

# Zdeněk Fibich's opera *Hedy* as a "Czech Tristan"

## Between Wagnerism and Verismo

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Fibich's opera *Hedy* (premiered in 1896) was received as a successful work, although many reviewers did not know how to call the prevailing style (mixture of wagnerianism, Grand opéra, verismo exotico, the second *Don Giovanni* composed for Prague because of reminiscences on Mozart's *dramma giocoso*). It is not uneasy to find clear musical hints on Puccini in Fibich's next opera *Šárka* (premiered 1897), but it was already in *Hedy* where drastic and geographically clearly determined subject was mixed with Wagnerian gesture of love ecstasy, which is everywhere and endless. Obviously, Fibich, as a mature artist, was able to connect rules of both Czech declamation and contemporary veristic fashion. This study tries to identify main stylistic features which shaped Fibich's fifth opera, and analyses receptive expectations from the side of Czech audience and its influence on Fibich's opera composition.

**Keywords:** Zdeněk Fibich, Lord Byron, the 19th century opera

### Introduction

Zdeněk Fibich (1850-1900) returned to opera composition at the beginning of 1890s after almost 10-years-long silence. Antonín Dvořák's stay in USA strengthened Fibich's position as the most important Czech opera composer of his period. A. Dvořák as well Leoš Janáček intensively commented Fibich's operas (*The Tempest*, 1894; *Hedy*, 1895; *Šárka*, 1896; *The Fall of Arkona*, 1899). For *Hedy*, Fibich took Byron's "Don Juan" as a main inspiration, and elaborated the four-act libretto by Anežka Schulzová with rich chromatic musical discourse combined with the local color of Greece. Shortly, after its premiere in 1896, it received the name of "Czech Tristan", nevertheless, it is only one side of selected approach to the opera composition of the fin-de-siècle Czech composer. Only the knowledge of historical context of 1890s in the Czech lands can decipher appropriate definition of opera type of *Hedy*.

### Zdeněk Fibich as a Wagnerian

Zdeněk Fibich (1850-1900) gained the reputation of a Wagnerian during the 1880s, because his third opera, *Nevěsta messinská* (*The Bride of Messina*) (1884) was consistently written in what was considered to be proper declamatory style. His emphasis on correct music declamation of Czech words was based on Otakar Hostinský's perception of Wagner's work. Hostinský, who was primarily an aesthetician, had adapted the libretto of *Nevěsta*

*messinská* from Schiller's play *Die Braut von Messina* (1803). Moreover, it has been established that Fibich and Antonín Dvořák debated the merits of Wagner's music dramas rather frequently towards the end of the 1880s. However, the utter failure of *Nevěsta messinská* in 1884 discouraged Fibich from composing operas for nearly ten years. When he decided to write for the stage of Národní divadlo (National Theatre) in Prague once more, the public frankly expected that he would present an unpleasant transformation of Wagnerian principles. Alois Göbl (1895) wrote to his friend Antonín Dvořák in America about Fibich's opera *Bouře* (*The Tempest*): "It is said to be Wagner himself, although the melodies are said to be self-indulgent in places" (as cited in Kuna, 1999, p. 371). Few people expected that Fibich would prove himself to be an accomplished composer who could combine Wagnerian elements of style—which, in Prague, meant flawless declamation—with an expressive melodic line.

In Dvořák's absence, Fibich began to be seen as the most important Czech operatic composer after Bedřich Smetana. This situation, unfortunately, was the fundamental cause of the "wars over Dvořák" that would come later. Nevertheless, there remains the fact that Dvořák as well as Leoš Janáček made significant comments about Fibich's new operas (*The Tempest*, 1894; *Hedy*, 1895; *Šárka*, 1896; and *The Fall of Arkona*, 1899). For his contemporaries, Fibich's creative work at the end of the century became an indispensable model for versatile and achievable operatic works—whether they would be received positively or with serious critical rebukes.

Fibich's opera *Hedy* (finished in 1895, premiered in 1896) was an immediate success. However, many reviewers did not know what to call the prevailing style. Today, we can identify the apparent Wagnerianisms that baffled his contemporaries as representative of the current international trend to combine different opera traditions (Internationalisierung der Oper). *Hedy* seems to be a remarkable mixture of Wagnerianism, grand opera, and "verismo exotico". The opera could also be perceived as "the second *Don Giovanni*" composed for Prague, where the tradition of Mozart's *dramma giocoso* was still alive, especially, since *Hedy* portrays an episode of Byron's *Don Juan*.

### *Hedy*

Fibich began to sketch his fifth opera on November 4, 1894; the end of the autograph score of the third act is dated November 27, 1895. Fibich and his librettist (his intimate friend Anežka Schulzová) devoted much care to *Hedy*. Fibich invited conductor Adolf Čech as well as critics Jaromír Borecký and Emanuel Chvála to a private hearing of the opera. For the director of National Theatre František Adolf Šubert, the production of *Hedy* was the only premiere of the 13 years of Národní divadlo. The principal music publisher in Prague, František Augustin Urbánek accepted the piano score of *Hedy* for publication with Czech and German text in April 1895, and he gave it excellent publicity. But involving Czech Prague in the presentation of a Fibich work also evoked unfriendly reactions. Mořic Anger, the second conductor of Národní divadlo, informed Dvořák (1895):

You can imagine how angry Fibich was with you because of the filling of your position at the conservatory. But now he's set up a bakery for operas—he's submitted one unfinished opera *Bouře*, and the next one *Hedy* is already in the oven—and he has already composed two acts—and begun the orchestration—I am enormously curious about *Bouře*, but since the performers don't expect anything, it will not be a success. (as cited in Kuna, 1999, pp. 362-363)

However, *Hedy*'s premiere was at least as successful as *Bouře* had been. It confirmed Fibich's victorious return to opera: "... the listener had the impression that we have not heard on the stage such a masterly sound as

last evening since the time of Smetana..."<sup>1</sup> (Novotný, (1951, pp. 166–171). Karel Knittl, who had severely criticised *Nevěsta messinská* characteristically began his review with the words: "It is said that everyone who enjoys attempts at Wagnerian music will approve of new music. It does not have to be pure-blooded Wagnerianism. It does not have to pray to Our Father of Bayreuth with an obbligation: And do not lead us into ballet, but deliver us from an ensemble" (Knittl, 1896, p. 77). But it was precisely the musically and scenically magnificent aspects of the opera that led to its problematic reception and condemnation. Critic E. Chvála was upset by his friend's opera, for ballet "in the old-fashioned manner" was a reference to *Les Huguenots* (1836) and *Robert le diable* (1831), to the ensemble, E. Chvála remarked: "... if a master makes an error, it is a serious one" (Chvála, 1950, pp. 99–405). The scorn that *Hedy* provoked is shown by the recollection that "women in the theatre shouted during intermission: 'I would give ten *Hedys* for one *Aida*'" (Piskáček, 1910, p. 350). How could one and the same work be rejected as an unsuccessful imitation of Romanesque opera, and at the same time, given a royal welcome as the Czech "Tristan"? The critic of *Národní listy* (*National Newspaper*), noted *Hedy*'s resemblance to *Tristan and Isolde* in his review (Borecký, 1896); so did Emanuel Chvála and many other reviewers, most importantly Anežka Schulzová (Richter, 1900, pp. 172, 183).

Anežka Schulzová, a well-educated literary figure and theatre critic, was attracted to Russian realism, Zola's naturalism and modern trends. On a more practical level, she became aware in 1894 of a relevant chapter about Byron in *Naturalism v Anglii* (*Naturalism in England*) by Georg Brandes<sup>2</sup>. She was aware of intense contrasts; "after the greatest danger of life," came "the splendid and gentle harmony of young love between Juan and Hedy", "the highest, freest, sweetest intensification of life"; after glory comes "the bitterest pain" (Brandes, 1895, p. 438). When she transformed part of Byron's epic into a libretto, it was clear that her text could have captured the spirit of musical verismo along with Greek local color. But Fibich conceived the work—as Wagner had with *Tristan*—as an intimate declaration of love. And we discover another paradox in *Hedy*. The rich chromaticism in musical speech, a reflection of Fibich's respect for Wagner, is characteristic of *Hedy*'s father Lambro, who destroyed his daughter's relationship with Juan. Wagner used the Tristan chord to signify longing, but by Fibich reinforces Lambro's destructive strength with equally destructive chords.

In Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (premiered in 1865), the lovers' meeting is openly presented. The close of *Hedy*'s second act is written as a lovers' duet, with a Wagnerian blend of death and erotic ecstasy, with a Tristanian union of soul and body: "V tobě jen žiju, pro tebe, s tebou!" (I live only in you, For you, with you!) (see Schulzová, 1896). In the middle of the fourth act, the pirates and Lambro lead Juan away as a prisoner to a ship. The voices of Hedy and Juan are joined in a miniature death of love ("Liebestod"): "Smrti, ty měj smilování, přijmi v šer nás svého míru, spojení kde věčné kyne!" (Death, smile on us, bring us your peace in the twilight, joined where eternity beckons!). At the end of the opera, Hedy is in the same dramatic situation as Isolde—although she has lost her love, she still feels love's exaltation and welcomes death. Beginning with the

<sup>1</sup> Sv. 1, review dated 14. 2. 1896. Wagner's opera *Tristan and Isolde* was premiered in Prague on September 1, 1896, in Neues Deutsches Theater. As we know, Fibich had in his library complete scores by R. Wagner and excerpted from Wagner's works appeared in various programmes. Leoš Janáček published his analytical remarks about *Tristan and Isolde* in *Hudební listy* [Music Letters] 1885 to show differences between Wagner and Dvořák, and to confirm a general opinion, that "each Czech musician should know Wagner's works (každý český hudebník Wagnerova díla znáti má)". see Janáček (2003).

<sup>2</sup> The Czech community first became acquainted with Byron's work at highly intellectual in translation through Hostinský's university colleague and rival Josef Durdík (see his cycle of lectures from 1870 and later, his *O poesii a povaze Lorda Byrona* (On the poetry and character of Lord Byron) and his translation of Byron's *Kain*).

phrase: "Zde můj život vzešel, a zde také skončí!" (Here my life began, and here it ends), her melody, like Isolde's Liebestod, rises in a phrase-by-phrase sequence of transpositions that lead it beyond clear reference to key.

The eloquence of Wagnerian "Orchestermelodie" is due to its interconnected leitmotifs. Its continuity is understandable at every moment. In *Hedy*, Fibich does not appear to be a master of dialogue and relationships, but of psychological monologue, of moods. He used some motives as conventional emblems and repeated them in shifting sequences. He continually varied and embellished certain ideas, particularly in the singing voice, in close union of voice with orchestra. Wagner carried the weight of the drama with an orchestra blended with voices; Fibich used "scenic vocalization" instead. Fibich did not imitate Wagner's extended use of motive, but concentrated on a single aspect of the work—and there, sovereignly musical, gave the structural weight to the singing voice. Like Wagner, Fibich gave tensile strength to the symphony orchestra, but he did not avoid melody that Wagner would consider unmelodic ("Was in trivialer Musik 'Melodie' heißt, ist nach Wagner gerade nicht 'melodisch'") (Dahlhaus, 1983, p. 73). Since Fibich avoided using leitmotifs structurally, he sometimes appeared to have no alternative but to present the voice in recitative over apparently meaningless chords (the purpose of chords in recitatives is to respond to the voice and intensify its effect, not to bear symbolic meaning). Fibich's use of Wagnerian unending melody often gives a first impression of emptiness.

While working with the text, Fibich remained faithful to the declamatory rules of Otakar Hostinský; as a result, his vocalization of text is extraordinary. Fibich fundamentally expanded the possibilities for grasping the essence of text during the 1890s. Yet the second love scene in Act II (after the announcement of Lambro's death) is very close to Wagnerian models, for example, the explosive scene 2 of the second act of *Tristan* and the love scene between Siegmund and Sieglinde in *Valkyre*. Even the stage direction also appears in the corresponding scene in *Hedy*: "the curtain quickly falls". Although the length of the scene in *Hedy* is not comparable to that of Wagner's scene, its compressed vitality and ecstasy echo Wagner's music. But even more, Fibich revealed his own self in the very construction of his opera. Although his melodies as are rather conventional recollections of the "love motives" in the third and fourth acts, the entire formulation of the meeting of Hedy and Juan in the second part of the first act and second act is subordinate "... dem ganzen reichen erotischen Themenmaterial" (to all rich number of erotic themes) (Richter, 1900, p. 182). Despite of all of its varied forms, this material is remarkably compact.

The fourth act is strikingly unified by the fisherman's ballad. The rapid display of motives from the preceding acts may not be the most important aspect of the work—Fibich could have merely filled out what seemed to be a required Wagnerian pattern. However, Fibich's contemporary Leoš Janáček, who was scarcely recognized as a composer during the 1890s, published an analysis of *Hedy*. It discusses the compressed reprise of the second-act love scene, when Juan and Hedy part for ever. Janáček was interested this musical compression, because it conveys profound experience: "The result is an emotional, darkened passage which also absorbs A, C, and F—and all of this activity takes place in less than a minute". Another passage did not escape Janáček's notice; significantly, he was then composing *Její pastorkyně* (*Her stepdaughter*, *Jenůfa*)—Fibich's setting of Hedy's cries: "Miláčku můj! Juane! Můj choti! Ty! Ty! Ach, tys' u mne!" (My love! Juan! My mate! You! You! Ach, you are part of me!). Janáček (1952) ended his review with the words: "Here the composer turns to another source of inspiration for his melodies. This is not pure music but the truth of uncontrollable melodic speech" (p. 309). But Fibich's own and more typical technique for setting the words was richly melodicized lines with a

corresponding loss of syllabic coherence and with adaptations of closed forms. Janáček did not adopt Fibich's style, but quite sincerely pointed out a compositional technique that could inspire Fibich. Janáček (1952), particularly, called attention to the beginning of the final scene of the fourth act of *Hedy*: "Dramatic expression is not entirely in command, for at the conclusion another compositional form appears—a two-part song..." (pp. 307-310). Fibich was successful as a Wagnerian in Janáček's eyes for these reasons: "The natural gifts that we in the Czech lands have, protect our composers from many eccentricities"<sup>3</sup>. If Fibich has used full and rapid harmonic movement within closed forms, along with considerable expressivity of speech in a verismo arioso, the passage might have satisfied Janáček.

Janáček chose remarkable details from Fibich's opera for discussion. However, the experience that Fibich and his librettist had with German drama also shaped their work. Lambro is comparable to Lysiart in Weber's *Euryanthe* (1823). The octet with double choirs "... ist hier auch dramatisch gerechtfertigt, die Situation ist dieselbe, wie bei dem H-dur Ensemble im *Tannhäuser*" (is also here dramaturgically right, the situation is the same like in *Tannhäuser*'s B major ansamble) (Richter, 1900, p. 197). Lambro's four-measure phrase in that ensemble may well be reminiscent of the era in which classic Italian opera flourished<sup>4</sup>. Fibich paid homage to W. A. Mozart with two quotations from the overture of *Don Giovanni*, which is sung by Juan in the first act. But his ambitious librettist merely copied what Vrchlický had done in Fibich's previous opera *Bouře*. After the premiere of *Bouře*, Karel Knittl (1895) said: "The vocal lines of Fernando and Miranda appear are satisfying from every point of view, even to a pandering to the taste of Italian cuisine" (p. 95).

It would have been difficult to portray the course of love objectively, especially with the elements of realistic comedy in the third act. The Greek theme was appropriate for the time, for verismo operas set in the hot-blooded, Mediterranean region were all the rage. But that sort of unrestrained temperament was foreign to Schulzová and Fibich. The entrance of the drunken Gregorios and the song of the young fisherman may have been composed as Greek songs (Schulzová, 1896). Nevertheless, Fibich used local color only to embellish certain passages and as an effective supplement, rather than an unified approach to musical structure that would serve as a counterpoint to the staged opera.

The public must certainly have been impressed by magnificent grandeur of the production. In the first act, Juan rejoices in the rays of the sun after his escape from death; the second act requires the moon and stars, as well as a fiery red torch (which suddenly went out during the premiere at the report of Lambro's death, leaving the stage dark) (Chvála, 1950, p. 402). The fourth act takes place at sunrise. The effect of the third act depends on sumptuous staging; even though the second act is set in a grotto, it has to be "decorated with luxurious splendor". (Schulzová, 1896, p. 21) The ballet is an integral part of this setting, which was strengthened by the demands of the director of Národní divadlo and the highly esteemed choreography of the famous dancer Augustin Berger. We might add that dances from *Hedy* were performed at the *Národopisná výstava československá* 1895 (*Ethnographical Czechslavonic Exhibition*) as the work of a Czech composer—remarkably, verismo exotico was combined with verismo's origins, depicting rural life. The insertion of a ballet is far from the dramaturgical ideals

<sup>3</sup> However, Janáček commented scornfully on performances of Fibich's operas in 1916 and 1917, see Tyrrell (2007), p. 775.

<sup>4</sup> Fibich was aware (as R. Strauss was, when asking Hugo von Hofmannstahl to write a contemplative ensemble for *Rosenkavalier*) that the very moment when one might expect "eine dramatische Bombe" may be the very place for an overwhelming "Ruhepunkt". Strauss used ensembles from *Lohengrin* and *Die Meistersinger* as examples (letter dated May 16, 1909; see Dahlhaus (1983), p. 33).

of Wagnerian opera. Wagner was told to compose "ein glänzendes Ballfest" for the second act of *Tristan*, but he refused to compose it without hesitation and admitted that there would be "fast gar nichts zu sehen" (Dahlhaus, 1971, p. 76) If Schulzová and Fibich had not wanted to stage the great wedding tableau, they could easily have left it out. Hedy and Juan do not participate in the wedding festivities; they merely look on. They are part of a lively scene entirely organized by the people. There is a similar event in the ensemble. In Byron's version, Lambro surprises the lovers in privacy. In *Hedy*'s libretto, Lambro is stubborn before he detects Juan's identity. During the contemplative ensemble, he suddenly began to behave according to custom and to have doubts.

### Analytical Remark on Don Juan's Aria

Giuseppe Verdi correctly feared that sophisticated compositions would become mere mosaics when adopted to the style of grand opéra. At the end of the 19th century, there was nothing to prevent a less wary composer from using the entire palette of diverse operatic traditions. *Hedy* includes crowd scenes with ballet, contemplative ensemble, Wagnerians very intimate lovers' duets, and rather conventional scenes for solo voice. Fibich had opened the second act of *Bouře* with Fernando's monologue (for tenor). He then drew from the legacy of late 18th-century opera to compose a three-part da capo aria that would fit into the entire context, which drew from the opera buffa tradition. Fibich allowed A. Schulzová to write an analogous passage in *Hedy*, but he had a different solution in mind. He used the two-part aria form of Rossini—but as a compressed verismo arioso in arch form. The relatively long instrumental introduction develops the motive of love that echoes through Juan's aria (see Figure 1). The andante fulfills the function of tempo d'attacco; Juan's senses are roused by his intense anticipation of Hedy's arrival. The use of accompanied recitative enabled Fibich to respond directly to Juan's exaltation. The cantabile is the Larghetto "Kolem ticho, šer, příroda sní lásky sen" (It's quiet, twilight, nature dreams love's dream), surges into the Con fuoco (cabaletta). This simple pattern is repeated once more, in shortened form—Andante, Larghetto "Mír vůkol, vůně, ticho" ("Peace all around, fragrance, quiet"). The passionate climax on the motive of love ("slast a blaho" ("delight and happiness")) substitutes for the closing stretta, and leads to Hedy's duet with Juan (allegro moderato "Již jsi mě čekal? Prahnuoucí duší!" ("You are already expecting me? With passionate soul!")). Juan's aria had already been analysed as a sonata form (Hudec, 1971, p. 135), but as Schulzová observed, it had a natural duple structure, a contrast of stormy passion (D flat major, Con fuoco) and quiet night (Richter, 1900, p. 186).

The arsenal of motives in the Andante section includes a motive describing a bush and the flicker of Hedy's shadow. Such motives are not intended to be Wagnerian leitmotifs. On the contrary, their entire purpose is to provide immediate reaction to every thought, every event, every emotion—this is also truth for the motive of the well to which Hedy ran in the first scene in order to revive Juan, then a bewildered, unknown foreigner. From the beginning of Juan's entrance, Fibich did not hesitate to incorporate the interplay of his own relationship with A. Schulzová into the opera. At the words "její nožka něžná již půjde tady" (her dear legs do not yet know how to come here), a motive from the piano composition *Dojem* (Impression) No. 111 (March 24, 1893) appears<sup>5</sup>. A quotation from *Dojem* No. 80 (January 2, 1893—ňadra, (bosom)) understandably is echoed in the passage: "Ňadra bouřně kde se dmou" ("her tempestuous bosom surges"). Fibich did not seem to find it necessary to

<sup>5</sup> Zdeněk Nejedlý called this little piece for piano "nohy" (legs), See Nejedlý (1948), p. 181.



assign an explicit motive to Juan. As a singer par excellence, Juan embodied all of the music referring to love's flame. His musical personality is an integral part of his voice, and the orchestra is responsive to it.

58

*più mosso*

Hle, bí - lý stín tam mišsel Již ple  
 Sieh, war das nicht ihr Schatten? O fauch -

*pp* *f*

sej srd. co. O - na, tot' o - na, cil mé tou - hyl  
 ze See - le! sie ist's, sie ist es, sie, mein Seh - nen!

*rit.* *a tempo*

*mf*

*mf* *pp*

*8* *riten.* *Lento.* Oh! zra - ku šal - ba  
 Oh! bitt'rer Wahn des

kru - tá, jen mě - sí - ce to pa - prsk se leh - ce za - kmit' ko - ri.  
 Au - ges. des Mon. des Strahl. nur war es, der leicht die Zwei - ge - streif - to.

*ppp*

*Andante.* (Rozhrne větvě u vchodu.) (theilt das Strauchwerk beim Eingang.) *Larghetto.*

Ko - lem ti - cho, vů - ně  
 Rings um Stil - le, Zwi - lich;

*p*

U. 902.







60 *Con fuoco.*

Lás - - ky věč - né sva - tý zár, tou - hy  
Lie - - be e - wig heil' - ge Glut, Sehn - sucht

vrou - ci bol - ná slast'! K ní, - jen k ní spě - jí  
schmerz durch web - te Lust! Hin - zu ihr eilt mein

tuž - by mé, k ní jen le - tí snu všech roj. Pro ní ci - tú sva - tých  
Sch - nen all; zu ihr fliegt der Träume Schwarm. Welch ge - heimnis - vol - ler

taj - pro ní váš - ně moc - né vir. Věč - ně jí  
Drang, wel - cher Lei - denschaft - ten Sturm! E - wig zu

u no - hou snít, pí - ti je - jí slad.ký dech, zí - rat  
Fü - ssen ihr ruhn, trin - ken ih - ren sü - ssen Hauch, so - lig

U. 902.



61

vo - ka zůr - ný čár, zmi - rat  
 ihr ins Aug' zu seh, ster - rat  
 3 *ff* *pp*

raj - skou roz - ko - sí! Slyš, tam za - zhel kro - ku zvuk!  
 dann in Himmels-lust! Horch, war's nicht wie Trit - te - schall?  
*c. p.* *ff* *c. p.* *pp*

(Spěšně postoupí ke vchodu, zírá ven a naslouchá.)  
 (Trillt rasch zum Eingang, blickt hinaus und horcht.)  
*Andante.* *ppp*  
 No, nel! Ti - cho, vsu - de  
 Nein, nein! Ru - ho rings - um,

ti - cho. Zdroj je - nom šum - ně se vi - he se - les - tè  
 Ru - ho. Mur - melnd nur win - det die Quel - le sich durch die

zro - so - nou tra - vou.  
 thau - i - gen Grä - ser.  
*pp* U. 902.

Figure 1. Don Juan's aria from the opera *Hedy*. Source: Adapted from Fr. A. Urbánek a synové, Praha U. 902 [s.d.], piano score.

One could say that as Fibich's idealistic love becomes greater than the real world, idealistic dreams become greater than reality. And along with dreams, there is a new freedom to choose solutions that are greater than expected. Fibich was now able to merge historical, perhaps even outmoded forms (finale concertato, bel canto, double-aria, dance suite) with impressionistic harmony, and eventually with atonality in following opera *Šárka*.

Jan Smaczny has found clear musical traces of G. Puccini in Fibich's opera *Šárka* (1897) (Smaczny, 1995, pp. 34-35). Fibich had already blazed the path to Puccini in *Hedy*. Its radical, geographically well-defined theme is blended with Wagnerian gestures of love ecstasy that can appear anywhere and continue without end. Fibich did not avoid inspiration from Italian opera when writing *Hedy*. In fact, he preferred his own collector's enthusiasm for Italian opera from the first half of the 19th century over conventional and fashionable verismo.

### Verismo and Czech Composers

Two Czech operas in the immediately preceding years—Karel Bendl's opera *Máti Míla*, premiered in 1893, and Josef Richard Rozkošný opera *Stoja*, premiered in 1894—openly, and let us add, unsuccessfully tended toward verismo. Fibich remained sceptical about verismo. Schulzová herself had a dislike of themes of social criticism in rustic settings. Such themes definitely could not expect to find immediate acceptance: for example, the premieres of J. B. Foerster's opera *Eva*, written in 1895-1897, and Leoš Janáček's *Její pastorkyně*, written in 1894-1903, ran into difficulties (Ottlová, 2000, p. 81). Fibich admired Richard Wagner's music, he continually followed opera development, and his ambitious librettist seemed to wish—in conformance with an ideal of unsustainable progress—to outdo all previous evolution of opera, and to vanquish all substantial operatic traditions.

Fibich wanted to avoid a radical grip on the model of verismo opera. He cautiously developed an unobtrusive, sophisticated evocation of bel canto opera, which gave him compositional sureness. And since the director of Národní divadlo and the public wanted spectacular tableaux and heartfelt love stories, Fibich was able to proceed in the direction of the relatively homogeneous development of the genre of Opéra-féerie represented by Wagner's *Tannhäuser* (1854), Gounod's *Faust* (1859), Meyerbeer's *La Africane* (1865), and Berlioz's *Les Troyens* (1863). Using a showy plot with a Tristian-like ending, Fibich was easily able to combine principles of "Musikdrama" and historical opera in the form of a ballet opera ("Ballettoper") (Döhring, 2006, pp. 239-240, 244).

### Conclusions

The opera *Hedy* was written in the period, when Fibich as a mature author returned to the composition for music theatre after the unsuccessful premiere of the opera *Nevěsta messinská* (The Bride of Messina). *Hedy* was very well received, although it bears clear hints of connection of heterogenous features. In *Hedy* Fibich put together fashionable veristic opera and Czech opera tradition, which tried to respect aesthetics of wagnerian music drama (so-called declamatory style). More over, concise veristic arioso stands in steep contrast to a ballet and finale concertato. A component, which assures artistic quality of *Hedy* is determined by the fact, that Fibich found a way for forming melodic line, which respects the declamatory rules of Czech word without losing pure musical sense. That is why *Hedy* could be received as a "Czech Tristan" as well as the second Don Giovanni written for Prague.

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