

An Analysis of Karel Jirák's Symphonic Scherzo

by

Dr. Amy Dunker

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Instrumentation:

Piccolo
Flute 1 – 2
Oboe 1 – 2
English Horn
Eb Clarinet (Opt.)
Bb Clarinet 1 – 2
Eb Alto Clarinet
Bb Bass Clarinet
Bassoon 1 – 2
Contrabassoon (Opt.)
Eb Alto Saxophone 1 – 2
Bb Tenor Saxophone 1 – 2
Eb Baritone Saxophone
Eb Bass Saxophone (Opt.)

French Horn 1 – 4
Bb Flugelhorn (Cornet) 1 – 3
Bb Trumpet 1 – 2
Trombone 1 – 2
Bass Trombone
Baritone
Tuba
Cello (Opt.)
String Bass (Opt.)
Harp

Timpani
Xylophone
Percussion : Triangle, Snare Drum, Bass Drum, Suspended
Cymbal, Tam-Tam

Duration: 9 Minutes

Grade: 6

Harmonic Language: Neotonal

Meter: Mixed (6/8, 9/8)

Texture: Melody and Accompaniment

Date of Composition: August, 1951

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Dedication Statement: To my friend Mr. Louis M. Blaha

Composer Bio:

KAREL BOLESLAV JIRÁK
1891-1972

Karel B. Jirák (born in Prague, Czech Republic, January 28, 1891; died in Chicago, IL, January 30, 1972), is a Czech composer who studied with Vítězslav Novák and Joseph B. Foerster at Charles University and the Academy of Music in Prague. Following his studies, he was appointed conductor of the Hamburg Opera in 1915 and from 1918-19, was the conductor of the National Theater in Brno. From 1920-1930, he became professor of composition at Prague Conservatory after which time, he became music director of the Czechoslovak Radio from 1930-1945.

In 1947, he was invited to Chicago to deliver some lectures at Roosevelt University, but after the communist take-over in 1948, he decided to stay in the USA. From 1948 until 1967, he was Chairman of the Theory Department at Roosevelt University. And following that, from 1967 to 1971, he served as Professor of Composition at Chicago Conservatory College.

Karel Jirák has composed over 90 works among which are 1 opera, 6 symphonies, 7 string quartets, *Symphonic Variation* (1941), *Piano Concerto*, *Concerto for Violin and Chamber Orcehstra* (1957), *Violin Sonata*, *Viola Sonata*, *Flute Sonata*, *Wind Quintet* (1928), *Clarinet Sonata* (1947), and *Requiem* for solo quartet, chorus, organ and orchestra (1952). He is the author of a textbook on musical form (1924) and between 1945-46 while still in Prague, wrote monographs on W. A. Mozart, Zdeněk Fibich and Jan Heřman, the Czech piano virtuoso. Later on, while in the USA, he wrote a small study about Antonín Dvořák for a SVU presentation.

Symphonic Scherzo for Band, op. 65a was dedicated to Louis M. Bláha (d. 1953), conductor of the J. Sterling Morton High School concert band in Cicero, Illinois, who commissioned this work from Karel B. Jirák. It was completed in August of 1951 giving the Morton High School Band an opportunity of taking on its challenge for the premiere in the spring of 1952.

Joseph Frantik (Bb Clarinet) and Anthony Jandáček (F Horn), students at Morton who played this work, both recall the tremendous challenge that *Scherzo* gave their band. "I remember how exciting it was for us to play a premiere," recalls Frantik. "It was the most difficult piece we had ever seen!" "For the largely Czech audience of parents used to the harmonies of Sousa, Bedřich Smetana, Antonín Dvořák and Josef Suk," recalled Jandáček, "Jirák's writing was challenging to their ears but nevertheless, even though their reaction was a bit uncertain for this avant-garde music in 1952, it was well received."

On March 25, 1961, Frantik, principal clarinetist who had played in the premiere as a student and completed his BM and MM at Northwestern University, now had the honor of selecting *Symphonic Scherzo* for his "conducting debut" as the new assistant to David McCormick on the Morton High School band faculty. Karel Jirák visited Morton in February 1961 during the preparation of the Concert Band's performance with Frantik and McCormick of *Symphonic Scherzo* and Smetana's *Vltava (Moldau)*. Jirák proudly attended the March 25, 1961,

performance in Cicero's large Morton East Auditorium."

Frantik, who remained his entire professional life at Morton, recalls telling Jirák of his student days' memory. "I was very touched by the performance of Rudolf Fírkušný's solo encore of Jirák's *Lullaby*, op. 24, when he played with the Morton Orchestra in 1954. I don't recall the concerto, but the memory of the *Lullaby* has never left me. I was not able to conduct *Symphonic Scherzo* in April 1961 at MENC because we were expecting our first child, but Jirák remembered our chat and sent me a copy of his *Lullaby* congratulating me upon our child's birth." In a letter written on April 12, 1961 accompanying this gift to conductor Frantik, Jirák, writing from Roosevelt University said, "Please accept my sincere congratulations on the performance of my *Symphonic Scherzo* and thanks for everything you did for this composition. Convey also, please, my thanks and congratulations to the boys and girls who really did a very beautiful job."

Morton High School Band Director, David C. McCormick, recalls this visit of Jirák to Morton High School. "Jirák came to the rehearsal to hear our Concert Band play *Symphonic Scherzo* and even conducted part of the rehearsal. He was very pleased when I said, "You had a more virile interpretation than I had!" At the same session, Jirák rehearsed *Vltava*, since I had programmed it as our final work. It was quite a remarkable opportunity for me, Frantik and the students. I conducted this work, in lieu of assistant conductor Frantik, on April 10, 1961, at the MENC North Central Division Conference in Columbus, Ohio. Enroute to Columbus, we played a full concert at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana which included the Jirák."

McCormick recalls having conversations with Jirák about the texture/instrumentation of the work. "Jirak said he scored it with more doubling that he would have preferred, but only because Blaha had specifically instructed him to keep everyone busy. You well remember that style of band music—students who play all the time have no opportunity to misbehave!"

Jirák also orchestrated this work for symphony orchestra, opus 65b, and it was performed first by the Chicago Symphony in 1953 with Rafael Kubelík conducting and then in 1969 by the FOK Prague Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Václav Smetáček.

David McCormick loaned out *Scherzo* from the Morton High School Band Library to the United States Army Band of Washington, DC, Lt. Col. Gilbert Mitchell, conductor. Later on, McCormick's successor at Morton, director Joseph Frantik, further loaned it to John Paynter of Northwestern University in Evanston, IL.

Jirák's widow, Blanka, had unsuccessfully tried to get the work published in Czechoslovakia. Years later, when Jirák's disciple and personal friend, Professor Dr. Jeroným Zajíček was assisting her in sorting through her husband's scores, he offered to help by submitting it for publication to Alliance Publication, Inc. which specializes in music of Czech composers. Alliance Publications Inc. is now proud to make *Symphonic Scherzo for Band* available to concert bands throughout the world.

Form:

A	ms. 1 – 71
B	ms. 72 – 139
Trio	ms. 140 – 236
A'	ms. 237 – 291
B'	ms. 292 – 323
A'	ms. 324 - 361

Theme 1 (Flute I and II, ms. 13 – 17):



Theme 2 (Horn I and II, ms. 72 – 79):



“Trio” Theme (Bb Clarinet I, ms. 140 – 155):



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