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CONCEPT ART ORCHESTRA RELEASES A RECORDING OF THE “100 YEARS” SUITE



Two years after the first performance of “Země stoletá” (The Country at One Hundred), a musical tribute to the centenary of the foundation of Czechoslovakia, a studio recording of the suite is being released under the title 100 YEARS. It is the third recording of the jazz big band **CONCEPT ART ORCHESTRA** on the Animal Music label; the first of the albums received the 2015 Anděl Award for the best jazz album of the year, the second was nominated for the same prize. The large suite which is a unique collective work of the Prague Six – a group of composers associate with the big band Concept Art Orchestra, with three of them regular members of the ensemble – consists of six parts. With a typical wit and originality the authors illustrate various periods in the history of the Czechoslovak state and later the Czech Republic.

Štěpánka Balcarová, Jan Jirucha, Luboš Soukup, Martin Brunner, Tomáš Sýkora and Vít Kříšťan each have authored one of the six movements in which they make full use of all the orchestration possibilities offered by a big band, expanding these with non-traditional instruments such as Ondes Martenot, accordion, the chimes, sampler and synthesizer. The individual compositions also include sensitive references to period music and citations from political speeches. The piece is remarkable for its sheer scale, its generic hesitation on the borderline between jazz and classical music, programmatic dimension and the gestation process which involved six composers successively adding individual movements after having acquainted themselves with the existing material. The result is a piece of exceptional variedness and unity. A special guest in the fourth movement, dedicated to the so-called “normalization” period following the Soviet occupation in 1968 and based on a motif from a song by Plastic People of the Universe, is the band’s long-term member, saxophonist Vratislav Brabenec.

The album was recorded at the studios of Smečky and Sono Records, in collaboration with the sound director Petr Ostrouchov and masters of sound Jan Holzner and Milan Cimfe. The cover design is by Aleš Najbrt and Jiří Veselka from Studio Najbrt. The album is distributed by Supraphon and it is also available from the Animal Music e-shop at <https://www.animalmusic.cz>.

The album **100 YEARS** features the following members of the **CONCEPT ART ORCHESTRA**: saxophones, clarinets and flutes: *Andrea Šulcová, David Fárek, Petr Kalfus, Malte Schiller, Luboš Soukup and Jonas Brinckmann*; trumpets and flugelhorns: *Felix Meyer, Gerhard Ornig, Jan Kaiser, Jan Přibil*; trombones: *Jan Jirucha, Štěpán Janoušek, Richard Šanda, Jakub Židek, Johannes Oppel*; piano and fender rhodes: *Vít Kříšťan*; doublebass and guitar: *Petr Dvorský*; drums: *Kamil Slezák*; guests: *Tomáš Sýkora* (samples), *Martin Brunner* (synthesizer and piano), *Jan Linhart* (chimes), *Ondřej Kabrna* (Ondes Martenot, accordion), *Vratislav Brabenec* (saxophone and clarinet) and *Petr Ostrouchov* (timpani).

The authors of the individual movements explain their approach and sources of inspiration:

ŠTĚPÁNKA BALCAROVÁ (Part 1: 1918 – 1938): *“I tried to capture what our first president symbolizes for us – diplomacy, elegance, prudence, grace, collectedness. I also made use of a unique recording of T. G. Masaryk’s New-Year’s Address from 1934.”*

JAN JIRUCHA (Part 2: 1938 – 1948): *“My main inspiring moment was the Munich Agreement. The Western powers allowed for the democratic Czechoslovakia to be divided and occupied and the consequences of this political step fatally influenced the future of Europe as a whole. I worked with a section of Smetana’s Vltava and an extract from the Czechoslovak hymn by František Škroupa. Both motifs are symbolically ravaged and trampled in my movement.”*

LUBOŠ SOUKUP (Part 3: 1948 – 1968): *“The determining factor of this period is the onset of the communist regime. I have been inspired by The Joke, a banned film by Jaromil Jireš from 1968 from which I have borrowed the folk tune ‘Ej dolina, dolina’. The melody emblemizes the idealism and naivety of the nation; the driving element in my part of the composition is the discrepancy between the easy complacency of part of the nation and the ubiquitous terror. The final part of my movement is dramatic: it symbolizes the arrival of the armies of the Warsaw Pact and the unequal battle between this small nation and the Soviet behemoth.”*

MARTIN BRUNNER (Part 4: 1968 – 1989): *“The ‘normalization period’ signifies for me a period of stagnation and resignation; after 1968 hopes of a social and political change had been extinguished for a long time. The official culture of the time was marked by a total and hideous lack of taste and in the minds of people who had lived through decades of lies and institutional pressure, a distorted worldview took root. This a legacy with which we have been dealing to this day and may be a long time till we are able to fully come to terms with it. I tried to find an expression for the oppressive sense of futility and helplessness, the monstrosity of the occupation armies but also the admirable perseverance of courageous individuals. I also used motifs from two songs by Plastic People of The Universe and consider it to be significant feature of the recording’s symbolic that it features a solo performance by Vratislav Brabenec who has been a member of the band since 1972.”*

TOMÁŠ SÝKORA (Part 5: 1989 – 2004): *“My musical perspective on the 1989 revolution and the ensuing period issues from memories of my childhood, young adulthood and identity formation; I remember this time very clearly. Over several weeks, the paradigm of the Czech society changed, the elation over the newly-acquired freedom was omnipresent and the following decade was wild and unforgettable. It was also a period of essential deeds and political decisions which determined the future course of this country.”*

VÍT KŘIŠŤAN (Part 6: 2004 – 2018): *“For me, this period is marked by a mix of an undetermined, intensive, bipolar and somewhat sarcastic sentiments. We entered the European Union, capitalized on the advantages of this association only to start complaining about the ‘dictate of Europe’. The Prague Castle has for long been enforcing a rhetoric in which terms such as ‘love’ and ‘justice’ are presented as swearwords. We would like to think of ourselves as living in a social and fair-minded system and yet, the country has been led by a very controversial and a prosecuted businessman. We would like to live for the future but tend to nostalgically revel in history. I have therefore used characteristic motifs of older compositions to create a mosaic of feelings which keep determining our society to this day.”*



CONCEPT ART ORCHESTRA is a jazz big band composed of Czech and international musicians led by the trumpeter, conductor and composer Štěpánka Balcarová. The band's uniqueness lies in its focus on the interpretation of new music by contemporary Czech composers. For the album **The Prague Six** (2015) the band received the Anděl Award in the jazz category. The album also topped the 2015 Czech Jazz Vintage survey by Czech jazz critics and promoters. The album **Christmas for Adults** (2018) received a nomination in the jazz category of the Anděl Awards.

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