

## Dramaturgy of the 23<sup>rd</sup> year of the Concentus Moraviae Festival

### Theme MUSIC AND HUMOR

01 06 – 27 06 2018

“A smile is the shortest distance between people”, said Victor Borge, one of the greatest musician-entertainers of all time. This smile is exactly what Concentus Moraviae 2018 is looking for. With Antonín Dvořák’s well-known seventh *Humoresque* as main tune the Festival explores the fascinating links between music and humor. Is it true that humoresques are “notoriously unfunny”?

As an introduction to the live recording of the Pier NYC concert of Frank Zappa on the 26th of August 1984 appears the following text: “No laser weapons, no fog, no over-dubs and still some people have the nerve to ask ... does humor belong in music?” In the same year pianist Alfred Brendel writes his brilliant essay “The sublime in reverse”, referring in the title to a definition by the writer Jean Paul. He tackles the question of music and humor and states: “For most performers and virtually all concert audiences of our time, music is an entirely serious business.”

Many music festivals focus on the sublime, not many on “the sublime in reverse”. In the few cases music and humor are linked it is mostly by musical clowns but one can do more than replacing musical notes with red noses. The different ways of laughing by philosophers and writers as Socrates, Diogenes, Cervantes, Montaigne, Nietzsche and Kundera helped defining Europe. Milan Kundera even defines laughter as a metaphor for Europe: the ability to doubt, to be critical. Music contributes in a refined and subtle way. With the words of Pliny the Younger: “Aliquando praeterea rideo, iocor, ludo, homo sum.” (“Sometimes I laugh, I joke, I play, I am human.”) This humanity is not only mirrored in the seriousness of music, but also in its ability to connect itself with humor.

The Festival ranges from all kinds of Flimflams, Bamboozlers and Lollapaloozas to *scherzi musicali* and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s *Musikalischer Spaß*. Of course some of the contemporary high level “musical clowns” as the duo Igudesman & Joo will be part of Concentus Moraviae, but that’s the most obvious representation of the festival theme. There are many more subtle ways to tackle the topic. Starting with some key compositions that feature all possible variations of humor: *Parade* by Erik Satie, *4’33* by John Cage, *Aventures* by György Ligeti or *Frankenstein!!* by HK Gruber. With some compositions the link is very refined, as with the *Diabelli Variations* by Ludwig van Beethoven or *Les soirées de Nazelles* by Francis Poulenc.

Besides the view from the composer’s side, the festival also invites several ensembles that grasp the festival theme in a unique or a fresh way: Ensemble Atonor plays instruments invented by Erwin Stache (from a phone orchestra to pieces for wardrobe racks), the orchestra Les Passions de L’Ame investigates baroque pranks with music of Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber (*Harmonia Artificiosa-Ariosa*) and Johann Joseph Fux’s *Turcaria*. The Berg Orchestra featuring violinist Martin Zbrožek performs *Pssst, maestro is coming!*, a parody of

how conductors behave on stage, and the PKF - Prague Philharmonia tests the patience of the audience and shows the humorous side of the “grand orchestra”.

In the dada performance of the Berlin Sound Poets Quoi Tête Jára Cimrman will fly to the moon, the bandoneon player Gabriel Rivano is in his program *Tango feliz* seeing the humorous side of life in a melancholic way, through the piano improvisation by Zdeněk Král the humor of Charlie Chaplin and Louis de Funés will be recalled. Within the guitar recital of Pavel Steidl texts by Milan Kundera will be presented who quotes in his *Book of laughter and forgetting* that “The history of music is mortal, but the idiocy of the guitar is eternal.” Often the humor will awake in a changed context as in Händel’s *Messiah* which the courageous Odd Size Ensemble performs in a humble cast of four musicians or in *the coughsymphony* by the famous comedian Lorient. Several humoresques will naturally be intertwined with the festival, those by Grieg, Dvořák or Rostropovich will be combined with *A smile for Slawa* for cello solo by Gija Kantscheli.

The fact that the sense of humor is not a privilege of our time will be confirmed by the *Lassus Grand Cru* program in which Zefiro Torna reveals the bucolical aspects of life in the 16th century, as was reflected in Orlando di Lasso’s chansons, *villanellas* and drinking songs. (It is good to remark that the evening is presented as musical wine tasting). Hundred years younger Nicolas Racot de Grandval called his comic cantata *La Matrone d'Ephèse* a “tragedy for laughing” in which five characters of the story are impersonated by single protagonist: We can look forward to one man show by the countertenor Dominique Visse who is well known to the festival audience.

The French ensemble Les Traversées Baroques plays inventive live music during the screening of classic *Pat a Mat* episodes which proves that the Czech clumsy handymen make laugh audiences all over Europe. Leonard Bernstein invites us to the cinema in his sixth episode of *Young People’s Concerts* on the theme “Humor in Music”.

The composer Miloš Štědroň has been appointed the artist in residence of the 23<sup>rd</sup> festival year. He will guide the audience through his wittiest compositions and present his view on the festival theme on various occasions. In a shared lecture with Milan Uhde he will participate in the European Festival of Philosophy.

Concentus Moraviae 2018 will use „no laser weapons, no fog, no over-dubs“ but will smile in all possible musical keys!

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