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Coming of Age in Bohemia: The Musical Apprenticeships of Benda and Gluck

DANIEL HEARTZ

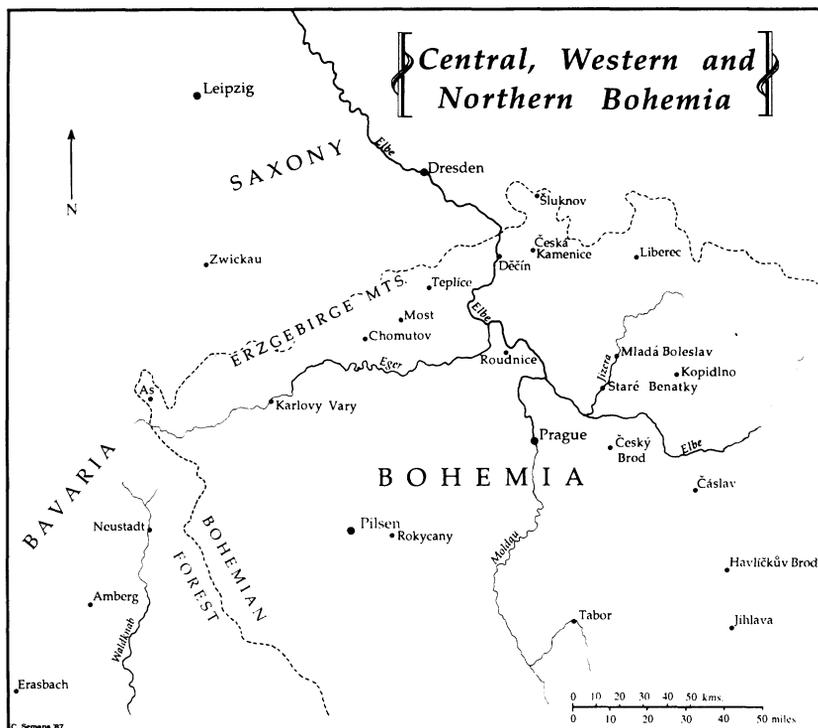
510
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Franz Benda, celebrated as a violinist and composer at the Prussian court, set down a memoir of his life and training when he was at the height of his fame in 1763. An anonymous friend of his gathered a different version of the same in what would today be called an oral history, written in 1766 and published the same year in Hiller's weekly newsletter concerning music.¹ Benda was born in 1709, only five years before Gluck, and eight years before Stamitz, for both of whom we lack early biographical information. Some inferences can be drawn about them by analogy with Benda's biography. Other prominent Czech composers born in the first quarter of the century were Tuma (1704), Richter (1709), Seger (1716), and Benda's younger brother, Georg (1722).

The Bendas are believed to have been of Jewish origins, the name coming from Ben David (Son of David), but the family had been Christian for several generations before the eighteenth century. Franz, baptized František on 22 November (the feastday of St. Cecilia), was born in the little town of Staré Benatky near Mladá Boleslav (Jung Buntzlau) on the Jizera river, a small tributary of the Elbe northeast of Prague (see map, Figure 1). His father was a linen weaver who also played the dulcimer, the oboe and the shawm in taverns, while his grandfather had been a steward on an aristocratic estate. His mother was Dorota Brixi, from a well-known musical family, the most illustrious member

¹ *Wöchentliche Nachrichten und Anmerkungen die Musik betreffend* (Leipzig, 1766–70; reprint, Hildesheim and New York, 1970), I, 175, 178, 199, 272. In the paragraphs that follow, this account, identified as Hiller 1766, will be used to supplement the main account from Benda's hand, first printed in *Lebensbeschreibungen berühmter Musikgelehrter und Tonkünstler neuerer Zeit*, also edited by Hiller (Leipzig, 1784). We quote, without making further reference to it, the English translation by Paul Nettl in *Forgotten Musicians* (New York, 1951), p. 204–45.

FIGURE 1.



of which was František Brixí (1732–1771). He learned to read, write and sing at the town school, he says, “with the help of the skilled schoolmaster, Alexius by name.” At age nine he was taken to Prague by his father. They visited his cousin Šimon Brixí (1693–1735), who was organist of the Týn Church. Brixí listened to him sing and read from sight, then promptly secured him a position as descantist in the St. Nicolai Church of the Benedictine cloister. His schooling was continued at the Jesuit Seminary, but he admits in all candor that he was much less interested in his studies than he was in visiting all the churches in Prague where good voices could be heard. We pass over certain details about overly indulgent friars, who lavished money on the young man, remarking only that Benda’s ambitions to better his lot were early manifest.

An opportunity arose to quit Prague and join the royal choirboys at Dresden, who were under the guidance of the Jesuits. The Prague Je-

suits tried to stop him, but to no avail—he ran away. When he arrived in Dresden after a boat trip down the Elbe river he found his future colleagues playing ball: “As I could not speak German, I addressed them in Czech; they were nicely dressed and, since I wore nothing but an old vest, they looked down on me; but after I was heard singing, I was, three days later, just as well dressed.” The anecdote says much about the age-old experience of the Bohemian musician, an alien in all the German-speaking lands surrounding his homeland, traditionally scorned (and not just for his poverty), yet making his way by sheer musical ability. It is just as poignant as Gustav Mahler’s oft-quoted remark about his rootlessness: “I am thrice homeless, as a native of Bohemia in Austria, as an Austrian among Germans, and as a Jew throughout the world. Everywhere an intruder, never welcomed.”² Of Mahler’s self-pitying tone there is not a hint in Benda’s account. While Mahler tried to cover up his humble origins—his father was a distiller and seller of spirits—Benda relates his without shame, along with some remarkably intimate details of his relationships with other people. There is a refreshing lack of self-consciousness here, an earthy humanity that is typical of the eighteenth century and that scarcely survived the Victorian age.

512

After a year and a half in Dresden Benda had risen to become a favorite soloist of Kapellmeister Heinichen, who did not want to lose him. Experiencing a natural desire to see his parents, the young musician had no recourse but to run away again. Returned home, he resumed singing in the local church and played the part of a woman in a comedy with music written by his liege lords, the Counts of Clenau. They permitted him to return to his studies in Prague, where he was taken on as a contralto in the Jesuit Seminary in the Old Town. Once again he neglected his studies, but not his music. By this time (1723) he was fourteen.

The year 1723 was a momentous one for Prague. Emperor Charles VI arrived with an enormous retinue for his coronation as King of Bohemia. Musicians from near and far gathered for the celebrations, which were capped by Fux’s opera *Costanza e Fortezza* (the title is the same as the royal motto chosen by Charles). It was given in the open air with a chorus of a hundred, of which Benda was one, and an orchestra of two hundred players. The Jesuits put on a Latin play for the Bohemian nobles in the library of the Collegium Clementinum. Entitled *Melodramma de Sancto Wenceslao*, it had music by the excellent Bohemian composer, Jan Dismas Zelenka (1679–1745), a disciple of Fux who was in the service of the Dresden court. Young Benda sang one of the parts.

² Alma Mahler, *Memories and Letters* (London, 1946), pp. 89–90.

He dwells little upon this but much on the singing of the castrato Gaetano Orsini (1677–1750) from the Viennese court, who took the part of Porsenna in Fux's opera. Orsini's arias in *Wenceslao* were in Italian. They were quickly supplied with sacred contrafacta in Latin and sung in church by Benda, who claims he could remember most of them many years later when writing his autobiography.

The Italian vocal art, and in particular the art of the castrato, was one of the strongest musical impressions of Benda's youth, far from Italy though he was. It can have been no different with Gluck and Stamitz, or countless other Bohemian youths who aspired to musical greatness. Almost as strong an impression seems to have been made upon Benda by Italian instrumental music. At age fifteen his voice broke and he was forced to rely on other resources. He had played fiddle in taverns since he was eight, and had taken the viola part in instrumental concerts given by the Dresden choirboys. Now he began to practice the violin in earnest. He learned the concertos of Vivaldi by heart. As we know from a multiplicity of sources, Vivaldi's music was in great favor at both Dresden and Prague. Another great violinist, Tartini, had come in person to perform at the coronation ceremonies in Prague.

Benda was at an age when he was expected to earn his own living. His father insisted that he keep playing as a *Bierfiedler* in the tavern, as well as learn to become a linen weaver. He soon aspired to marry the Burgomaster's daughter and applied for permission to do so to Count Clenau, to whom he was bonded as a "Leibeigene."³ The Count instead gave him money with which to go back to Prague and seek a good violin teacher. He found one in the person of Koničzek, who was in the service of Prince Lobkowitz, and to whom he paid a ducat a month for lessons. If Gluck and Benda ever met during their formative years, it would likely have been in the circle of the Lobkowitz musicians, for Gluck's family ties to this princely house were strong. Benda's violin lessons soon terminated because, as he says, Koničzek was unable to teach him more. Once again he returned home and resumed playing in the taverns.

The next episode Benda recounts takes on the character of an epiphany in his young life, all the more so because of his possible Jewish heritage:

In those days an old Jew, whose name was Lebel and who was born blind, used to play for dancing in another tavern. He was a man with

³ Johann Mattheson defined "Leibeigene" as "one who possesses his own goods, but may not serve another master unless at the will and pleasure of his master," in his *Grundlage einer Ehren Pforte* (Hamburg, 1740), p. 137.

quite excellent gifts for music. He himself composed the pieces and played exactly and very clearly, even the high notes (Hiller 1766, 187, specifies up to high A) and he was able to make his instrument sound exceedingly sweet, although his violin was not particularly good. I often followed him to have the opportunity to think about the way he played and I must honestly admit that I received more stimulation from him than from my master to make my instruments sound as well as I could. Moreover, I am convinced that playing for the dance had done no harm to my artistry, particularly with regard to keeping time.

Given the exaltation of his later posts in royal service Benda writes with remarkable candor. He offers no apologies for having learned the soul of his art from someone so low in society, an old blind Jew, a *Bierfiedler*. His remarks, as innocent as they may seem, reveal sweeping vistas. Musical ideals were changing rapidly in the early eighteenth century. Sensuous tone, projected by a high treble voice or the violin with the utmost clarity and brilliance, combined with the rhythmic élan of the dance—these are qualities which, whether sounded by a soprano castrato, a Vivaldi or Tartini, or an uncommonly inspired popular fiddler, would eventually lead the new century to discover a musical personality of its own, distinct from that of the seventeenth century.

514

Count Clenau next sent Benda off to Vienna (1726) in order to serve in the household of his friend Count von Ostein, the intention being that Benda would perfect his skills and return to serve his hereditary lord as a valet. He remained until 1729 mainly in Vienna, where he met many musicians, one of the best violinists being old Timmer, who sang tenor at court (Hiller 1766, 190). Most impressive, he says, was the playing of the celebrated Francischello, a cellist in imperial service (with whom he often played trios according to Hiller 1766, 189). He formed a liaison of long duration with another young Bohemian violinist, Georg Zarth, and they both fled to Warsaw. His escapades, amusingly told, need concern us little more, except in the general sense. Good musicians were, like good cooks, often “stolen” by one aristocratic establishment from another. Yet the penalty for desertion was severe, and Benda might have come to grief several times had imperial justice been any more effective than it was. The celebrated hornist Jan Václav Stich-Punto (1746–1803) evaded arrest but his mother, a serf attached to the estate of Count Thun, was imprisoned and shackled for her son’s escape, and Josef Fiala (1748–1816) was imprisoned for three years for leaving his master.⁴ In Benda’s case upward mobility meant deserting at

⁴ Tomislav Volek and Stanislav Jareš, *The History of Czech Music in Pictures* (Prague, 1977), p. 82. There is also the well-known case of Ditters, arrested in Prague for deserting his master in Vienna.

least three different masters in Vienna, and leaving the service of a high Polish nobleman to join the service, successively, of the King of Poland, the Elector of Saxony in Dresden, and Crown Prince Frederick of Prussia. By the time of this last move (1733) he had bought his freedom from Count Clenau by bribing his steward and paying 200 Thaler outright.

Composition figured very little in Benda's account of his apprentice years. When he was studying with Koniček in Prague he says that he was "very industrious as far as playing and writing music was concerned and even worked until late at night." The oral version of his life contains an incident even earlier than this, going back to the coronation year of 1723, and concerning his first, unguided efforts at vocal composition:

From the Jesuits Benda passed to the service of the Order of the Cross. Here the desire arose in him to compose. He then made two settings of *Salve Regina*, one with only organ accompaniment, the other with two violins in addition. He said to me once: Heaven knows how they should have been written according to the rules of musical composition. He remembered about the first setting that he had to sing it several times on orders from the Regens chori because the vocal part had so much to do. (Hiller 1766, 178)

515

Not until Benda joined the royal Prussian musical band does he seem to have received any serious instruction in composition, and this came at the hands of the *Konzertmeister*, Johann Gottlieb Graun, who also coached him in some of the finer points of violin playing.

Up to then I hadn't heard any violinist whose *adagio* would have convinced and pleased me as much as his. I sought his friendship of which he found me worthy. He was kind enough to study a few *adagios* with me which turned out to be a great advantage later on. He was also very helpful in making me handle the bass, since I had started to compose violin solos. His instructions in my study of composition really helped me to a certain perfection, and I profited a great deal from his corrections. I must add that, at that time, I was still a tenor and had to sing a few arias every evening.

Next Benda mentions the other Graun, Carl Heinrich, who was on loan to the musical establishment of the Crown Prince in 1734, prior to becoming its *Kapellmeister*. Only in the oral version do we learn that under his tutelage Benda harmonized chorales, attempted writing a symphony, and also some concertos (Hiller 1766, 191).

In a postscript to the memoir on his life he wrote in 1763, Benda added a few more details about his sporadic early training. He regretted that he never mastered the keyboard.

This instrument would have been of great service in my compositions; the fact that I did not master it made me shy away from composing "strong" things and fugues. Knowing my limited possibilities I endeavored all the more to write violin sonatas in a skillful and singable manner. . . . In short, I am not ashamed to confess publicly that I cannot be placed among the great contrapuntists. Everyone has his own gift and should try to do his best with it.

Benda closes his remarks by expressing admiration for those contrapuntists "who also can express beautiful thoughts" (perhaps referring to his colleague Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, who was still in Prussian service in 1763) and disdaining those who show "an only apparent and inflated mastership." Of the latter he says, "they never listen to the compositions of their colleagues to enjoy them, only to find something in them they can criticize." Benda's last remark shows that, even after many years in Berlin, his Bohemian musical temperament had not deserted him.

Religion plays a very large part in Benda's written account of 1763. It is excluded altogether in the oral version Hiller published in 1766. When Benda was in Poland, a fellow musician, a Saxon Protestant, induced him to read scripture for the first time, and he began to waver in his Catholic faith, which he claims was firm up to this date. He became a Protestant when entering Prussian service a few years later. After his parents visited him in his new position, they returned to Bohemia and faced a severe interrogation by the Catholic authorities, one incident of which underscores the considerable hostility that Czechs then held towards Germans. Concerning letters that they brought back from Prussia in 1734 Benda's mother testified, "one was for a cloth maker, but we tore that up because he was German."⁵ In 1742, with Prussian armies in control of northern Bohemia, King Frederick II took steps which brought Benda's parents to settle in the Bohemian colony of Nowawes near Potsdam. They too became Protestants, along with all their children, as soon as they were out of Bohemia for good. This raises the question, smouldering perhaps ever since the forced re-Catholicization of much of Bohemia during the Counter-Reformation, if the Hussite sentiments among the common people had ever been stamped out altogether.

⁵ Franz Lorenz, *Die Musikerfamilie Benda. Franz Benda und seine Nachkommen* (Berlin, 1967), p. 7. The translation from Czech into German of this written inquisition was made by Alois Hnilička, *Aus Georg Bendas Jugend* (Prague, 1911), p. 10: "Mein Mann hatte auch einen Brief nach Humpolec an einen Tuchmacher, aber übergeben wurde er ihm nicht, wir zerissen ihn, denn er war deutsch."

Gluck came from a family that had risen above the artisan level of the Bendas. They were not bonded servants. But Bohemia was for Gluck the same land of shadowed hopes, a country in perpetual political bondage to Austria, although a kingdom in its own right, a land of forced religious orthodoxy, of economic depression and absentee landlords. On a more cheerful note, it offered Gluck the same musical and cultural riches it had offered the Bendas: a variety of colorful folk-dance and folk-song practices; good vocal and instrumental training in the schools from the lowest grades on up; a tradition of elaborate music-making in the churches that extended even to very small towns and villages. For Gluck as for Benda there were abundant opportunities to perform, but not for the study of composition in a formal sense. Both betook themselves to Vienna and other parts when the opportunity arose to do so.

Gluck was baptized on 4 July 1714 in Erasbach near Berching in northern Bavaria. The Gluck family had long been expert at activities connected with forestry, such as planting, fishing, hunting and game conservation, by which endeavors they had risen to positions of responsibility on the vast country estates of the Lobkowitz family and other great landholders. On Gluck's father's side the family can be traced to Gluck's great-grandfather, Simon Gluck, who came from "Rockenzahn," now believed to be Rokycany near Pilsen in the central part of western Bohemia. Nothing is known about Gluck's mother, not even her surname. On Gluck's baptismal record she is called "Walburga" and on his marriage certificate "Anna Walburga."⁶ She bore several children to Alexander Gluck, the last in 1723. Shortly before Gluck's third birthday the family moved to northern Bohemia, where they resided throughout Gluck's formative years.

The key to Gluck's ancestry and early life lies in his family's ties to the princely house of Lobkowitz, which possessed huge tracts of land in the westernmost part of Silesia (the duchy of Sagan), in northern Bohemia and in the Bohemian Forest on the western side of the country. Their holdings pushed into the Upper Palatinate (present-day northern Bavaria) and included the county of Störnstein-Neustadt, which they possessed since 1566.⁷ Prince Ferdinand August von Lobkowitz (1655–1715) resided periodically at Neustadt an der Waldknab, where he was

⁶ Anton Schmid, *Christoph Willibald Ritter von Gluck. Dessen Leben und Tonkünstlerisches Wirken* (Leipzig, 1854), pp. 461–62. Gluck himself never used his middle name.

⁷ Jacques-Gabriel Prod'homme, *Christoph-Willibald Gluck* (Paris, 1948; revised by Joël-Marie Fauquet, 1985), chapter one. This is the best account of Gluck's ancestry and has served as the source of all the information in our paragraph.

born. It was here that Gluck's grandfather, Hans Adam, joined his service as a gamekeeper (by 1675). He also accompanied the prince to his residence at Roudnice (Raudnitz) north of Prague and held the title "veneur de la cour princière de Sagan." In one document of 1683 he is referred to as *joculator*, which does not exclude the possibility that he provided the court with musical entertainment. Adam lived a long life, until 1722, so Gluck could well have known him. Four of his sons survived him, all foresters or gamekeepers. Alexander, Gluck's father, was born on 28 October 1683 in Neustadt. One of a contingent of fifty men raised from the county of Störnstein-Neustadt, he followed his master in the War of the Spanish Succession, and family legend has it that he rose to become gunbearer to the great general of the imperial forces, Prince Eugene of Savoy. Free of his military duty he settled c. 1711 in the village of Erasbach and married Anna Walburga, from which union Gluck may have been the first born. The same year as his birth, 1714, the treatise of Baden awarded the Upper Palatinate to Bavaria. Alexander remained for three more years in Erasbach, where he owned his house, but then he returned to imperial territory, settling in Liberec (Reichstadt) in northern Bohemia, where he was forest-master to Grand Duchess Anna Maria of Tuscany, wife of the last Medici, Giovan Gastone. Five years later he assumed the same post with Count Philipp Joseph von Kinsky at Česká Kamenice (Böhmisch Kamnitz) to the west of Liberec; the Glucks resided nearby in the village of Chřibská (Kreibitz). Then in 1727 Alexander Gluck crowned his career by becoming *profectus sylvarum* in the service of Prince Philipp-Hyacinth von Lobkowitz at Chomutov (Komotau) in northwestern Bohemia, directly west of Roudnice. The Glucks lived in the forester's house in the village of Jezeří (Eisenberg). Having become a rich and respected man, Alexander liquidated some of his assets at Neustadt an der Waldknab and retired in 1736 to an estate he had purchased near Most (Brüx), the town where Gassmann was born in 1729. Gluck's mother died in 1740, his father in 1743; he returned to receive his lot in 1748.

By analogy with Benda's earliest schooling we can assume that Gluck learned to read and write at the lower schools in northern Bohemia, that he was taught to sing and play instruments as well, as we know was the normal practice all over Bohemia. Burney commented on the phenomenon, which made a marked impression on him when he passed through the Bohemian countryside in 1772.

I found at length, that, not only in every large town, but in all villages, where there is a reading and writing school, children of both sexes are taught music . . . [At the village of Čáslav, birthplace of Jan Dussek] I went into the school which was full of little children of both sexes, from six to ten years old, who were reading, writing, playing on violins, hautbois, bassoons, and other instruments. The organist had in a

small room of his house four clavichords, with little boys practicing on them all; his son of nine years old, was a very good performer.⁸

The elderly Gluck told something similar to the painter Christian von Mannlich: "in my homeland everyone is musical; music is taught in the schools, and in the tiniest villages the peasants sing and play different instruments during High Mass in their churches."⁹

The composer-essayist Reichardt, irritated by Burney's assertions, set himself the task of explaining more fully how Bohemia became so musical. He disputed many of Burney's opinions but not that about the superior musicality of the Bohemians. In the ninth of his letters published in 1776, written from Schlukenow near the Bohemian border, he begins:

What a fruitful land for the musical observer is Bohemia! Scarcely have I crossed over the border when I stumble upon phenomena that amaze me. I recover from my astonishment and begin to investigate *why the Bohemians are more musical than all their neighbors*, and I find connections and causes which no one else has suspected. Burney found the cause of this only in the singing schools [actually, Burney did not mention singing], but Moravia and Austria also have singing schools and their inhabitants are not nearly so musical. The main causes must be sought further. A curious fact which I must mention first is that not only singing is taught in the country schools, but instruments as well.¹⁰

519

Reichardt goes on to claim that the skilled instrumental players from Bohemia found in musical establishments all over Europe come mainly from the Riesengebirge, and specifically three counties on the Saxon border: Děčín (Tetschen), Šluknov (Schlukenow) and Lipova (Hanspach, just west of Šluknov). Most people here, he says, are craftsmen who ply their glass and linen wares throughout Europe. Before the father sends his son forth as a salesman he makes sure that he has learned to sing and play in the schools and has mastered at least one instrument, so that he will have a resource upon which to fall back. When the wandering son returns he often brings back with him a still greater musical expertise, and sometimes even musical scores from the greatest centers, with which he enriches the musical life of his native land. This argu-

⁸ Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in Germany, The Netherlands and United Provinces* (London, 1773, 2/1775, reprinted New York, 1969), vol. II, pp. 4–5. This source is identified in the text subsequently as *German Tour*.

⁹ See note 16 below.

¹⁰ Johann Friedrich Reichardt, *Briefe eines aumerksamen Reisenden die Musik betreffend* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1774–1776, 2 vols.), II, letter 9, pp. 123 ff. The translations from Reichardt are my own, as are all other translations, unless specified otherwise.

ment, in which excellence engenders further excellence, has a circular neatness about it.

If Reichardt is correct in pointing to the northwest corner of Bohemia as the most musical part of "the most musical land," it is worth remembering that this is precisely the part of the country to which Gluck's father took him during his last two positions. A legend in the Gluck family has it that Gluck ran away to escape his overly severe father, who wanted to make a forester out of him, about the time Alexander Gluck entered his last employment under Prince Lobkowitz near Chomutov (1727). This will come as no surprise after reading the escapades that Benda tells about himself.

Chomutov boasted a Jesuit Seminary. The argument as to whether Gluck attended it or not used to be pursued with some heat. His name does not appear on the rolls, although that of one of his younger brothers does. Gluck's failure to learn Latin (he had to study it later in life) has been adduced to deny that he had a Jesuit education, whereas his failure to master written German has been adduced, paradoxically, to prove that he did.¹¹ The Jesuit Seminaries had quite elaborate musical forces at their disposal, and they used them among other ways in producing plays for the religious edification of the public. These were Latin spoken dramas (like *Wenceslao* of 1723), staged with elaborate machinery and accompanied by music in the form of arias, choruses and instrumental interludes; summaries of the dramas were printed in both Latin and, in the case of Bohemia, Czech.¹² The vernacular was used to help get the point across to the larger part of the public, which had learned to read and write it in the lower schools. The Jesuits did not use Czech in teaching their students, nor did they use German. Latin remained the language of instruction. Burney observed that German was little used in Bohemia, even in Prague.

It was with much difficulty that I acquired information from the Bohemian musicians, as even the German language is of little use in that kingdom, throughout which the Slavonian dialect is generally used. M. Seeger, indeed, spoke Italian, and was very communicative; it was from him that I obtained confirmation of my discovery, that not only

¹¹ Alfred Einstein, *Gluck* (London, 1964), p. 7, weighs both sides of the argument and points out by way of analogy that the Viennese poet Michael Denis, educated by the Jesuits, did not, at age eighteen, have correct German. Arnošt Mahler sums up some of the Czech writings on the subject in "Glucks Schulzeit. Zweifel und Widersprüche in den biographischen Daten," *Die Musikforschung* XXVII (1974), 457-60. Mahler suggests that Gluck may have been a choirboy in the Jesuit Church at Chomutov and that he probably began learning to play the organ there.

¹² Vladimír Helfert, "Die Jesuiten-Kollegien der böhmischen Provinz zur Zeit des jungen Glucks," *Festschrift für Johannes Wolf* (Berlin, 1929), pp. 57-64.

in Bohemia, but in Moravia, Hungary, and part of Austria, children are taught music in the common schools . . . (*German Tour*, II, 14).

In 1727 or 1728, when Gluck was no more than thirteen or fourteen, he went to Prague, supporting himself during the journey and upon arriving, we are told, by his musical skills. Gerber, one of his first biographers, got the date and place of Gluck's birth right in his *Lexicon* of 1790, unlike most early sources, so there is some reason to trust what he says next: "in his early years he laid the groundwork for music at Prague and already distinguished himself upon several musical instruments."¹³ Anton Schmid, author of the first major biography, claiming that he got his material from the composer Tomaschek, who was a friend of Gluck's brother Franz, and from the children of Gluck's brother Karl, maintained that Gluck played the violin and the cello, sang in various churches in Prague, particularly the Týn Church, and gave lessons in singing and on the cello. There are many indications of Gluck's activities as a singer and teacher of singing during his maturity; Schubart says "this master possessed a very individual talent for teaching singers of both sexes."¹⁴ He is known to have mastered both the violin, and, unlike Benda, the keyboard. He used the violin to lead the orchestra of Prince von Hilburghausen at Vienna during the 1750s according to Ditters.¹⁵ Many observers, including Burney, have testified to Gluck's use of the keyboard to accompany the voice of his niece, himself, or other singers.

521

The most plausible account of Gluck's childhood is that by the Alsatian painter, Johann Christian von Mannlich, who states that Gluck told him about his early life at a luncheon party in St. Cloud outside Paris during the summer of 1774. Mannlich wrote his memoirs in French around 1810. He quotes Gluck as saying:

My father was forestmaster at M . . . in Bohemia and he planned that eventually I should succeed him. In my homeland everyone is musical; music is taught in the schools, and in the tiniest villages the peasants sing and play different instruments during High Mass in their churches. As I was passionate about the art, I made rapid progress. I played several instruments and the schoolmaster, singling me out from the other pupils, gave me lessons at his house when he was off duty. I no longer thought and dreamt of anything but music; the art of forestry was neglected.¹⁶

¹³ Ernst Ludwig Gerber, *Historisch-biographisches Lexicon der Tonkünstler* (Leipzig, 1790–92), s.v.

¹⁴ Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, *Ideen zu einer Aesthetik der Tonkunst* (Vienna, 1806; reprint Hildesheim, 1969), p. 226.

¹⁵ Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf, *Lebensbeschreibung seinem Sohne in die Feder diktiert* (Leipzig, 1800), chapter 7.

¹⁶ "Gluck à Paris en 1774," *La Revue Musicale* (1934), 260: "Mon père, nous disoit-il, étoit maître des eaux et forêts à N . . . en Bohême; il m'avoit destiné à le remplacer un jour

The story continues as follows. Gluck's father redoubled his workload in an effort to stop his practicing, so he practiced at night. Next the father locked up his instrument, at which Gluck took up the Jews' Harp and mastered it. He was at his most blissful on Sundays when he sang in the church choir. He begged to be allowed to go away and study music, but his father would hear none of it. This refusal drove Gluck to despair and he ran away, to Vienna says Mannlich, but he must misremember this detail, since so many other indications point to Prague. Eventually Gluck's father yielded and even gave his son some financial support for his studies.

Gluck matriculated at the University of Prague in 1731, it has been claimed, under *Logici* as "Christophorus Gluckh Palatinus Erspachensis" and under *Logicae et mathematicum auditores* as "Gluck Christophorus Palatinus Erspachensis" (i.e. a Palatine from Erasbach).¹⁷ He did not complete his studies, and presumably he devoted more and more of his time to music, just as did Benda a few years before him. Reichardt, in the letter of 1776 already cited, describes a situation that may be close to what Gluck experienced after leaving the comfortable circumstances of his family home.

522

In Bohemia a man who had acquired some means sends one of his sons to study at Prague, giving him almost enough to live on. The rest must be earned by making music. As the young master gains greater knowledge of the world, and his wants become correspondingly larger, he must play more and more in order to earn more. Soon he is playing more than he is studying, and finally he becomes a musician altogether. Now he plays the best compositions daily in the churches, attends all public concerts given by travelling virtuosi, and has a chance to model himself upon them; he probably attends the Italian opera buffa as well, hears diverse good things there also, and thus soon teaches himself to become a skilled musician. He remains in Prague under these conditions for a while, until he finally sees too many next to him who are striving for the same goal, and then he migrates and seeks his fortune further afield.¹⁸

dans son poste. Dans mon pays tout le monde est musicien; on enseigne la musique dans les écoles et dans les moindres villages les paysans chantent et jouent des différens instrumens pendant la grand-messe dans leurs églises. Comme j'étois passionné pour cet art, je fis des progrès rapides. Je jouois de plusieurs instrumens, et le maître, en me distinguant des autres écoliers, me donna des leçons chez lui dans ses moments de loisir."

¹⁷ Hans Joachim Moser, *Christoph Willibald Gluck* (Stuttgart, 1940), p. 24. Arnošt Mahler, "Glucks Schulzeit," cited in note 11, does not mention Moser and says that the roll of auditors for this period is missing.

¹⁸ See note 10 above.

For most Bohemian musicians, Vienna was the next destination after Prague. It was to be so for Gluck, who is thought to have arrived in the imperial capital around age twenty, in 1734 or 1735.

Anton Schmid, relying on his Gluck family sources, states that the Lobkowitzes welcomed Gluck to Vienna, extended him their support, and gave him an opportunity to further his knowledge of musical principles. Schmid says further that it was at the Lobkowitz palace in Vienna that Prince Melzi heard Gluck sing and play, upon which he appointed Gluck to his service as a chamber musician and took him to Milan (soon after Melzi's marriage to Countess Harrach on 3 January 1737).

It was a time of both mourning and celebration in the vast palace near the imperial Burg, just across from the Augustinerkirche. Prince Philipp-Hyacinth von Lobkowitz, thought to have been the first important patron of young Gluck, died on 21 December 1734; his widow married Count Gundekar Althan the following August. Both wedding and funeral would require all the musical forces that could be mustered. Schmid insists on Gluck's repeated expressions of gratitude towards his Bohemian patrons, and above all to the Lobkowitz family, in an emotional way that suggests that the Gluck family put great store by them.

523

Among the lesser and greater nobles of Bohemia who have always been devoted to music Gluck acquired many patrons who supported him most generously, as he could scarcely affirm often enough, and specifically the princely family of Lobkowitz, which many of his forebears had already served in the noble work of forestry and gamekeeping. From this it emerged that he always proclaimed, wherever he was, that Bohemia was his real fatherland, and that the Bohemians were his countrymen and his benefactors (p. 22).

It seems that by this insistence Gluck wanted to make it clear that his birth in the Upper Palatinate was no more than a historical accident. Those among his contemporaries who were in the best position to judge the matter considered him a Bohemian, and as we shall see, one went so far as to claim that his mother tongue was Bohemian, that is to say, Czech.

Gluck figures along with the Bendas and Stamitz among the greatest Bohemian musicians of the preceding century in the article "Ueber den Zustand der Musik in Böhmen" by Niemetschek, author of the first biography of Mozart, in which Gluck is likewise called a Bohemian.¹⁹ The most authoritative chronicler of Czech music of the late eighteenth century was Bohumír Jan Dlabáč, whose *Allgemeines historisches Künstler-*

¹⁹ *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* II (1800), 488 ff.

Lexikon was published at Prague in 1815. In an introductory essay he called Bohemia the true school of music and attributed its musical flourishing to the influx of talent drawn to Prague for the coronation of Charles VI in 1723, and its decline to the suppression of the monasteries in the 1780s. To make his point he listed twenty-two Bohemian masters who rose to prominence between these two events. Of those we have mentioned above he included Tuma, Stamitz, Benda, Bixi, Koniček, Seger, Gassmann, and, of course, Gluck. Moreover, the Viennese court poet Pietro Metastasio referred to Gluck in 1756 as a “maestro di cappella boemico.”²⁰ Long resident in the imperial capital, Metastasio was well aware of the various political and linguistic distinctions within the empire; he regularly spent his summer holiday in Moravia. The French were not very aware of such distinctions. Viewed from Paris, Bohemia looked like just another of the many parts of Germany, which in some senses it was, and Gluck along with other Bohemian musicians was often subsumed as German. Yet part of the hostile reaction that Gluck aroused in Paris among italophiles expressed itself precisely in epithets reminding people that Gluck was a Bohemian. Thus Marmontel dubbed him “le jongleur de Bohème” and others referred to *Iphigénie en Tauride* as the “Iphigénie de Prague.”²¹

524

Gluck's foremost operatic disciple in Vienna, the Italian-born Salieri, left a touching souvenir from Gluck's last year in his memoirs, which were translated into German and published by Ignaz von Mosel. No one was in a better position to describe what conversations with Gluck were like than Salieri, who relates this about his parting with the elderly master upon leaving for Paris in 1786.

Gluck, whose native tongue was Czech, expressed himself in German only with effort, and still more so in French and Italian, a difficulty only increased by the paralytic condition he suffered during his last years. Usually he mixed several languages together during a conversation, and so the farewell speech to his favorite protégé went as follows: “Ainsi . . . mon cher ami . . . lei parte domani per Parigi. . . . Je Vous souhaite . . . di cuore un bon voyage. . . . Sie gehen in eine Stadt, wo man schätzet . . . die fremden Künstler . . . e lei si farà onore . . . ich zweifle nicht,” and as I embraced him he said in addition: “ci scriva, mais bien souvent.”²²

²⁰ *Tutte le opere di Pietro Metastasio*, ed. B. Brunelli, vol. III (Milan, 1951), pp. 1152–53, letter of 8 December 1756 written to his friend Farinelli in Madrid.

²¹ Prod'homme, *Christoph-Willibald Gluck*, p. 13, quotes Marmontel. Joseph Richter, *Eine Reise von Wien nach Paris* (Vienna, 1781), p. 72, says that the Parisians spoke derisively of *Iphigénie* using this term, but that they flocked to see it.

²² *Ueber das Leben und die Werke des Anton Salieri, K. k. Hofkapellmeister* von I. F. Edlen von Mosel (Vienna, 1827), p. 93: “Gluck, dessen Muttersprache die böhmisch war, drückte

Schmid, Gluck's first biographer, did not dispute that Gluck spoke Czech, but suggested he picked it up during his years in Prague, and that Salieri was in error about it being Gluck's native tongue. More devious manoeuvres have been attempted by Gluck's German biographers of this century, while the French ones have, without exception, taken Salieri at his word. Arend objected that not a single letter written in Czech can be found, to which Prod'homme countered that no letters written by Liszt in Hungarian were known either, but does this make him a German?²³ Prod'homme also insisted that while Gluck could make himself understood writing either French or Italian, his written German was neither more nor less incorrect. Moser wanted more than letters in Czech as proof; he asked for the seemingly impossible: lyric works using the Czech language. Another French writer answered this point as long ago as 1770.

Laurent Garcin, in his *Traité du Mélo-drame*, written by 1770 and published in 1772, was a partisan of the new opéra-comique that had sprung up at Paris during the 1750s and 1760s. He defended the works in this genre by Philidor, Monsigny and others, comparing their spoken dialogue, simple songs and ensembles and many opportunities for dramatic effects with Italian comic opera, in which he found the arias too elaborate and the recitative boring. Looking around Europe for a phenomenon comparable to opéra-comique, he singled out the musical shows in Czech given throughout Bohemia, and above all at Prague. He praised Czech as a lovely language for music, and said of these stage-works that the airs succeed each other rapidly in order to give rise to pantomime, without recitative, but with spoken dialogue and gesture. Italian music is well known and executed in a superior fashion in Bohemia, he says, but the natives prefer their own because it is more lively and more theatrical. To sing its praises further mention need only be made of the composers who deemed it worthy of their talents, namely Gluck, Wagenseil and Bixi. Even Italian musicians declare themselves partisans of this Czech music, he says, once they come to know it.²⁴

There are a few other hints as to the existence of opera in Czech ca. 1750–1790, but the works in question have yet to be discovered. Bur-

sich in der deutschen, und noch mehr in der französischen und italienischen, nur mit Mühe aus, und diese Schwierigkeit wurde in seinem letzten Jahren durch den paralitischen Zustand noch vermehrt, in der er versetzt war."

²³ Max Arend, *Gluck, eine Biographie* (Berlin, 1920), p. 20; Moser, *Gluck* (1940), pp. 20–21. Moser does nothing to enhance his credibility as a historian by claiming Stamitz and others born in central Bohemia as Sudeten Germans. Stamitz was born in Havlíčkův Brod and went to school in nearby Jihlava, as did Mahler. Moser's falsifications extend even to such minuscule matters as saying that Gluck told Mannlich about his early life when Gluck was in Mannheim, instead of in France. (p. 22, note 1).

²⁴ For the original passage, see Appendix.

ney, passing through Prague in 1772, observed: "There have been no operas here lately; however, German and Sclavonian plays are performed three times a week, which are, at present, the only public exhibitions at Prague, of any kind" (*German Tour*, II, 1). Had Burney ventured to attend one of these "Sclavonian plays," perhaps he would have found them more operatic than he guessed (but probably not Italianate enough to suit his tastes). Over a decade later another visitor to Prague, no one less than the sovereign, Emperor Joseph II, wrote to his theater director in Vienna, Count Rosenberg, saying that he preferred the Czech opera given occasionally to the bad Italian comic opera given locally.²⁵ Sparse as are these references, they confirm Garcin as to the presence of some kind of musical entertainment in Czech during Gluck's lifetime. It may well have been nourished by the Latin spoken dramas with music given by the Jesuits. Later, it could also profit from the direct importation of examples of opéra-comique from Paris, a case in point being *Bastien et Bastienne*. At issue here is that Garcin gives us firm testimony of Gluck's contribution to the Czech-language operas, which can be placed tentatively in the late 1740s and early 1750s, when Gluck resided for long periods in Prague. Contributing to such shows in the vernacular presupposes that Gluck knew Czech well, that it was indeed, as Salieri says, his native tongue. Anyone who knows Gluck's music well could not doubt the Bohemian origins of its composer.

526

Events have conspired to play down the achievements of the eighteenth-century Bohemian masters. At present the Czechs themselves pay little attention to the part of their musical heritage that came before Smetana. Moreover, the Romantic stereotype about the Bohemians being mere *Musikanten* dies hard.²⁶ But some progress has been made in setting the picture straight.²⁷ While it is impossible to ascertain what kind of training Gluck received before he went to Vienna for the first time, what may be inferred from indirect evidence we hope to have extended by drawing this parallel between Benda and Gluck.

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²⁵ Rudolf Payer von Thurn, *Joseph II. als Theaterdirektor* (Vienna and Leipzig, 1920), pp. 69–71, letter written from Prague on 29 September 1786: "L'opera buffa d'ici est si mauvais, que je préfère l'opera bohème qu'on donne par fois ici." Joseph was tutored in the Czech language as a boy, the better to rule his future subjects; on this point see Derek Beales, *Joseph II* (Cambridge, 1987), vol. I, p. 49.

²⁶ Karl Michael Komma, *Das böhmische Musikantentum* (Kassel, 1960), pp. 162–63, *passim*, adopts a patronizing attitude towards Bohemian composers, without taking the trouble to study their music.

²⁷ Camillo Schoenbaum was quick to correct Komma's perspective in "Die böhmischen Musiker in der Musikgeschichte Wiens vom Barock zur Romantik," *Studien zur Musikwissenschaft* LII (1962), 475–95.

APPENDIX

Laurent Garcin, *Traité du mélo-drame, ou Réflexions sur la musique dramatique* (Paris, 1772), pp. 114–16. The privilege is dated January 1771.

Il faut donc lui proposer l'exemple d'une autre Musique, laquelle, avec réflexion et connoissance, suit une méthode toute différente de l'Italienne; c'est celle qui est en usage dans tout la Bohême, et sur-tout à Prague, Musique pour laquelle les Italiens ont tous la plus grand estime, et que plusieurs même préfèrent à celle de leur Nation. Cette Musique, dont j'ai entendu exécuter divers morceaux, ne fait jamais perdre un moment à l'action de la Scène; les paroles* y sont enchaînées les unes aux autres, point de répétitions, point de reprises, les airs sur le papier n'ont pas quelque fois quatre lignes, vous les voyez se succéder rapidement, pour faire place enfin à la pantomime. Les Musiciens de Bohême ne font point usage du récitatif qu'ils appellent un chant contre nature, mais à côté des airs, ils employent le discours ou la pantomime, à-peu-près comme dans nos Opéras-Comiques, nous entremêlons le chant et le dialogue parlé. Cette Musique s'exécute dans un pays où l'Italienne est bien connue et supérieurement exécutée; on la trouve plus animée, plus théâtrale et il suffiroit pour en faire l'éloge de dire que les *Gluck*, les *Wagenseil*, les *Bixi*, l'ont jugée digne de leur talens. Toute étrange que doive paroître aux Italiens la Musique Bohémienne, il en est peu qui ne s'en déclarent partisans, dès qu'ils viennent à la connoître. Ce n'est donc pas à copier la Musique d'un Peuple, mais à perfectionner la sienne, que doivent tendre les réflexions et les efforts de tout Artiste.

527

*Bien des gens s'imaginent que la Langue Bohémienne n'est point favorable à la Musique; c'est une erreur. Tout ce qu'elle offre de rude sur le papier, s'adoucit dans la prononciation. J'ai vu des Compositeurs Italiens la préférer à leur propre Langue. Le son de l'*a* y revient plus fréquemment qu'en aucun autre, et cette voyelle est, comme on sçait, la lettre favorite du Musicien.