creating a unique experience for all human senses. A music ritual that creates a bridge between tradition and futurism. The *Drowned* SP was made in Los Angeles’ Seahorse Sound Studios, used by Devendra Banhart, Zola Jesus, Brodka and Paris Hilton. The EP mix was later mastered by Danielle Warman from The Chiller Sound Studio in New York, in which the likes of Mike Gordon and Bruce Springsteen mix their albums. On the visual side, costumes, props and stylized videos round off the distinctive entirety

of the project, dominated by the Bohemian Cristal Instrument: *“I don’t even perceive it as an instrument, it feels like a wilful entity that plays through me. I really enjoy travelling with this instrument to unknown places, although physically it can be rather demanding. I’d like to take it to the Los Padres National Forest which nearly burnt down last year. Also, I positioned it in a lake the Italian Alps,”* says Lenka Morávková, travelling with a glass suitcase.

Bohemian Cristal Instrument
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circus brothers ^{CZ}

From the largest Czech festivals via concerts in Germany, Austria, Romania and Slovakia to a lot of clubs and street busking. Circus Brothers obviously have tons of energy to spare and are capable of entertaining their audience until the early hours with the nonchalance of clowns and the drive of gobbing punks.

Named as Circus Brothers, they have diligently worked the scene for the past two years although their faithful fans do remember the band from its previous stint as Circus Problem. This sextet is inspired mainly by Czech and Balkan brass music, which they serve with a dash of disco, rap, house, electronica beat or folk. The term they chose to slap on their motley mix is “disco-balkan” despite a rather traditional instrumen-

tation: drums, keyboards, clarinet, violin, trombone, baritone horn, melodeon and guitar.

The epiphanic moment for the band's frontman, Eliáš Jeřábek, came while he was watching the film *Underground* by the Bosnian director, Emir Kusturica. The film's raw, unsentimental portrayal of life became Jeřábek's main source of musical inspiration. The members of the Circus Brothers not only play, they also research their music during their foreign travels. The violinist Martin Sedlák based his diploma thesis on this topic.

In January 2018, the Circus Brothers self-financed their debut album titled *#vjeržim* and took it on their Czech-Hungarian tour, on which they were joined by a Hungarian band called Bohemian Betyards.

Circus Brothers

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LIVE @ ESNS

THU 17. 1. CEE PARTY – OOST Klub
17:10 – 17:25 street show
THU 17. 1. Mutua Fides 1:15 – 2:00



floex + tom hodge cz/uk

"It all started as a friendly encounter of two musicians without a clear intent. What brought us together was our love of the piano, electronica and the clarinet, which we both play. During several years we used to meet in the Prague Floex Studio and our intimate improvisations gradually grew into a spectacular project intertwining the sound of present-day electronica, Tom's piano and the symphonic orchestra," is how Prague music producer Tomáš Dvořák describes the origin of an album on which he worked with London composer and musician Tom Hodge (Piano Interrupted, Max Cooper, Second Moon of Winter). Although their conceptual electro-acoustic album might have seemed, especially with the added orchestra, overly grandiose, the creators managed to trim their ambitions down to impressive compactness.

A Portrait of John Doe is a musical re-enactment of a story of an ordinary, common man in the present world, tensely awaiting the fourth industrial revolution. He tackles the challenges with humour, overstatement and inner imagination. The recording was made in conjunction with the Czech Radio

Symphonic Orchestra and released by Mercury KX Publishers, Decca's new sublabel.

Although the concept, the geographic distance between the musicians and, specifically, the deployment of a symphonic orchestra with the ensuing logistics, plus the time and money constraints do not allow for extensive touring, the infrequent performances were organized with simple yet remarkable multimedia skills: *"To finance the orchestra was an insurmountable obstacle. Only once did we manage to use a full orchestra. So, we filmed individual orchestra players with 35 cameras and created a concept in which the accompanying instruments get projected onto the balconies that levitate above our heads,"* reveals Floex, who has since his student days specialized in multimedia installations, presenting them regularly at experimental festivals and unusual locations (i.e. the Android horologe named *Archifon* recently installed in Spanish Oviedo, which combines interactive mapping with aspects of church architecture).

After the autumn ten-venue tour, which closed in Russian St. Petersburg, Floex and Tom Hodge re-

leased – again with Mercury KX/Decca Classics – a digital EP titled *John Doe: Arise in Prague* that includes live performance of various compositions from the debut album featuring the Czech Radio Symphonic Orchestra as well as four percussionists. Eurosonic Noorderslag is so far the only concert venue they have booked for 2019. In other words, when exclusivity goes hand in hand with the originality of artistic expression.

Floex
floex.cz

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LIVE @ ESNS:
FRI 18. 1. Grand Theatre (Main)
20:00 – 20:45

hellwana ^{CZ}



There is hardly a more striking rapper on the Czech music scene. Yet, Hellwana is certainly more than a mere statistical boost of a particular segment. To the somewhat stale pond of Czech rap – let alone the entire Czech pop scene – she brings a whiff of fresh air, female optics plus the influences of the most recent London street sound. After all, she grew up in London and English is her second native tongue.

Hellwana had a rocket-powered start to her career – in November 2017 she made a four track EP record called Sunbeam and a year later she won the "Czeching" song export competition, held by the public Czech radio station Radio Wave, in which foreign (non-Czech) programmers and journalists choose Czech domestic music talents that are likely to make it abroad. Hellwana's victory was quite unexpected, yet deserved, as proved by the performance she gave at the "Czeching" showcase evening. The viewers were enthralled by her plucky and charismatic routine, consummate rapping, singing and dancing. Off

stage, Hellwana, aka Monika Evans, is rather quiet and reserved. "Hellwana is basically the extrovert part of myself that revels in human interaction, flashing smiles, fooling and prancing around," she revealed in her interview for Radio Wave. "Myself, I am calmer and in the company of others I can be quite shy. If I were to go on stage as Monika, my knees would buckle. Hellwana somehow gets on with it," she explains laughing.

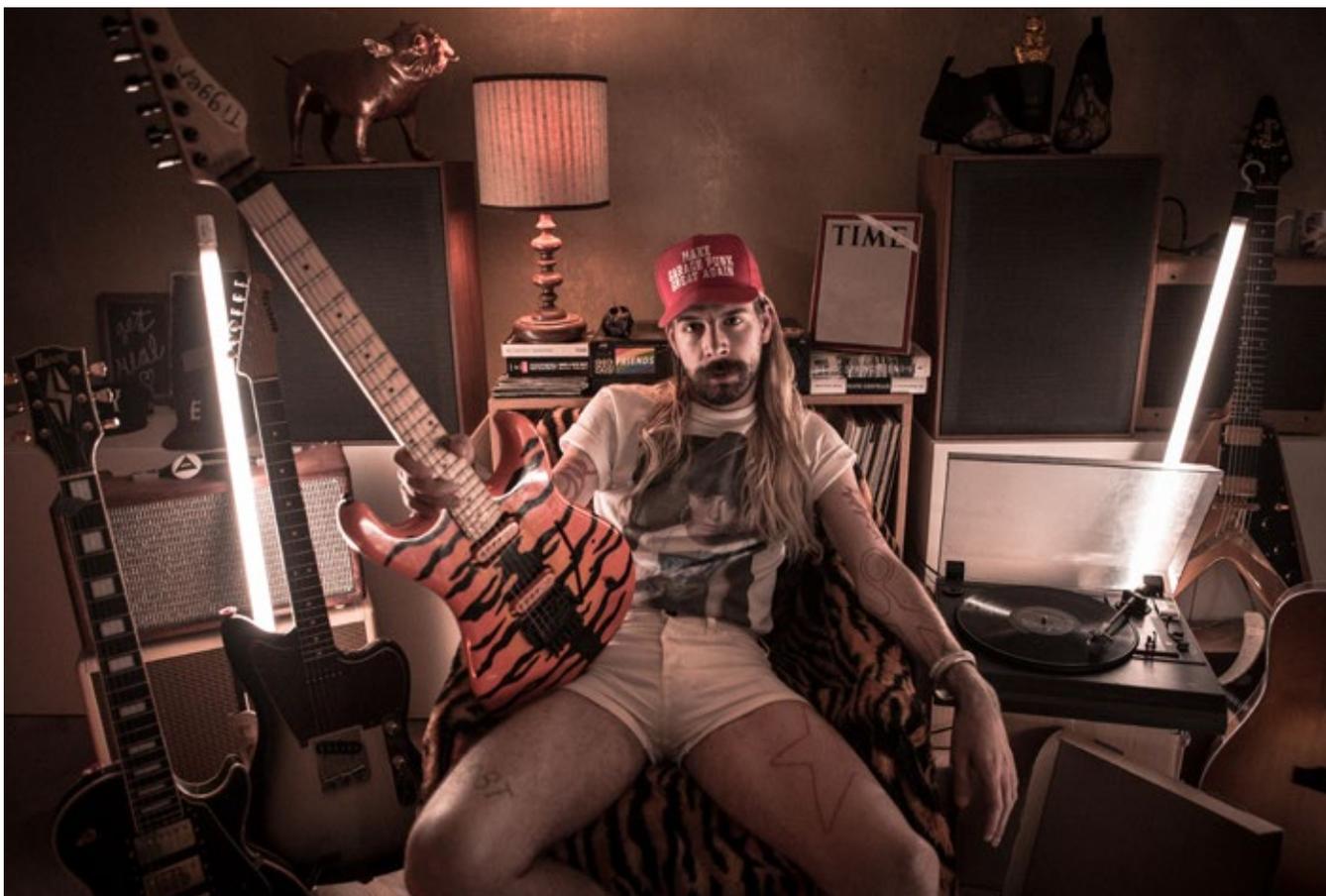
She was introduced to music by her mother who used to take her to dancehall, reggae and drum'n'bass parties. At home they would listen to jazz and soul. In Prague, Hellwana joined a hip-hop group called Trash Gang, the members of which helped her with the "Sunbeam" EP. It is a cocktail made up of ingredients such as grime, trap and neo-soul. At present, Hellwana is working up with a producer and a DJ who calls himself Cyper Sound. They are collaborating on another EP, this one to be sung in Czech. In her lyrics, Hellwana supports a positive treatment of the human body and roots for the new girl generation. Her favour-

ite artists include, for instance, the singer Jorja Smith and rapper Skepta. Overall, her attitude to the hip-hop genre is not without criticism: "Today, they rap about money, about women and men, who to sleep or not to sleep with, what house or car to have. We no longer rap about typical, everyday things. The music is losing touch with humanity," says Hellwana, the great hope of Czech rap.

Hellwana
facebook.com/hellwana

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LIVE @ ESNS:
THU 17. 1. CEE PARTY
– OOST Klub 19:10 – 19:30
FRI 18. 1. Huize Maas (front) 23:00 – 23:45



lazer viking ^{CZ}

Wild, uninhibited, self-centred, self-destructive, at times introverted and melancholic, Lazer King is a unique phenomenon on the Czech scene – the embodiment of a devoted rock'n'roller, who works his socks off on stage. A bit of a clown, a bit of a guitar slinging messiah, now he makes you laugh, now he makes cry. You either love this one man project or you hate the entire essence of rock'n'roll.

Jakub Kaifosz first drew attention as a member of the surf-punk trio Wild Tides that entered the rock scene from the recesses of the Prague district of Letná, at the onset of this decade. He embarked on a solo career under the name Boy Wonder & The Teen Sensations and completed his rock'n'roll apprenticeship, in its various forms, on his debut album Radical Karaoke, released in 2015. Under the newly assumed name of Lazer King, Kaifosz, for his second album "Flesh Cadillac",

joined forces with the British electronic producer known as Sabreheart, which resulted in a Dadaistic mix of guitars and synths reviving the 80s New Wave. Both albums brought Kaifosz the Best Record of the Year nomination for the Apollo Prize awarded by Czech music critics. The upcoming third album titled "Drag" (due out at the start of 2019) was made with a significant input by Chuck Rowell from the Crocodilles.

"There is nothing worse than being idle, not having a thing to aim at," is how Lazer Viking described his work ethic in the autumn of 2016 in his interview for Full Moon. He has no time for rest. Ideally, he plays a gig a day, if not two. His music roots stem from 60s pop music, traditional American rock'n'roll, and Elvis Costello in his coat of arms. Two chords, vocal backup barking *doo-wop* and salami pizza for supper. The 50 years dead genre still rules the roost.

Lazer Viking gets plenty of thumbs-ups as well as derision but he knows only too well he can't win them all. Unlike many others he takes it in with a broad smile: *"All it takes is to put on that silly lady's Perfecto jacket I got second-hand, match it with a cheap pair of sunshades from the chemist's and out of the blue I turn into a rock'n'roll desperado."* His words can only be taken at face value.

Lazer Viking

lazerviking.bandcamp.com

Management & Booking

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LIVE @ ESNS:

THU 17. 1. Lola 00:00 – 00:45



lenny ^{CZ}

Lenka “Lenny” Filipová can be, boldly speaking, described as the wonder kid of Czech Pop. She started learning to play the piano at the age of four, wrote her first song when she was eleven, played the piano in the band of her mother, a successful pop star, Lenka Filipová, and signed a her own deal with the Czech branch of Universal Music in 2013. She was then only 19.

By the end of 2013, she had put out two multi-song EPs, mostly authored by herself. Both records were favorably received, but the following debut tour suffered several postponements – simply because the protagonist was not entirely “happy with it“. Her first LP, *Hearts*, came out in 2016 and became a huge hit not only in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, but also, for example, in Italy. Ranging from the ballads that characterized her early output, Lenny moved to a thoroughbred pop music style, which incorporated the sound of sharp guitars, caressing r’n'b arrangements and echoes of straightforward 80s music. Lenny’s modern and self-assured approach to pop music was something the Czech music scene was craving for. She was rewarded by no less than

four successfully converted nominations for the Anděl (Angel) Czech Music Prize.

Lenny in no way restricts her playing field to the Czech music backyard. The positive reaction her LP received in Italy, particularly the single *Hello*, earned her, a year later, several appearances on various Italian TV shows. In the same year, she extended her contract – to the global level – with the German music concern Universal Music. But even there Lenny intends to continue down a path of her own choosing, largely taking her own decisions, as she confirmed for Musicserver.cz: *“They know me well in the Czech branch of Universal so I don’t cause any surprises. But with the Germans, I noticed they were taken aback by some of my reactions. I was not used to other people doing the thinking, agreeing or recording for me, without my approval. If I believe I’m right, I don’t budge.”*

Lenny plans to release her next album in 2019. So far, it has been preceded by two songs – the racy and charged *Enemy* (reflecting the merciless behaviour within the music industry) and the cuddly and sentimental ballad *Home*. The two songs

may differ in style, yet they both visibly stress the underlying pop potential, which typifies all Lenny’s compositions, enhanced by inventive electronic arrangements.

This stubborn young lady certainly knows, what she’s doing.

Lenny
lennymusic.net

Management&Booking:

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LIVE @ ESNS:
THU 17. 1. CEE PARTY
– OOST Klub 17:50 - 18:10
FRI 18. 1. Machinefabriek 20:00 – 20:40



manon meurt ^{CZ}

The small town of Rakovník in Central Bohemia seems to be continents away from big international festival stages. However, the rock quartet Manon meurt, formed in Rakovník in 2012, have made their dreams come true. Their music, lacing Shoegaze sound with post-rock moods and dream pop, is currently the best the Czech alternative music scene can offer. And the international festivals? The four musicians fronted by Kateřina Elznicová have done a few over the years.

The British Shoegaze Wave from the early 90s, epitomized by names such as Ride, Lush or Slowdive, was Manon meurt's first major inspiration. The band's first break came in 2013 when they opened for the revived major act of the Shoegaze genre, My Bloody Valentine, at their first Czech gig in 2013. How many bands get told by the soundman of the Irish noise rock legends they are "too loud"? Manon meurt raised funds for their eponymous debut EP album from their fans by launching a crowdfunding campaign. The record got noted also abroad and was re-issued by the Canadian publisher Label Ob-

scura. By then, Manon meurt, apart from numerous domestic tours, had also performed at festivals such as Nürnberg.Pop, PreMonte and Ment.

It was not until 2018, that Manon meurt "divulged" their first LP record, coded in latin numerals *MMXVI-II*. In the recording studio, they were joined by Jan P. Muchow whose band The Ecstasy of Saint Theresa in the mid-90s had enriched the Shoegaze arsenal of music with an album titled *Free-D* (Original Soundtrack) released by the cultish London label Go! Discs (The La's, The Housemartins, The Beautiful South). That made the circle complete, although the album *MMXVIII* significantly deviates from the Shoegaze style by interjecting their complex song structures with dream passages as well as energetic outbursts.

"Nothing against simple verse-refrain-verse songs, we sure like them and listen to them. But it did not satisfy me to stay solely within that format," says the drummer Jiří Bendl, whose thunderous beat contrasts with Kateřina Elznicová's dream-like vocals, while Vojtěch Pejša's guitar switches between brutal feedback, and

gentle fills. On top of that, David Tichý's keyboards supply Manon meurt's music with unpredictable shadings. *MMXVIII* is the direct opposite of consumer music, a complete and very emotive record that requires the listener's full attention. On the other hand, the experience of Manon meurt in concert generates love at the first listen. It's so easy to get washed away by the wave of their music.

Manon Meurt

manonmeurt.com

Management & Booking

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Real Something
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LIVE @ ESNS:

WED 16. 1. Vera 22:15 – 23:00

THU 17. 1. Plato – Record Store 14:00 – 14:20



mydy rabycad ^{CZ}

After two years, Mydy Rabycad returns to Groningen. The band started in 2012 playing electro-swing but soon found the genre box too constricting. Their new new orientation has been described as glamtronic, an electro-pop cocktail enhanced by an extravagant visual style, and crowned by the unmissable singer and lyricist Žofie Dařbujánová.

There is no doubt Mydy Rabycad are among to the most attractive Czech bands on the international circuit. They have played in 20 countries on 4 continents. They have had concerts in France, Denmark, South Korea, Canada, USA, Corsica, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Austria, Slovakia, Switzerland, Turkey, Algeria and Egypt. Last December they expanded their horizons to Brazil and other parts of Latin America. Among their major achievements are music festivals such as Glastonbury, Sziget, Lowlands or Paapop. Their concert at the Canadian prestigious festival Ottawa Bluesfest was included among the 10 best festival sets in 2017. The band was also favourably received at South Korean jazz festivals in Seoul and in Daegu, as well as awarded the post of a foreign headliner at the Festival International de Louisiane, Lafayette, USA.

The band's core line-up, apart from Žofie Dařbujánová, consists of Jakub Svoboda (keyboards, synthesizers),

Mikuláš Pejcha (saxophone) and Jan Drábek (bass). The full sound of the band is completed by Tomáš Konopka (drums, producer), Ondřej Slánský (guitar) and Petr „Kužel“ Blažek (sound, manager and sometimes singer). Also worth noting are the solo careers of some of the individual members. At the end of last year, Žofie Dařbujánová released her first solo recording on which we can find, together with her colleagues from Mydy Rabycad, the excellent Czech Hammond organ player, Ondřej Pivec, who has settled in New York as a member of Gregory Porter's jazz band. There is also a gospel choir from Bronx led by acclaimed arranger and choirmaster Stephanie Fischer or Czech and singer Lenny (she also plays this year's ESNS). Meanwhile Jakub Svoboda, who has a solo career under the assumed name of Nèro Scartch, cut his own album titled *Piece of My Life* in 2015. Recently, he made a new single *Turn Me On*.

Mydy Rabycad have so far put out three albums – *Let Your Body Move* (Warner Music, 2013), *Glamtronic* (Indies Scope Records, 2015) and *M.Y.D.Y.* (Indies Scope Records 2017). Their next album is expected to be released in November 2019.

Here is a review of Mydy Rabycad's performance at the Bluesfest in Ottawa in 2017: *"Hitting the stage in futuristic burlesque-wear, you knew that*

it was going to be a unique set. This Czech electro-swing outfit rocked the crowd with such a natural charisma fans new and old were swept up in the excitement.... Feet constantly off the ground on both sides of the barricades, the band was a force of nature so contagious that the hill crowd was just as rowdy as the pit. With the singer coming down to the rail to dance with the crowd shoe-less they made sure no one was standing still. Truly one of the standout shows of the festival, and a band worth catching if you have a chance."

Mydy Rabycad
mydyrabycad.cz

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LIVE @ ESNS:
THU 17. 1. Barn 00:00 – 00:40



pipes and pints ^{CZ}

Prague-based band Pipes and Pints have had a really wild and exciting year this past 12 months which concluded with the release of 4 brand new singles from the upcoming album. Each single represents the diversity of both band and genres in which they walk easily. "Raise our Flag", started the new era of the band and together with "Rebel in my Veins" did not let old fans doubt that they are still their favorite Pipes. The other single, which was a melodic one "Dark Into the Night" is influenced a lot by country, versus "Karma Killer" which is influenced by sharp metal and rock and roll. "Dark" and "Karma" are both new for the Pipes and Pints sound and this shows the beginning of their progress regarding sound and songwriting. Karma Killer is also a symbolic cutting ties to the past. „We are taking destiny back in our hands,, says band leader Vojta Kalina (bagpipes).

Pipes and Pints were formed in Prague in 2006. The sound of their music was made by combining traditional folk, country, rock and roll and punk-rock, all of this connected by the sound of Scottish bagpipes. This Combination of traditional instruments

with energetic music is not just interesting but also functional and the band supports it by a very energetic stage presentation. The band played dozens of shows and recorded their first EP and a year later the long play debut named Until We Die.

The Band continues almost without stopping touring across Europe, Russia and the UK for the next two years . The second album Pipes and Pints was recorded with well-known Californian producer Darian Rundall (he produced, for example, Pennywise, US Bombs and Suicidal Tendencies). The New album "Found and Lost" was released at the end of 2012 and was very well received not just by fans but also had very good reviews in Czech Republic and also abroad. In the Czech Republic they won the Cený Anděl music awards in the Punk and Hardcore category. The following years were again full of touring and also some personel changes. Because of changes the band had two years break.

Pipes and Pints are now back!! The brand new line up with Irish singer Travis O'Neill. The band

returned to the stages with more fire, wild and full of enthusiasm about their new era. During 2018, Pipes had already played dozens of shows supported by a tour in Spain, France, Switzerland and Germany. The first four singles are the vanguard of the first album with the new face and „a definitive entry into the new era“. We will be releasing some very exciting news in May 2019.

Pipes and Pints

pipesandpints.com

Management & Booking

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LIVE @ ESNS:

FRI 18. 1. Barn 00:00-0:40



thom artway ^{CZ}

Thom Artway could be a modern day hero from a fairy tale about a poor boy who owed his fame to good fortune. Or, equally: how a sad boy made it from the attic to the Sziget Festival. But let us not jump ahead... A talented young musician belongs to that generation of songwriters who, with guitar in their hand, grow up in the streets of the big cities of this world. Artway wrote down in the opening page of his diary a note about starting his musical journey by the so-called Lennon wall in Prague's Lesser Quarter only to find himself "all of a sudden" on a half year long tour of Australian cities, winding up in Sydney. Hardly anybody knew him at home in the Czech Republic..., that is until 2015, when his single "I have No Inspiration" became an immediate hit staying, for over one year, near the top position of the Czech Hit Parade. Soon after came similarly successful songs *Blind Man* and *Conformity*, followed by Artway's debut album *Hedgehog* released by Warner Music (2016). This record, several months later, won 2 prestigious domestic Angel Awards in the Male Singer and the Discovery Of The Year categories.

Artway opened a few concerts for the famous young French singer, Zaz, and shared the stage with Glen Hansard who invited him twice as a guest to his shows in the Czech Republic. In 2017, Artway became the winner of a prestigious international project called Czech Fresh. The victory secured him a deal

with a major world-wide booking agency United Talent Agency. It gave him the opportunity to work in one of the best domestic recording studios and a chance to shoot a video clip in the YouTube Space Lab in London. It also provided him with a few slots at important international festivals, the largest of which was the Island Of Freedom Sziget Festival in Hungary. By then, it was August 2018 and, at the end of that month, Artway's second album *All I Know* was released. Spring release of the first single from the first album was followed by the October single *Sleeping Next to You*, which premiered in British web magazine "Clash" and the release of the new album will be advertised by the premiere of the clip "Can't Wait", which is going to appear a week before Eurosonic. The album itself will be released in May 2019.

The CD got rave reviews paying tribute to Artway's overstepping his own shadow, fine tuning his own style and appropriating, in a highly personalised manner, the British song-writing tradition with a touch of tenderness, melancholy and quiet joy. "*The debut album 'Hedgehog' was, even with the hit 'I Have No Inspiration', mainly suited for autumnal evenings by the fireplace. The latest album 'All I Know' has at least two supporting pillars. One pillar celebrates the love of music in its innermost form, the other pillar proves that even with all the modern production technology and the occasional desire to experiment this talented boy from the village of*

Vlachovice will always find a way," wrote the top Czech music website Musicserver.cz. It is not alone in expecting more things to come from Thom Artway.

Thom Artway
thomartway.com

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LIVE @ ESNS:
THU 17.1. ESNS Extra – Coffee company
15:20 – 15:40
THU 17. 1. Doopsgezinde Kerk 21:35 – 22:15



zabelov group cz/by

The wide-ranging concept of jazz, its fascination with rhythmic sequences and abstract vocals, experimentation and the constantly search for new sounds, as well as the fusion of cultures, is the gist of Zabelov Group's approach to music and its presentation. Apart from live instruments, the duo uses synthesisers and other effects. But the key musical elements are the continuous spontaneity on stage and the shaping of momentary moods.

Duo Jan Šíkl and Roman Zabelov have been on the scene since 2012. The Czech composer and multi-instrumentalist, Šíkl, graduated from Prague Conservatory. In addition to playing drums and trumpet in Zabelov Group and the band, Korjen, he writes music for the National Theatre, Czech Radio, the Spitfire Company, and frequently cooperates with the Orchestra Berg. Roman Zabelov comes from a small village, Zhilitchi, in Belarus. In the family tradition, he learned to play accordion – his grandfather was a self-taught musician, his father and his two older brothers are professional accordion players. Zabelov has been a student of music in Prague since 2010. He notably enlivens the musical production of Zabelov Group with his ethereal voice.

The Zabelov Group first captured their live performance on a home-recording titled *40 000* in 2012. Their following live album, *Secret Sessions*, was made in 2014. Last autumn Minority Records released their first studio recording named *Eg*. The album, moreover, contains passages of “wild sound” recorded outside the studio: the sound of a church organ as well as of various guests, including a highly esteemed Czech double bass player, Jaromír Honzák. What started as a feat of acoustic purism gradually became complex cinematic music interspersed with sound samples and acoustic instruments boosted by electronic devices.

“In our work various tendencies started getting layered on top of each other. Discovering the sound possibilities of a modulated accordion brings us to ambient music as well to strict grooves. We are interested in fusing the abstract compositions with the narrative of spoken words and sampled wild sounds. We discover our potential as instrumentalists and at the same time we enjoy the possibilities of studio post-production. I don't know if we are going to go for the same synthesis with our next record, but with the 'Eg' album we may have interlinked all the existing layers,” says Jan Šíkl about the *Eg* album.

Members of the Zabelov Group are, among other things, also the authors of theatre and ballet music. Last year they performed at the Czech Music Crossroads and Nouvelle Prague showcases. Also, they were selected for the Ines Talents 2018 program and at the end of January 2019 they are off to the MENT Ljubljana showcase festival.

Zabelov Group
zabelovgroup.com

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Live @ ESNS:
FRI 18. 1. Grand Theatre (Up) 23:45 – 00:25



autumnist ^{sk}

Original and clever electronic music is thriving in Slovakia. One of the forefathers of this micro scene, Vlado Ďurajka, is the brain behind the project "Autumnist". This music producer from the central European town of Trenčín, who has been a major local influence since the beginning of this decade, certainly shows no signs of retiring. His group Autumnist has recently started playing rich orchestral arrangements that stretch from synth-pop through trip-hop all the way to Dark Wave. It is a mix of hypnotic crisscrossing of styles without frontiers, filmic atmosphere and the folklore of extra terrestrial nations.

The first shoots of sophisticated electronica in Slovakia sprouted at the turn of the millennium – it was then that Ďurajka made his debut in a band called Abuse with a trilogy of EPs records that were intended to be a continuation of the pioneering label Warp Records. Abuse's LP debut, released 2 years later under the title *The Great Outdoors*, mapped the ambitious downtempo and trip hop

genres. Ďurajka re-affirmed this sense of creative direction again under the newly assumed name of Autumnist. The eponymous record (2009) was dominated – in the spirit of the changed name – by pensive autumnal moods. The album won the Slovak music critics' prize Radio Head Awards. The subsequent album *Unrest* (2013) proved that The Autumnist had shed their limitations of electronica, throwing post-rock impressions and song-writing into the mix.

"The new album is substantially influenced by thoughts about the present or future developments of human society," Ďurajko comments on the *False Beacon* album (2018) for Full Moon. During the making of this record, Autumnist added several guest vocalists to the core quintet formation, which resulted in an organic sound stretching from ambient to lo-fi pop. Pigeon-holing, however, is the last thing Ďurajka worries about: *"The Autumnist offers something pretty original with its combination of samples, loops and a grinding, honk-*

ing sax that explores the middle ground between soundtrack and indie dance grooves of 808 State and an experimental soundscape take on John Carpenter jamming with Massive Attack and a hypnotic blend of up-to-date electronica," wrote the "Louder Than War" server about this album. Autumnist, which has opened for bands like Recoil, Laika, Cinematic Orchestra and Mouse on Mars, and also played at various European festivals, make music for the times of unrest.

Autumnist
autumnist.com

Management & Booking
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LIVE @ ESNS:
FRI 18. 1. Der Aa-Theater 00:20 – 01:00



b-complex ^{sk}

From the international point of view, they may be the most famous name in the Czechoslovak music warehouse. The hit *Beautiful Lies*, released in 2010 as part of the *Sick Music* compilation published by the prestigious drum and bass Hospital Records (Netsky, High Contrast and others) opened the door for B-Complex to DJ stages all over the world. The B-Complex Project is presently preparing a new album from the workshop of Matia Lenická, perhaps the first Slovak female artist to openly declare her support for the LGBT movement.

"I think it is inherent in the name of the project that I won't ever be totally complex, though I am not simple. Of all the things within me the majority are sizzlers," says the drum and bass producer Matia, who was born in the town of Šala and grew up in the Bratislava suburb of Petržalka, adding: *"After a period of time spent focusing on the one area that I am interested in, comes another period that is worse, more complicated. I try to remain flexible, to look at things from different*

angles, to make music with a sense of depth that I would not have to be ashamed of." The composition *Beautiful Lies* gave Matia the opportunity to play world-wide, including Australia and New Zealand. Perhaps this gave her the confidence to reveal her bi-gender identity in 2015, which was certainly not easy, given how conservative and religiously enthusiastic Slovakia undoubtedly is.

B-Complex publishes her music with labels such as Santorin, Zardonic Recordings and Spearhead Records. A large part of Matia's time is taken up with producing music for other projects or by remixing. Her most recent track is called *Past Lessons For The Future*, a combination of euphoric drum and bass with sampled speech by the famous Czech actor reciting timeless ideas written by a famous Czechoslovak diplomat and politician Jan Masaryk. This composition earned B-Complex the 2016 Best Single of the Year in the Radio Head Awards announced by Slovak Radio FM. The aforementioned text by Jan

Masaryk speaks of tolerance and understanding, i.e. values that Matia herself tries to represent. Matia is fully aware that her attitude might perhaps make things easier for others: *"Somehow, it makes me feel better and happier than just sitting here like St. Matthew. I hope my example may help someone else. I think there is a great need for people like myself in Slovakia. To change the perception of these things."* B-Complex is expected to release its next album in 2019.

B-Complex

[facebook.com/bcomplex](https://www.facebook.com/bcomplex)

Management & Booking

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LIVE @ ESNS:

FRI 18. 1. Simplon (Main) 02:15 – 03:00



isama zing ^{sk}

Indefatigable and still progressive; Jonatán Pastirčák has been known for a long time in Slovakia as Pjoni. His name guaranteed quality, inventive production and mainly experimental and partly improvised and ambient club sets. On the contrary, his new alter ego, Isama Zing, reacts to the latest developments on the dance scene. Post-club vision, the world of deconstructed beats, echoes of trends and anti-trends. Present-day electronica is unconstrained by genre dogmas, listeners bias or technologies. Isama Zing produces music that is both futuristic and, simultaneously, firmly anchored in the conscious needs of the current club scene. Field recordings layered upon synthetic sounds create organic and novel harmonies – the screeching of a wardrobe as a penetrating groove, dance passages interrupted by melodic structures and cold industrial reverberations. Isama Zing's music creations are complex, but he draws you into his world with surprising ease, despite his flaunted status of exclusivity and his actively stressed context.

“What I really like about the current climate in the so-called ‘post-club’ scene is the absence of genres. There are no fixed rules that would define the music. And there is also a strong connection between the world of contemporary visual arts and the music scene, often coming from the same background. Maybe the only common factor is the idea of deconstruction. So yes, I would say that my music somehow works with the deconstruction of urban subcultures, even though I don’t intend to fit into any particular one,” says Pastirčák, who actually has never been a solitary figure.

The eponymous EP was released by the Mäss label which Pastirčák runs together with his lifelong friend and renowned Slovak producer, Ink Midget. The Bratislava micro-collective aims to contribute to the night life of the Slovakian capital and to create sparks, by various (including international) releases, on the European electronica scene. It is similar to the effort propagated by the Shape platform, that supports innovative musicians, to which Pastirčák has been nominated this year. He

also caused reverberations, even outside the traditional music circles, by the project Antigona, on which Isama Zing/Pjoni collaborated with another salient voice of the Slovak alternative scene, female singer Katarzia. A series of songs putting across a direct message together with non-traditional theatre music accompanied the Greek play *Antigone*, staged by the Slovak National Theatre. Certain political activism can be detected in the sound of Pastirčák's new pseudonym as well as from the cover of his EP, depicting a woman wearing a burka.

Isama Zing
soundcloud.com/isama-zing

Management & Booking:
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LIVE @ ESNS:
 THU 17. 1. Simplon (Up) 23:00 – 23:45



katarína máliková & ensemble ^{sk}

Slovakia is a country of mountains, high and low, the Tatras and the Fatras, rocky as well as forested. Under the rounded tops of the Low Tatras lies the village of Polomka, where one of the most talented composers and voices in the Slovak music scene lives. Katarína Máliková, in her debut album "Pustvopol" (2016), subjected traditional folklore music, which is still popular in Slovakia, to avant-garde, postmodern treatment. Not many musical debuts have ever received such a reception in Slovakia. The album scored many points in the Radio Head Awards by winning in three categories: Album of the Year (Critics' Choice), Debut of the Year and World/Folk Music. The unprecedented success can be easily explained by the originality, precision and integrity of the project. Together with her large ensemble of instrumentalists, Máliková presented her postmodern folk mix on the main stage of the Slovak music festival Pohoda as well as in many Slovakian and foreign clubs. Presently, the inventive Slovakian diva is completing her new solo set, surrounded by synthesizers and keyboards.

The airiness and confidence with which Máliková tackles the high notes and the fast fingering are truly stunning. Dramatic accents but also intimate arrangements reveal a kind of raptorial drive as well as a capacity for quiet and subtle nuances, which are hard to acquire except through a classical music education. On stage, she exudes a nearly gothic darkness and a certain type of theatricality, bordering on horror. While "Pustvopol" mostly rippled the waters of folk, the upcoming album will be immersed in the synthpop genre. And also in gloom: *"The first album was about rediscovering my own roots. The next album will be "self-loss", about getting uprooted. It is difficult; first I found myself, then I lost myself. It is never definite, I certainly found something, but at the moment I am in some sort of a void. The music and lyrics that are coming out of me are dark. It takes courage to fathom it all. I think the next album will be sad, it will be more demanding,"* intimated Máliková to the Slovak internet magazine Popular.sk.

It seems quite unwise to expect that Katarína Máliková will spend her entire music career in one fostered position. On the other hand, an attempt to emulate the success of her debut album on the same playground could be a doomed effort. The music "playground" is a vast and increasingly unexplored area, therefore full of possibilities for talents of Katarína Máliková's magnitude.

Katarína Máliková & Ensemble

katarinamalikova.com

Management & Booking

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LIVE @ ESNS

FRI 18. 1. Grand Theatre (Main) 21:30 – 22:15



möbius ^{sk}

Words are useless and silence is inconsolably empty. A similar mantra was adopted by the Slovak duo Möbius, named after the founder of topology, Ferdinand Möbius. This mathematical discipline, concerned with objects in space with special qualities, fittingly captures the essence of the duo's music. It takes you on rolling, instrumental roadtrips that touch on sludge, doom and stoner. Möbius cover a wide spectrum of frequencies and fill all kinds of space with condensed and, primarily, loud sound. It is generated by a seemingly modest set of drums and guitars. Aggressive and stubbornly overbearing compositions hardly ever reach higher rates of bpm, and the feedback filled stop-times do not allow enough time to take a deep breath before another salvo of protracted distortion is unleashed. Möbius's uncompromising attitude is reminiscent of the legendary Eyehategod or the nomadic Jucifer. This comparison is in no way overstated.

The Slovak independent hardcore scene, from which Möbius stems, exists away from the limelight of popular music. The underground clubs in small towns in (not only) central Slovakia are the breeding ground for an entire generation of new bands, for whom Möbius, based in the popular Stanica club in Žilina, has been the trailblazing example. Möbius's four-composition album *The Magic of Macabre*, following the demo *Path of Nothingness*, portrays the duo in the darkness of riff-absorbing walls, including the violin intermezzo that connects both sides of the LP. Möbius know only too well that there is always plenty of space for good heavy-metal music in this world and so, without any contrived calculation, they compose music which in the end (as in the case with many bands in this category) is best digested live. In garages, steampunk clubs or, ideally, anywhere equipped with a PA system that at least partially overpowers

the screeching guitar and the crashing cymbals. Not a simple task!

Here is an excerpt from a review of Möbius in the biggest Slovakian punk/hardcore web magazine, Punkgen.sk: *"Dark slow mud suitable as a soundtrack for suicides and similar diversions. It you manage to listen to it until the end, the band gives a bag of healing mud free of charge."*

Möbius

mobiusedoom.bandcamp.com

Management & Booking

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LIVE @ ESNS:

FRI 18. 1. All Round Poolcentrum 22:15 – 23:00



nvmeri ^{sk}

Slovakian pop musicians who grew up in churches and parishes, now known as the Bratislava trio Nvmeri. They won public recognition back in 2017 when they, under their previous name of The Uniques, won the Record of the Year Prize in the domestically most prestigious music competition Radio Head Awards. What endeared them to the critics? Nvmeri's ability to revive 1970s and 1980s pop music trends, while constantly remodelling their sound and composition. Having completed their first eponymous album, *Nvmeri* (2013), it seemed Pišta Kráľovič, Palo Javorník and Miro Tuchyňa were in no hurry, which was their major strength. A massive and precise sound, metamorphosed studio material and frequent improvisations made an impact not only at home in Slovakia but also at international song contests such as Euronic Noordeslag and Waves Vienna. Nvmeri also performed in Belgium, Austria, Italy and Croatia.

In the summer of 2015, they finally released their second album titled *I Don't Think So* and remained faithful to black funk/soul, even innovative pop that is not afraid of the label "math pop". Alternative art as complimentary, alternative art that does not take the term pop as a swear word. "Right from the albums recorded under the name of *The Uniques* we took pride in playful grooves, slightly chaotic arrangement and unobtrusive soul singing. Thanks to this, Nvmeri manage to imbue relatively complicated compositions with a surprisingly subtle atmosphere. However, that does not mean the recordings are not colourful and diverse. Quite the opposite. The songs often change dynamically as well as structurally. They can be fragmentary and hyperactive. Their inner core is often packed with angst and panic. Now the individual instruments converse with care, now they slump into moodiness. The guitar moves from glistening Telecaster tones to thick distortion only to indulge a few songs later in warm wah-wah tones. Nvmeri may not offer tonal runs and climbs, yet what gives their music a sense of im-

pact is the calming quality of Pišta Kráľovič's singing that dominates their entire production. Nvmeri's new album is a fusion of complexity and changeability with a search for inner balance," wrote the Full Moon magazine after it had invited the band to its stage at the renowned Colours of Ostrava Festival. In sports terminology, they call it a good springboard.

Nvmeri
nvmeri.com

Management & Booking
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Real Something

LIVE @ ESNS:
THU 17. 1. Heerenhuis 20:40 – 21:20



our stories ^{sk}

The essential characteristic of the trio from the town of Šala in southern Slovakia is the variety of style. Although the instrumentally skilled musicians rooted their music style in the familiar scheme of popular post-rock, they use this base to launch expeditions in various directions such as blackgaze, math rock or post metal. Yes, you are right, better known colleagues from the Bratislava band Ills wave hello, closely followed by the popular Russian Circles or the enthusiasts from Mutiny on the Bounty. Mesmerising melodies contrasting with hard passages, driven by enviable force and energy. Painful riffs and incalculable rhythms.

The story of a this trio featuring Beni Starý, Tomáš Kompaník and Jakub Spiszak began to

write itself in April 2013 – in their words – under very unforeseen circumstances. The future trio members probably did not expect that a friendship formed at one all-night party would last so long. By now, they have amassed a great number of performances at music festivals such as Pohoda, Hviezdné noci Bytča, AKM Culture Days or Whoneedslyrics?! But even more importantly, after their highly acclaimed first EP made in 2015 and three subsequent singles, their debut album is likely to be out at the very start of 2019. Our Stories should celebrate the release with a new member in the band since Adam Miškovič has replaced the founding member, Beni Starý. Our Stories often bring unexpected twists but that is exactly what makes them interesting and unique.

Our Stories are approaching one of the milestones in their development. One day, perhaps, you may feel proud that you have known them from such an early stage.

Our Stories

ourstories.bandcamp.com

Management & Booking

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LIVE @ ESNS:

FRI 18. 1. Heerenhuis 23:20 – 00:00



the ill^s sk

Some bands easily generate a sensation that they have been part of the scene since time immemorial – you keep meeting them at various festivals, everybody knows and speaks highly of their albums. In short, these bands are dynamic and popular. One such example are The Ills, although it may be somewhat puzzling that they have been around for only a decade. Not only did they manage – during the first ten years of their existence – to pull off four LPs, streams of concerts and several pan-European tours, including such festivals as Icelandic Airways, Incubate, Dunk!, Ment and Colours of Ostrava, but also they totally appropriated a genre termed post-rock, which they invested with new direction and content.

It all started in 2008 in a small flat in Bratislava. The journey that took them from dreaming of a band while being on playstation, to getting real instruments and, eventually, getting their first gig was

surprisingly fast. Two guitars, bass, drums, plus a ban on vocal microphones. How many bands like that can you get in this world? Indeed, the Ills are unique. Not only because of their passion and energy or the shape, taste and smell of their genre cocktail, artfully blending post-rock with shoeglaze, math-rock, post-metal, hardcore or strictly punk, but also because of their unique melodies that integrate various Slovakian folklore influences, possibly more than the band members would like to admit. Still, if you check out albums like *Zoya*, *Ornamental* or *Mental*, you will soon find out that folklore costumes are rather infrequently represented in Slovakian post-culture.

The relatively long break from playing live concerts The Ills have enjoyed in 2018 could mean only one thing: they were recording a new album. The Bratislava quartet plans to release the new record early

in 2019. The band has hinted that the so far untitled album will be their most experimental endeavour to date, while promising major surprises. Will the boundaries of post-rock be pushed even further? It would certainly be “business as usual” for the four guys from the Slovakian capital.

The Ills
theills.net

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LIVE @ ESNS:
WED 16. 1. Der Aa Theater 21:30 – 22:15

thisnis sk



With the saxophone, accordion and drums instrumentation, one is tempted to pigeonhole the band as a village pub combo, if not a funeral marching band. Actually, the members of the Thisnis trio first met in a formation named Funeral Marching Band. However, an attempt to derive an analogy based on that circumstance would be off target. Thisnis are devoted to top-notch alternative music rendered quite distinctively by means of free interpretation and metagenre variation principles. The added value is delivered in the form of unique singing by the band leader and saxophonist, Miroslav Tóth. Nevertheless, do not expect some sort of intellectual experimentation. Thisnis music is wild, passionate as well as playful, best suited to the aficionados of Karlheinz Stockhausen, Frank Zappa, even the uninhibited Morphine.

This Hungarian-Slovak group consists of Miroslav Tóth, Ádám Móser a Áron Porteleki. Each one of them is a multi-instrumentalist, which gives the trio

its uniquely rich sound. An inseparable part of their concerts are also the video projections and other visual art created by the Hungarian fine artist Czaba Kis Róka, who is also responsible for the cover of the band's only album, *Variationes Calvariae Locus*, released by the free-minded Czech label Meteorismo (Federsla, The Mond or The Pololániks). The Czech His Voice magazine wrote about the album: *"In this recording it is pleasant to follow the natural blend of all the currently used techniques for playing classical instruments, the mentality of a nervy TV viewer flicking from channel to channel, and the formal thought processes developed over the centuries in European music as well as in the entire history of jazz. The resulting effect on a listener should be nothing less than sheer joy at the availability of such a rich artistic experience."*

At times, Thisnis concerts are regarded as emotionally unpalatable. Such a claim may hold some water, However, it is far too harsh – bands like Thisnis

simply require greater concentration and mental application than most mainstream music. Thisnis rewards the keen listener with an array of extraordinarily imaginative tones, emotions and colours. The more their music defies familiarity, the more exciting and alluring it gets. Such an adventure does not come for free, but it leaves the listener positively impacted.

Thisnis

miro2toth.wixsite.com/home/thisnis

Management & Booking

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LIVE @ ESNS:

THU 17. 1. Grand Theatre (Up) 23:45 – 00:25



tittingur ^{sk}

Apart. Together. Always. Noise rock >>> Maximal techno. And everything in between.

This project was created by two Slovakian musicians, Matúš Mordavský and Dominik Suchý, back in 2011. Originally, it explored the post-punk terrain only to end up merging noise-rock with electronica. Soon after, the initial project was put to sleep by its creators who, having graduated, followed their separate professional paths. Years went by until they re-established a (virtual) connection between Copenhagen and Bratislava, on which they completed the mixing of their first record *Lavina (Avalanche)*. The record was later released on Slovakian label Exitab (2017). *Avalanche* represents a dirty post-club music that puts a wager on the techno-beat relativised by distorted guitar and synthesizer lines, not far from Fuck Buttons or Prurient.

Tittingur swear allegiance to the physical nature of the listener's response, which is especially character-

istic of their live performances. These tend to take place in hardcore and techno venues such as boats, churches, castles and industrial objects. Uncompromisingly distorted sound planes, power surges, dirty sound but also grim David Lynch-like atmosphere – they all bear reference to hailed names from the brutal electronica margins of miscellaneous kinds – bringing to mind entities such as Amnesia Scanner, The Body, Container or Tim Hecker.

This year's novelty *Beings* (also on Exitab) reveals even cruder and edgier matter which, at the same time, is peculiarly ambivalent. The claustrophobic sense of space and discomfiting ambience are mercilessly cleaved by sonic ice picks. The overall impression is reminiscent of dreamlike plungecum-flight, painful as much as it is blissful. "*Beings*' is quite a dark piece, which simultaneously flows and entertains with its pervasive energy. Experimentation, noise, hallucinogenic sound blanket, screeching rust, il-

lusory chaos and frenzy. Everything is in balance whilst, effectively, taken care of. It all makes sense in the end. All that matters is whether (or not) to let it under your skin!" writes Full Moon in one of the first reviews of this record. It takes psychological bravery as well as open-mindedness to be able to listen to *Beings*. A mental drug for both beginners and advanced listeners.

Tittingur

facebook.com/tittingur

Management & Booking

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LIVE @ ESNS:

THU 17. 1. News Café 22:10 – 22:50

ESNS 2019

CZECH & SLOVAK FOCUS

FULL PROGRAM

MUSIC

WEDNESDAY 16. 1.

THE ILLS DER AA THEATER 21:30

MANON MEURT VERA 22:15

BOHEMIAN CRISTAL INSTRUMENT DER AA-KERK 0:30

THURSDAY 17. 1.

CIRCUS BROTHERS MUTUA FIDES 1:15

MANON MEURT PLATO – RECORD STORE 14:00

THOM ARTWAY ESNS EXTRA – COFFEE COMPANY 15:20

CIRCUS BROTHERS CEE PARTY – OOST KLUB 17:10 STREET SHOW

LENNY CEE PARTY – OOST KLUB 17:50

HELLWANA CEE PARTY – OOST KLUB 19:10

NVMERI HEERENHUIS 20:40

THOM ARTWAY DOOPSGEZINDE KERK 21:35

TITTINGUR NEWS CAFÉ 22:10

ISAMA ZING SIMPLON (UP) 23:00

THISNIS GRAND THEATRE (UP) 23:45

MYDY RABYCAD BARN 0:00

LAZER VIKING LOLA 0:00

FRIDAY 18. 1.

LENNY MACHINEFABRIK 20:00

FLOEX & TOM HODGE GRAND THEATRE 20:00

KATARÍNA MÁLIKOVÁ & ENSEMBLE GRAND THEATRE (MAIN) 21:30

MÖBIUS ALL ROUND POOLCENTRUM 22:15

HELLWANA HUIZE MAAS (FRONT) 23:00

OUR STORIES HEERENHUIS 23:20

ZABELOV GROUP GRAND THEATRE (UP) 23:45

AUTUMNIST DER AA-THEATER 0:20

PIPES & PINTS BARN 0:00

B-COMPLEX SIMPLON (MAIN) 2:15

PANELS

THURSDAY 17. 1.

HITCHHIKERS GUIDE TO THE GALAXY OF CZECH AND SLOVAK
LIVEMUSIC SECTOR ARTIESTENFOYER 13:30

FRIDAY 18. 1.

BOYCOTT CZECHOSLOVAKIA – MUSIC JOURNEY FROM
COMMUNISM TO CAPITALISM ARTIESTENFOYER 13:30

ART

DAILY SOUNDSCAPE – VIDEO MAPPING ART SHOW GRONINGER
MUSEUM - MUSEUMEILAND 1. 18:00-23:00

DAILY GARAGE IN FRONT OF STUDENT HOTEL 17:00 - 20:00

DAILY VIKTOR FREŠO: PIČUS / NIEMAND VISMARKT

DAILY GRANDSTAND 5 – GREETINGS FROM GRONINGEN TO BRUCE
NAUMAN BY ILONA NÉMETH IN FRONT OF STADSSCHOUWBURG

MEETING POINT

DAILY CZECH & SLOVAK NETWORKING LOUNGE OOSTERPORT,
G3 DURING THE CONFERENCE OPENING HOURS

PARTY

THURSDAY 17. 1. OOST KLUB 17:00 – 20:00

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SHORTLISTED
BEST MUSIC FESTIVAL

EUROPEAN
FESTIVAL
AWARDS
2019

these acts are coming to esns for you!

How exactly are bands selected for ESNS? Is it the recordings, the quality of their live concerts, or well organised management? Should they be mainstream or underground? Robert Meijerink, the person behind many of these choices, works as a booker at the Doornroosje in Nijmegen, as well as on several festivals in the city. Since 2005 he has been one of the main bookers for ESNS in Groningen, a.k.a. "the mother of the showcases." You can also catch him at many other showcases and events across Europe, and we are very pleased to be able to express our appreciation for the high quality of this year's focus.

INTERVIEW ROBERT MEIJERINK

WORDS MICHAL PARIZEK

PHOTO EMMA SWANN

You have been working as a booker on ESNS for a long time, how did you get the job?

I was initially asked in the autumn of 2005, a couple of weeks before the deadline. The former Director of ESNS asked me because he liked the work I did for Doornroosje and for the Valkhof Festival in Nijmegen, a seven-day free festival in my hometown.

Do you have any idea as to how many bands you've listened over the years?

No and to be honest, I don't care. I think it's more important to focus on new music.

Have you discovered any of your favourite bands at ESNS, or performers you still love today?

I try to keep track of as many acts as possible who played ESNS in the past, but again, I'm much more focused on new and upcoming acts.

Recently, many names from smaller European countries have been quite successful, significantly more than a few years ago. Do you think there is a possibility that some of the bands from Estonia, Belgium or Austria, for example, will eventually reach the same level as English or American headliners?

The European Music scene has developed in a very positive way over the past decade, and as a consequence we are now seeing big names from Europe, headlining or co-headlining festivals. It's great to see that Estonian acts like Tommy Cash, Ewert and the Two Dragons and Kerli have had success and are playing abroad at big festivals and doing headline tours. So it's only a matter of time before we see acts from the 'not so obvious' European countries' on main stages. But the European scene still needs to learn a lot from the stronger countries out there. You simply cannot compare artists and their professional environment from the bigger countries with smaller ones.

The CEETEP program, which Full Moon magazine was also part of, aimed to discover headliners for

major events from CEE countries. The program ended a few years ago, but we are still waiting for those major bands. Do you agree?

Well, that's not a surprise, right? CEETEP was a kickstarter aimed at creating awareness and highlighting emerging talent. The program has ended but ESNS continues that work by focusing on acts in order to make delegates, professionals, media and music lovers aware that there is great music coming from this part of Europe.

How does the selection of bands happen? Can you explain this a bit for us?

ESNS works through submissions. You can apply from May 1st until September 1st. My colleagues and I consider every applicant and start booking the festival from the end of August until November 10th. We work closely with partners like the Export Offices of various countries, the European Broadcasting Union (Public Broadcasters in Europe) and also the members of ETEP, the European Talent Exchange Program. In fact, the whole set up and process of booking is very different from any other festival because ESNS' aim is to stimulate and promote new and emerging acts from Europe.

How many people are involved in the selection process?

The ESNS booking team consists of 3 people.

How important is the personal taste of the people who select the bands? I have no doubt about their professionalism, of course, but I can imagine that it has to play a part, right?

Taste matters, but objectivity is also very important in the booking process. At ESNS we prefer to figure out how the live show is, but we also take a close look at an act's professional set up. We have to ask ourselves questions like: is the act successful or known in their home country? Does the act play live often? Is there a team on board? Does the act have connections in Europe? Are they planning to release something? What's the label? Is there a proper plan? Is it the right year to showcase a particular act?

ESNS is rightly considered to be "the mother of the showcases," I wonder if you sometimes dis-

cover some bands at other, smaller events, which you then invite to Groningen?

Sure, me and my colleague(s) regularly travel to other showcase events in order to check out new acts. We prefer to see acts live and if it's not possible, we send a spy or ask our partners in Europe.

How many showcases and festivals do you visit each year?

Around 10, same for my colleague Oskar.

MAINSTREAM OR UNDERGROUND? IT DOESN'T MATTER.

How impressed were you with the level of bands from the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic that applied for this year's Country Focus?

We were surprised in a very positive way. Not only by the number of applicants but also by the quality of the artists.

Was it difficult to make a final selection? Could you recommend one band that the delegates should definitely come to see from each country?

It's always difficult because we only have a limited number of slots, so as a booker you need to make tough decisions by turning down quality acts. It's not the most fun part of the job. And given that ESNS is an equal billing showcase festival, I would respectfully ask the delegates to listen to the music and make up their own minds. These acts are coming to ESNS for you.

Did you find anything outstanding in the selection from the Czech and Slovakian scenes?

Yes, of course. We noticed that there is really a lot of quality and diversity in styles and music, and we're very happy to be able to present a diverse selection like this. Normally we don't invite acts for a second time, but during a Country Focus, we sometimes use the opportunity to invite acts who have played in the past. We also aim to highlight what happens in that country and to celebrate the Country Focus with some more established and/or known acts who nonetheless deserve to be discovered by people outside their country of origin.



Are the acts from this year's Country Focus different, for example, from the countries on which ESNS has focused in the past? Are they different from each other?

Different country, different program. Of course there are differences between the focus countries. The good thing is that there are so many cultural differences in Europe that it's obvious that Czech and Slovakia are very different from a country like Denmark, which was our focus last year.

After the results were announced, some people from the Czech scene remarked that the selection of Czech performers was too mainstream, too obvious. These people think that we have far more interesting bands that were not selected. Kalle in particular was mentioned. Do you remember them? Do you know why Kalle was not selected? Maybe these people should organise their own festival? I'll be happy to attend. (smiling) I do remember Kalle, definitely interesting but we felt it was too early for them. Our job is also to avoid inviting acts too early in their career.

The question of what "mainstream" really is, of course is a bit silly, and the meaning will probably be perceived differently in each country. Personally, I don't think about this at all and I do not think it's important. But still – is ESNS a mainstream festival?

It's not a matter of mainstream or underground. It depends on how you look at things. ESNS is a conference and showcase festival focusing on European Music. ESNS is the only 100% showcase festival in Europe that focuses on new and emerging acts, that also tries to highlight trends and future developments in the live music industry. ESNS prefers to show diversity in styles whether it's chart-driven pop or black metal, jazz, neo-classical or punk, singer/songwriter, soul, as well as kuduro, cumbia, hip hop and much more. Our aim is to showcase the acts, put them in front of a professional audience of bookers, media, labels, managers, agents, and promoters, and last but not least, music lovers.

Over the years a lot of names have appeared as part of the ESNS program who went on to become really big – these include Anna Calvi and Royal Blood, to name just two. If I remember correctly, I saw Royal Blood at ESNS in a small venue playing for a few dozen people. Is there anyone in this year's programme who has a similar chance, or perhaps even better potential?

Without mentioning any names, I hope that you will be able to discover your new favourite band.



the disallowed light-heartedness of pop

THE HISTORY OF POP MUSIC IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

WORDS KAREL VESELÝ

PHOTO

In Prague, in the year of 1956, the poet and lyricist, Jiří Suchý, and the musician, Jiří Šlitr, came up with an ambitious plan – to create a completely new type of modern-day theatre. The idea was to combine seven art forms – film, poetry, jazz, puppets, dance, fine art and musical comedy, hence the name of the theatre SEMAFOR – in Czech: SEdm MALých FORem (seven small art forms). Although the original intention was finally reduced to a double mix of theatre comedy and songs steeped in jazz music, the influence the Semafor Theatre exerted in the years to come was colossal. It changed the stale cultural atmosphere of a country, in which everything was dictated by the state propagated doctrine of “building the bright tomorrows”, and injected it with a fresh spirit of playfulness, bordering on Dadaism. People queued for theatre tickets and the cheerful songs by Suchý & Šlitr became immensely popular, unlike the artificially optimistic ditties composed for the purposes of ideological propaganda blaring out on the radio. “Our style? Rhythm, joyful melody, clever lyrics. If it has to be sentimental and sweet, then it must have irony, too,” explained Jiří Šlitr who, with his pal Suchý, laid the foundations of modern Czechoslovak popular music. Following on in the style of Suchý & Šlitr, new songs always contained an element of irreverence as well as seriousness, demanded by the times in which they were played.

The Semafor epoch epitomises the relaxing of the post-WWII rigidity, the brutal purges in the first half of the 1950s, during which the communist regime executed over 200 political and class enemies. In the 1960s, all of this suddenly become a thing of the past. The artists began to feel free again and it was a feeling others could easily share in. During the 1960s, many future significant personalities of the Czechoslovak culture graced, if only briefly, the Semafor stage. Artists like Jan Švankmajer (film director and Surrealist), Juraj Herz (film director) or Waldemar Matuška (pop singer). Here, Miloš Forman shot his first film called *Audition* in 1963, using songs by Suchý and Šlitr. Forman, one the prominent figures of the so-called Czechoslovak New Wave, later moved to the United States where he directed feature films such as “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest”, “Hair” and “Amadeus”. The Semafor Theatre launched the career of Viktor Sodoma, the frontman of the first Czech rock band, The Matadors, which in the mid-1960s imported to Czechoslovakia the new exciting sound of distorted electric guitars and the whole R&B sound fever.

The sixties in Czechoslovakia culminated in 1968 with the Prague Spring – a reformist movement partly initiated from within the ruling Communist Party, in the hope of resuscitating the idea of humanly practised socialism and rescuing it from the shackles of Soviet Stalinism. However, the military invasion by the Warsaw Pact armies on 21st August 1968 irretrievably violated the dream of creating a fair-minded society and trampled underfoot the remaining (if any) faith in the Communist Party. One of the heroic figures of that period was the singer Marta Kubišová, whose song *Motlitba pro Martu* (*A Prayer for Martha*) became the symbol of national resistance against the occupying armies. “May peace forever rule over this land,” people sang as the reformist government headed by Alexander Dubček surrendered its power under the threat of Soviet tank canons. Soon after, during the political cleansing of the cultural sector, Marta Kubišová was banned from performing and recording music. The same ban was imposed on the protest songs written and performed by Karel Kryl whose album “*Bratříčku zavírej vrátka*” (*Shut The Gate, Bro*) (1969) captured the feelings produced by the bitter outcome of the Prague Spring. Karel Kryl reacted to the ban by emigrating to West Germany, where he continued recording meaningful songs, most of which were deeply appreciated in his home country.

The inauguration of president Gustav Husák in 1969 kicked off a sour period, officially referred to as the “normalisation process”. The opportunistic political nomenclature installed by the Soviet Union may have made the population toe the line but, in private, the majority of people never liked it. The cultural sector, once again, found itself under the crushing pressure of political censorship. Concerts and publications were subjected to the prying scrutiny of the Communist Party inspectors. If any musician or musical body failed to meet the strict ideological requirements inspected by purposefully set up cultural committees in a series of so called “requalification tests”, then the politically “unfit” musicians would not be granted a permission to perform in public. Thus, an entire generation of non-conforming musicians had to seek shelter in an unauthorised sphere referred to as the “Underground” (pronounced in English), which usually meant playing at privately-held parties such as birthday celebrations, and distributing home-made recordings in circles of likeminded people.

As the normalisation process intensified, the “Underground” artists started getting exposed to the omnipresent control of the State secret police (STB) and its wide network of informers. In 1976, the STB clamped down on the then best-known Underground rock band The Plastic People of the

Universe, which resulted in the imprisonment of the band’s members for several months for alleged disorderly conduct. Although the music played by The Plastic People did not communicate any explicit messages of political animosity, the totalitarian regime decided to punish this band as a deterrent to others. Inevitably, it had the inverse effect of turning the “Plastics” into martyrs and heroes of the anti-communist cultural resistance. This resulted a huge wave of support in political opposition circles and, most significantly, it led to the founding of a broad civic movement under the name of Charter 77. Its manifesto called for the defence of basic human rights and respect for the rule of (existing!) law. One of the leading figures in the Charter 77 movement was the playwright Václav Havel.

The trial of the Plastic People of the Universe even caused reverberations abroad. The band’s album of songs based mostly on poems written by the enigmatic Egon Bondy, titled *Happy Hearts Club Banned* (1975/75), was released in France in 1978 and became the first Czechoslovak rock record to be substantially reviewed in foreign newspapers. Otherwise, Czech and Slovak rock musicians had quite limited contact with the music scene in the West. In general, only a small number of mostly mainstream records found their way through the Iron Curtain that separated the so-called Soviet Block countries from the rest of Europe.

Some foreign albums, known as “licensed” issues, were supplied to the Czechoslovak domestic market by state-owned publishing companies. Often, the “licensed” records had either a completely different cover or an additional sleeve note attached to the back side or the inside of the original cover, providing information about the artist and the record. Frequently, this was the only way of informing the domestic listeners (in Czech) about a particular artist or music movement. (During certain periods, most of the officially distributed Czechoslovak music magazines “chose” to write only about domestic productions since any review of Western music had to be blatantly dismissive (or at least strongly critical). In the 1970s, on average, ten “licensed” foreign albums got published for the Czech market on a yearly basis. During the following decade, the number rose to twenty per annum – most of them being “best-of” editions. Releases of serial albums tended to be significantly delayed, usually by several years, after their original release in the West. The Beatles album *Abbey Road* was published in Czechoslovakia in 1972, years after the famous band’s breakup. (No other Beatles record was officially available on the Czech market at the time.) The lack of direct contact with the music scene in the West was partly made up for by cover versions sung by domestic

singers in Czech. Sometimes, the covers were acknowledged as covers, but quite often not: the band would simply borrow the melody, come up with “catchy” Czech lyrics and the uninformed public did not know a thing.

As with any product in short supply, fans had to rely on the black market. Original records were smuggled into the country by a handful of lucky individuals who managed – one way or another – to travel to the West. The other source was relatives or friends living abroad. But this route was rather unreliable since mailed packages could be confiscated by the customs authorities. Another route led via shops in Hungary or Poland, where the distribution laws – with respect to selling Western music – were not so strict. Also, the music fans (mostly in Prague) could use their own Record Exchange in a “movable” (semi-legal) public place, nick-named “Burza”, where records could be bought, sold or bartered. Many fans “recycled” the purchased vinyl LPs by transferring them at home onto their tape-recorders and, later, exchanging them again at the “Burza”.

The lack of access to Western music generated yet another tradition (which, in a diminished form, lasts to this day), i.e. the listening sessions in student’s clubs, cultural centres or music theatres, where people would listen to music accompanied by expert commentary. This was a breeding ground for future DJs, music journalists, even PhD musicologists. Live concerts by Western bands were extremely rare. In 1965, the American jazz legend, Louis Armstrong played in Prague. So did the British rock band, Manfred Mann, which gave a memorable concert followed by police intervention. Then there was a long-lasting void. In 1985, a semi-legal gig by Nico took place in Brno. In 1987, in an atmosphere of partial political loosening, the authorities in Pilsen (1987) staged a concert which, among others, featured the German band Einstürzende Neubaten. Due to protests and misbehaviour on the part of the audience, the concert was disrupted and cancelled. In 1988, Prague had the opportunity to enjoy the concert of the year given by the British band Depeche Mode. Tens of thousands of people attended the concert dressed all in black. At that point, the political regime began to realise how difficult it would be to manipulate the young generation into submission. A year and a half later, young students instigated the fall of the communist regime.

THE IDIOT OF MUSIC AND THE PRESIDENT OF FORGETTING

The mainstream of Czech pop music, with the support of state run radio and television, fell under the control of several management groups, each promoting its own pool of male and female pop singers. Their main task was to keep the nation pacified and to generate the illusion of prosperity and happiness. “I know I have to take things as they are because they can’t be any other way,” went the refrain in

one pop song in 1984. The biggest music star of the normalisation period was Karel Gott. A huge singing talent, whose beginnings are closely tied to the Semafor Theatre. He became immensely popular in the 1960s. Between 1968 and 1981, he won every year the top official prize in Czechoslovak pop music, the Golden Nightingale Award. Gott’s musical repertoire certainly never tried to politically undermine the totalitarian regime. Musically, he is closer to Frank Sinatra than to the Rolling Stones, hoping to connect with virtually all age groups of listeners. And he does.

In 1971, Karel Gott did not return from his tour of West Germany. For a while, he was weighing up his chances of staying in exile, but after the intervention of the then Czechoslovak communist president, Gustáv Husák, Gott returned home, having negotiated for himself a unique deal that allowed him to have parallel careers in the East as well as in the West. The well-known Czech writer Milan Kundera wrote about Gott’s “un/escape” in his novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. Kundera opined that the Czech pop singer represented “music without memory” – consumer fodder for the masses with no questions, thoughts or history attached. Husák was the ‘president of forgetting’ and Gott was the ‘idiot of music’. They would always be together because they both worked towards the same goal. “They deserve one another,” concludes Kundera.

Gott was extremely popular in West Germany, where the “Golden Voice of Prague” or the “Sinatra of the East” sold millions of bel canto hits. In 1977, Gott, in line with other officially approved artists signed the so-called Anticharter 77 which claimed that in socialist Czechoslovakia, as far as human rights were concerned, everything was just hunky-dory. Gott’s music and life story became the symbolic backbone of sanitized life during the normalisation period. That is to say, those who did not cause trouble could lead relatively comfortable and peaceful lives.

In the second half of the 1980s, the political regime grew steadily weaker and slackened its grip. This had a positive influence on the process of creative fermentation in the cultural sector. In the musical mainstream, Slovak bands such as Elán or Team gained in prominence, having incorporated new trends in Western music in the more alternative field – the band Bez ladu a skladbu led by Michael Kaščák, the future founder of Pohoda Festival, gained notoriety. In the Underground scene the influence of punk grew stronger, while the rebellious young generation found its most fitting expression in the style of heavy metal. Strangely, this music genre raised no eyebrows among the censors, since the Czech variety of heavy metal, in general, preoccupied itself with historical mysticism rather than political intellectualism. Elsewhere, huge numbers of people started visiting folk festivals which, although typically innocuous, had a hidden subversive streak,

stemming from the old connection between folk and protest songs. This connection was remembered especially by the generation of folk singers who had once drawn inspiration from singers gathered around the Šafrán (Saffron) Agency who, in the 1970s, suffered from political persecution and even forceful expulsion from Czechoslovakia. The protest song tradition preserved and cultivated the art of reading between the lines. Hence many younger folk musicians enjoyed embellishing their lyrics with intricately insinuated messages wrapped in double-meanings or “innocent” hints.

The quick rise of the new and self-assured generation in the 1980s was temporarily slowed down by an article, under the title of *Nová vlna* (New Wave), published in 1983 in the propagandistic *Tribuna* weekly. “Primitive texts in connection with primitive music, loathsome costumes, provocative behaviour, the rejection of everything normal, green and pink hair, swastika tattoos, colourful stripes painted across their faces, etc., this is the result, this is what this wave has brought us,” clamoured the badly researched article. Still, this text had a far-reaching impact. The authorities hardened their approach and banned several young bands that espoused new alternative trends in their music.

One of those bands was *Pražský výběr* which swept the music scene at the turn of the seventh and eighth decades with unrivalled musicality and energy. Their music contained influences from jazz as well as the New Wave. On the top of that, their ambivalent lyrics drove the censors up the wall. For many years these musicians played cat and mouse with the communist authorities, pirouetting around the snubs and bans that were thrown in the band’s path. Their album, *Výběr* (also known as *Straka v hrsti*), completed in 1982, but only released five years later, was, and still is, regarded as the very best album of the 1980s. However, the album was quickly taken out of circulation and, for most of the decade, it ended up being distributed secretly. The band’s frontman, Michael Kocáb, became an important political figure after the Velvet Revolution, when he became the decisive force behind the removal of the Red Army from Czechoslovakia in 1991, thus definitively terminating the long period of ignominious Soviet occupation.

In June 1989, the American folk and protest singer Joan Baez, during her performance at the Bratislava music festival, sang the anthem of the Polish reformist movement Solidarity, after which she immediately added a song for the Charter 77 movement and its leading figure Václav Havel. The audience ecstatically applauded her but the organisers interrupted the concert and Joan Baez did not come back on stage. It later transpired that Václav Havel was smuggled in as one her stagehands. The Czech playwright and philosopher had been only recently released from prison, having served time for his participation in anti-government protests. Five months



later, in November 1989, Havel was greeted at a jam-packed Wenceslas Square in the centre of Prague as the national hero of what was later termed the Velvet Revolution. Only a few days later, on an improvised stage on the balcony of one of the houses at the head of the same square, Karel Kryl and Karel Gott, in an unusual gesture of national reconciliation sang the Czech national anthem. The nation also witnessed the comeback of Marta Kubišová who performed her historic song “A Prayer For Martha”. The Velvet Revolution was triggered first by a student demonstration that was brutally put down by special police units, and then by a long strike led by students and dramatic artists. The demise of the communist regime could not be stopped because simultaneously a similar chain of events had been getting underway in the neighbouring Soviet Block countries. Democracy won and, in December, Václav Havel became the new Czechoslovak president.

The early 1990s was a turbulent period. The recently acquired freedom provided the country with hitherto unseen opportunities and the Czechs and the Slovaks wanted to make the most of them. Previously banned albums were getting published, new concert venues were being hurriedly opened, often without permission. Half-forgotten legends were coming out of their underground hideouts. And eager music fans did their utmost to catch up with what they had missed during the previous four decades of communist dictatorship. The country saw the big international recording companies open their local subsidiaries, and the standard type of western music industry that develops local talents into commercial stars slowly started to take off.

In August 1990, Václav Havel invited the Rolling Stones to do a concert in Prague. Due to its size, the concert could not be staged anywhere else except

at the enormous Strahov Stadium where, since the 1950s, the communist authorities would periodically stage choreographed collective exercises called Spartakiáda, intended to demonstrate the physical readiness as well as political unity of the Czechoslovak nation under the socialist regime. These organized monster-shows of muscle-flexing robotics was, at long last, replaced by British/American rock music. The Rolling Stones as well as their guest Václav Havel were applauded by a hundred and twenty thousand people. Václav Havel remained in office as the Czechoslovak president for two more years. Since the Velvet Revolution the autonomous tendencies in Slovakia had been growing both in size and vigour. In 1992, the Czech and Slovak prime ministers, respectively elected in the country's first fully democratic elections, decided to divide the country. Czechoslovakia ceased to exist on 31st December 1992.



freedom is not to be taken for granted

The activities of Michal Kaščák, mainly known as the founder of Pohoda—the biggest music festival in Slovakia, have far overreached the scope of the music scene. He frequently states that he considers a free festival to be a miracle and treats it accordingly. How does he see the current situation on the music market and what does he think about the Slovak selection at Eurosonic?

INTERVIEW WITH MICHAL KAŠČÁK (POHODA FESTIVAL)
WORDS JANA MICHALCOVÁ
TRANSLATION LUCIA CALVO
PHOTO CTIBOR BACHRATY

Pohoda festival has been on the map of the best music festivals in Europe for a long time now. It receives a number of awards every year and is especially acclaimed by its visitors. What is the history of Pohoda?

The festival was created at a time when our band ceased performing and we still wanted to invite the friends we used to play with to our town. That was in 1997 and since then, something new was added every year until it turned into what is currently the biggest festival in Slovakia. That is not essential though. What is essential is what kind of festival it is—we want it to be as homely as the first year was, to have the friendliest atmosphere possible. We want it to present the most interesting art possible. If I were to say it in a philosophical way, I'd say that I consider Pohoda to be a celebration of freedom. It has evolved from the original meeting of friends into an event that is supposed to remind people that freedom is not to be taken for granted.

In other words, Pohoda goes beyond the scope of a music festival.

Exactly. It's a place where different kinds of art meet the nonprofit scene. There are all kinds of debates, as we are very interested in social participation. We organize a lot of events even during the year. These events deal with sensitive social topics such as the issue of homelessness or they serve as a reaction to various sad incidents, such as the murder of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová. Since I personally experienced the way the music scene worked in the totalitarian regime before 1989, I really appreciate the fact that a festival like Pohoda can even exist. That's why we are trying to return something to society, whether through debates, installations or reactions to the movements in society.

What part does music play in the festival?

I personally consider music to be a miracle, while it is also a means to create a community that will spend some time together at the festival, which is the way we see music at Pohoda. We try to present artists that cannot be seen in Slovakia during the year or that have never played here before. We

would like to bring the top performers from different genres, including the minority ones as well as the contemporary classical scene, and combine them with local bands, from the small unknown ones to the big names.

What do you think about the selection of our bands at Eurosonic?

It is excellent. It shows different sides of the Slovak scene, its playfulness and willingness to experiment. The dramaturgists Robert and Oskar have done an exquisite job. I am excited to see how responsibly they have treated this choice. Every selection is subjective, everyone would do it differently and that's what is great about art. Robert and Oskar have showed their unbiased view without pressure from the agencies, publishers or export offices. They have presented an independent report about our music scene and I think this report is excellent. I'm glad it combines artists of different styles, from dark metal all the way to experimental improvisational music. I want to point out that the focus will help even those artists that haven't been selected, since it directs the attention to the whole scene and so the success of any artist helps the others as well.

The Slovak and Czech music scenes are often regarded collectively on a European scale. Yet when you look closer, they function almost completely independently from each other. What do you consider to be our uniting as well dividing feature?

I thought that after the division of Czechoslovakia we would stay artistically very close and that we would be strongly interconnected. I must say though, that I have nearly lost touch with the Czech scene, the only exception being the booking of the festival. This I'm sorry about. My experience from the festival and from the music programs I have done on Czech television makes me think that it is taken more seriously in the Czech Republic. On the one hand, it is good, while on the other hand, the scene suffers by it. It is good because musicians are getting ready for an international career more responsibly. They look for managers and agents, they are more rigorous. On the other hand, the music can sometimes show signs of more effort to please and less courage to experiment. I feel like the professionalization in Slovakia hasn't gone that far yet and as a result, the bands that are formed seem more

experimental to me, they seem more courageous and less concerned about themselves, as if there was greater courage to make mistakes. And that is what I really like about the Slovak music scene. So I don't really feel any connection there. I don't think that the scenes co-exist together as they did in the 80s, but that's not a problem at all. Each of them is great within the scope of the individual countries and both the Czech and the Slovak scene definitely deserve to be discovered.

I have always said that we are much greater seekers. We know the British scene and we are partly acquainted with the European scenes, but our huge advantage is that we know our own scene. The whole world knows John Lennon, but only a few people know Marián Varga, and that's to our benefit. We know amazing artists of good quality who are completely unknown in the world. They are like our hidden treasure. Of course I believe that a lot of these treasures will be revealed to the lucky and bold listeners from other countries.

Our mainstream scene is mainly dominated by shallow pop rock and bands which resemble each other quite conspicuously. Eurosonic has managed to capture the more alternative scene, which is more diverse. Is there anything particular which represents it?

Even though it's hard to talk in general, I like the way Slovak electronic music has evolved. There are a lot of good experimental projects. The world music scene has equally advanced towards experimentation; the punk and the metal scene are great. Then there are bands that can respond to the current trends very well, such as Nvmeri for example, although I can't really define their style. There is a hint of a guitar tradition, but it's much more playful, they use more effects . . . I don't know if the term post-indie would work here. So I think that the scene is really great and new interesting bands are being formed all the time.

Our scene is still undiscovered westward from us. It could be the same in the east. Do you see any advances there?

Well, we are equally ignorant of Ukraine as Austria is ignorant of us. No one listens to any Slovak bands there. We know considerably more Austrian bands than Austrians know Slovak ones. And it is the same way with us and Ukraine and it'd be nice to change

it. We try to get bands from Russia or Ukraine to perform at Pohoda each year, but it's still only one or two out of 150 bands. There is a certain feeling of injustice in the fact that we are more focused on the west. It is partly logical though. The way I see it, the most interesting things are happening on the British or the American music scene. The most represented scene at Pohoda is the British one. It's not because of someone pressuring us, but because it's just great.

The representation of British bands could have been mainly seen at last year's festival, whether it was Fink, The Chemical Brothers, Glass Animals and many others. That brings me to a question: Where does Pohoda stand in terms of numbers?

The budget of the festival is around 3,5 million euros. The most important part of it is the budget for the bands, which is around a million and a half. It seems as a huge amount, but there are bands that cost more than our whole festival budget put together. It's one of the consequences of the monopolization of music. The prices go up because we do not compete with colleagues from other festivals, but with whole corporations that have enormous financial capacity and which compete with each other to get artists. As a result, they overpay the most successful ones, which is harmful to music. Smaller bands are forced to accept ever-smaller fees for their gigs while the rates of the biggest ones are increasing. Sometimes it's a number that exceeds the budget for all bands put together. Names that it used to be possible to book for Pohoda cost half of the whole budget now. That is a way we don't want to go. In this respect, it is very tempting to book one big name. I think that would jeopardize the character of the whole festival. I think that's another negative result of monopolization. It seems to me that music has been taking over mistakes made in other fields, where too much concentration of economic power goes against free choice and so it becomes a caricature of the free market and healthy competition. I was hoping that art could avoid this.

Monopolization is one thing, but you mentioned once that even bands of smaller or medium scale could take up a large part of the budget. You said that you rarely book a band for less than 1000 euros. It's as if the range between five and twenty thousand euros has ceased to exist. It's two thousand euros or

thirty, fifty or a hundred thousand. It often comes to almost one hundred thousand euros for a band that hasn't even released an album yet. I don't think that's beneficial even to the bands themselves. There's a lot of pressure to increase the fee of each artist if they prosper, or if they have great online viewing figures that are measurable. It could be harmful to these artists, as it deprives them of the time for natural growth.

It's a kind of stupefaction by figures . . .

Yes, dealing with data and numbers is a delicate job. For example, some of the artists we work with are worth a lot of money and they are statistically immeasurable on the social networks in Czechoslovakia, but they are huge in Germany for instance. Their agents often argue that the band could get one hundred thousand for the same date in Germany, so why should they come to our place for ten. But no one knows them here and they wouldn't sell out a club of two hundred people. Yet since we live in a globalized world, it is kind of merciless and no one looks at the size of the country or the popularity of a given artist in that country, since the artists can easily go somewhere else where they are really appreciated.

This sounds as almost ideal for the artists. I don't think that all performers could enjoy such comfort though.

One of the most important things for the bands that will go to Eurosonic is to realize that in order to rise on the club scene, they will need to invest their time and unfortunately their money too. The clubs often cannot afford to pay much and the musicians that have made pretty successful careers on the club scene in Western Europe don't live wealthy lives. More and more young British bands are getting a second job despite being represented by big agencies. It didn't used to be like this. I can currently see the mentioned disproportion, when small bands are forced into smaller rates, the argument being that they should be thankful for getting to play, while big bands are paid increasingly more. I consider the approach of big showcase festivals a little unfair, when they don't pay the band for anything—not even the travel, nor royalty, nothing. I see it as abuse of the power of the event. At Pohoda, we always try to pay artists their fee at least. It will cover their travel expenses and leave them something extra to enjoy the

evening. We pay even if they play in a garage and no one knows them. They don't make a fortune, but at least they get paid, and we are able to provide lodgings for all of them as well.

One of the specific features of Pohoda is that you don't receive almost any finances from public sources. There are many local festivals that do it differently. Was it your own decision?

In 2006, we made a decision that we wouldn't apply for any grants to the Ministry of Culture. Even so, we had been successful with our application only once till then. We currently receive support in the amount of 50 thousand euros from European taxpayers and 15 thousand euros in a subsidy from the city of Trenčín, where the festival is held. This decision came in a period when the campaign of the winning party was built on hate towards the minorities and I couldn't imagine that the minister of culture would brag that it was thanks to the Ministry of Culture that Pohoda, which is founded on the principle of tolerance, could be realized. The government that followed afterwards had a different approach to culture and minorities but I already felt like we were in a very good position, where we could maintain a complete distance from politicians and criticize them freely without being reproached with criticizing them for money. We can afford to disapprove of the political power, whatever they deal with.

This freedom is priceless. That's why we decided that we wouldn't make it easy for us and that we would try to find resources from the private sector. Politicians in our country like to misuse the fact that culture is subsidized here and I think that artists still don't know how to handle it the way they do in Scandinavia, in Iceland or in Britain. Our distance makes me really happy.

So you compensate for it with socks for example...

We compensate in many ways. The socks are a festival souvenir, they are small, they can fit in everyone's luggage and a lot of people actually wear them.

Will it be possible to get hold of them at Eurosonic?

Definitely, we will prepare a special edition. So if you forget to bring socks, dear visitors of Eurosonic, head to the Czechoslovak lounge and we will give you some.

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From a San Francisco furniture shop to the club stage as a DJ, a manager, a promoter and a booking agent, David Urban has tried his hand at many things. The founder of a leading Czech promotion and booking agency, D Smack U, he has brought to the Czech Republic and Slovakia hundreds of outstanding artists, such as Editors, Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Hurts, Pixies, Queens of the Stone Age, Laibach, Wu-Tang Clan, Primal Scream and many others. D Smack U has been doing business since 1993, working not only with clubs but also with large festival in the region, i.e. Rock for People or Grape. What was it like to organize concerts in the Czech Republic once the frontiers were open, and what should Czech bands focus on improving? David is best placed to answer.

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID URBAN (D SMACK U AGENCY)

WORDS ANNA MAŠÁTOVÁ

PHOTO SU

Your father was a doctor, your mother a chemical researcher, so your family was not exactly musically minded to influence you in that sense. Was it at school that you first discovered music?

I became a huge music fan at the age of fifteen. We used to listen to all sorts of music at school. I liked it and later I started doing my own research.

Did you listen to the radio? It was not that easy during the communist period.

I did not listen to anything, only what we lent to each other and I used to go to record exchanges. Some people had contacts in the West. Through their parents and other contacts, they would get records sent over here. An average LP cost 400 Crowns then, the average salary was 2500 Crowns, so you could get 6 LPs every months.

At the time I was into Black Sabbath, Kiss, Iron Maiden, Judas Priest, Deep Purple, Queen, but later I switched to a different genre. I was more into punk, stuff like The Residents. In 1984 I used to listen to bands around Rock in Opposition, which I can't understand now at all. I can't listen to it now. With the exception of Art Zoyd, who are very good, or Univers Zero, who were quite minimalistic. Since the ancient days, like 1979-80, I haven't kept any records. I sold them. As I developed and grew older, my tastes changed but I can still find some records from 1985. Then came postpunk, Joy Division, The Cure, plus all the smaller bands. As of 1985 I got into the industrial sound, Einstürzende Neubauten, which I still like. I also added other genres like the dance scene or NY bands such as Sonic Youth and Swans.

In 1991 I got an invitation to San Francisco. Perhaps some kind of subconscious contact through The Residents that I was listening to, or the hippies, but I have always felt more of a punk than a hippie. Anyway, I had a chance to fly there.

You did not work there in the cultural sphere but in a furniture shop.

Yes. When I arrived there, I was driving in from the airport and seeing all the cardboard boxes and I thought – well, that's America, yeah. But San Francisco is very cool, it's relatively small, plenty of public transport, you don't need a car, you can commute anywhere. As for culture, everybody goes there. Exhibitions or films or bands, they all go to New York, LA and San Francisco.

Any unforgettable cultural experiences?

I can remember loads of cultural experiences

Anything not X-rated?

A good point. I was really impressed by Crash Worship in 1991. That was how I imagined a big group orgy, that is without the sex. It was a marching band that walked through crowds of people, pouring water with blood and everything on them. That was bizarre, all done in the industrial style. Also, I would go to see gigs like Kyuss, Pigface, the first Lollapalooza with Janes Addiction, etc.

What made you come back?

I guess I got a bit homesick after a year and a half. First I was there only for half a year, then I extended my visa for another 6 months and then I had to enroll at school where I met my future wife.

During that period, did you think of organizing concerts?

No, I started as a DJ in the Bunkr. The only qualification I had was that I had piles of CDs that I brought back from America. I played anything I liked. During that period, 10:15 Promotion and Interconcerts started doing concerts here. Vlček did a few gigs, Ondřej Šturma also did a few, and René Brejla in the pub U Zoufalců (Desperados), some good stuff. I was then getting into the Asian underground, like Transglobal Underground, Asian Dub Foundation, Loop Guru. Nobody wanted to bring over those bands, so I thought I'd give it a try. By then I'd had some experience because in 1993 I had worked in the Alterna Komotovka club in Žižkov, at first organizing gigs by Czech bands. I managed my friends Rány těla (Body wounds). It was a wild period. That's how it all started and from then on it took off by itself.

To ask a band to go to Czechoslovakia or the Czech Republic, was it easy?

It was one big unknown then. The same goes for those who were looking after them. I started by calling them from a public telephone, that was my office, a telephone box and a lot of change. It worked like this: I could use a fax in my sister's place, letter head and all that. A friend of mine taught me what it should look like. I put down that I was a DJ and the kind of music I played to let them know that I had some background in music. And I sent it off with my friend's number on it. Next day I phoned this friend of mine to see if I got a reply. No answer, so I went to call again to ask whether they got my fax, and they said they couldn't find it. So it was back to my sister's office. There I changed the date and sent it off again. Some of them worked out, I suppose. When calling England, you had to wait for 10 minutes. But I managed to get a break. I was the first one to bring the Revolutionary Dub Warrior. After that, it got going.

How did you get to find new music?

I was working at Radio 1, which was well supplied, mainly thanks to Josef Sedloň. And it has stayed that way. There was a bit of info in some Czech magazines, not much though. I did not need to read about Deep Purple. Rock & Pop was the only decent source. Frankly I don't remember.

So you were doing managing, booking, promoting plus being a DJ.

These things are never done separately in the Czech Republic. It's all down to one person, that's the way it works. Doing just one of those things, you would not be able to make a living out it.

First sold out concert?

Acid Jazz Trip Hop Party in Roxy. We sold 1200 tickets. The Significant Others played there. It was good.

Can you see more professionalism in the scene after those 30 years. Do you think there is a lack of good examples?

With a few exceptions, the bands are incredibly lazy now. They hardly work on themselves the way Sunshine



did. Today, Mydy Rabycad or Please the Trees. I know Sunshine used to spend 4 hours a day in the rehearsal room. They worked hard, they were on form, they were not afraid to hit the stage. You don't get it anymore. Sunshine fell apart just before they peaked. They did have a good agent who managed Franz Ferdinand. Something went missing there, something went wrong, and it all fell through. Perhaps it'll work out for Mydy or PTT, though they are not so clear-cut to follow. Sunshine was unadulterated rock, easier to identify with.

Is the Slovak scene in a better shape?

I like certain things better in Slovakia, but I can't judge, we only work in the framework of the Grape Festival.

Do you think a program like Eurosonic's Focus on the Czech Republic and Slovakia can help those scenes?

I hope so. Of course, people who go there must do the prep, get some info about how it works there.

What was the first event of a similar type that you ever experienced?

Around 1996-97 I went to London for the IMC, it was in its seventh year. One agent put me in touch with some people, it worked out, the snowball effect.

Over the decades with D Smack U there must have been many fuck-ups. Which one do you certainly not want happen to you again?

Certainly the last two Love Planet Festivals in Tábor. They were physically draining. They took eight years to sort out. I get my events insured now. You may think you are insured, but the insurance company is not here to hand money to you. It's here so that you can bribe God. You pay Him hush money and the rest just works out. The insurance company will always screw you up.

What pisses you off when dealing with a band's management?

Thirtymeg emails. Otherwise people I regularly work with mail me their stuff. I'm their man in Prague. Then, of course, there are other people who work with more agents here, and they divide the job among more promoters, be it in Prague or in the Czech Republic. Then you have to keep an eye on what's going on. When I like someone, then I obviously address them myself. The ratio between what I get and what I miss is 70 to 30. Things don't come to you automatically. If I just sit here in the corner then I won't get much done. You keep learning. The competition is getting tougher and tougher, which I don't exactly mind. Sometimes it complicates things or it gets more pricey. But it is great to be able to choose, although some people cry over it when they have to do three concerts in one day. That's the way it ought to be. Otherwise you get stuck in a rut.

Which places should foreign visitors visit?

I would certainly recommend the Cross Club, it's exceptional. The rest is the same as anywhere else in the world: Café V lese (Café in the Forest), Lucerna Music Bar, or Roxy. Those places are good. Cross is exceptional. I don't go much outside Prague. I do like the Vitkovice Zone. I have never been, but their events reach beyond the region.

Where do you go to scout bands?

Mostly to my desk at home. I also travel to the Eurosonic, the Great Escape and the IFF in London, at the end of September. It's not so much a showcase, more like social networking. You get to meet all the people in one place. It's pleasant and informal.

What concerts are doing this year and are you looking forward to them?

Algiers, that comes from the heart. It took me two years before they first came here. The moment I heard them I went for them. Also, I am looking forward to Balthasar. I did all their concerts in the Czech Republic. Also others promote the bands of their members, like J. Bernardt and Warhaus. It is interesting to observe. You begin with twenty people in the 007 Strahov Club and now you see how much bigger it's grown.

Which Czech band playing at the Eurosonic would you recommend?

Manon meurt.

a helper that won't get cold

FROM ROBOTICS TO DIGITAL CROWD MANAGEMENT, THE STORY OF AMENA DISPLAYS

WORDS JANA MICHALCOVÁ
TRANSLATION LUCIA CALVO
PHOTO AMENA DISPLAYS

There are many inspiring stories worth looking at when thinking of successful companies. The story of Amena Displays, a young and innovative company, might be just one of them. Despite its young age, Amena was already able to successfully cater to the biggest names in the event industry, such as Coldplay, Guns N'Roses, Depeche Mode, Robbie Williams and The Rolling Stones. Over the three years of its existence, the company has also established cooperation with many sports events such as Formula 1, MotoGP, Red Bull Air Race and Nordic Ski World Championship.

Back in 2012, apart from studying robotics, Pavol Amena was working part-time as a stage builder when he got an idea that would help facilitate communication between the visitors and the organisers of festivals. "Usually, at festivals, everyone keeps searching for directions and asking you for things, especially if you hold a walkie-talkie in your hand. When I saw all those lost people, I thought there was something missing." That was the moment of inspiration for the first transportable Amena display. Since its first use at a Depeche Mode concert, the company has built a solid army of these digital helpers, with many improvements and updates. What started as a little info panel is today a powerful crowd management tool to help safety managers in all corners of Europe communicate instructions in a split second, ad-hoc and remotely. The screens are independent and eco-friendly, as they use solar & battery power supply. Remote control via the internet helps to enhance flexibility and shorten communication times, something that may be crucial for unexpected or crisis situations. Thanks to the feedback from more than 50 events every year, as well as a custom-built control system, the company is able to deliver new functions and features based on particular event requirements. "We have a very intense and personal client-oriented approach, so if there are any requirements or wishes that our partners have, we just develop the features for them," explains Pavol. "We are with the production team during the event, as our operation is part of the whole experience. We know our tricks for content creation and control of the screens. We are keen to share our experience and always try to utilize the capabilities of the system at its best. That's part of our added value," explains Juraj Melicher, Pavol's col-

league in charge of client relationship and business development.

Pavol started his creative work and the Amena story in an apartment block in the centre of Bratislava. The finished prototypes were constructed in a shared garage in a neighbourhood called Ružinov. It's already been one year since the company moved to a bigger warehouse as it hit space limitations for further growth. The production could have fully expanded at the new location, but all the screens are still being completed handmade. Our interview is set outside the production activities of the company though; we are sipping coffee on one of the top floors of a Bratislava business centre with a perfect view of the stadium, where Martin Gore had performed a few years before.

The original idea was to replace people in neon vests by the displays with orange wording, which would allow a much wider coverage, an advantage appreciated especially by the organisers of big events. "They don't smoke, they don't need a break, they don't get cold when it's raining outside, they know how to smile..." It seems that similar technological solutions will eventually be necessary considering the disinterest in the lowest and worst paying jobs at events and the growth of their business. Juraj seems equally content about the most recent period of their business: "It has been an interesting year. We have had a three times greater number of events than last year, while the number of our team members hasn't yet changed. We are pleased to see our technology can help, and be successful outside of our region.

R&D IN PRACTICE

The Amena website gives hints about their services, but it seems like more is going on. "We are currently undergoing a website update, as there is just so much to show. This season, we developed and brought to events many new products. We enhanced our already tested portfolio of four different models by adding dynamic gates and the smart box system. Also the colourful and entertaining Gifmee screens are new, and the analytical camera is something very hot, currently being tested at Eurosonic." Juraj continues with the news explanation. The product portfolio is getting wider, but it seems like all the products share a common approach to flexibility. What makes them different is their in-house designed user interface. Once logged in, it is easy to change the content or event prepare scenarios in

advance. "We get ready by preparing the scenarios properly in advance and then just activate them when needed, particular scenario could be triggered remotely by one click from the control room of the event. "The connectivity is crucial for proper functioning. We have multiple connectivity options to set up the system according to the environment. The SIM cards for 3G or 4G network are the basic option, followed by Wi-Fi and LAN ports. In case of unstable connection, it is possible to plug the system into the Satellite network, and for hard backup in near field proximity we use Bluetooth. We have already started to experiment with IOT networks such as Lora and Sigfox to check if we could implement them." The founder reveals the crucial importance of proper connectivity management.

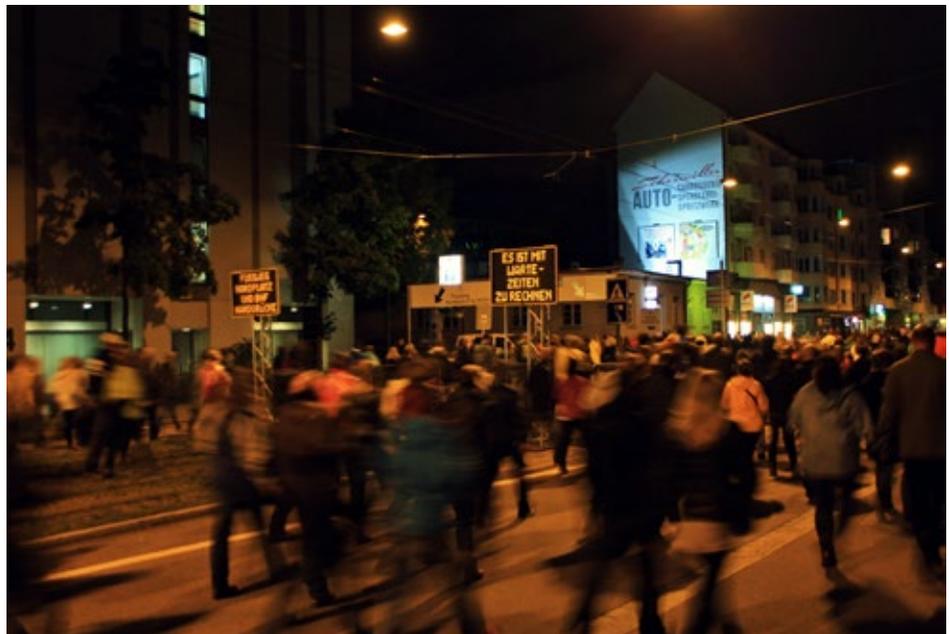
It might seem that with smartphones in everyone's hands, it should be enough to provide information through a festival app or Facebook. But last year's focus group discussion at Eurosonic interestingly showed the opposite. "Four randomly selected young people were gathered to answer questions about festival content consumption including warning messages and application use. Surprisingly, two of them didn't have enough storage in their phones to run the app, as they preferred to keep the storage for photos and videos. The others were limited by their data rates. Furthermore, they considered Facebook to be old-school. And then there is the question of smartphone battery life at the events. In their efforts to reflect the most contemporary market, they have been regularly adding new upgrades at the request of clients. That's why the audio player function is being tested and should be added at the beginning of 2019. "The screens are being given another sense. They will not just show information, but will also speak to the crowd. Thanks to this feature, the screens will be able to deliver messages even to those people who are not in direct viewing reach of the screens, like people in the camping area tents for example. We see the future of events in digitalisation, data analysis, automation and artificial intelligence. A lot of other sensors could be added to the system such as meteorology or wind measurement. For example, we are also looking at face recognition software, as this would be of immense value to the police and safety teams in a potential search. It would be sufficient to upload a photo of the wanted person into the system and the cameras would locate the right person as soon as he is in reach of our devices." adds Pavol, already planning the future.

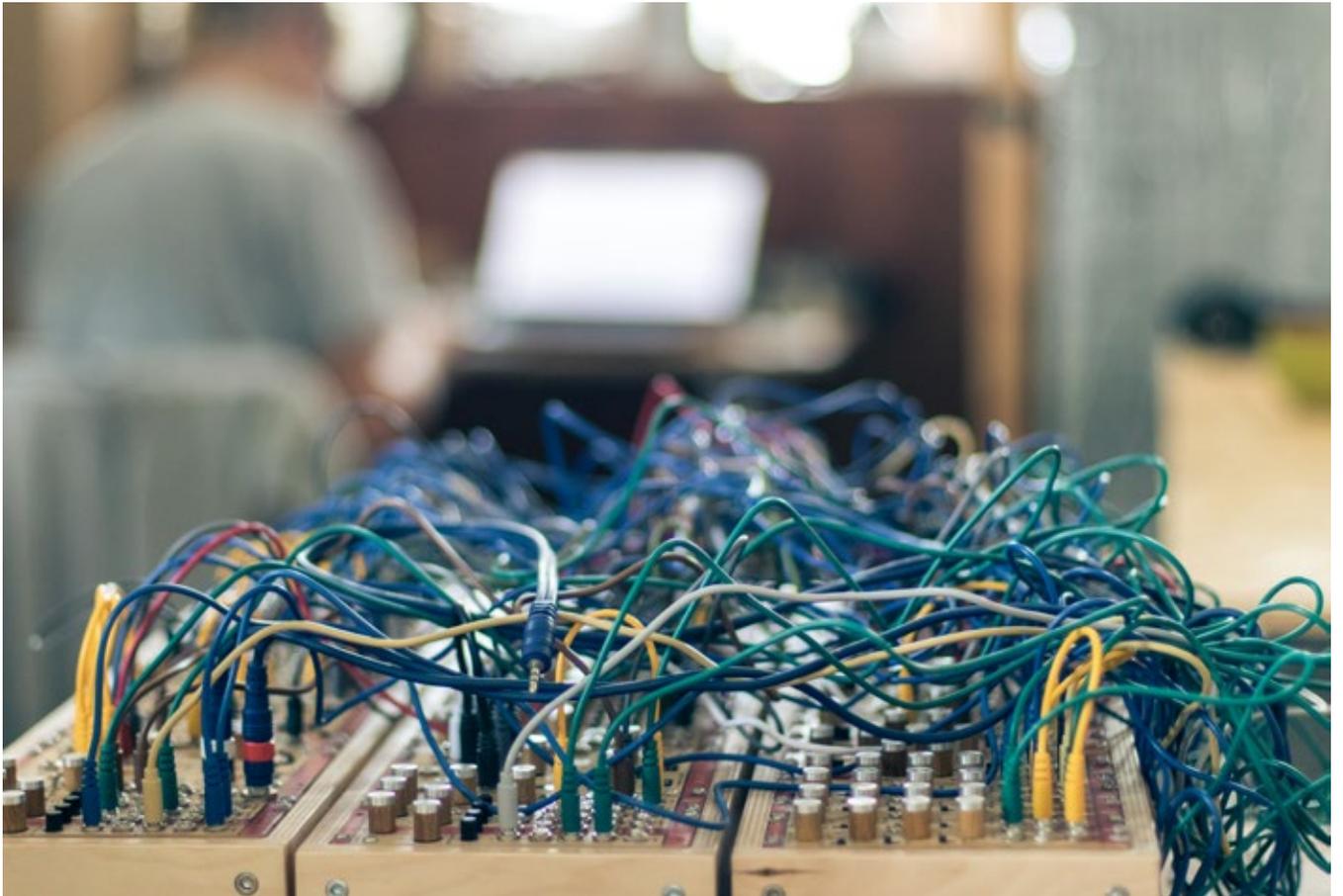
"We have been gradually extending the portfolio. Navigation itself has led us to crowd management, which is more challenging, and we have also added traffic management. Our cooperation with the Austrian highways authorities (ASFINAG) is working very well, and the last year we helped visitors to The Rolling Stones concert find the best highway exits and to park their cars quickly and efficiently. This year we enhanced our cooperation and provided the same service for Formula 1, MotoGP, RedBull Air Race and DTM. We have also very good cooperation with the Zurich police department in Switzerland, where we have been helping for 2 years to navigate visitors the sold out Letzigrund stadium at the concerts of Robbie Williams, Ed Sheeran and The Rolling Stones. Our services are getting recognized, but there is still lot of work ahead of us. There are new possibilities, we have our vision and we keep on working hard towards it." adds Juraj.

AWARENESS-RAISING IS NECESSARY

It's great to see that alongside multinational corporations offering many stable and comfortable positions in the offices of Bratislava, two individuals decide to go into development and entrepreneurship in such a specific field. Technology is developing rapidly and training and awareness-raising seems to be necessary. The range of customers interested in the displays is wide. Springtime is all about sports events. Vienna City Marathon, as well as the Bratislava CSOB Marathon are already long-term clients of Amena. The screens help them to mark the corridors dynamically, and to warn about traffic restrictions. But the feature list is not at an end by any means. Every screen has a built-in integrated webcam, and its use is surprisingly valuable. Not just is it much easier to identify correct location and viewing angle, but thanks to recording, it is also possible to analyse the situation in reverse.

The work of Amena Displays has shifted them into the group of modern innovative technological companies. And apart from top local events such as Pohoda, Grape or Uprising, their displays have found their way even beyond the borders to festivals such as Electric Love, Shut Down, Ruisrock and many others. The following statement sums it up: "The ideal vacation is at home." Nonetheless, it does not seem that Palo Amena would be willing to stop his development as he has already laid down the basis for other projects, which are, however, not yet patented, and therefore must remain secret.





assemble and play

THE STORY OF BASTL INSTRUMENTS
WORDS DAVID ČAJČÍK, VADIM PETROV
PHOTO JAN VRBA

In 2013, the founding members of Bastl Instruments from Brno, Václav Peloušek and Ondřej Merta, arrived at Rome's Maker Fair, the paradise of DIY geeks burning with a desire to invent, solder and construct. However, they soon realised that their over-sophisticated products, led by Bastl's flagship – granular sampler *Microgranny 2* – would not be in demand here, since their products are far too “assembled”. In the evening, immediately after the shutting of the festival gates, they booked a stand at the Frankfurt Musikmesse, a huge trade fair which represented the opposite pole to the DIY world in which they had been doing business until then. In a miniature stand of three square meters, the “freaks from the East” looked fairly out of place with their colourful sets of small boxes. Especially since their stand was situated right next to Yamaha's grand pianos, where, by mistake, their allocated spot was. Despite (or because of) that it proved to be the most decisive moment that fired up their firm. Now they have twenty five employees, generate a turnover of over one million Euros on a yearly basis, and work with seventy distributors in twenty countries around the world. The company transformed itself from a purely artistic and ethnographic entity to one of the most successful music export stories in present-day Czech Republic. And they did not have to give up their vision and ethos.

The former studio of digital design in Brno's Faculty of Fine Arts provides a spacious and suitable artistic environment. Looking through the windows we can see that the garden has been converted into a typical graveyard of statues generated by the Art School, but the inside the building is abuzz with life and technologies. There are people sitting at the tables tirelessly soldering, folding and sorting things out, dozens of drawers filled with spare parts hang on the walls and we've never seen so many coloured cables bunched together. Thousands of instruments, assembled or preassembled in DIY kits, are being packaged right in front of us. Modular synthesizers, racks, samplers, even mixing desks... All originally and playfully designed, in beautiful casings made of unconcealed wood and manufactured in the carpentry workshop in the garden. Equally detached, but perfectly accessible, are the developing or, to put it more precisely, recording studios that are so indispensable for the running of Bastl Instruments. According to Merta, who works here as a producer under the pseudonym of OJG: “Everything we produce is primarily inspired by our needs as mu-

sicians. Our motivation is not to make products that already exist, perhaps the ones in pink. We test out ideas on people with whom we play concerts and work in stress production trials.” “By the musicians for the musicians’ is one of the credos they go by at Bastl and they always will. The instruments made by engineers in giant companies often do not have the most natural playing feel, if you can afford them in the first place, that is.

AS YOU GO ALONG

The word *bustle*, the actual root of the name Bastl Instruments, refers to the DIY tradition of frantically chasing after components to make home-made electronic equipment back in the days of undersupplied markets in communist Czechoslovakia. One of the pioneering figures in this field, Standa Filip, lent his nick-name *Standuino* both to the DIY platform and to the predecessor of what is now the Bastl production team. Standa specialised in ethnographic mapping of the Bastl scene, a unique phenomenon in the Central European region. And it was microcontroller *Standuino*, Peloušek and Merta who travelled with their workshop specialising in open source hardware all over Europe, taking part in up to a hundred different (smaller and bigger) events. Giving lectures, producing, inspiring and getting inspired. “The Makers Movement is a strong pressure group against the West, which we confronted with our own ‘bastling’ philosophy. We had to declare our allegiance to our own tradition, we had to build our own identity,” adds Merta. One invitation led to another, the fans proliferated and so did the know-how. During their stopovers around Europe, they kept improving the first sampler, *Microgranny*, until, unexpectedly, a Japanese distributor got in touch regarding the first bulk order. The noise scene in the Far East thankfully decided to accept Bastl Instruments and in the years 2012 and 2013 the company was sustained predominantly by the Asians’ love of East European top quality boxes for making dirty sounds. In view of the growing demand the initial idea of making products only for friends slowly gave way to serial production. Roughly at the same time came the inevitable step of rebranding from *Standuino* to Bastl Instruments.

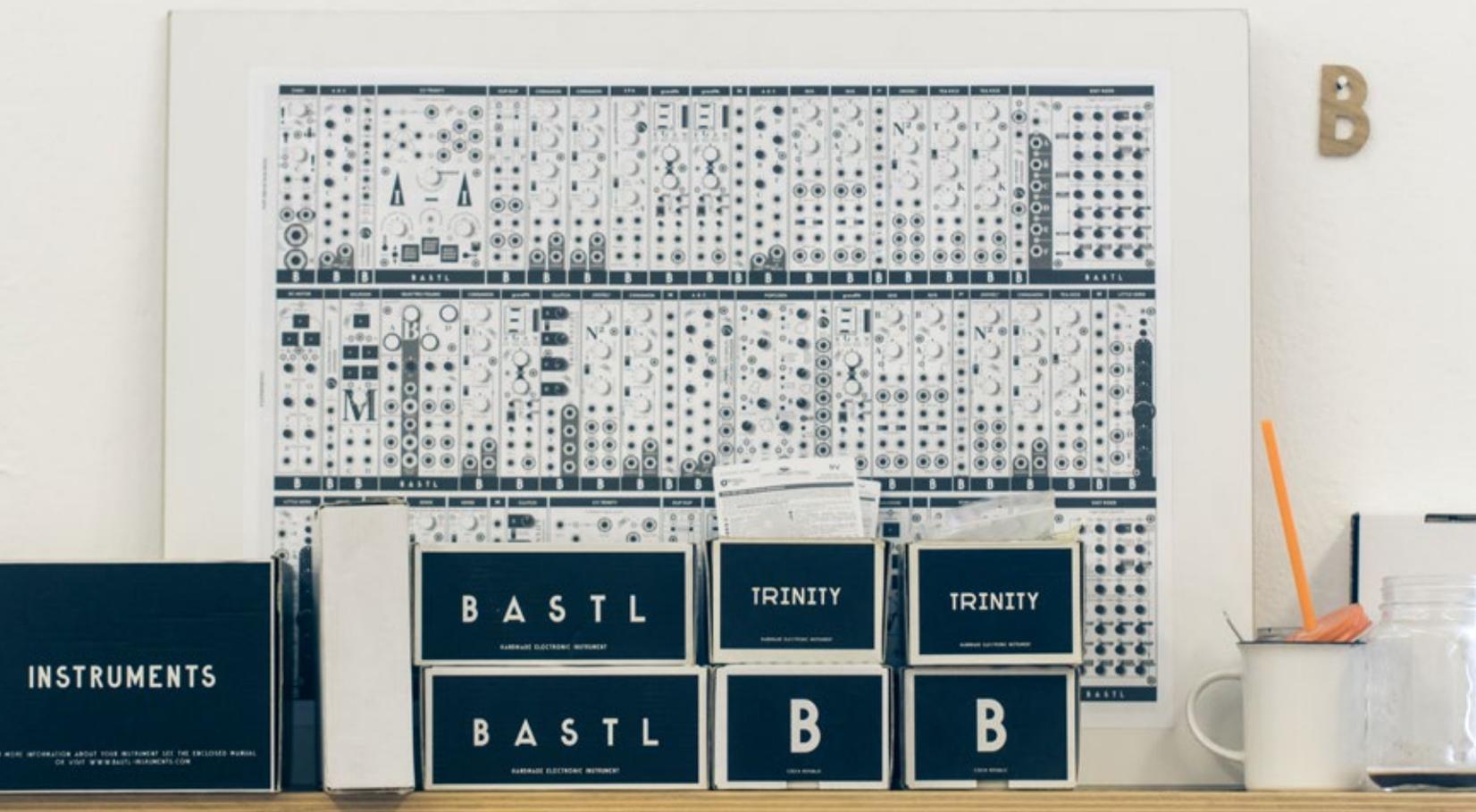
After the first boxes and samplers, the world was ready for modular synthesizers. “We had no money to buy them so we had to make them. The first ones had the pots the other way round. We thought it was ok. We simply did not know which way was the right way,” said Merta. Internationally, the prices went up over the years and low-cost brands entered the market. However, today's quality of Bastl Instruments stands head and shoulders above the

rest. A recent issue of the Resident Advisor online magazine published a review of a Bastl analogue synthesiser developed in collaboration with Peter Edwards of Casper Electronics: “Over the past two years Bastl has moved away from the field of design and non-mass produced euroracks to reach the top rung among the producers of miniature equipment. They achieved this without losing the specific oddness and originality of their authentic wooden modules,” writes the magazine. Presently the top importers are the rich regions: California, Germany and Great Britain. At Bastl, they have so far resisted the pressure to increase their prices, as demanded by international distributors. “We are not getting involved in how rich people buy things on the basis of a price list. But we try to redistribute the money from rich people in rich countries to local economies, to smaller projects and build up the scene there,” explains Merta. The lofty position of Bastl Instruments is also illustrated by the fact, that although their products are regularly sold in the Czech Republic, the company as such does not have a webpage in the Czech language. On the other hand, for several years Bastl Instruments had a company retail shop in Brooklyn, New York.

The range of Bastl products widens every year. Presently the multi-effect *Thyme* processor has become one of their milestones. Here, the developers took the complexity of the product one step further. Václav Peloušek candidly explains the qualification issue regarding the company's developers: “All of us here have learned what we know today by working here. We studied art and on paper we knew nothing. We learned everything as we went along.” Judged against the established brands with their long lines of highly educated engineers, it may work to Bastl's advantage that the entire field of knowledge related to electronics was always perceived as a space for experiment, an area where not only content can change, but also the methods. “We want to find out how to work with the instrument. That is why we work more on the interfaces than on the actual instruments. We know how to create both analogue dirt and digital dirt. Now it is time to tackle the area of controls, which is what sells our products. Bastl modules are compact and they have a lot of function controls within a small space. Yet, they are still playable.” Customers expect Bastl to come up with inventions of this type – new products with new ways of playing and controlling the instrument.

BRNO INCUBATOR

Bastl admit that it is not going to be simple for the second largest Czech city, Brno, to get rid of the reputation of being a place from which go in search



of better opportunities, instead of being a place to come to in search of better opportunities. With a population of under four hundred thousand people, the city may have a fairly strong student community and a solid chunk of Czech industry, but with Prague being only two hundred kilometres away, and Vienna even closer, talented people get easily tempted to greener pastures elsewhere. The team of artists and fans attached to Bastl, however, tries to make the most of the more intimate atmosphere of Brno and turn it into an incubator of ideas for various projects. Be it a club, a music publishing house, a clothing manufacturer, an educational video production, a magazine or a coffee roasting shop... “We initiate pilot schemes. Many projects started up, some faded away. Some schemes reach the stage of no longer being a pilot scheme. It’s nice to see them become independent, without our participation.” Bastl functions as a semi artistic, semi social hub that enables people to gather, work together and exchange experiences – not only within the framework of Brno’s cultural scene. It is not unusual that non-active musicians would learn about Bastl through completely different sources, for example through producer Leoš Hort who plays music under the nick HRTL. Hort has been using various

Bastl instruments for years, both as a producer and a performer (Eurosonic 2018).

It is possible to find a long list of similar propagators of this constantly widening commune in the Bastl online magazine. The important factor is the philosophy behind the already mentioned DIY kits. Playing and creating are two linked vessels, as Václav Peloušek says: The moment people build their own instrument, they know how the instrument works and it deepens the relationship. The instrument is no longer an alien object. For many people it’s all about chemistry.” When they perform their first concert with an instrument they have built themselves (the concert being organized by Bastl – according to the textbook case of horizontal integration), then both the audience and the musician will be equally grateful to Bastl. Irrespective of how crazy the noise set might be. “Communicate experiences even if you are not a professional,” sums up Merta as one of the main benefits of team work.

The founders reveal their future plans to build a memorial for Woody Vašulka, the renowned co-founder of the video-art genre who lived in New York and who was also a devotee of Bastl. A resource filled library

dedicated to electronic sound literature is being expanded with a compilation of synthesiser literature, the purpose of which is to inspire young people to play and construct their own instruments. This particularly concerns people who are not, or who believe they are not, sufficiently solvent to do so. Also, the aim is to remove the dogmatic notion that users of modular instruments are customarily white men above the age of thirty. Among the activities that may help to dispel this notion are residential stay programs for international artists and, very significantly, collaboration with the Zvuk (Sound) lab in Prague, which provides an excellent educational platform for lectures and workshops. It is an important centre of knowledge in that particular part of Bohemia. After all, it was the impulse to discover and learn that propelled the two founders of Bartl Instruments to where they are today. Ondřej Merta concludes: “The many things that we did, we did for ourselves. Then someone convinces you that these things are also interesting to someone else. That epitomises the idea of Bastl. It is a terribly simple story. It repeats itself all the time. But you still like it. We do not enjoy just having a company that makes synths and generates a certain turnover. We enjoy the instruments, our own cultivation and the ability to pass it on.”



FULLMOON

FULLMOONZINE.CZ



under the pirate goat flag

The official motto of Prague's Radio 1 is the slogan "The alternative without a playlist", which the station's large staff has adhered to for over a quarter of a century. To explain this phenomenon and why this station is still important for the Czech independent music scene, we need to tell the story about how an ordinary goat became the station's unofficial mascot.

WORDS ANTONÍN KOCÁBEK

It all started with an advert jingle. You hear an authentic dialogue between a soundman and an old lady, who happens to be his neighbour. He asks her to voice the promo spot by saying: "My goat does not listen to me because she only listens to Radiol". The old lady is audibly shy and nervous. Charming, she fluffs the first take. Eventually, quite relieved, she gets the line right, but with the kind of diction that makes it useless for commercial media. Radio 1, however, has been using this take, including the acknowledgement in the jingle intro, for roughly two decades, and the listeners still love the authenticity of it. The goat gradually became a trademark that features on various publicity material, and in recent years many radio presenters started making contributions to support real goats kept by families in Africa. It is exactly the "stem the tide" approach that distinguishes Radio 1 from other stations. The prerequisite for working as a newcomer in Radio 1 is love and knowledge of music – not so much the self-assured delivery, media education or silky presentation skills.

When, after many years of successful existence, the station's management organised a pronunciation workshop, the invited elocution specialist was alarmed at the vast array of mispronounced words and inbred speech impediments. But due to such imperfections and other commonalities – such as no faked optimism or elation over having to get up at 5am – Radio 1 gained points on the scale of popularity. The core value rests with the kind of music Radio 1 plays, especially the compositions other radio stations are afraid of. To play music of free choice is a no brainer for Radio 1 DJs.

DICTATOR'S UNDERGROUND

In Prague, one of the dominant features on the hills alongside the Vltava River is a huge pedestal, where in 1955 the most humongous group sculpture in Europe, headed by Stalin, was erected. The granite memorial had a short lifespan, however. The refutation of Stalin's personality cult by his successor, Nikita Khrushchev, resulted in the demolition of the sculpture. The pedestal has, however, survived to this day – sheltering extensive underground space. After the Velvet Revolution, the cavernous underground place became, in the autumn of 1990, a gal-

lery in which an exhibition called "Totality Zone" was opened, presenting works of mostly American artists, various performances and other cultural activities. This venue also gave birth to another long anticipated project – the creation of an independent radio station. Irrespective of the changed political atmosphere in Czechoslovakia after the demise of the totalitarian system, the communist legislature remained unchanged for many months to come – including the media laws which gave state radio a complete monopoly of the market. "Radio Stalin", as some people sarcastically called the miniscule transmitter – a gift from France – that barely covered the centre of Prague, simply decided not to wait any longer and began to broadcast. The station was staffed by a group of enthusiasts, mostly Prague university students. Apart from music, the programme consisted of interviews with various artists, musicians and prominent public figures.

The most distinguished guest was the then Czech president, Václav Havel. Radio Stalin became an instant hit among the young generation of Praguers for whom the Radio 1 style of broadcast was a complete novelty. At the time, the state run radio stations practically ignored any non-commercial music, plus their everyday production was stilted by all kinds of official ceremoniousness. In contrast, Radio Stalin boasted a few young and knowledgeable DJs who, by then, had already started to organise the first indie parties in various Prague clubs, playing new, original music, the type that authoritarian doctrine before the Velvet Revolution used to proscribe as ideologically flawed. Here it is tempting to draw a certain analogy with foreign "pirate" stations such as the British Radio Caroline, whose ship was anchored at a safe distance away from the country's coast. Be that as it may, some rigid Czech officials got scared and after one week of "unofficial" non-stop broadcasting confiscated the transmitter and closed the radio station down. Thankfully, the ensuing media clamour, pressure and petition signings by vast numbers of supporters soon resulted in legislature changes that opened the door for new radio stations in Czechoslovakia.

THE BITTERSWEET 90S.

The 1990s in Czechoslovakia went like a roller-coaster ride in a newly acquired freedom. Radio 1 found home in an underground space called Bunkr

in the center of Prague – which later also became (for a large part of the decade) an iconic music club – and began, by then officially, to broadcast in 1991. Cooperation and coexistence with the highly popular Bunkr Club had its advantages as well as drawbacks. On the positive side, the club hosted many famous names in the music business (the club opened with a gig by Moe Tucker, an original member of The Velvet Underground), who would often find time to pop in for a short radio interview, happily leaving an album to fill the radio's half empty CD shelf. On the negative side, bad decisions by the management eventually left the club and the radio in substantial debt which, three years down the line, led to a mutual dispute and a change of address. It was then that the Radio 1 camaraderie manifested itself again. All the broadcasters agreed to continue, over a limited period of time, working for free until "further progress". Progress arrived roughly 3 years later, bringing in another change, quite unfamiliar in commercial stations: the established Radio 1 DJs who were on the air several times a week agreed to keep only one or two broadcasting slots a week. The remaining time was divided among newcomers. It was then that the first, and so far the last, DJ audition in the history of Radio 1 took place. Given the brilliant reputation of Radio 1 the queue of applicants aspiring to play music (for no pay!) stretched all the way out of the building onto the street. The new team featured around 30 individuals, two of them under the age of seventeen. The variety of music was extensive – apart from their own sources the DJs had access to an archive which contained around 3 thousand CDs, a phenomenal quantity for the Czech Republic at the time.

The initial, economically unsustainable, period came to an end when the first owners decided to sell their majority stake to the American Metromedia International Group that was looking for acquisitions in the former Eastern block. This transaction brought in the first attempt to institute "normality" by introducing traditional rules known to exist in commercial radio stations, such as putting in a new programme director with previous experience in mainstream radio, by playing music from playlists, and by giving the listeners the voice of the same DJ at the same time everyday. Such measures met with strong resistance from the listeners, as well as loud protests and a palpable loss of allegiance from the



DJs. Finally, the new management backed down and returned to previous “liberal” ways. Eventually, they even re-installed the former producer, Lenka Weinrová, one of the few remaining members from the original cast of enthusiastic station founders. She has managed to hold onto her position, despite the various ownership changes, to this very day. What also remained was the entirely unique situation, in which a radio station that plays mostly alternative music and is run like a regular commercial radio, manages to stay in the black.

NEW GENERATION

In the very beginning, Radio 1 did not set any limits – the broadcasters simply played the music they liked. From alternative rock, like Sonic Youth, through goth and postpunk bands to the new romantics, R.E.M., Depeche Mode and U2, that are considered mainstream nowadays. Classic rock and Oldies were played, too. Yet, very soon Radio 1 also began to propagate the latest musical trends – the shoegazers, the bands around the 4AD label, Belgian electronic body music or the American crossover headed by Red Hot Chili Peppers and Faith No More. Radio 1 never dropped the principle of educating the audience, always trying to discover new and fresh music. While other music stations played things safe by

sticking to the tried and tested, Radio 1 is aware its fans care about inspiration and information. It saves the fans time by separating the indispensable from the dispensable. And thus it remains to this day: in addition to present-day music, every broadcaster reaches for something from the past, guided by his personal preference rather than by what remained singularly popular. A lot can be gleaned from the tracklists that are published on the internet. Or the results of the still functioning and well-liked Top 15 on www.radio1.cz.

The broadcasting staff at Radio 1 keeps on changing, including the creators of specialized longer-lasting series. Altogether, their number totals up to 80 people. For most of them, with a few rare exceptions, it is a hobby. In the summer of 2018 a new programme director, thirty year old Zdeněk Lichnovský, was appointed. He is flanked by several quinquagenarians from the earlier days of the station, plus two twenty year old newcomers. You can hardly hear any broadcaster’s voice more than once a week. Radio 1 DJs, outside the broadcasting studio, work as musicians, promoters, journalists, soundmen, music producers or computer specialists; they even include a writer, a scriptwriter, a respected female web designer, a busy translator and the Prague Air-

port spokesperson. Their former colleagues can be found in the Czech branches of major international music labels or established concert agencies. The programme structure, apart from the usual items such as daily interviews with musicians, latest book and film reviews or talk shows with exclusive guests, also features a number of specialised broadcasts transmitted in the evenings, late nights and over the weekends. The listeners can tune in to radio travelogues, design surveys, audiovisual art news as well as topical programmes presenting techno, punk, jazz, breakbeat, dancehall, soul & funk, grime, world music, oldies and modern experimental music.

Currently, a large part of our audience listens to Radio 1 on the internet. Inevitably, the youngest listeners are often younger than the station itself. On the whole, Radio 1 is a unique reminder of the fact that even the seemingly unreal can become real. The radio premises featured in several Czech films and not so many books about music history in the Czech Republic after 1989 omit to mention Radio 1. A sticker attached to several new album covers saying “Radio 1’s on” sends out a clear message: it is not only about looking back into the disappearing past, but also about looking at the functioning present – this is truly optimistic.



the guarding antenna

Independent cultural centers have been the phenomenon of recent years, and not only in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The eternal question is how long they will be able to survive in the market and competition jungle. They are often literally dependent on national grants, possibly the resources of various benefactors, and a few bad months can leave an unpleasant mark on their existence. While these facilities function as independent units in the Czech Republic, the majority of the Slovak centers are united in an organisation that helps them deal with similar problems. Anténa (Eng. "antenna"), a network for independent culture, provides general advice and training as well as help in specific cases of need. It currently connects eighteen cultural centers of various kinds all over Slovakia. The activities of Anténa are presented by Michal Klembara, the vice-president of the organisation.

INTERVIEW MICHAL KLEMBARA (ANTÉNA)
WORDS MICHAL PAŘÍZEK
TRANSLATION LUCIA CALVO
PHOTO PETRA ADAMKOVÁ, JURAJ CHLPÍK AND EGISL
PAULSEN

2019 will mark the 10th anniversary of Anténa. What was the main initiative behind its foundation?

Anténa will turn ten years old towards the end of the year. I wasn't present at its foundation but the reasons behind it have persisted till now. Independent cultural centers needed a stable platform that would enable them to meet regularly, communicate with each other, help each other and solve problems related to the independent scene in Slovakia.

What have you been able to accomplish since then and what do you still need to work on?

Anténa—network for independent culture, is an important partner for the Ministry of Culture in Slovakia and especially for the Slovak Art Fund. We defend the interests of our members, consisting not only of cultural centers, but also independent theatres and recently even cinemas. A lot of great work has been done by the individual members themselves. New partnerships have been formed. We have launched vocational training for people working in culture centers or culture in general. Obviously, there is always more that could be done. We are especially limited by lack of time. We would like to start focusing on research in the upcoming period.

The subheading of the organisation is "network for independent culture." I would like to know whether your function is based in connecting the activities of the individual centers or if you create your own program and events as well.

When it comes to events organised by Anténa, it is mainly in terms of education. We organise various workshops and lectures every year. We have been thinking about our own festival, perhaps the showcase format, for a long time, but we haven't come up with any final concept yet. One of the purposes of

this festival would be to promote the network and its members, as well as to provide training and networking. The same objectives that are already in place for Anténa itself.

There are a great number of quite distinct projects among the organisations that you represent—what connects them?

It is related to the definition of an independent cultural center. The main feature is that it regroups organisations that are not established by the state or the local authorities. Year-round activities and the organisation's own premises are an important prerequisite of the membership. There is naturally more that connects us. Besides similar problems and worries, it is also the enjoyment of this kind of work. We can give advice, help and learn from each other.

What should an independent cultural center be like?

There is a technical side to it, as I have already mentioned. The organisations weren't founded by the state or the local authorities. They were formed as civil initiatives. That is the essence—they are independent and they have freedom to create and choose their own program. It should go hand in hand with financial independence. It doesn't necessarily mean that cultural centers shouldn't make use of external financing in form of grants and subsidies. The main idea is that the center wouldn't be dependent on one financial resource in such a way that its possible loss could bring it down.

How can an organisation become a member of Anténa? There is quite a detailed description of all the requirements the projects need to meet, but I am more interested in the actual course of admission. How long does it take? To what extent do you verify the activities of the projects? Is there any incubation period?

Admission can take an entire year. After membership candidates contact Anténa, they receive an on-

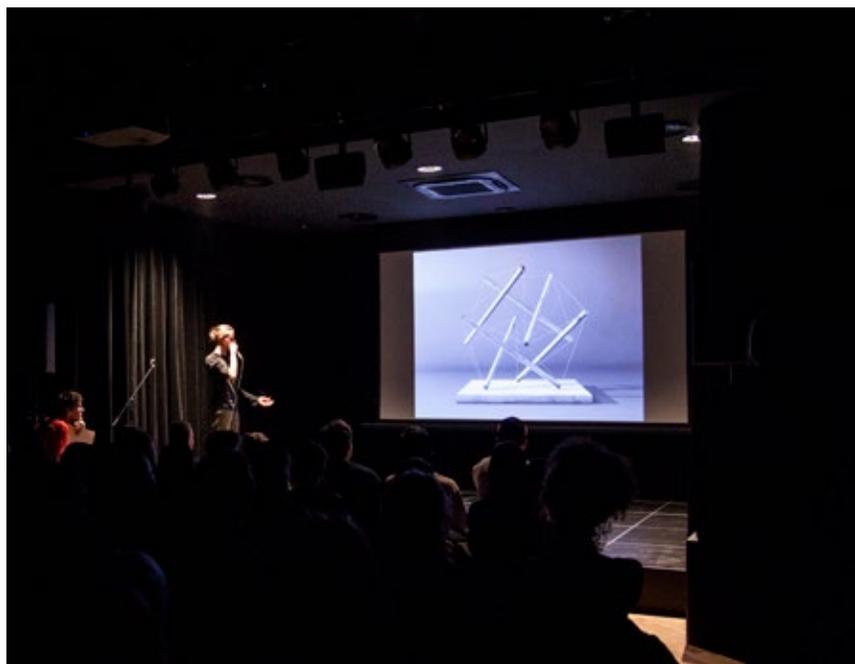
line form, which serves as the first documentation for the evaluation of the application. This step is followed by a personal presentation of the center at a network meeting where the members cast a vote. We have recently been accepting candidates first as associate members and only afterwards as full members, so there is a kind of transitional period to allow us to get to know each other. Although it rarely happens that the center applying for membership wouldn't already be known by anyone from Anténa. Our members are located all over Slovakia, so we know what is happening in the individual regions.

Why should an independent cultural organisation join Anténa?

Apart from the advantages such as free participation at the training programs of the network, or the participation at TEH meetings, it is especially because of the networking, exchange of experience, help in critical situations, counselling and the like. At the same time, I see the other side of it. By joining Anténa, you can support its activities for enhancement of the environment for independent culture in Slovakia and you can represent the interests of the sector before the politicians and state officials.

Is there any competition among the individual centers? I can imagine that they are interested in similar kinds of artists and probably share their program to some extent. Slovakia is not such a big country that such tension could be avoided. Do you ever face similar situations?

We don't see any competition among the individual centers. They operate in different cities and regions. The exception would be Bratislava, where three of our centers are located, but each of them tends to go a different way, as far as the program is concerned. You can find significant differences in the take on the program of the organisations across the whole country. Sometimes the same program gets booked for more events, but it mostly is due to bands planning tours around culture centers. The dates are their responsibility then.



It doesn't really matter to the centers if a given concert happens one day or the other, as their program works on a day-to-day basis. This is definitely not a stumbling block. If there is space for competition among our members, it is in competing for the funding from Slovak Art Fund. We try to deal with the fund collectively though, create conditions for the programs designed for cultural and art centers and fight for more finances for the whole fund anytime we get a chance. We try to create better conditions for everyone, not just the members of Anténa.

Let's think of a particular example—I have a band and I would like to arrange a tour in Slovakia. Is it possible to contact anyone from your team or is it necessary to address each of the individual organisations successively?

You need to address the individual centers separately. Each of them has their own program and their own strategy for creating this program. Then, of course, the given musical genre might not suit all of those places and vice versa. The web page of Anténa can help you find your way around the arrangement in Slovakia as well as navigate you to the contact information.

The program and the activities of individual centers are one thing, but another thing is the background and environment. They are often set in former factories or industrial buildings on the edges of towns, what is the tendency?

I wouldn't explicitly say that it's the edges of towns. Most of our members are based in places around the city center with good walking or transport accessibility. The only member that is literally based in a former factory is Tabačka Kulturfabrik in Košice, but even so they are only a stone's throw

away from the very center of the city. The tendency to found cultural centers in old factories has been strong all around Europe, but this trend hasn't been much reflected in Slovakia very much. The dominant places are all kinds of town houses or commercial buildings, former schools and the like. Several of our members even reside in buildings that were originally built as cultural locations in the last century—it's mostly old cinemas, as, for example, the Lúč club in Trenčín.

Do you also help with communication with the local authorities?

It hasn't been done systematically, as everyone needs to deal with their own local problems, but if there is the need and the possibility, individual members are prepared to help. They can offer advice, participate in public debates, or try to put pressure on the authorities of the particular place in another way. They also try to explain the contribution of independent culture and the need for support of such activities.

Is there any association of the individual centers with any foreign partners? Do you support their cooperation with similar organisations outside of Slovakia?

Anténa has been an associate member of a network of European independent centers, the Trans Europe Halles (TEH), for a long time. It is a great platform for the establishment of foreign partnerships and the participation in international projects. Several of our members are members of TEH as well, but even those that are not are enabled to travel to regular TEH meetings, thanks to their membership in Anténa, and so make use of many of the advantages this international network provides. We have also established collaboration with Sharpe, a music

showcase festival in Bratislava, where we organised a meeting of the directors of cultural centers with Slovak and foreign music managers.

The political and maybe even the social situation in Slovakia doesn't seem to be very supportive of independent culture, or am I wrong?

The towns and municipalities don't have the same resources available to support culture and art as they do in the Czech Republic, for instance. But there have been some positive changes in this regard recently, although it naturally depends on the particular town or region. The essential point, however, is the support from the state, which is much more significant than in the Czech Republic.

So our interview ends on a positive note. You seem to be optimistic about the prospects for the next few years.

The national funding schemes have gone through major changes in the last ten years. And it is not just about greater resources. The Ministry of Culture has surrendered their control over grants (retaining only the restoration of heritage sites), which they gradually transferred to three independent public funds, these being controlled directly by the cultural community. The individual grants are decided upon by specialists in independent commissions. The Slovak Audiovisual Fund was established as the first one in 2009, the Slovak Art Fund in 2015, the Minority Cultures Fund was formed last year and resulted in cultural autonomy for minorities, although it's not called that way for political reasons. The current situation is the best there has ever been. Of course, it can change in the future, but that's the mission of the whole cultural community, including Anténa—to protect the current situation and work on its improving it.



beyond the borders of ordinary pop

Czeching is a music export project powered by Radio Wave (the youth channel of Czech Radio). It is dedicated to helping progressive and promising Czech music projects on their way to reach European listeners and stages. Each year an international jury composed mainly of European Broadcast Union (EBU) radio professionals selects one band that gets the opportunity to record and release a new EP, shoot a music video as well as perform at the biggest European showcase festival, Eurosonic Noorderslag, with support from Czech Radio. Their recordings are offered to other radio stations through the EBU Music Exchange. Czeching was established in 2013 as a radio program to discuss the international potential of the Czech music scene, within few years it has developed into a unique export project.

The first winners of Czeching were singer and composer **Never Sol** and surf-punk trio **Wild Tides**. In 2015 a newly established international jury voted for R'n'B duo **VR/NOBODY**, who had great success with their EP "Now" which they recorded in the radio's recording studio. Almost all the 300 vinyl copies released by Czech Radio were sold out within a month. They were the first Czeching winners to perform at Eurosonic Noor-

derslag. That year Radio Wave listeners voted for producer **Aid Kid**.

In 2016 Czeching also became a monthly radio show where the topic of music export was further explored. All the 2016 nominees and a special foreign guest, the Iranian-Dutch singer **Sevdaliza**, performed for the first time at the Czeching Showcase, where the winners were announced. The overall winners were electronic producers **Himalayan Dalai Lama**. Their EP "Space" recorded in Czech Radio's studio Karlin was released on digital platforms and as a limited edition of cassettes. Radio Wave listeners voted for electronic duo **Ba:zel**.

In 2017 Czeching was presented as a weekly column on Radio Wave introducing experts in the field of music export and career-building in music to inspire young bands and producers. Czeching Showcase again took place in the garages of Czech Radio. For the first time musicians and music professionals had a chance to take part in the afternoon discussion program that offered several panel discussions with local and foreign professionals on the topic of radio programming, searching for new talents and music export. The main guest was DJ

Mary Anne Hobbs. The jury voted for young producer and singer **Zagami Jericho** and the listener's favorite was avant-garde rock'n' roll **Lazer Viking**.

Last year Czeching introduced an educational program for young musicians and music professionals focused on management skills. It was conducted with support from SoundCzech. Czeching showcase moved to the acclaimed Prague club **MeetFactory**, where talented rapper and singer **Hellwana** was announced as the new winner. Her EP *Phases* was released on the 4th of January. She will perform at **ESNS19** at **Huize Maas** on **Friday January 18 from 11 pm**.

Best of luck to all the musicians and many thanks to our partners and jurors from EBU, ESNS, Radio France, BBC Wales, Rai Radio 2, Radio FM4, Radio OFF Krakow, Kino Šiška/MENT Festival, Radio Petöfi, PULS, Rádio FM, RÚV, Radio Czwórka, MTVA, VAL 202, Radio Nacional de Bulgaria and Jan Sneum.

**CZECHING
POWERED BY RADIO WAVE**

wave.cz

rozhlas.cz/czeching

there is still something left to discover

It is hard to imagine the Slovakian music scene without Radio_FM. This station has without question been the center of nearly all musical happenings in the country, all the way from the Radio_Head Awards to their pioneering program devoted to amateur demos—Demovnica. This show didn't focus merely on broadcasting but on concert evenings, namely live sessions, unique mixtapes or the announcements of the crucial names that would appear at Pohoda festival, as it is often by listening to Radio_FM that the fans first find out about them. Every Slovak musician will keep on praising the radio station, you could try asking the performers at Eurosonic. We have discussed this radio station with Daniel Baláž, a musical dramaturgist and perhaps the longest serving member of its team.

INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL BALÁŽ (RADIO_FM)

WORDS MICHAL PAŘÍZEK

TRANSLATION LUCIA CALVO

PHOTO STANO KLACANSKY

Radio_FM is currently one of the essential pillars of the Slovak music scene, especially for the alternative branch. Could you tell us the history of the station?

I joined Rock FM radio in 2000, after Ragtime Radio shut down, and I believe I was the first one to join out of the current FM group. It was a mainstream station then, but it was already picking up features from the BBC Radio 1—commercial during the day, alternative at night. That was fourteen years ago and the night program expanded into the evening as part of a rebrand, and Radio_FM gradually became a radio station for all the interesting edges of the mainstream, the most daring ones included.

I know that the radio didn't seem to have good prospects in 2010 because of the merger of Slovak television with Slovak Radio. It even seemed for a while that the station would shut down. In the end, you managed to stand your ground. I suppose this situation has long been stabilized, or do you still have to deal with any serious problems?

We were pleasantly surprised by the reaction of our fans and listeners, whether on social networks or in front of the Slovak Radio headquarters. It took the minister about three days to change his mind. Over the years, we have become so accustomed to it that it might even feel strange if each new government formation and RTVS leadership didn't bring along some effort to either shut us down or at least change us. I must say that the last two terms have been quite peaceful though.

I remember a debate at Sharpe festival where you mentioned a quota that obliges the radio to broadcast a significant percentage of local artists. It must be quite limiting, right?

The quota doesn't take the displacement of the scene into account. We supported it completely even before the quota was imposed, so it does nothing but complicate our lives now. The legal requirement to

broadcast an obligatory 35% of Slovak artists makes the audience listen to an artist or a song that does not suit them completely. 25 % would be fair for the kind of radio station that we are.

Rádio_FM has a very wide range of work—live sessions, concert evenings Demovnica live, unique mixtapes. Audioport, or common broadcasting with the Czech Radio Wave, takes place a few times per year, and there are other activities. Is there anything else that you dream of launching?

One of my dreams is to have a big 20-member newsroom full of not only DJs and editors, but also journalists covering all relevant themes unrelated to music that modern listeners who are young at heart should know about. We do have some of that. We have different radio sections and regular guests with interesting thought-provoking views of the world. Yet as a fan of the spoken word, I would still appreciate more of them. And also generous and creative marketing that would make loyalty to our brand easier and more pleasant for our listeners.

What topics unrelated to music do you mean specifically?

Society, technology and pop culture, ecology, as well as things that I don't know anything about but which could be of interest to me as well as to our listeners.

Are there any independent radio stations in Slovakia?

I am not aware of anyone in Slovakia wanting to pour money into such a project that would work as a substitute for public service broadcasting. There are some local stations and digital streams that have partly similar playlists to FM, but playlist is the smallest part of it. There are plenty of other factors, activities and obligations that result from this work and only a very few people would want to deal with them.

The necessity of supporting the local scene is often brought up, which is something Radio_FM as well as Full Moon can identify with. At the same time, I still sometimes feel like we are not doing enough

and the whole thing could be better or in other words, more effective. What's your view on that?

The next time you feel like you're not doing enough, think of the British music scene in the 70s and the 80s, and how it wasn't possible for the radio to broadcast anything apart from the mainstream, except for John Peel's night shows. Yet the scene remained alive in spite of it. That means that it doesn't stand on the apparent pampering of musicians by the media. The 40 years of natural development are simply missing. The Bolsheviks managed to isolate a major part of both of our nations. In any interview with a Scandinavian, American or British band, you can read a version of a sentence that goes like this . . . "my older brother used to listen to it," or ". . . I noticed it in my father's LP collection . . ." What kind of selection can you find in the majority of Slovak homes? The folklore band Moravanka? Elán? The best-case scenario being the children's collection of Mikeš the Cat or Kopecký and Horniček? Even if it's only unconscious, contact with diverse music is especially important, in fact determining. Unless we're speaking about some genius, who exists independently of any musical impulse, a kind of individual that gets born every 50 years.

The context is definitely important and forty years of blockade cannot be easily erased. Yet still—it's been almost thirty years since 1989. That is a long time. I still sometimes feel like our cultural environment is generally getting too conservative, sometimes even ignorant, and I don't mean just in music. Or am I mistaken? Could this change?

I have no idea. We're doing all that we can.

A quarter of a century has passed from the division of former Czechoslovakia into two independent states. I suppose that you follow the Czech scene at least partially. Do you think you could compare it to the Slovak one? Is such a comparison is even possible?

I really envy you for these artists: Bert and Friends, Čáry života, Midi Lidi, Ventolin, Bratři Orffové, Mayen, Good Times Only, Floex, Dva, Jan P. Muchow, Tata bojs, Načeva, Monkey Business.



How do you see the current Slovak music scene? Its quality, diversity, scope? Do you think it's capable of competing parameters, let's say within the scope of Europe?

It's getting better, slowly but surely. Hats off to anyone who invests their energy, time and money into production, and even has something to say. The current trend in Slovakia is folklore, after I don't even know how many waves of rediscovery of this genre, and there is new interest also in world music. Folklore is a way to anchor ourselves in some kind of identity, more of the village man rather than the urban one. Naturally, folklore is a way of preservation. We are a rural country, where folklore downright flourishes, even despite the politicians. When it comes to world music, we are broadening our horizons beyond the local hills. We open up to something new, we combine and experiment. Here's our chance to impress. I like the way artists like Alapastel or Katarína Malíková play with folk motifs. The encounter of the artificial and the old world creates a peculiar tension, devoid of pathos or esotericism.

Anyone else you could recommend?

I also like Theydon Boys, Dominik Suchý, both his solo work and Tittingur, Vrtačky po desáté hodine, Peter Zagar, Neři mi do ucha, Tante Elze, Leto s Monikou, Ficture or Pišta Kráľovič. A larger number of demos and new local recordings pass through my hands, and one of the sad facts is that affected pop rock from the late 80s and loops from free plugins still dominate even in 2018. That's one of the reasons why we don't only put new stuff on the radio, but we include the older music that the current bands are based on. If no one has done it till now, who else is going to do it? I don't want to keep reading the Facebook posts of our local musicians dating the origin of indie music from the debut of Arctic Monkeys. I really don't.

Talking of demos—as a musical dramaturgist, you must listen to a great deal of new music. Do you still enjoy discovering new names? Is there anything left to discover?

I'm surprised myself to see that I still enjoy it. And yes, there is a lot to be discovered, even though the overproduction makes the whole thing very time-consuming. In addition to Bandcamp, Soundcloud and the holy trinity of Spotify, Apple Music and Deezer, print magazines are still a great source of new music, opinions and information. I still flip through the pages of UNCUT and Electronic Sound, as well as Full Moon.

Thank you. Last question: Are you content with the selection of Slovak bands at ESNS? Is there anyone you would especially like to recommend to the visitors of the festival?

None of them should humiliate us. I like The Ills, I admire them for being able to know those long songs by heart, and they don't even use sheet music. *(laughter)*

make do without a bottle opener

The Czech fanzine fever that this book portrays through several examples also had (and has) other carriers of the bug. DIY publishing's origin isn't necessarily an expression of enthusiasm; it can also originate from oppression, fear and severe deprivation caused by the cultural and historical conditions that were present in former Czechoslovakia during communism. The hitherto untold stories of Czech fanzines are therefore immensely exciting and adventurous. They're driven by at times obsessive curiosity and quirky DIY approaches, and are also a testament to the prevalent atmosphere in society at the time, the essence of the past regime, and to the strategy of survival within it.

WORDS MILOŠ HROCH

One only need to remember the Czech beer bottle opening trick: it always fascinates friends from the West, who are usually stuck without the appropriate instrument. A beer bottle can be opened using a table, a lighter, teeth, or even paper folded several times over. Domestic DIY 'zinesters didn't have access to Western music, books, comic books, movies or fanzines; they couldn't publish without censorship. They didn't have their bottle opener, but they managed. They also had something to follow, and sources to learn from.

Formerly communist Central European countries have a special word for self-publishing: "samizdat," a term originated in the Soviet Union in the 1940's. It is a paraphrase of the word "Gosizdat," a nickname for large, official state publishing house. Samizdat ("samo" meaning "self", "izdat" meaning "to publish") meant to be in opposition to that state publishing house. Before 1989, Czechoslovak dissidents used samizdat to distribute manifestos, foreign magazines, letters, literature of domestically ostracized authors, and translations of banned books, which volunteers used to hand-type using typewriters and carbon paper and all under threat of interrogation or imprisonment. The more efficient means of printing were under strict control of the regime.

Samizdat didn't necessarily have political content, but it did have political significance simply by virtue of its existence within an oppressive regime. It originated in the fear-infused 1950's and became a tool of intellectuals, dissidents who criticised the regime, and also underground artists. This is the musical and artistic community which Ivan Martin Jirous, the main theoretician of the Czech underground, defined in his "Notice of the third Czech musical awakening." He described it as a movement which creates its own distinct world aside from established society; a world with its own internal energy and a different aesthetics, and as a result, a different ethics.

In 1976 Vratislav Brabenec the member of the persecuted avant-garde band Plastic People of The Universe (the symbol of the Czech underground movement, their music was inspired by the Velvet Underground and by the artistic group Fluxus as well) was among others arrested and protests against this fact culminated in the formation of the Charter 77—an appeal by dissidents and intellectuals criticized the violation of human and civic rights that Czechoslovakia had sworn to uphold by signing the Helsinki Accords. The regime reacted by a propaganda campaign that depicted members of the underground culture as dangerous elements. Two years later fans of the Plastics began to publish *Vokno* magazine, a cultural underground bulletin. "The first series was thematic, each issue had a theme—music, literature, art, and others," recalls František Stárek, its "publisher".

Vokno was printed on an Ormig grain alcohol copier, which was assembled over a period of several months from parts stolen from an office machine factory. The magazine was the predecessor of domestic music fanzines. One could read about the Velvet Underground or about Czechoslovak experimental bands in it, but no names of authors were present, nor real names of villages where underground concerts took place, unless the concerts were broken up by police and subsequently written about in the official *Rudé právo* (*Red Order*) newspaper.

The cultural underground and the activities of samizdat journalists is well documented. This book is more aimed at fanzines, which can be considered as being in the shadows from a historical perspective. All of the underground authors however share a common zeal, even if the forerunners were more closely associated with political opposition and faced interrogations by the secret police or even imprisonment. The passion is evident in an excerpt from a poem from the *Grey Day* anthology, written by Pavel Zajíček, a member of the underground band DG307, in a 1980 text: "I was transcribing some lyrics deep into the night; I could feel their birth, and their mirror in sounds. However I don't have strength to involve someone else—I think it's best to do EVERYTHING on my own".

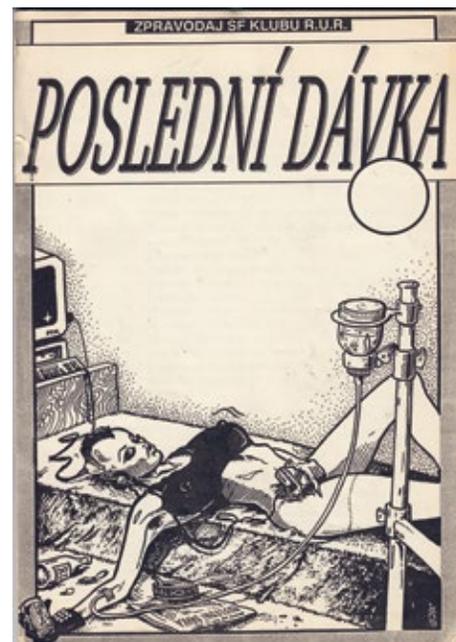
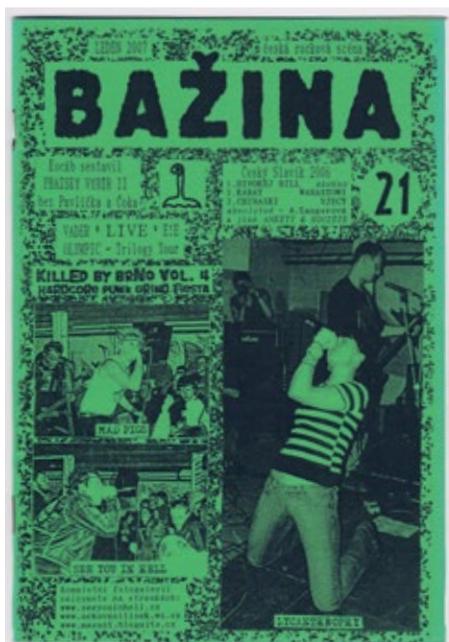
WE'LL LEAVE YOU ALONE, YOU LEAVE US ALONE

Without anyone knowing that it was called DIY, that is, Do It Yourself, all around the world, local fanzine makers had one thing in common with their foreign counterparts: a stubborn conviction that they can do everything on their own, without the money or help of others. In contrast to the rest of the world however, there was one significant difference—desperate deprivation not only in cultural goods, which was reflected into both the content and the methods of fanzines.

All things Western had an aura of forbidden fruit around them—this was the reason why people from Czechoslovakia and other communist countries desired them. If they were to fulfill those desires and ambitions however, they had to be creative and manage on their own. When skateboards were the craze of the young generation in the West, the first such item in Prague was copied by the locals using any available materials: the wheels were made from garden hoses and the iron trucks were cast at home using homemade forms. Rare vinyl records obtained from friends traveling abroad or from street garage sales were used to learn not only English, but also whole musical genres. Foreign magazines were avidly read.

Teenagers imitated English words, Czechoslovak punks used wax to hold their mohawks up and bashed into their guitars. Not only that, but foreign fashion magazines found their way into the country through often complicated paths; those were used to inspire home-made copies of Western fashion styles. The clash of different ideas and desires was epitomised by the Berlin wall, dividing Eastern bloc and the Western one, the world of Marx and the world of Coca-Cola.

The Russian-American historian Alexei Yurchak describes the symbolic overcoming of boundaries in his book *Everything was Forever, Until it was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* using the term "Imaginary West". People lived in an information vacuum, in both real and cultural isolation, and could not travel freely or dress according to trends or like their favorite bands. They couldn't do anything without state supervision—but they desired



to so much that they created their own version of the West within limitations set by the state. All of these factors were behind the origin of the first true Czechoslovak fanzine, created at the beginning of the Eighties by a group of science fiction fans at the Mathematical-Physical Faculty in Prague: “We want to publish fanzines like in the West too!”

At this moment, the fanzine virus mutated from the Czechoslovak tradition of samizdat. There was also another agent of the mutation: an ingredient of Real Socialism, the Czech phenomenon of *chatarstvi*, or cottage-going. This was a phenomenon when whole families would leave large cities during the weekends and travel to the countryside, where they might own a small house or a cottage, and would spend the weekend there rather than in the city.

It was in effect a reaction to the complete control of the Communist regime, the limited options for traveling, and to the development of large prefabricated estate housings. The transformation of original urban housing began in the Fifties, and all across the country, standardized, uniform panel blocks sprang up. The greyness of the times and the cramped living conditions in the “rabbit-hutches” was depicted perfectly in Věra Chytilová’s film *Panelstory* (1981). Cottage-going provided a care-free time in a grey zone that was of no interest to the governing regime – similar to publishing fanzines.

Civic involvement lost all meaning in an atmosphere of incessant control; people could not ex-

press themselves freely at work, so they found an outlet in hobbies. Cottage-goers worked on perking up their cottages, others would become members of fishing clubs or would collect stamps or make model airplanes or publish their own magazines and share their enthusiasm for what interested them but what couldn’t be found in shops and what wasn’t written about.

Fanzines were an ever-changing zone with different ratios of the above-mentioned ingredients. Although something of a reduction, it’s possible to separate Czechoslovak fanzine creators into two categories: dissidents and cottage-goers. The first were forced through the content, their stubbornness, and principles to come into conflict with the regime; the second accepted the regime’s terms so that they could “only” devote themselves to their hobbies. They had no need to resist. They even had de facto state approval, as the state encouraged and supported “spending quality free time.” It was an unspoken exchange: you leave us alone, and we’ll leave you alone.

The stories of fanzines are therefore also stories of our past: in these past zines we read science fiction and metal fans obsessively making up music charts and takes us into the grey (cultural) zone; computer game enthusiasts documenting technology shows the at-the-time technological lag behind the West, and comics book fans show us the desire to create their own superheroes and to domesticate the originally American medium.

I shout “That’s me!” Stories of Czech fanzines from the 80s till now

Miloš Hroch and collective
Page Five, 2017, 230 pages
ISBN 978-80-270-2942-6
pagefive.com

(An excerpt from “Have you ever tried putting a Mentos into Cola?”, the opening essay of the book.)

The book I shout “That’s me!” Stories of Czech fanzines from the 80s till now, published in November 2017 by PageFive, for the first time takes its readers through uncharted waters of the Czech fanzine scene, that is, of unofficial amateur magazines. It brings to light stories of those who fell for computer games or wrote sci-fi stories, who obsessively compiled their own metal music charts, who were driven to street demonstrations by hardcore punk music or who wanted to change the standing of women in society. And who then wrote about it freely in their magazines.

who cares if it's your saturday...

Hobby or business? The Prague company, Nomads of Prague, has been looking after music bands touring the Czech Republic since 1992. And it is one of the best (and biggest) in Europe. Do you need instruments, backline, cars, crew or merch? Ask them for help and they will take care of everything with ease, dedication and a smile. The names of their clients - Neurosis, Converge, Russian Circles, Mono, Shellac, Chelsea Wolfe and NOFX - speak volumes. The Nomads of Prague have been driving bands around Europe for over quarter of a century, and you will not find the expression "cancelled concert" in their vocabulary (nor in their world).

THE STORY OF NOMADS OF PRAGUE

WORDS MICHAL PAŘÍZEK

PHOTO SU

The storage warehouse in the Prague district of Švábky is used by several companies but the backline service of "Nomads of Prague" occupies the largest space in the entire building, although for most of the year it usually stays empty. The Nomads of Prague are constantly driving their vans or Nightliners with one of the many bands touring Europe or the British Isles. The modest company offices are situated on the first floor of an inconspicuous building (the open windows of the adjacent buildings are not far away), and the company founder, Miroslav Švec, whom everybody calls Tschepitz, is not, for some reason, in a good mood. "We have new neighbours. Some Thai boxers opened a new gym, or rather a club house, right across the way," he says and further explains, "but there are a few tricky guys among them, former members of the National Resistance (*Czech unregistered neo-nazi organisation whose members invited to Prague, for example, the former boss of the American Ku-Klux-Klan, David Duke. - Note: author.*) I am not sure what to think about it. I have already asked the owner to the rent me that space, but he does not want to know as long they don't misbehave. We started looking for a new abode, but it's not that easy these days."

FAMILY BUSINESS

It's quite logical that the unexpected presence of rightwing extremists in the neighbourhood rubs the Nomads of Prague the wrong way, because the company was built on the values of the punk and hardcore scene to which they still adhere. "The first tour we chauffeured in 1992 was with Czech hardcore group Kritická situace (*a legendary hardcore group formed in the 1980s - Note: author.*) Later our activities snowballed and, two years later, we started working mainly with American bands, doing jobs for foreign booking agencies," recalls Tschepitz. These were the first "nomadic" years, when the team worked independently, without the umbrella of a registered company. The decisive break, he says, came in 1998 when he bought his first van which, at the time, was

not a negligible investment: "I could no longer do it only half-way, we were all forced by circumstances to get into debt. It was clear we had to go for it at full throttle." The ensuing years were immensely hectic. Tschepitz links the expansion of his business to the concert boom that swept Europe at the end of the 1990s. "Since then, the Nomads of Prague never stopped. It was like living inside a pressure cooker. The demand grew, we had more offers, but we didn't have the capacity to cope with it. We kept adding cars until we reached the present state of things. We still experience the same. We still have some limits."

The principles of the scene, in which the Nomads of Prague started doing business, became manifest in the functioning of the company: "Right from the beginning, and it hasn't changed since, we treated every new client as a family member. We automatically treat them as equals, the same as the rest of us. New clients enjoy the same conditions as those who have worked with us, say, for 20 years. Then it's up to them if they come back next time or turn to someone else. But I have to say they usually return to us." Tschepitz openly admits the company's philosophy has never been to be the cheapest. The main stress has always been on the quality and complexity of service: "Our system was based on offering full service for the band right from the start - it took just one phone call or email, saying what they needed, and we made sure they got it all. Crew, backline, car, merch, logistics, including hotel bookings, simply the lot."

It is precisely the complexity of the service, that distinguishes the Nomads of Prague. They are quite unique in Europe because these days most companies focus on providing specialized services. According to Tschepitz, this is manifest in the fact that gone are the days when you sent a budget and the client just accepted it: "Fifteen years ago, I sent off the budget and the deal was done. No questions asked. Today, when I communicate with a new client I have to expect, in advance, that one third of them are not going to respond to the offered calculation. Mostly, people search for the cheapest option, they prefer to combine the services of several independent firms."

Understandably, the sense of generational kinship, friendship and partnership, all come into it. With the generation that started out in the first half of the 1990s, whether you played in the band or provided the back-up, the connection is still there. To get the same with the bands is rare: "The bands just keep coming, but with the new ones, given my age, I can hardly expect to develop a deeper relationship. It's just business, but done thoroughly, like with our established clients."

MILESTONE CALLED EU

Tschepitz's office is decorated with framed posters of tours-gone-by. "This poster is from the Botch tour, which they did across Europe together with Lvmen (*another legend of the Czech hardcore scene with which the Nomads of Prague's boss used to play - Note: author.*) It was the first tour booked by the Avocado Bookings agency, with whom we had a long-term partnership. Today, they have outgrown us. They have bands like Ministry and Parkway Drive on their roster. They have so many clients. We became too small for them." In their early days, the Nomads of Prague worked, apart from Avocado Bookings, with several other booking agencies operating in Europe, for instance Odyssey (formerly Conspiracy), who they use to this day. There are certainly many other and much bigger agencies in Europe that offer similar services to the Nomads, but Tschepitz is in no way tempted to push his way to the very top echelons of his business. The present position of the firm suits me just fine. Plus, for quite a while, the Nomads have been servicing festivals, concerts and events in Central Europe, going all the way back to the Czech Republic's entry to the European Union."

"Originally we did not want to do it. However, the break came when we shared the production of the first United Islands Festival in 2004, which marked the Czech Republic's entry into the EU. Then, one artist or band from each EU country flew to Prague to give a concert," reminisces Tschepitz, who goes on to talk about various problems they encountered at that festival: "We partially covered the requirements from our own sources. Still, we had to borrow lots of instruments and equipment from another company,





and we paid for it dearly. They charged us for every scratched cover case, every blemished piano key – it was really nobody’s fault, just wear and tear. After three weeks of hard work we found ourselves in the red, tens of thousands of crowns poorer. That gave us a clear impulse to buy all the instruments and equipment right away. Since then, we have been providing the facilities for individual events – from huge festivals like Colours of Ostrava, through club gigs to symphony orchestra concerts. During its busiest periods, the company employs dozens of people.

The current turmoil in the EU is troubling the boss of the Nomads of Prague, especially the Brexit saga. Nearly every European tour produced by his company includes working in the British Isles: “I obviously remember the days before being part of the EU. You needed a work permit for each band, which involved a lot of bureaucracy, but it was manageable. It was a completely different process from what we have now, and nobody knows what will come next. If it’s going back to the old days, or if it’s, actually, going to be worse. I’d say it’s gonna be worse.” Tschepitz says, most of the bands are used to playing one day in Paris and the next day in London, but that will hardly be possible after Brexit: “The worst case scenarios speak of daily queues of trucks in Calais and the on the opposite side too. On the way from Dover, there is a motorway about 20 kilometres

long, where you can take a short cut to Heathrow. There, they tested an emergency parking place for trucks waiting to cross the Channel from Dover. But Dover’s still sixty miles away from there!”

BAND IN THE FIRST PLACE

In recent years, the Nomads of Prague have been dispatching around a hundred and fifty tours per annum. Around Christmas, all their vehicles gather for a short period in the company’s central hub, otherwise they are in permanent use. According to Tschepitz, the decisive factor is the human factor: “We don’t want to, nor can we, take on just anybody. We have about thirty people at our disposal, not only from the Czech Republic but from all over Europe, that we hire for various tours,” he clarifies, and adds one of his key principles, “I won’t confirm any tour until I know who’s going to be doing it. I don’t want to get into a situation in which I have to quickly pick someone whom I don’t fully trust. With people that work for us, I know I can trust them. I know they will do a good job and the bands will be happy with them. We keep on looking for new people, but it is obviously difficult. I have to be sure that a person who tours with the band will know exactly what to do – in other words, so that I can stop worrying about it. Of course, problems do happen occasionally, but in the Nomads we need immediate solutions: If you get a call at three in the morning, then it’s surely not someone wishing

to say good night. You have to answer it, there is no other way. Who cares if it’s your Saturday because they are stuck by the motorway and the concert starts within a few hours.”

Clever and quick solutions to unforeseen situations are what the Nomads are good at. It is not just that the people who work in the company are the fans and often also friends of the bands with which they work, but also that most of them have, like their boss did once, their own bands. It means they know what it’s like to be on the other side. Tschepitz claims that it is not exceptional to get a call from a band that did not accept his tour offer but two weeks later their car is broken and the company they eventually signed with does not have a replacement. If he can, he provides help, although, in general, he does understand these situations: “You simply can’t afford this sort of failure. Not in my world.” Again, he shows the experience of having spent thousands and thousands of kilometres on the road, with bands like Converge or Shellac, although the boss of the Nomads of Prague gave up driving the bands several years ago: Of course I miss it. There were years when I spent eleven months in the car, jumping from one tour to another. The last tour I did was three years ago.” He may not sit behind the steering wheel now, he sits at his desk, but he still sticks to the bottom line of his business: “Make sure that the bands stay OK.”



SONO Records studio is quite simply one of the best recording studios in Europe, located in the beautiful countryside, only 20 minutes from Prague, and the airport is only 15 minutes away by car. The residential studio complex provides 3000 square meters for musicians, writers and producers to work in and create recordings of the highest quality last 30 years. The studio complex includes pre-production suites, a cozy hotel, restaurant, bar, day rooms and a garden to relax in.



Both studios are centred around Neve consoles – Rupert Neve 5088 and Neve V51 series with Otari and Studer analog tape machines and Pro Tools HD3 192kHz. SONO's extensive equipment list includes some of the finest quality outboard and wide collection of vintage microphones and instruments.

The studio has also been popular with the most successful Czech bands and musicians Lucie, Kabát, Marta Topferová, Invisible Word, Iva Bittová, Lenny, Thom Artway, David Dorůžka, Organic Quartet, Tomáš Liška, Radek Baborák, Vertigo and many others.

Satisfied customers over the years have also included David Bowie, Joss Stone, Nazareth, Gypsy Kings, Julian Lennon, Living Colour, Glen Hansard, The Levellers, Mike Stern, Limp Bizkit and G Love and Special Sauce. SONO has also catered for many different genres, as diverse as film and classical music, rock bands, jazz and dance music artists and world music artists.



SONO Records studio works closely with the publishing house Glitterbeat and the albums they created together won the Womex Award several times. Clients who worked on their albums in SONO studio are: Tamikrest, Noura Mint Seymali, Aziza Brahim, Samba Touré, Bassekou Kouyate, Fofoulah and others.

The studio has a program supporting young artists and organizes workshops for students, sound engineers and musicians.

www.sonorecords.cz

Facebook: SONO Records, Sono Studios

Email: **info@sonorecords.cz**



CZECH REPUBLIC

EU member since 2004 / Part of Schengen Area

POPULATION AND RESIDENTS OF COUNTRY BY ETHNICITY:

10,58 million

(64% Czech, 5% Moravian, 1.4% Slovak, 0.4%

Poles and 0.2% German. At the last census in 2011,

“nationality” was optional and about 26% left this

blank. It's estimated that the Czech Republic is

home to 250,000 Romani people, as well as 440,000 foreigners.)

CURRENCY, VALUE AGAINST 1 EUR:

Czech koruna (CZK), 1 Euro = 25,80 CZK

GDP PER CAPITA:

36,784 USD

MOST POPULAR LOCAL MUSIC GENRES:

metal, rock, pop, folk, drum and bass, techno and electronic.

MAIN MUSIC VENUES:

The live music scene is utterly vivid in Czech Republic so out of the 400 optional clubs, find a shortlist below. (alphabetical order)

Cafe V Lese, Praha (capacity 250)

Fleda, Brno (800)

Forum Karlín, Praha (3000)

Futurum Music Bar, Praha (400)

Kabinet Múz, Brno (250)

Lucerna Music Bar, Praha (1 000)

MeetFactory, Praha (1000)

O2 Arena, Praha (18 000)

Palac Akropolis, Praha (900)

Radost FX, Praha (800)

Rock Café, Praha (600)

Roxy, Praha (1 000)

Sono, Brno (2000)

Tip sport Arena, Praha (13 238)

AVERAGE TICKET PRICE FOR:

local acts performing: 150 CZK

international acts performing: 350 CZK

EXPORT OFFICE:

Soundczech

soundczech.cz

LABELS:

(besides majors, alphabetical order)

Animal Music, Bigg Boss, Červený kůň, Genot

Centre, Indies Scope, Minority Records, Polís,

Pushtek, Stoned to Death, Supraphon, Tranzistor

MUSIC MAGAZINES, WEBSITES:

(alphabetical order)

Alterecho, Fakker!, Full Moon magazine,

Harmonie, Headliner, iReport, Musicserver, Rock &

All, Rock & Pop, Spark, Uni

MOST RELEVANT RADIO STATIONS:

(alphabetical order)

Český rozhlas Jazz – (not only) jazz and fusion

Český rozhlas Vltava – classical, folk, alternative,

world music, spoken word and many more

Evropa 2 – most listened pop music radio

Radio 1 – in the name of alternative music since 1991

Radio Wave – station for young listeners – fresh,

new and alternative

MOST IMPORTANT INVENTIONS

BY COUNTRY:

(alphabetical order)

colour photography, contact lenses, cubist

architecture, non-alcoholic beer, sugar cube

FOTO ZDENKO HANOUT (COLOURS OF OSTRAVA)

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT SOUNDCZECH.CZ

MAIN FESTIVALS

BEATS FOR LOVE

Ostrava

b4l.cz

3.-6. 7. 2019

The largest electronic dance music festival in Central Europe is held at the heart of the Industrial National Monument.

BRUTAL ASSAULT

Jaroměř

brutalassault.cz

7.-10. 8. 2019

An open-air extreme metal festival that takes place in the 18th-century army fortress Josefov. It features artists that perform all forms of extreme metal, including some of the genre's most prominent figures, as well as artists with dark and intense styles from genres outside of heavy metal such as punk rock, experimental rock and electronic.

COLOURS OF OSTRAVA

Ostrava

colours.cz

17.-20. 7. 2019

The biggest international music festival in the Czech Republic welcomes over 45,000 visitors each day. Held at the European Heritage Protected Site of former mines, iron and steelworks. In total over 350 events ranging from bands, DJs, films, open discussions, workshops plus theatre, poetry and art installations.

FOLKOVÉ PRÁZDNINY

Náměšť nad Oslavou

folkoveprazdniny.cz

27. 7. - 3. 8. 2019

Over 8 days, visitors of multigenre Folk Holidays festival spend their music, art and dancing holidays surrounded by the charming environment of the renaissance city of Namest. Artists in the past have included Waterson-Carthy, Glen Hansard, Hazmat Modine, Iva Bittova, Tim Eriksen, Sam Lee & Friends, and many more.

HIP HOP KEMP

Hradec Králové

hiphopkemp.cz

15.-17. 8. 2019

Hip-hop and urban music festival, largest of its kind in central and eastern Europe. Attracting over 20 000 hip-hop fans, the festival has become popular thanks to its tightly curated lineup, showcasing the scene's stars alongside those just breaking through.

JAZZFEST BRNO

Brno

jazzfestbrno.cz

several dates, mainly spring 2019

An international jazz festival established in 2002. Its commitment to jazz is indeed strong as the main organizers are also working musicians/educators in the jazz field. They bring the highest level of musicianship and artistry closer to local musicians and artists. Branford Marsalis Quartet, GoGo Penguin, John McLaughlin and Dianne Reeves have already been announced for 2019.

LET IT ROLL

Milovice

letitroll.eu

1.-4. 8. 2019

The world's number one drum and bass festival, held on a former military base. The history of the festival started back in 2002 when the Drum & Bass scene was slowly beginning to form in the Czech Republic. Since 2015, the daily attendance has surpassed 23000 people and the numbers are still growing.

METRONOME FESTIVAL PRAGUE

Prague

metronomefestival.cz

21.-22. 6. 2019

A two-day music festival whose stellar lineup combines major international performers with a "best of" from the local scene. The headliner of 2019 edition are Kraftwerk, Morcheeba, KAMPI, Primal Scream, Czech indie pop band Khoiba and the Slovak instrumental group The Ills. The Metronome festival was launched in 2016, and in its first year attracted 7,500 people. The last one saw 18,000 people.

MIGHTY SOUNDS

Tábor

mightsounds.cz

12.-14. 7. 2019

The festival focuses primarily on punk and punk rock, rock'n'roll, hardcore, reggae, ska, rockabilly, indie rock and other styles of music that are derived from, or closely related to, these styles.

MLADÍ LADÍ JAZZ

Prague

mladiladijazz.cz

30. 3.-30. 4. 2019

The festival has been spotting and highlighting foreign as well as local talent from the jazz and experimental scene since 2008 focusing mainly on contemporary jazz ((the name translates as The Youth Tune Jazz) and its bold crossovers to other genres. As well as concerts, it organises the Jazzfruit competition for young jazz bands, the jazz workshops for children, specialist workshops for musicians and the year-round Jazzbit club series.

ROCK FOR PEOPLE

Hradec Králové

rockforpeople.cz

4.-6. 7. 2019

One of the largest Czech open-air summer music festivals features Czech and international acts of various genres, most prominently alternative rock, pop rock, punk rock, and EDM. Headlining acts have included Muse, Arctic Monkeys, My Chemical Romance, the Offspring, the Killers, Paramore, Massive Attack and more.

STRUNY PODZIMU

Prague

strunypodzimu.cz

several dates, fall 2019

Each year the festival treads the pioneering path to broader musical horizons, every concert is a major event of its type and genre. In its 22nd edition in 2018, the festival offered new premiere performances of artists the likes of Terry Riley, Daniel Lanois & Venetian Snares, Open Mike Eagle, Lizz Wright, The Punch Brothers, and more.

SHOWCASE FESTIVALS

CZECH MUSIC CROSSROADS

Ostrava

crossroadsmusic.cz

15.-16. 7. 2019

The showcase and conference presents quality contemporary music of Central Europe and features the best of world music, folk, jazz and new acoustic music not. The event is attended by a number of international personalities and experts.

NOUVELLE PRAGUE

Prague

nouvelleprague.com

8.-9. 11. 2019

With its central European location, Prague is an ideal location for a boutique, exclusive and targeted showcase festival and conference. Enjoy a varied conference and music programme, interesting guests and advice to help you navigate the music business.



SLOVAKIA

EU member since 2004 / Part of the Schengen Area

POPULATION AND RESIDENTS OF COUNTRY BY ETHNICITY:

5,42 million

(85,8 % Slovak, 9,7 % Hungarian, 1,7

% Roma, 0,8% Czech, 2% other)

CURRENCY:

EURO

GDP PER CAPITA:

32 895 USD

MOST POPULAR LOCAL MUSIC GENRES:

Pop, Alternative, Hip Hop, Metal, Electronic

MAIN MUSIC VENUES:

(alphabetical order)

Fuga, Bratislava (250)

Klub Lúč, Trenčín (300)

Majestic Music Club, Bratislava (capacity 1000)

Malý Berlín, Trnava (300)

Národné tenisové centrum, Bratislava (5 000)

Nová Cvernovka, Bratislava (300)

Refinery Gallery, Bratislava (2 000)

Slovnaft Arena, Bratislava (7 000)

Stanica, Žilina (300)

Tabačka, Košice (500)

Wave, Prešov (300)

Záhrada, Banská Bystrica (300)

AVERAGE TICKET PRICE FOR:

local acts: approx. 7 EUR (estimation)

international acts: approx. 30 EUR (estimation)

EXPORT OFFICES:

Lala – Slovak Music Export
musicexport.sk

World Music from Slovakia
womusk.com

LABELS:

(besides majors, alphabetical order)

ACR, Ajlavmjuzik, Deadred, Exitab, go2stage, Hevhetia, Mäss, Opus, Proto Sites, Real Music House, Slnko Records, Z Tapes

MUSIC MAGAZINES, WEBSITES:

(alphabetical order)

Hudba.sk, jazz.sk, Nový populár

MOST RELEVANT RADIO STATIONS:

(alphabetical order)

Radio Devín – classical, jazz and experimental music

Radio Expres – most listened pop music radio

Radio_FM – new, alternative music

MOST IMPORTANT INVENTIONS BY COUNTRY:

Indirect amalgamation of gold by Ignac Born (1785), parachute

FOTO MICHAL AUGUSTINI (POHODA FESTIVAL)

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT MUSICEXPORT.SK

MAIN FESTIVALS

GOTHOOM

Žarnovica

gothoom.com

18.–20. 7. 2019

10th edition of the unique and the biggest metal festival in Slovakia. The aim of the event is a quality metal, support of the local scene and a unique atmosphere. The 2019 line-up consists of acts like Dark Funeral, Fleshgod Apocalypse, Belphegor and many more.

GRAPE FESTIVAL

Piešťany

grapefestival.sk

9.–10. 8. 2019

The Grape festival was founded in 2010 by a party of friends. The original idea was to create a small-sized festival for approximately 2000 people in the pleasant environment of the town Pezinok, known for its tradition of wine production. It's 10th edition will host Superorganism, Tom Greenan, The Kooks, Chvrches, The Black Madonna and many more.

HIP HOP ŽIJE

Bratislava

hiphopzije.sk

28.–30. 6. 2019

Open-air festival that celebrates the eponymous genre (the name translates as 'long live hip hop'). Honouring the traditional four elements of hip hop culture – MCing, DJing, breakdancing and graffiti – the weekend features more than a hundred performers and artists across three stages. Predominantly a celebration of Czech and Slovakian hip hop talent, the lineup is also interspersed with a selection of iconic names from the US. Redman, DJ Premier, Ace Hood, AZ and Mobb Deep have all appeared in recent years.

HUDBA SVETA ŽILINA

Žilina

hudbasvetazilina.sk

3.–5. 4. 2019

International world music festival provides an opportunity for a live presentation of various musical cultures from all corners of the world. Its objective is to point to the diversity and beauty of world music in the interpretation of excellent local and foreign musicians. Each evening will bring different music related to different cultures or musical styles.

POHODA FESTIVAL

Trenčín

pohodafestival.sk

11.–13. 7. 2019

Pohoda Festival is characterized by its values of friendliness, hospitality, sharing, and tolerance. All of this without forgetting its unwavering commitment to quality service. The philosophy of the festival is to welcome the public the same way as we would welcome a friend to our home. Pohoda has a major festival line-up with a boutique festival vibe for a fraction of the regular ticket price. Pohoda is located 2 hours away by car or train from the capital city of Slovakia, Bratislava, and 3 hours from Vienna. The festival is located under an ancient castle on a converted air force runway. In 2018 Pohoda sold out for the third time in history with a record time for pre-sales.

TOPFEST

Nové Mesto nad Váhom

topfest.sk

28.–29. 7. 2019

An open-minded festival in nature that champions artists from all across Europe. The biggest cheers are reserved for the heavy metal and rock acts that entertain the energetic Slovakian masses. A heady mix of contemporary big guns like Thirty Seconds To Mars and Rag 'n' Bone Man have graced the Topfest stage over the past few years, whilst global royalty of rock such as Iron Maiden and Guns 'n' Roses stamped their mark in Slovakia.

UPRISING

Bratislava

uprising.sk

23.–24. 8. 2019

One of Europe's biggest reggae and dancehall music festivals. Held at the lakeside summer resort of Zlaté Piesky, Uprising is all about those laid-back, sunshine vibes, filling its site with street art, yoga classes, classic Jamaican food, workshops and more around its music programme that includes Jah Mason, Turbulence, Kubar Ment and others in 2019.

VÝCHODNÁ FESTIVAL

Východná

festivalvyhodna.sk

4.–7. 7. 2019

The greatest folklore festival in Slovakia is the top show of the best home and foreign folk ensembles and traditional folk culture. Východná village is situated below the Tatras mountains with preserved folk architecture. The festival has been organised since 1953 in the large open-air theatre overlooking the village early in the summer during the first weekend of July. Every year it welcomes an average of 1,500 performers, and the number of visitors reaches 70,000.

WORLD MUSIC FESTIVAL BRATISLAVA

Bratislava

worldmusicfestival.sk

26.–29. 9. 2019

Brings music from all over the world to Slovakia's capital at the end of September. There are around 20 concerts of world music, jazz and related genres happening on several stages over four days. The accompanying programme consists of music film premieres, workshops and other exciting events and an international conference.

SHOWCASE FESTIVAL

SHARPE

Bratislava

sharp.sk

26.–27. 4. 2019

Fresh and sharp music from Slovakia, Europe and beyond. It takes place in Bratislava at Nová Cvernovka – a former chemical school transformed into an independent cultural centre. 6 stages, 30 acts and 2 nights in the last weekend of April, plus a music industry conference, draw local music fans as well as international professionals from the region.

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ABOUT FESTIVAL

Rock for People is a three-day music and camping festival held in the stunning rural Czech Republic.

Hailed as one of the best music festivals in Europe, for more than 20 years Rock for People has hosted major international acts making Rock for People a permanent fixture in the Czech calendar. The festival includes genres such as rock, indie, punk, hardcore punk, metalcore, electronic, ska, metal, pop, hip hop, drum and bass, dubstep, but also features theaters, discussions, workshops,

street food zone, games and many more.

Rock for People is a peaceful, friendly festival, where people soak up the summer sun, drink delicious local beer, make best friends with their camping neighbors, go swimming in the lake and dance all night.

With the festival celebrating its 25th anniversary this summer it would be the perfect time to share it with you and illustrate how Rock for People went from dirty small festival to a three-day spectacular show.

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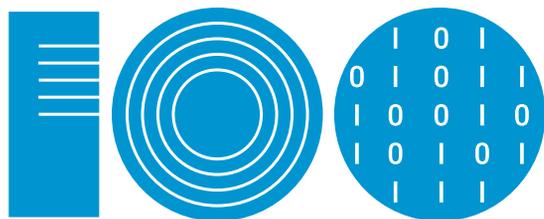
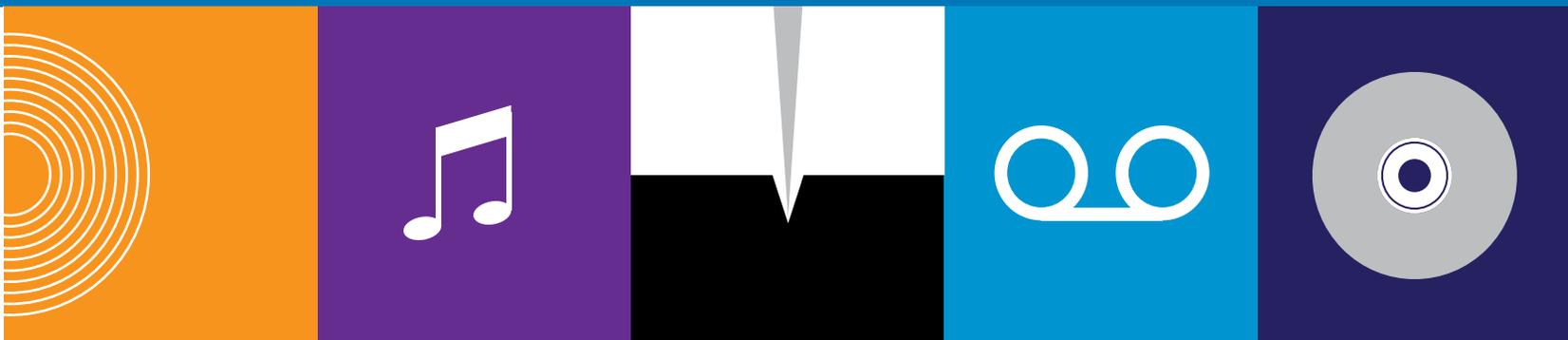
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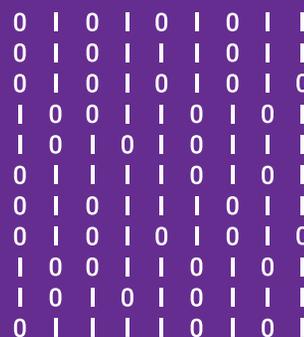
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The **Union of Authors and Performers (Svaz autorů a interpretů)** is a Czech association of professional and amateur musicians.

Our area of focus is the **copyright law, economic impact** of the music industry and professional **counseling**. We also organize music marketing and copyright law **workshops** as well as music **competitions**. We **cooperate** with a number of institutions such as the Chamber of Commerce, various government organizations and media. **Our goal is to create positive economic and legal conditions for musicians.**

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