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## Festival FORFEST Czech Republic 2011

by Jan Grossmann

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*To the readers of Composer/USA:*

The name of FORFEST is already not unknown. About this international festival of contemporary music and art we have already reported several times. Forfest is a unique event in Europe because of an extraordinary spiritual dimension of many of the compositions introduced there. The festival takes place annually in late June in the picturesque Moravian town of Kroměříž – a town known for its precious cultural and artistic monuments registered on the UNESCO list. Some of the readers of Composer/USA have had the opportunity to be guests of FORFEST. Soaking up the atmosphere, meeting with friends on the same wavelength -- they have had a chance to look around in Kroměříž, to see rare works of art, architectural monuments, unique Baroque-garden architecture and collections of rare music scores in the archives of the Archbishop's Castle.

There was occasional participation of American composers, performers, and conductors even in the early years. Later, however, more and more American artists have become artistic collaborators at FORFEST and bearers and propagators of its ideas. Of course the festival is dominated by composers and artists from Central Europe, mainly from the former Czechoslovakia. However, while many foreign artists receive grants from their native countries to participate in FORFEST, many artists are content with a modest fee, and are still coming to Kroměříž with beautifully prepared, representative programs.

Among the U.S. artists of the 22nd year of the festival: multi-flutist, composer, conductor, Professor Emeritus of Music at the California State University, Northridge, and



President of the National Association of Composers/USA, Daniel Kessner, his consort, a major pianist, harpsichordist and chamber musician, Dolly Eugenio Kessner, and renowned guitarist William Feasley. Their compositions have enriched this year's programming in addition to those of Dan Locklair and Peter W. Madlem.

Among the exceptional events at this year's Forfest were the realization of the chamber cantata by Daniel Kessner, *In the Center*, for mezzo-soprano, string quartet and piano (Kristýna Valoušková and Collegium Arion, with first violinist David Mimra, pianist Helena Fialová). This composition was premiered at FORFEST 2000. I knew it also from the composer's CD, but this time it was like a different composition: masterfully secure, tectonically balanced, with surprising turns of expression and dramatic moments of expression of angelic purity and peace.

No wonder that after the last prolonged tone, the applause truly exploded. *In the Center* almost overshadowed the compositions performed by the Duo Kessner earlier on the concert: first from another foreign author, a leading French composer of Georgian origin, Nicolas Zourabichvili de Pelken. *Grande Quinsonnade* by Zourabichvili for solo flute is a work of prevailingly sorrowful and meditative character, but also organically utilized tightrope-walking of technical finesse. In particular, the amazing, transcendental, magical and darkly dense *Terra Oscura* for

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## FORFEST *Continued from backpage*

solo piano by Zourabichvili, and *Epigraph Sonata for Flute and Piano* by Kessner, composed in 2010, were events that this authors' concert of the two friends transformed into an unforgettable experience.



Let guitarist William Feasley forgive me for not taking any written notes during his appearance. No, I hadn't lost my notepad. But looking at his concert program, I wanted just once only to listen - to allow the quiet, beautiful tones to run their own course, as if it were a cleansing bath. I think that a reviewer can occasionally afford such a luxury, without assessing, without seeking out adjectives, without thinking about the balance or comprehensibility of the article. Allow the reviewer not to do his job in this case, and simply let the sounds wash over him. I did it and felt blissfully.

Earlier, I had the impression that the artist could not immediately find his correct position of peace and security. But then in *Impetus*, by Vojtěch Mojžíš from Prague, which was featured in the author's presence in the world premiere, I was tuned in to just the right wave. Other compositions, too, created a constellation of idyllic tranquility. The program consisted of works that stroked, calmed, rather than trying to solve anything: *El Tango Negro* by Marcel Ferraris, *Caprichos de Goya* by the American composer of Italian origin Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, and *Homenaje a un Cubanaso* from Cuban-American composer Jose Lezcano. *The Pateroller Sonata* from one of the most respected of Hollywood composers, Peter W. Madlem, was dedicated to William Feasley.

This year FORFEST was -- in terms of style and creative poetics -- amazingly monolithic. There were no appearances by creative exhibitionists from the ranks of conceptualists, nor minimalist artists, nor any neo- nor post-Darmstadt composers. There was, therefore, a lack of challenging genres and stylistic pluralism, although the solid colors featured this year was not a bad thing. What touched me deeply was an extraordinary degree of spirituality in some of the other programs and compositions.

Especially strong was the author's concert of professor of the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno, František Gregor Emmert (b.1940), a humble, quiet, discreet, magically inventive personality, a composer of passionate faith. Fortunate indeed were those who heard *Veronica's veil, dramma intimo*, for solo violin, performed by by violin-magician Milan Paľa, Slovakia -- who was practically Professor Emmert's Court Violinist -- or *Hlas plesania / Voice of praise and salvation*, for soprano and violin (in an amazing performance by Janka Tajovska Krajčovičová and Milan Paľa again).

Also impressive was the author's concert of the First Lady of the Czech composition scene, Professor at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, Ivana Loudová, which included her *String Quartet No. 2, In memory of Bedrich Smetana*, which was created in her earliest years as a composer (in a phenomenal performance by the FAMA Quartet from Prague - David Danel, first violin), the *Sonata*

for Violin and Piano (with Anna Veverková and Jan Dušek), and *Planet of Birds II*, for violin and electronics, dedicated to the memory of the author's teacher during her study in France, Olivier Messiaen.

This year's festival was also graced by the return of Slovak pianist Elena Letňanová, formerly head of piano department at the University of Dayton, Ohio, where she settled after the forced emigration from communist totalitarianism. Maybe some readers remember her recital at Carnegie Hall where she performed as the first Slovak artist. Her program at FORFEST included works of three of perhaps her favorite contemporary authors: *Semplice* by Slovak composer Roman Berger, *6 Epigrams* by Slovak composer Miro Bázlik, and *Brittle Relations* by Peter Graham from Brno.

The concert of the ensemble Convergence (Kristýna Valoušková - soprano, Zuzana Bandúrová - flute, Ondřej Štochl - viola) presented a unique and compelling performance of *De Profundis* by Slovak composer (living in Switzerland) Iris Seghy, a work with a warm, peaceful and resistant beauty revealing a deep intimacy of our dialogue with the Friend-God.

In addition to many others, the final concert of FORFEST, with the Wallinger Quartet, was spiritual in the best sense: the *5th String Quartet* ("Tribute to Antonín Dvořák") by composer Jiří Matys of Brno, the *2nd String quartet* by another Brno composer, Pavel Zemek, whose surprisingly gripping work is worthy of a separate study, and the *5th String Quartet* by David Matthews of England, who was present at this year's Festival.

FORFEST featured also the opening exhibition of glass objects of Slovak-Czech artist Marek Trizuljak, works on paper by the Italian artist Tommasina Squadrito (she was present at many of the concerts), paintings by Dana Puchnarová from Prague, and Bohuslav Reynek's books of poetry, along with photographs by Daniel Reynek.

The festival was also the venue for a biennial three-day Colloquium on the universal theme of spiritual currents in contemporary art. FORFEST was held under the personal patronage of the Mayor of the City of Kroměříž, Daniela Hebnarová, as well as the Minister of Culture of the Czech Republic, Jiří Besser, the Czech Commission for UNESCO, and the Archbishopric of Olomouc.

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