

Monologue**Bořkovec** Sonata.**Klusák** Monologue 'Ubi vult'^a. Partita.**Smolka** The Mist of Depression.**Vycpálek** Suite, Op. 21.

Jitka Hosprová (viola).

Supraphon SU4049-2 (full price, 1 hour 1 minute).Website www.supraphon.com. Producers IgorTausinger, ^aMilan Puklický. Engineers Jaroslav Vašíček,^aJan Lžičař. Dates September 2009, ^aMarch 2010.

Jitka Hosprová

Supraphon

One of the uncontracted benefits of reviewing is being sent music you don't know; I knew the names of all the Czech composers here and had heard some, not much, music by them, and so this CD has been a voyage of discovery for me. The fact that the journey is undertaken on the fragile barque of a solo viola, not on a full-orchestral cruise liner, makes it all the more impressive.

The 1931 Sonata of Pavel Bořkovec (1894-1972), 12 minutes long, is proud and assertive in its outer movements, intense and introspective in the central one; it has a more heroic, muscular tone than the solo-violin music Hindemith was writing at around the same time. The title of the *Monologue*

Instrumental

'*Ubi vult*' (1987) by Jan Klusák (born in 1934) is taken from St John, 3:8: 'Spiritus flat, ubi vult' ('The spirit will blow wherever it will') and thus points to the improvisational character of the material, which nonetheless extends to an ambitious 21 minutes in length. Like the Bořkovec of 50 years earlier, it inhabits a liberated tonality, neither modernist nor nailed to the past. Jaroslav Smolka's notes quote the composer to the extent that the work 'develops within a firm outline', but neither composer says what it is, and although I've cocked several ears at it, I'm still not sure it doesn't ramble – though if it does, it's in a dignified and proud manner.

The 16-minute Suite (1929) of Ladislav Vycpálek (1882-1969) contains the most sheerly passionate music on the disc, both in the furious athleticism of the *Con moto*, the second of its four movements, or in the pained lyricism of the following *Lento*, which apparently represents the dialogue between a man and woman before separation. Smolka's own *The Mists of Depression* (1982) is the most explicitly modern work here, though it's still merely the extended tonality of the rest of the programme rather than explicitly modernist. The title doesn't indicate indulgent self-examination on the part of the composer; rather, it's based on the last decipherable sketch of Smetana's, which he headed 'Viola als Muster' ('viola as model'), and represents the feverish travail of the artist's brain, the ideas intense and urgent, phrases turning obsessively around in the mind. The robust neo-Classical dancing phrases of Klusák's tripartite Partita (undated in Smolka's notes but probably from the early 1950s) then blow in after the febrile Smolka like gusts of fresh air and bring the CD to a bracing conclusion.

Jitka Hosprová brings evangelical zeal to her performances on this CD, having already stood up for several of the pieces in concert: she gave the premières of both Klusák pieces and played the Smolka at the concert that marked the composer's 65th birthday. The recording, made for Czech Radio, is clear and direct, and Supraphon makes the most of Hosprová's cool blonde looks, finishing the presentation in a mauve to offset the pink of her dress. Her instrument is an Andrea Postacchini from 1856.

The Bořkovec is the major discovery here, but all five pieces are serious additions to the solo-violin repertoire, and this CD offers them the best of shop windows. *Martin Anderson*