

MIRIAM MATEJOVÁ

## PAVOL KRŠKA (1949)—A SLOVAK COMPOSER OF SACRED MUSIC<sup>1</sup>

Composer Pavol Krška is one of the most prominent representatives of Slovak sacred music. He devotes himself to the creation of spiritual vocal and instrumental composition as well as chamber and choral compositions, and practical liturgical music. Great vocal and instrumental compositions for Slovak lyrics *Requiem*, *Stabat Mater* and *Te Deum* have been performed in many Slovak cities and even abroad. He has been awarded several times for his work and contribution to the sacred music field. The greatest appreciation for his work in 2003 was the Fra Angelica<sup>2</sup> Prize given to him as the first composer by the Conference of Bishops of Slovakia, for his contribution of Christian values to the arts.

### LIFE MILESTONES

Pavol Krška was born on May 11, 1949 in Ružomberok. Both composers' parents were devoted to music. His father used to play in a brass band and

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<sup>1</sup> This study was originated within the frame of management of the project KEGA nr 019KU-4/2019 "Popularization of new Slovak artificial spiritual music in the academic environment".

<sup>2</sup> The Fra Angelica Award is the highest honour that the Catholic Church bestows on the representatives of the arts community. Since 2002 it has been granted by the Conference of Bishops of Slovakia. Blessed Fra Angelico (real name Giovanni of Fiesole) was an Italian painter of the Early Renaissance and Dominican priest. He was declared Blessed by Pope John Paul II on October 1982. As one of the most prominent painters of Florentine Early Renaissance he became the patron of artists.

his mother could play the violin. He attended the Folk Art School in his native town of Ružomberok. In 1964-1970 he continued his piano studies at the Conservatory in Žilina. After graduating in 1968, he received an invitation from the Jesuits to study music in Milan, but his plans for the future were linked to Slovakia. In 1970, he began to study composition at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. Since 1976, he worked as a teacher at the Conservatory in Žilina.

He taught musical and theoretical subjects and led a compositional group. Some of his students are still active as composers<sup>3</sup>. Except for the conservatory, Pavol Krška also worked at the Department of Music at the University of Žilina, where he taught music theory and improvisation. Pavol Krška was a co-founder of the Children's Orchestra of Salesians in Žilina, whose main goal was to bring as many children as possible to music and singing. He finished teaching in 2009. He currently lives with his wife in Turie—a village near Žilina, where he continues to compose. He has been awarded several times for his work, contribution to the field of sacred music, and pedagogical activities<sup>4</sup>.

#### FEATURES OF MUSICAL COMPOSITION

Pavol Krška is the author of approximately 140 mundane and sacred compositions<sup>5</sup>. His works were mostly created either on the basis of a specific order, or on the direct initiative of colleagues, friends, family members, or they were composed for specific artists. The technical and expressive side of the compositions places heavy demands on interpretation.

The compositional mastery of the composer lies in the ability to achieve a significant musical effect with help of minimal means. His compositions

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<sup>3</sup> Lukáš Borzík, Andrej Kalinka, Peter Javorka.

<sup>4</sup> Ružomberok Mayor's Award for representation at home and abroad (1998), Fra Angelica Award (2003), Žilina Self-Governing Region Award for Enrichment of Slovak Music and Sacred Music Art (2011), Certificate of Merit in recognition of the development and representation of the town of Žilina for sacred music creation and pedagogical activity (2013).

<sup>5</sup> Two stage works, 6 compositions for solo voices, choir and orchestra, 9 vocal and instrumental compositions, 4 compositions for male choir, 20 compositions for mixed choir, 6 compositions for chamber orchestra, 3 compositions for symphony orchestra, 28 chamber compositions, 14 pieces for solo instrument (piano, violin, guitar, viola, cello, harpsichord, four-handed piano, accordion, a group of three accordions), 24 instructional pieces, 15 liturgical songs, fanfare for Catholic University in Ružomberok, signature tune for International Cithara Festival Cith Aediculae.

are unmistakable and easily recognizable. It is based on traditional practices; the harmonious structure is clear, in some places enriched with modern harmonies close to Impressionism. Since the songs do not have a major key, he does not mention a key signature at the beginning of the songs. Melody and rhythm are fresh and original. The composer is unique in the choice of instruments to achieve an interesting colour (Michalová 162). In sacral work he often uses an organ as a solo or accompanying instrument. The composer leaves the artist space for creativity, does not insist on keeping the tempo or dynamics (Kolena 3). The composer sets biblical texts in Slovak, Latin and Old Church Slavonic.

#### CREATION OF SACRED MUSIC

Pavol Krška created sacred compositions already during the totalitarian regime. Like many other composers, he had to compose secretly and anonymously. The compositions, which could not be officially published, were signed under the pseudonym of P. K. Rubčan, which meant Pavol Krška—Ružomberčan.

As the sacral work of the composer is quite comprehensive, we focus only on selected compositions in the article: those composed for Andrej choir, those created in cooperation with Milan Kolen, oratorios composed in cooperation with František Balún and Pavel Smolík; as far as smaller forms are concerned, bring closer Passion and carols for solo voice or a choir, and carols for piano four hands.

The first sacral compositions were created by Pavol Krška around 1984 for the church choir Andrej, which was active at the Church of Sts. Ondrej in Ružomberok. At that time the choir was led by regenschori, organist, priest and conductor Štefan Olos<sup>6</sup>. In 1975, Štefan Olos introduced tradition of evening concerts in the Church of Sts. Ondrej. They took place on the last Sunday of June and enjoyed the attention of believers from all over Slovakia. Each concert was thematic, presenting the sacral work of domestic and foreign composers. Pavel Krška's compositions for vocals had been composed so that they could be

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<sup>6</sup> Štefan Olos (1917-1998) was a priest, organist and teacher. He founded the Liptov ensemble, which performed in the Vatican in 1969 on the occasion of the 1100th anniversary of the death of St. Cyril. He led the church choir Andrej, which worked at the Church of Sts. Ondrej in Ružomberok. In 1995 he conducted a 600-member mixed choir and orchestra at the Pontifical Mass of John Paul II on the mountain of Mariánska Hora in Levoča. He holds the Fra Angelica Award for his contribution of Christian values to the arts.

performed within amateur vocals. By simplifying his musical language, the composer has become more convincing and easier to find his way into the hearts of believers. The first composition was *Príbeh z Evanjelia (Príbeh z Nového zákona)* (A Story from the New Testament) for baritone, mixed choir and chamber orchestra, introduced in 1984 and a musical story of a sinner based on the Gospel of John. The choir hadn't studied *Pastierske Vianoce* (Shepherd's Christmas) for solos, mixed choir and chamber ensemble because they did not fit into the content of the concert of the year. Shepherd's Christmas drew richly from Slovak folklore, which was reflected in the lyrics, but also in the use of rhythmic models. Folk texts, simple at first glance, concealed deep messages about good and bad, about loving God and neighbour. One year later, on the occasion of the 1100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of St. Methodius, a small oratorio *Konštantín a Metod* (Constantine and Methodius) was created for a reciter, solo voice, female choir, mixed choir, wind quintet (2 trumpets, 3 trombones) and organ, which Pavol Krška also prepared a libretto for. An interesting feature of the oratorio is that, in addition to the Slovak language, also Old Church Slavonic was used by author. The year later it was an oratorio *Peter—prvý z dvanástich* (Peter—The First of Twelve) for a reciter, solo, mixed choir, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones and organ. In the Marian Year of 1987, proclaimed by Pope John Paul II, he composed the story of the birth of the Lord *Mária a Jozef* (Mary and Joseph) for solo voice, mixed choir, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones and organ, sometimes also referred to as Annunciation.

After 1988, he began to create compositions on the initiative of Milan Kolena<sup>7</sup>, who met Pavol Krška during his studies at the Conservatory in Žilina. All songs that have come from this collaboration are still popular. Choral composition *Oslavujte Pána* (Celebrate the Lord) was created in 1988 for the needs of the Church of Sts. Simon and Judah in Námestovo, where Milan Kolena led a choir. *Requiem* for solo voices, two mixed choirs and organ<sup>8</sup> was composed on the occasion of the first anniversary of the tragic death of Milan Kolena's older brother John (1989). The requiem was written in Slovak, which was explained by author as follows: „Slovak seemed appropriate to me because the texts are very deep and beautiful and

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<sup>7</sup> Milan Kolena (1965) is the artistic director of the agency BRATISLAVA MUSIC AGENCY which is dedicated to the organization of international choir competitions and festivals. He Works as an artistic head of the choir Spevácky zbor Apollo, assistant of the choir Chlapčenský spevácky zbor in Bratislava, conductor of the mixed choir Miešaný zbor bratislavských učiteľov, and head of Gregorian Schola Gregoriana Bratislavensis.

<sup>8</sup> There are two more versions of accompaniment: 1. For organ and string orchestra, 2. For organ and orchestra.

they are discoverable for listeners. You will find out what is hidden in those words when singing in Slovak” (*Ars musica*). Requiem is a composition addressing the listener from the beginning. Slovak texts make it an understandable piece even for an ordinary listener addressing and making him/her to reflect on the true meaning of life. *Stabat Mater* for solo voices, mixed choir and organ is more demanding compared to the previous Requiem, and it requires not only excellent performers and conductor but also a prepared listener, who can penetrate into spirit of the work. In 1993, Pavol Krška composed *Omša (The Mass)* for solo voices, mixed choir and organ. The Mass is written in Slovak and consists of five parts: Pane zmiluj sa (Lord, Have Mercy), Sláva Bohu (Glory to God), Verím (I Believe), Svätý (Saint), and Baránok Boží (Lamb of God). *Te Deum* for solo voices, two mixed choirs and organ uses its own language in every choir: Slovak and Latin. Latin language was used by the composer for the first time, to demonstrate the connection with the Gregorian chant by which the composer was inspired. The basis for the composition of *Missa Brevis* for a mixed choir was a Latin text, which arose from a need to present the Pavol Krška’s work abroad.

Based on his cooperation with the author of themes František Balún<sup>9</sup> and the librettist Pavol Smolík<sup>10</sup>, three big projects arose. The first of them under the title *Svätí Košickí mučeníci* (Saint Martyrs of Košice), was a scenic oratorio for soloists, choir and orchestra, introduced in 2010 on the occasion of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the canonization of the Martyrs of Košice by Pope John Paul II. The libretto describes the last life moments of saint martyrs Marek Križin, Štefan Pongrácz and Melichar Grodziecki. They did not abandon the Catholic faith even in prison and thus signed the death sentence. The second oratorio—opera—was *Cyril a Metod* (Cyril and Methodius), the highlight of Pavol Krška’s work. In two acts and six scenes, he engrossed the arrival of the Thessaloniki brothers in Great Moravia. The premiere took place in the St Martin’s Cathedral in Bratislava in 2013. The scenic oratorio in fourteen scenes with a prologue and epilogue *Umučenie nášho Pána Ježiša Krista* (The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ) was his last project premiered at the Holy Trinity Church in Košice in 2017. The oratorio is

<sup>9</sup> František Balún (1948) worked as an opera singer in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. He held the position of artistic director of the State Theatre Košice. He holds the Fra Angelica Prize for his contribution of Christian values to the arts.

<sup>10</sup> Pavol Smolík (1964) worked as a director and dramaturg of the SND Theatre in Bratislava. At present he Works as a professor at the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. In 2013, he was awarded the Fra Angelica Prize by the Conference of Bishops of Slovakia for his contribution of Christian values to the arts.

exceptional because the musical and dramatic portrayal of the story of the Passion of Jesus Christ appeared in Slovak music for the first time.

The composer was involved in composition of Passion works on the initiative of the Salesian Don Marián Valábek SDB<sup>11</sup> in 1998-2005. By their creation Pavol Krška contributed to renewal and enrichment of liturgical music in Slovakia. The composer's Passion works appeal to listeners with the exceptionality of melodic and harmonic approaches. The first of them, created for tenor, bass, reciter and mixed choir, was premiered in the Chapel at the Salesians in Žilina in 1998 under the title *Pašie podľa Jána* (The Passion according to John) (little). Since then it has been shown here every year during the Easter holiday. Other Passion works *Pašie podľa Marka* (The Passion according to Mark) for tenor, bass, spoken figure and mixed choir, *Pašie podľa Lukáša* (The Passion according to Luke) for narrator, tenor, bass and mixed choir as well as *Pašie podľa Matúša* (The Passion according to Matthew) for narrator, tenor, bass and mixed choir were introduced at the Salesians of Don Bosco in Bratislava.

The carols were composed by the composer for solo, choir and piano four hands. In 1993, he created *Desať kolied pre spev a klavír* (Ten Carols for Voice and Piano) to order. A year later, he created *Štyri koledy pre miešaný zbor* (Four Carols for Mixed Choir)<sup>12</sup>, which is still popular. He composed two cycles of carols for his friend František Balún, a native of Slovakia: *Päť kolied pre spev (barytón) a komorný súbor* (Five Carols for Voice (baritone) and Chamber Ensemble)<sup>13</sup> and *Päť kolied pre spev (barytón) a rôzne nástroje* (Five Carols for Voice (baritone) and Various Instruments)<sup>14</sup>. The texts of carols are in the Eastern Slovak dialect. In 2007, *Päť kolied pre miešaný zbor* (Five Carols for Mixed Choir)<sup>15</sup> was created.

In 1993, he composed a four-hand work for piano *Desať kolied pre štvorročný klavír (PM)* (Ten Carols for Piano Four Hands)<sup>16</sup>. At the request

<sup>11</sup> Marián Valábek SDB is a Salesian priest. He lectured at CMBF UK in Bratislava, at the Institute of Joh Paul II in Bratislava and at the Catholic University in Ružomberok.

<sup>12</sup> Dobrá novina, Narodil sa Kristus Pán, Búvaj, Dieťa krásne, Pospiechali do Betlehema

<sup>13</sup> Velika veselosc nam nastala, Čo to znamená tamto nového, Počúvajte brat'ia, pred'ivnú novinu, Neslýchaná radosť dnes sa zjavila, Išol stary do Betlehem

<sup>14</sup> Vstávaj hore Kubo, Vstavaj hore, bratičku, Kďe sa rozhod'ite, vi, valasi, Čo sa stalo ňesľichane, Raduj sa, vesel sa

<sup>15</sup> A včera zvečera, Dnešný deň sa radujme, Jak si krásne Jezuliatko, Pastieri vstávajte, K Ježiškovi, miláčkovi

<sup>16</sup> Aký je to svit, Búvaj, Dieťa krásne, Dobrý Pastier sa narodil, Ležau bača, Do hory, do lesa valasi, Narodil sa Kristus Pán, Šťastie, zdravie, pokoj svätý, Tichá noc, Vitaj náš Ježišku narodený, Vstávajte, pastieri, berte sa hor!

of his wife, after seven years, he created *Slovenské koledy a vianočné piesne pre štvorročný klavír* (Slovak Carols and Christmas Songs for Piano Four Hands)<sup>17</sup>, which is a rework of *Desať kolied pre spev a klavír* (Ten Carols for Voice and Piano). Both cycles are suitable study material for small pianists at elementary art schools, where they can be used for four-hand piano teaching and even as musical material for choir accompanied by four-hand piano. Whereas we are convinced of the quality of piano cycles, both of them were printed<sup>18</sup>.

The personality and work of Pavel Krška deserves our attention, which we strive to keep not only by publishing (printing) his piano work but also by promoting his sacral work at home and abroad.

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<sup>17</sup> Aké to svetlo, Aký je to svit, Narodil sa Kristus Pán, Vstávajte pastieri, Pastieri, pastieri, Dobrá novina, Do hory, do lesa, valasi, Do mesta Betlema, Sem, pastieri pospiechajte, Pospešte sem, pastuškovia, Narodil sa Spasiteľ, Pred tebou sa klaniame, Z Panny Pán Ježiš, Čas radosti, veselosti, Búvaj, Dieťa krásne, Ó, chýr preblahý, Povedzte nám, pastierovia, Dobrý Pastier, Buďme všetci potešení.

<sup>18</sup> Krška, *Ten Carols for Piano Four Hands (PM)* 27; Krška, *Slovak Carols and Christmas Songs for Piano Four Hands* 47.

## PAVOL KRŠKA (1949) – SŁOWACKI KOMPOZYTOR MUZYKI SAKRALNEJ

## Streszczenie

Artykuł dotyczy wybranych kompozycji sakralnych słowackiego kompozytora Pavla Krški (1949), który w ostatnich dziesięcioleciach stał się jednym z najważniejszych przedstawicieli muzyki religijnej na Słowacji. Dzieła wokalnie-instrumentalne jego autorstwa: *Requiem*, *Stabat Mater* i *Te Deum* są często wykonywane, dzięki czemu wpisują się w ogólną świadomość tak zawodowych muzyków, jak i szerokiej publiczności. Jednym z celów prezentowanego artykułu jest wzbudzenie zainteresowania twórczością Pavla Krški tak, by stopniowo znalazła swoje miejsce w repertuarze nie tylko słowackich, ale także zagranicznych wykonawców.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Pavol Krška; kompozycje religijne; oratorium; pasja; kolędy.

## PAVOL KRŠKA (1949)—A SLOVAK COMPOSER OF SACRED MUSIC

## Summary

This article deals with selected sacred compositions of the Slovak composer Pavol Krška (1949), who is one of the most important representatives of sacred music in Slovakia in recent decades. His vocal and instrumental pieces *Requiem*, *Stabat Mater* and *Te Deum* are frequently performed and thus brought to the attention of both the lay and professional music community. We believe that, as the composer's work is so well-known in Slovakia, it will gradually find its place abroad.

**Key words:** Pavol Krška; sacred works; oratorio; passion; carols.