

**SILVIA HRONCOVÁ**

Director of the National Theatre Opera and the State Opera

## **Leoš Janáček's opera *The Excursions of Mr. Brouček* is returning to the venue that hosted its world premiere – the National Theatre in Prague**

**Prague, 14 March 2018**

**On 22 March the National Theatre in Prague will premiere a new production of Leoš Janáček's *The Excursions of Mr. Brouček*, conducted by the music director of the National Theatre Opera Jaroslav Kyzlink and staged by Sláva Daubnerová.**

*The Excursions of Mr. Brouček* is the one and only Janáček opera that received its world premiere in Prague. The opening night took place on 23 April 1920. The National Theatre has prepared a new production of the work to mark the centenary of the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic. Inspired by the Czech poet and writer Svatopluk Čech's novels dating from 1888 and 1889, Janáček's opera is a comic taken on the chronic moral maladies of the Czechs. Today, it affords the opportunity for deliberations about how far we have advanced over the past one hundred years.

“Our anniversary Prague production encompasses both parts of the opera – *The Excursion of Mr. Brouček to the Moon* and *The Excursion of Mr. Brouček to the 15th Century*,” says **Jaroslav Kyzlink**, the music director of the National Theatre Opera. “Janáček was directly inspired by the conductor Otakar Ostrčil, the then director of the National Theatre Opera, to write the second part of *The Excursions* (the first had been completed almost a decade earlier), which was to reflect the foundation of Czechoslovakia in 1918. Hence, we naturally opted for this piece to commemorate the centenary ...”

“*The Excursions of Mr. Brouček* occupies a special position within Leoš Janáček's oeuvre,” the stage director **Sláva Daubnerová** points out. “Janáček wanted to be socially engaged, as well as critical, he did not only aim to entertain the audience. It is important to revive the opera, to show its novelty, progressiveness, as well as the fact that Janáček was at least a century ahead of his time.”

**Jaroslav Kyzlink** has ample experience with performing Leoš Janáček's music. At the Janáček Brno international festival in 2010, he conducted the world premiere of the original version of *The Excursion of Mr. Brouček to the Moon*. The title role in the production was portrayed by the tenor **Jaroslav Březina**, a soloist of the National Theatre Opera company and a holder of numerous awards, including the Thalia Prize and annual prizes of the Operaplus.cz portal. He said about Janáček: “I deem Janáček a truly extraordinary composer. All his operas are highly elaborate, depicting a variety of relationships, fates and emotions, which simply deeply touch the heart of every perceptive listener. And I also think that Czech singers have the great advantage of

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understanding Janáček's operas, thus knowing precisely what he strove to express in them.”

Besides Jaroslav Březina in the title role, the production will feature the singers Aleš Briscein and Martin Šrejma (Mazal, Azurean, Petřík), Vladimír Chmelo and František Zahradníček (the Sacristan at Saint Vitus, Lunigrove, Domšík), Marie Fajtová and Alžběta Poláčková (Málinka, Etherea, Kunka), Miloš Horák and Jiří Sulženko (Würfl, Wonderglitter, the Councillor).

The Slovak theatre-maker **Sláva Daubnerová** has brought to bear the opera's surrealistic potential in her production: “I would like to underline the surrealistic playfulness and wit. Janáček was also a genius owing to his having striven to depict the prose of life, its everydayness, familiarity and triviality. He did not seek theatricality. I feel greatly honoured to have been afforded the opportunity to stage an opera by Janáček, because he was an artist who throughout his life went against the current trends, which is very akin to how I feel and thus immensely inspiring. He served to me as an impulse for my taking the decision to include Svatopluk Čech and another two artistic figures in my production. Fusion of the characters of the Poet/Cloudy/Vacek the Bearded, the Composer/Harper/Miroslav the Goldsmith and the Painter/Glorious Rainbow/Vojta gave rise to the elite trio of Svatopluk Čech, Alfons Mucha and Leoš Janáček. With a Brechtian distance, the three characters guide the audience throughout the opera as commentators. The costume designer **Simona Vachálková** and I have conceived the individual characters similarly to the surrealists featured in Max Ernst's painting A Friends' Reunion”.

The sets designed by **Pavel Borák** are an absolutely pure, neutral architecture, akin to an “exhibition hall”, based on the principle of installation, work with objects. The trip to the Moon, for instance, is rendered as the Stone Age, harbouring a cold, gallery-like atmosphere. This part of the opera should bring to mind the Belle Époque, nostalgically recalling the trouble-free period preceding the outbreak of World War I. The Hussite era, in which the second part of the opera is set, is depicted as the Bronze Age, with its dominating motif being the Sun, yet possessing a dark atmosphere.

Janáček completed *The Excursion of Mr. Brouček to the Moon* in 1917, nine years after he had begun working on the piece. Subsequently, he composed *The Excursion of Mr. Brouček to the 15th Century*, thus furnishing the opera with the second, contrastive part – the satirical facet was followed by a patriotic and tragicomic dimension.

*The next new National Theatre opera production, of Ivan Acher's Sternenhoch, will receive its world premiere on 7 April 2018 at the New Stage.*

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