

PER BOYE HANSEN

Artistic Director of the National Theatre Opera and the State Opera

opera

Mieczysław Weinberg's Symphony No. 21 "Kaddish" scheduled for Czech premiere as a part of the Musica non grata project

Musica non grata is a project aimed at rediscovering works by composers persecuted by the National Socialists. On Saturday 23 April, at 7:00 PM, Tomáš Brauner will conduct the National Theatre Orchestra at the National Theatre's historic building, performing a Czech premiere of Symphony No. 21 "Kaddish" by Mieczysław Weinberg as a part of the project. The soprano Marie Fajtová will sing the solo part and the evening will be opened by Maciej Ruczaj, the director of the Polish Institute in Prague, speaking on the context of creation of the work.

Mieczysław Weinberg (1919–1996) was a Polish composer targeted by both the Nazis and communists. His last symphony titled "Kaddish" is dedicated to the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of April 1943. The work has strong personal ties to the fate of Weinberg's parents and his sister Esther, who were murdered by the Germans in the occupied Poland at some point between 1942 and 1944. Solo violin parts in the piece refer to Weinberg's father, who used to play the violin throughout the composer's childhood. The symphony further features wild klezmer ensemble imitations, intrusions by a piano playing *Ballade No. 1 in G minor* by Chopin – a piece often performed in the Warsaw Ghetto – and a powerful soprano solo in the final movement of the symphony. Recently, the work has gained international reputation thanks to a recording done by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Gidon Kremer's Kremerata Baltica orchestra conducted by Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, who also sang the soprano solo at the end. The recording was published by Deutsche Grammophon and gained the prestigious Gramophone Award and a Grammy nomination. *"The compositions by Mieczysław Weinberg remain – to a certain extent – among the hidden jewels of 20th century's music; they are treasures that we have been rediscovering only in the few last decades. This applies also to Weinberg's twenty-first symphony titled "Kaddish". It would certainly take several long paragraphs to discuss all the qualities of this extraordinary work. Therefore, I would like just to briefly characterize this symphony as a work of powerful and unique emotions with a strong impact not only on the audience but also on me personally. And that impact is even stronger when we realize that "Kaddish" can be viewed as an image of the uneasy path that Weinberg had to walk during his lifetime,"* said the conductor **Tomáš Brauner** reflecting on the Czech premiere of the piece.

Mieczysław Weinberg was born in the Polish-Jewish interwar Warsaw, where he also took his first steps as a musician. After managing to flee the occupied Warsaw on foot in 1939, he spent most of his adult years in the Soviet Union. A victim of a Stalinist show trial, he spent several months in prison in 1953. The mode of his artistic expression, as well as his importance for Russian music as a whole, now usually makes him a composer mentioned alongside Sergei Prokofiev and his lifelong friend Dmitri Shostakovich. Nevertheless, it has been especially Poland – the country of his birth – to strongly respond to Weinberg's artistic legacy in the recent years and a number of internationally recognized projects have resulted in his popularity rising also in other parts of the world.

The „*Kaddish*“ concert will be a part of a mini-series of two performances organized in collaboration with the **Polish Institute in Prague** focusing on the life of Warsaw Jewish community in the first half of the 20th century. The other concert will be a recital by Olga Avigail Mieleńczuk and the Tango Attack dedicated to Yiddish tango and the pop music of pre-war Warsaw. Tickets for both concerts are available from www.musicanongrata.cz and the ticket offices of the National Theatre.

Musica non grata is financially supported by the **Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in the Czech Republic**.

Concert information

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Musica non grata press contact

Iva Nevoralová

PR & marketing Musica non grata

+420 608 028 054

i.nevoralova@narodni-divadlo.cz

National Theatre press contact

Kateřina Motlová

PR & Marketing of the National Theatre Opera and the State Opera

Tel: +420 725 712 443

E: k.motlova@narodni-divadlo.cz

Tomáš Staněk

Public Relations of the National Theatre

Tel: +420 605 207 249

E: t.staněk@narodni-divadlo.cz

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