Alexander Moyzes and His Piano Sonata in the Context of Slovak Music Between the Wars

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ALEXANDER MOYZES AND HIS PIANO SONATA IN THE CONTEXT OF
SLOVAK MUSIC BETWEEN THE WARS

A Monograph

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

in

The School of Music

by
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August 2015
To my father
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this monograph is to introduce to the English-speaking public the Slovak twentieth-century composer Alexander Moyzes and his Piano Sonata in E Minor, Op. 2 (1942), virtually unknown outside Slovakia. The style of the Sonata represents a retreat from earlier, more experimental positions of its author; this shift can be explained by a closer look at historical and aesthetic circumstances surrounding its composition.

The first chapter provides an essential biography of the composer with an emphasis on his life and works between 1925 and 1940. The second chapter compares single movements of the Sonata with earlier manuscripts and identifies the salient features of the composition. The conclusion reflects on the artistic value of the Sonata from a wider perspective.
INTRODUCTION

The Paradoxes of Alexander Moyzes

When you listen to a piece by Dvořák, you can tell it is by Dvořák; when you listen to Brahms, you know it is Brahms. It is about the individual style. I know it took me a lot of hard work to achieve some kind of personal style. As Czechs say, it is not “given from above”: you have to pursue it on your own and to believe that what you are doing is being done the way it is supposed to be done. I tried to reach myself in order to know that it was the true myself in my music. It matters not whether it is described as contemporary or as traditional. What matters is whether there is quality achieved in it, and whether it is you alone in that quality.

— Alexander Moyzes

In today’s Slovakia, the name of Alexander Moyzes (1906–1984) is known – or at least remotely familiar – to any person with a minimum of musical knowledge. According to the ubiquitous commonplace, he belongs to the triad of “founders of Slovak national music” (the cumbersome institutional status of such entity would actually be more aptly conveyed by upper case letters), together with Eugen Suchoň (1908–1993) and Ján Cikker (1911–1989). These three figures are present in all Slovak music history textbooks and in most works on cultural history of Slovakia, however limited their scope may be. Moyzes is known to have been actively involved in the creation of the Slovak Philharmonic, the Slovak Radio Orchestra, the Academy of Performing Arts, the SLUK, the Union of Slovak Composers, and to have trained a host of Slovak composers. Thus, everything seems to be in order: the name of Alexander Moyzes deservedly became an inseparable part of the Pantheon of Slovak art. The name only, however: our times are much less kind to his musical legacy. Moyzes’s status in Slovak musical culture can be likened to the destiny of those writers everyone knows but very

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2 Slovenský ľudový umelecký kolektív (Slovak Folk Art Collective).
few actually read. It will probably not be an exaggeration to claim that most of professional musicians in Slovakia would have a difficulty to recall, let alone reproduce, one single theme from Moyzes’s large output, the only exception being perhaps some of his choral arrangements of folk songs or Christmas carols, frequently performed by amateur and professional vocal ensembles, or some of his didactic works. A common attitude of many Slovak musicians (or at least those of my generation) could be thus summarized: “Moyzes, the ubiquitous ‘meritorious artist’, epis tome of socialist realism? We’ve had enough of that!” Unfortunately, throwing the baby out with the bathwater seems to be a recurring pattern of reaction during the periods following political upheavals in the history of modern Slovakia. A curious vicious circle seems to have taken form here: under the general impression that Moyzes, a prominent or “institutional” composer of the Communist regime, hence ideologically compromised, has already received sufficient attention and enough performances in the past, musicians perform or record his works rather rarely; not being performed or recorded, he is gradually becoming less known and more detached from the living musical culture. Moyzes’s instrumental corpus (twelve symphonies and a considerable number of solo and chamber compositions) is simply underperformed, especially if compared to the performance history of works by Suchoň (and Cikker, to a lesser degree).

The disparity between the treatment of Moyzes and Suchoň can be easily illustrated by a short look at their hundredth anniversaries (Alexander Moyzes’s in 2006, Eugen Suchoň’s in 2008). While the outcome of Suchoň’s anniversary in 2008 has been palpable – a commemorative series of CD recordings and a number of books and articles, not to mention the festivals and performances of his

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3 Meritorious Artist (Zaslúžilý umelec in Slovak) was an honorary title awarded by the government in most Eastern bloc countries for extraordinary achievements in arts. Needless to say, after the fall of Communism in 1989 it quickly turned to be a stain on one’s curriculum.

4 Vladimír Godár notes: “Tchaikovsky or Mahler were born and died in the same state and political system. In the twentieth century, Slovakia experienced a constitutional or political change in nearly each decade.” In “Hviezdná hodina slovenskej hudby – 12 symfónií Alexandra Moyzesa” [A great moment of Slovak music – Alexander Moyzes’s twelve symphonies], Nové Slovo (2004/3), 20.

5 To name the most salient instances: an updated edition of Ernest Zavarský’s monograph Eugen Suchoň (Bratislava: Hudobné centrum, 2008), an edition of Suchoň’s diary (Danica Štilichová-
works in Slovakia and abroad\(^6\) – Moyzes’s hundredth anniversary offered a musicological conference,\(^7\) a few performances of his orchestral works, a short-lived international composition competition,\(^8\) and exactly zero dedicated recordings.\(^9\) The scholarly treatment of Moyzes contradicts even more his institutional status in music history textbooks: the only existing biography dates back to 1956, year of Moyzes’s fiftieth birthday, thus covering only the first half of his creative output.\(^10\) Post-1989 reflection on Moyzes’s later works is rather scant; a study attempting a balanced look at the composer in his complexity, unbiased by ideological filters – still present in many recent writings on communist-era music – has yet to come. The Slovak Musical Center reports in its online database of Slovak composers 107 texts (books, monographs, articles and reviews) on Eugen Suchoň written after the Velvet Revolution, while for Alexander Moyzes the number amounts to but 14.\(^11\)

Ironically, I can consider myself a victim and, at the same time, an unconscious contributor to the situation described: in 2006, I barely noticed Moyzes’s anniversary, whereas in 2008 I took part in

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\(^6\) Suchoň’s anniversary was a full-fledged modern media event, resulting in performances of most of his orchestral works (between the regular concert season of the Slovak Philharmonic and the concerts of the most prestigious classical music festival in Slovakia BHS (Bratislavské hudobné slávnosti – Bratislava Music Festival) and in staging of both of his operas Krútňava and Svätopluk at the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava.

\(^7\) K pocte Alexandra Moyzesa a Ľudovíta Rajtera [Homage to Alexander Moyzes and Ľudovít Rajter] International Musicological Conference, Bratislava, October 4–6, 2006. For the proceedings, see Bibliography.

\(^8\) 1. Medzinárodná skladateľská súťaž Alexandra Moyzesa [1\(^{st}\) Alexander Moyzes International Competition for Composers], Bratislava, Fall 2006; no more editions have taken place since then.

\(^9\) The only Moyzes’s orchestral works performed in Bratislava in 2006 were his Seventh Symphony, Partita in Honour of Majster Pavol of Levoča, Musica Istropolitana and Hudba žene [Music for a Woman]. Sources: web archive of the Slovak Philharmonic; program booklet of the festival BHS 2006.

\(^10\) Written by one of Moyzes’s first students Ladislav Burlas: Alexander Moyzes (Bratislava: Slovenské vydavateľ'stvo krásnej literatúry, 1956).

\(^11\) Of course, these bibliographies are far from being exhaustive: proceedings from the conference on Moyzes mentioned in Note 3 are not listed, for example. Nevertheless, they can still be considered as more or less accurately indicative. Eugen Suchoň: http://www.hc.sk/en/hudba/osobnost-detail/988-eugen-suchon#bibliografia (accessed December 5, 2014). Alexander Moyzes: http://www.hc.sk/en/hudba/osobnost-detail/985-alexander-moyzes#bibliografia (accessed December 5, 2014).
numerous performances of Suchoň’s works and contributed to the organization of a musical festival in his name. My original intention, therefore, was to dedicate my monograph to Eugen Suchoň’s piano compositions (a partial reason for my interest in Suchoň lies in the fact that Suchoň was born and is buried in my hometown). However, my personal “discovery” of Moyzes’s Sonata in E Minor, Op. 2, a few years ago (in six years of my Conservatory studies in Slovakia at the turn of the century, the name of Moyzes had been mentioned exactly once: in a music history class during a lecture on Slovak twentieth-century music; I had never heard of anyone studying or performing anything by Moyzes) woke my curiosity and I began to search for recordings and scores. I soon came to realize that Moyzes’s music in Slovakia was not ubiquitous at all: the only existing recording of the Sonata was by made by a British pianist for a British record label, and the set of Moyzes’s twelve symphonies was offered by NAXOS, a Hong Kong based company. As Vladimír Godár puts it, amnesia seems to be a prominent characteristic of the Slovak musical community. In Bratislava, the obvious capital of national culture, the only Slovak-made recording of the “founder of Slovak music” I was able to purchase was a CD containing string quartets by him and his father Mikuláš Moyzes. I must confess at this point that even after my prolonged immersion into Alexander Moyzes’s impressively crafted musical universe, I still find Eugen Suchoň to possess a somewhat stronger musical individuality: his 1937 Sonatina for violin and piano, for example, is a universal masterwork with probably no rivals among works written by his compatriots in the given period. Nevertheless, all the factors mentioned above led me to choose Alexander Moyzes for the subject of my work, in an

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12 AD UNA CORDA – Cum Laude Maestro, International Music Festival in Pezinok, Slovakia, May 7–9, 2008.
attempt to achieve three goals. Firstly, to rekindle interest in his unfairly neglected piano sonata; secondly, to offer a closer look at this fundamental figure of Slovak musical culture for an English-language reader, as sources in English are almost nonexistent; and finally to contribute, in however minimal way, to the general understanding of musical and/or cultural processes occurring in Slovakia between the two World Wars.
CHAPTER I: ALEXANDER MOYZES, HIS MUSIC, HIS TIMES

Alexander Moyzes was born on September 4, 1906, in Kláštor pod Znievom, a town in northern Slovakia, then Kingdom of Hungary. A deconstruction of this textbook-like sentence offers a number of cues – whether direct or symbolic – for a better understanding of historical and cultural factors that shaped Alexander Moyzes’s biographic and creative trajectory during the first half of the twentieth century.

First of all, the family name. Zdenka Bokesová, in her biography of Mikuláš Moyzes, Alexander’s father and a prominent composer as well, offers a detailed genealogic tree of the Moyzes family from late eighteenth century onward. Moyzes is the alternative Hungarian spelling of Moyses, the Latin name of the biblical Moses. The most common contemporary Slovak form of the name is Mojžiš, with several departures such as Mojzeš, Mojzes, Mózes, and Mojziš, attesting synchronically the interweaving lines of Latin (Moyses), Magyar (Mózes) and Slavic (Mojžiš) heritage, present in Slovakia throughout the centuries. On the other hand, the history of the surname in the composer’s family is diachronically parallel to the process of ethnic and linguistic self-defining of Slovaks during the century of nationalisms: second great-grandfather was Štefan Mojzsiss (1825), great-grandfather Joannes Mogzsiss (1829), and Alexander’s grandfather František changed his name from Mojžiš to Moyzes, which name passed through the father Mikuláš to our composer. In short, this represents a passage from an inchoate stage of orthographic uncertainty to a well-defined modern linguistic identity. The name Moyzes also constitutes a direct reference to the Slovak National Revival movement initiated in the 1840s, a phenomenon typical for most nineteenth-century minor European nations. One

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of the most significant achievements of this movement was the foundation of *Matica Slovenská* in 1863, a cultural and scientific institution devoted to the research and the documentation of a wide range of topics related to Slovakia and the Slovaks (*Matica* followed the model of similar existing Serbian and Czech institutions). One of the founders and the first chairman of *Matica* was the Catholic bishop and patriot Štefan Moyses, a well-respected and influential figure of his time.\(^{17}\) As Bokesová points out, “[Moyses] became a model for František Mojžiš [composer’s grandfather] … who changed his original family name Mojžiš into Moyzes, after the bishop’s surname; he did so, however, when Hungarian authorities invited him, as a state-employed teacher, to Magyarize his Slovak name.”\(^{18}\) Secondly, the town of Kláštor pod Znievom as a reflection of the cultural and musical situation of Slovakia in early twentieth century. Despite being a mere village in present time, nineteenth-century Kláštor pod Znievom was a lively town of fundamental importance for the abovementioned process of Slovak National Revival (concentrated in the nearby city of Turčiansky Svätý Martin, headquarters of *Matica*) and the seat of one of the first three Slovak-language *gymnasia*, institutions vital for the formation of local and national intelligentsia – a *condicio sine qua non* of an autonomous cultural life.

After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (the 1867 *Ausgleich*), however, these schools were closed, together with the *Matica*, in a generalized attempt of the Hungarian state to Magyarize its non-Hungarian nations. The educational history of Kláštor pod Znievom continued in the form of a Hungarian-language Institute for Teachers, where Alexander Moyzes’s father Mikuláš taught from 1904 to 1908. Mikuláš Moyzes (1872–1944) was one of the best prepared and gifted Slovak composers of early 20th century and his life shows the dilemma faced by his contemporary colleagues: either leaving Slovakia for Vienna, Budapest, Prague, or staying home to become a provincial music teacher or church musician with very little chance of getting works performed and appreciated.

\(^{17}\) Bishop Moyses had a crucial impact on the life of Ján Levoslav Bella, the only Slovak Romantic composer whose works can stand comparison with his Czech or Hungarian counterparts: Moyses sent the talented young man to Vienna to study with Simon Sechter.

Ladislav Burlas, one of Alexander Moyzes’s first students and his first biographer, summarizes the situation as follows:

At the moment of the birth of Alexander Moyzes, on September 4, 1906 … the situation on the field of Slovak musical culture was marked by the oppressing lack of social and cultural freedom, hindering the development of Slovak national music particularly in the nineteenth century – a century of national musical cultures. The departure of Ján Levoslav Bella from Slovakia in 1881 represents the end of the last hopes in a synthesis of local musical elements with the developed European musical culture. All subsequent activities thus moved toward the field of popular education, without higher artistic goals or demands.19

The father celebrated Alexander’s birth by composing one of his best works, the Missa solemnis in C. In 1908, the family moved to Prešov, a midsized urban center in northeastern Slovakia, where Alexander’s parents settled for good. Despite the bleak situation of Slovak music, Prešov offered Alexander during his childhood and youth a wealth of musical stimuli, numerous occasions for active music making, and a favorable family environment. In addition to his father’s profession of pedagogue and composer, Moyzes’s mother Mária Anna Witteková (1877–unknown) was a singer: it did not come then as a surprise that young Alexander began to demonstrate a great facility in learning to play the violin and the piano at the City Music School, to compose around the age of fifteen, when he also became organist praised for his improvisations in three different churches of Prešov. Interviewed by Ilja Zeljenka in 1984, he recalls further elements of his musical upbringing: the performances of the Military Band of Prešov, his four-hand devouring of symphonic repertoire with his friend pianist Jozef Harčár, eavesdropping on father’s conversations with fellow composers about harmony, counterpoint and theory in general, but also studying Bartók’s For Children at the Music School.20 Moreover, as a major center, Prešov was a frequent destination of musicians from Budapest.21

19 Ladislav Burlas, Alexander Moyzes (Bratislava: Slovenské vydavateľstvo krásnej literatúry, 1956), 15.
20 Zeljenka, Rozhovory, 5–7, 22.
Toward the end of his studies at the Prešov Gymnasium (1917-25), the question of career choice became increasingly pressing for the young talent. When he first declared his interest to become a musician, his father, too painfully aware of all the consequences of pursuing such an interest (“I do not want my son to become a ‘money making machine’,” he argued), at first backed the idea of a career in engineering, suggested by Alexander’s teachers. However, having the soul of an artist, and influenced by the encouragement of the respected composer Mikuláš Schneider-Trnavský, who was impressed by Alexander’s obvious talent, Mikuláš Moyzes at last approved and supported Alexander’s decision to become a musician. After having passed the Gymnasium’s leaving exam in spring 1925, Alexander moved to Prague in the fall to study at the Conservatory.

In the period following the implosion of Austro-Hungarian Empire and the birth of the democratic Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, Prague was the most natural choice for young Slovaks, despite the centuries-long historical, cultural and musical ties of Slovakia to Vienna and Budapest. Consequences of war and politics: after centuries of more or less peaceful coexistence in major urban centers, Slovaks, Magyars and Germans (or Austrians) happened to end up on opposite sides of history: Slovaks as part of the winning Czechoslovakia and Magyars and Austrians as parts of the defeated Central Powers. Alexander Moyzes puts it quite simply: “I could not imagine studying in Budapest or

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22 Burlas, A. Moyzes, 19.
23 As mentioned in the Introduction, Alexander Moyzes, Eugen Suchoň and Ján Cikker are considered “founders of Slovak national music”, which could be paraphrased in its current usage as “first Slovak composers that finally succeeded in catching up with the rest of Europe in terms of art music.” This seems to be at least unfair toward the previous troika of Slovak composers active before World War I: Alexander’s father Mikuláš Moyzes (1872-1944), Viliam Figuš-Bystrý (1875-1937), Mikuláš Schneider-Trnavský (1881-1958), who had prepared the ground for them (among other things, they share a common feature that exemplifies the condition of a Slovak musician at the turn of the century: all three of them were forced to spend considerable periods of their lives abroad in order to simply survive as professional artists). A number of articles have recently appeared questioning their simplified dismissal as provincial semi-professionals, and aiming at a more balanced and contextualized assessment of earlier Slovak music (articles by Ľubomír Chalupka and Vladimír Godár, listed in the Bibliography).
Vienna. At that time, they did not like us very much over there. Although I eventually had a good start in Vienna, but that madman of Hitler came and everything was over.”

By that time, the nineteen-year old composer had sketched or completed at least 24 minor works, reflecting the musical world of Prešov: compositions for piano, organ, harmonium, string quartet, voice and choir. His first choice of major at the Prague Conservatory also reflected this world, as well as financial concerns: rather than for composition, he opted for organ performance. In his father’s world, the position of organist at a major church represented one of the most secure and well-paid jobs.

Moyzes studied organ with Bedřich Wiedermann and, somewhat later, began to study composition with the famed music theorist Otakar Šín, whose influential Textbook of Harmony represented an attempt to conceptualize and codify late-Romantic chromatic harmony in terms of Riemannian functionality.

In his conversations with Ilja Zeljenka, Moyzes describes the first impact of Prague on him: “The shock was enormous… I came from a smaller town with completely bourgeois customs, with all we condemn on it today. And in Prague – I don’t even know, where to start from. Large posters announced Furtwängler or Bruno Walter. I’d never imagined I would see them one day – all these singers, violinists, pianists and composers.” Despite the abysmal difference between the two musical worlds, the training acquired in Prešov proved more than sufficient: Moyzes graduated from the prestigious and highly demanding Conservatory in mere three years, with a double major in organ and composition.

His teachers included Jaroslav Křička (instrumentation), Otakar Ostrčil (conducting), and Karel Boleslav Jiráček (musical forms). At his graduation in spring 1928 (with the first movement of his Symphony No. 1 in D Major, Op. 4), Šín recommended him for the composition class of Vítězslav

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24 Zeljenka, Rozhovory, 25.
26 Otakar Šín, Úplná nauka o harmonii na základě melodie a rytmu [Complete handbook of harmony based on melody and rhythm] (Praga: Hudební matice Umělecké besedy, 1949).
27 Zeljenka, Rozhovory, 8.
Novák at the Master School (a specialized higher level of the Conservatory). Moyzes studied with Novák from 1928 to 1930. This time, however, he had to commute weekly from the two hundred miles distant capital of Slovakia Bratislava, where he was appointed – in fall 1928, at twenty-two years of age – teacher of theoretical subjects at the recently established Academy of Music and Drama. The commuting was made possible by a scholarship procured by Novák, which represented the best credential for the young composer: despite the simultaneous presence of Leoš Janáček, Josef Suk and Josef Bohuslav Foerster at the Conservatory and on Czech musical scene in general, and despite his later descent into near oblivion, Vítězslav Novák enjoyed – for quite a long time – the status of indisputable pedagogic authority and was considered the direct heir of Dvořák.

Moyzes graduated from the Master School in 1930 with his Symphonic Overture, Op. 10. By this time, the Czech musical circles had labeled him as an avant-garde composer, and some of his works from late 1920s and early 1930s indeed fully justify this qualifier. The noteworthy stylistic range of his output from this period testifies the richness and diversity of Prague’s musical life. Within the institutional framework of the Conservatory – conservative by definition – the most traditionalist tendencies coexisted with the cosmopolitan curiosity for everything new. Both Šín and Novák insisted on acquiring a full mastery of traditional compositional craftsmanship through thorough study of harmony, Bachian counterpoint and old forms. Novák was known for “rejecting every avant-gardist novelty” and for “refusing to analyze Schoenberg” with his students. His compositional and pedagogic program represented a synthesis of folk elements, expressionism and impressionism, applied on traditional forms and inscribed in an essentially Romantic aesthetics: French in contents, German in form, if we are allowed a simplification. The most advanced feature of his music was probably his

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29 Vysloužil, “Avantgardní,” 137.
occasional use of quartal harmonies; as we will see later, these elements will constitute the basis for the constitution of Slovak Musical Modernism.

This formal traditionalism – quite understandable, as it was required by the Conservatory – can be seen in Alexander Moyzes’s Seven Piano Pieces, Op. 2a, and in his Two Studies in the Form of Prelude and Fugue, as well as in his use of forms as passacaglia, fugue or suite, which would gradually develop into a constant and fruitful interest in Baroque music.\(^\text{30}\) The Seven Piano Pieces, Op. 2a, are especially important as they later evolved into our Sonata in E Minor, Op. 2, completed in 1942. For now it should be sufficient to mention the movements that constituted the Op. 2a: Prelude, Scherzo, Adagio and four fugues. A closer analysis of these works will be provided in the chapter on the Sonata. Alongside these traditionalist and inescapable academic requirements, the Conservatory offered numerous possibilities of exposure to newest musical tendencies, stimulated also by the international environment at school: his classmates included Mykola Kolessa, the first Ukrainian modernist composer and his Slovenian counterpart Slavko Osterc; the school also regularly invited artists as the French composer Vincent D’Indy (with a lecture on contemporary French music in 1925), the famous American avant-gardist Henry Cowell (with a lecture on the acoustic development of music, also in 1925) or the Italian conductor Bernardino Molinari. Burlas mentions performances of atonal, athematic and electronic music (more exactly, music for trautonium).\(^\text{31}\) Ostrčil, Moyzes’s teacher of conducting, performed a few contemporary operas with the Conservatory’s Opera Studio and conducted Berg’s

\(^\text{30}\) Baroque inspirations can be found in works as \textit{Ludové piesne a tance zo zbierky Anny Szirmay–Keczerovej} [Folk songs and dances from the collection of Anna Szirmay-Keczerová], Op. 28 (1936); second movement of the \textit{Poetic Suite}, Op. 35 “Noble Dance from the XVII Century” (1940); \textit{Sinfonia da chiesa}, Op. 36 (1941–42); \textit{Partita na poctu Majstra Pavla z Levoče} [Partita in honour of Majster Pavol of Levoča], Op. 67 (1969). Also, the structure of our \textit{Sonata in E Minor} corresponds more to a Baroque \textit{sonata da chiesa} than to a modern sonata.

Wozzeck at the National Theatre in 1926.\(^{32}\) In 1927, the Conservatory produced the first performance of Stravinsky’s opera Mavra in central Europe.\(^{33}\)

Moyzes also attended the open class of Alois Hába, the pioneer of microtonal music, devoted to the discussion of microtonal systems and to analyses of recent works by Schoenberg, Berg and Janáček.\(^{34}\) Hába’s analytical interest included even jazz music: he allowed Jaroslav Ježek, Moyzes’s friend, schoolmate and the future Czech Gershwin, to discuss his newly composed “third stream” pieces. Through Ježek and his collection of most recent jazz records, Moyzes came into close contact with this novel and increasingly popular style from America. Another classmate, Emil František Burian, premiered in 1927 his jazz Requiem for soprano, tenor, voice-band, saxophone, drums, two pianos and harmonium, and published in 1928 the first Czech study of jazz music.\(^{35}\) Interest in jazz was considered a hallmark of avant-gardism across the continent. In 1928, world’s first program in jazz studies was established at the Frankfurt am Main Musikhochschule. Erwin Schulhoff, who had been writing jazz-influenced pieces since early twenties, joined the faculty of Prague Conservatory in 1929.

Outside the Conservatory, the musical life of Prague offered a full panorama of contemporary music: the Association for Modern Music performed works by Stravinsky, Bartók, Hindemith, Schoenberg, Casella and others.\(^{36}\) Moyzes also recalls performances given by composers in person (Prokofiev, Bartók) and personal meetings with Zoltán Kodály and Albert Roussel, describing his profound admiration for the latter’s Trio for flute, viola and cello.\(^{37}\)

\(^{32}\) Vysloužil, “Avantgardní,” 137.
\(^{33}\) Burlas, A. Moyzes, 27.
\(^{34}\) Moyzes on Hába: “I was interested in quarter tones. Hába asked me to sing a quarter-tone scale and I did it perfectly… although I didn’t know how to use it in composition… In his harmony textbook there was an example of resolution of a dominant seventh chord: it was done incorrectly. I thought: how is he going to do it with quarter tones? And later, he even started to fool around with athematic music… Our relationship was otherwise good. After all, my wife was his relative, her grandmother’s name was Hábová.” In Zeljenka, Rozhovory, 15.
\(^{36}\) Burlas, A. Moyzes, 27.
\(^{37}\) Zeljenka, Rozhovory, 24.
These and other influences were reflected in Moyzes’s above-mentioned wide, almost eclectic range of musical styles embraced in his compositions during that period. Jazz influences were explicitly present in *Charleston* and *Slow Fox* for piano (1927), in *Vest Pocket Suite*, Op. 6 for violin and piano (1928),\(^{38}\) and, above all, in the *Jazz Sonata* for two pianos, Op. 14 (1930).\(^{39}\) Moyzes seemed to assimilate well the rhythmic elements of jazz, but the overall result was not entirely convincing, as Ernest Zavarský observes: “given his serious attitude, Moyzes unwillingly overloads the modern dance music idiom and deprives his dance compositions, unproblematic in their nature, of their lighthearted character.”\(^{40}\) The textural and harmonic thickness can be seen in measures 33–35 from the first movement of the Jazz Sonata (Figure 1).

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\(^{38}\) In five movements: Allegretto con umore – Andante di Blues – Scherzino – Arietta – Vivace di fox.

\(^{39}\) In three movements: Allegro – Tempo di valse lento – Tempo di foxtrot.

\(^{40}\) Ernst Zavarský, *Súčasná slovenská hudba* [Contemporary Slovak music] (Bratislava: Závodský, 1947), 19.
Jazz elements were also present, although in a more oblique way, in works that could be inscribed into the aesthetics of *civilism*, understood as de-sentimentalized artistic interest in aspects of modern urban life such as sports, entertainment, everyday activities, and similar. Quite present in the artistic life of Prague in the 1920s, civilism represented the central European response to the moderate expressionism of *Les Six* and to the objectivized linearity of the German *Neue Sachlichkeit*. This tendency was exemplified in the above-mentioned *Vest Pocket Suite* (whose title refers to the popular *Vest Pocket Revue*) and particularly in the Divertimento, Op. 11 (1930), an example of what could be called “urban impressionism”. Originally composed with the title *O Martičke* [About Martička], the cycle depicted an ordinary day of Moyzes’s fiancée Marta Březíková, with movements as “Martička Wakes Up”, “Martička Goes to School”, etc. Moyzes subsequently eliminated all personal references and published the work under the neutral neoclassical title of Divertimento, consisting of six movements: Morning – Going to School – Song About Love – Tango Blues – Waltz – Notturno. The angular linearity of unresolved dissonances and near atonality in *Vest Pocket Suite* (Fig. 2; note measures 3 and 4, in which all twelve notes of the chromatic scale are used) almost disappears to the advantage of polished and decidedly tonal elegance of the Divertimento (Figures 3 and 4). Of some interest might be the fact that Moyzes also arranged the Divertimento for jazz band.

The most explicitly avant-gardist works by Moyzes are those inspired by the poetry of so-called *davists*, a group of leftist or outright communist poets and writers associated with the literary magazine DAV (1924–1937). The song cycle *Farby na palette* [Colors on a palette], Op. 5, composed in 1928, is based on the verses of the avant-gardist poet and later prominent politician of Communist Slovakia Laco Novomeský. In the *sinfónia cantata Demontáž* [Dismantling], Op. 12, (1930), Moyzes sets in music a socially charged poem of the same name by another *davist* Ján Rob Poničan.
Figure 2. Alexander Moyzes: *Vest Pocket Suite*, Op. 6, beginning of Andante di Blues.

Figure 3. Alexander Moyzes: *Divertimento*, Op. 11, movement III (Song about love)
These works bear traces of the Russian futurism, ideologically above all, but also musically (see the declamatory, syllabic treatment of the vocal line in relation to the piano part in Figure 5).

One direction would become increasingly present in Moyzes’s music: composition of works based on or influenced by Slovak folk music. Interest in musical folklore was common, even if expressed in different ways, across the entire spectrum of musical schools or aesthetic tendencies. In Moyzes’s case, the inputs and impulses were multiple. First of all, his teacher Vítězslav Novák was a fervent admirer of Slovak and Moravian folk music and incorporated these elements into his composition and personal harmonic language; in some of his works the folk element becomes programmatic, for example in his symphonic poem *In the Tatra Mountains*, Op. 26 (1902), in the *Slovak Suite*, Op. 32 (1911),\(^{41}\) or in his *Sonata Eroica*, Op. 24 (1900), inspired by the legend of the Slovak brigand Jánošík. In his essay

\[^{41}\text{The English title “Slovak Suite” is quite misleading: the original Czech title “Slovácká Suita” does not refer to Slovakia or to Slovaks, but to the small region of Slovácko on the very border between Slovakia and Moravia.}\]
Vítězslav Novák and Slovak Music, musicologist and composer Ivan Hrušovský, another student of Moyzes, describes Novák with a quasi-paradox: “… Vítězslav Novák became de facto the first Slovak modern composer on the highest professional level… Without Novák’s compositional and later especially pedagogic activity, Slovak music would probably follow other ways, although predispositions for a more radical transformation were already present in it.”

Secondly, interest in folklore was present also on the other side of the Romantic Volkstümlichkeit.

Moyzes admired Stravinsky’s folklorist works and the immense ethnomusicological activity and folk

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music-rooted compositional creativity of Bartók was not unknown to him, although Bartók’s activities curiously did not find a great resonance in Czechoslovakia in the 1920s. Moyzes was very critical of the amateurish and primitively purist (or purely primitive) treatments of Slovak folksongs by provincial composers as Milan Lichard or later Dezider Lauko; at the same time, his intentions were similar to those of Stravinsky, Bartók, Kodály, or other folk-inspired modernist composers, aiming at a deconventionalization of folklore through a return to its more archaic layers and through its freeing from the constraints of European nineteenth-century major/minor tonal cage. An important part of these efforts was the complete dismissal of the “alla Ungarese” idiom, used and abused by numerous composers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, recognizable by the use ad nauseam of the interval of augmented second and of the same syncopated rhythm, supposed to convey the “Hungarianness” but effectively flattening the most characteristic and interesting traits of melodies from different ethnic areas of the Kingdom of Hungary. Modernist composers were well aware that this hackneyed idiom reflected the standardized repertoire of Gypsy bands playing in inns and cafés across all Europe rather than genuine folk songs heard in real-life rural settings. A little linguistic detour might shed more light on the underlying political and cultural issues. Returning to our textbook-like phrase that opens the present chapter, the historical Kingdom of Hungary – homeland of Magyars, Romanians, Slovaks, Croatians, Slovenes, Serbians, Italians and Ruthenians (in approximate order of demographic distribution), dismantled in 1918 – and the actual territory of ethnic Magyars are, in modern Western languages, referred to with the same word, “Hungary”, or the derived adjective “Hungarian”, whereas for most of the minor nationalities incorporated in the Kingdom the two entities were distinctly separated as two different words. For example, the title of Brahms’s *Hungarian Dances* is translated into Slovak as *Uhorské tance* (Dances from the Kingdom of Hungary), whereas Bartók’s work *8 Hungarian Folksongs*, Sz. 64, is translated as *8 maďarských ľudových piesní* (8 Magyar Folksongs), making it clear that in the former case the
dances could well have been of Romanian or Serbian origin. The overlapping of the terms – and the consequent disappearing of minor cultures from the sight of the general European public – was naturally felt (and noticed by Western observers such as R.W. Seton Watson)\(^ {43}\) as a form of cultural and linguistic imperialism enacted by the ruling nation in the Kingdom of Hungary. One of the principal efforts of artists from those minor cultures was therefore to define the distinctive features of their genuine folk art, often rendered invisible by the Magyar hegemony, and recuperate them for a modern, de-romanticized use.

These factors were present in the composition of *Twelve Folk Songs From the Šariš Region, Op. 9* (1929), in which Moyzes succeeded in creating a harmonic idiom that was modern, clearly derived from the peculiar intervallic features of Šariš melodies, and aimed at enhancing rather than dominating them (see Figure 6).

In the Adagio from Op. 2 (originally composed in 1928 as part of *Seven Piano Pieces*, in 1942 it became the third movement of our Sonata in E Minor), folk song is present indirectly: it is imitated, and in a quite convincing way. According to Burlas,

> In the melodic idea and in its treatment we encounter an authentic Slovakness, demonstrating a synthesis of national folk elements with technical and stylistic conquests of the contemporary musical world. In the Adagio Moyzes presents us, for the first time (with the exception of some earlier unfinished attempts), with an idea of his own that is closely related to folk song melodics. It is not an adaptation anymore; it is rather that higher sort of compositional work, where a composer is able to bring his own music close to a specifically national musical expression.\(^ {44}\)

These words were written in 1956. In seeming conflict with the raging socialist realism and internationalism, they are in spirit very similar to those of Neverov, the Herderian reviewer of Glinka’s opera *A Life for the Tsar* in 1836: instead of literal quotes, “he [Glinka] has looked deeply into the


\(^ {44}\) Burlas, *A. Moyzes*, 54.
character of our folk music, has observed all its characteristics, has studied and assimilated it – and then has given full freedom to his own fantasy.\footnote{Quoted in Richard Taruskin, \textit{Music in the Nineteenth Century} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).} All these moments point to a certain persistence of Romantic ideas about the national \textit{Geist} (today’s Herders would use the word \textit{identity}) in the twentieth-century musical and cultural discourse in Slovakia.

Be that as it may, Moyzes’s concerns in his late 1920s were much more international than national. This led to the later dismissal and near obliteration of his early modernist works: when the doctrine of

\footnote{Quoted in Richard Taruskin, \textit{Music in the Nineteenth Century} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).}
socialist realism was imported from the USSR, replacing the parameter popular/proletarian with national/folkish, the most progressive works Moyzes came under fire for being “cosmopolitan”, “detached from the people” and, of course, “formalist” (“cosmopolitan” was one of the most feared labels).46

The remaining works written in this period belong to the category of absolute or autonomous music, where Moyzes again displays his preference for traditional forms: for example, Symphony No. 1 in D Major, Op. 4, written by the twenty-two-year-old composer between 1928–29 (Moyzes used the first movement as his graduation piece in Prague in 1928) and revised in 1936; the work had largely positive reviews, received several performances by the Czech Philharmonic under Václav Talich and was later published by Universal Edition in Vienna. A mention also deserves his String Quartet in A Minor, Op. 8, written in 1929 – one of Moyzes’s best works, in my opinion. Essentially monothematic (or oligothematic, as Burlas calls it, meaning the use of very few thematic cells),47 it features a noteworthy transformation of an expressionist opening statement into the theme of the last movement’s neo-Baroque passacaglia (Figures 7 and 8).

Figure 7. Alexander Moyzes: String Quartet No. 1 in A Minor, Op. 8, opening.

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These are the main elements that shaped Moyzes’s output during his studies in Prague and during his early years in Bratislava, thus summarized by Jana Lengová:

in the case of Alexander Moyzes, different stylistic manifestations do not create a succession of creative phases, but rather occur simultaneously: works with different stylistic orientations come into being at the same time, namely works with expressionist, neoclassical and neofolkloristic orientation… If we were to specify and enumerate these influences, the list would be roughly as follows: Neue Sachlichkeit, civilism, contemporary dance and jazz music, musical historism with a dominant interest in Baroque music, Slovak folk song (especially from eastern Slovakia), impressionism (filtered through the works of Vítězslav Novák, Moyzes’s pedagogue at the Master School in Prague). It is difficult to determine whether this heterogeneity was exclusively a consequence of searching for a creative base, or a result of prevailing external impulses; most probable is the mutual compenetration of both tendencies…

When Moyzes graduated from the Prague Conservatory in the spring of 1928, his reputation had already reached the capital of Slovakia and earned him the invitation to serve on the faculty of the recently established Hudobná a dramatická akadémia pre Slovensko v Bratislave (Slovak Academy of Music and Drama in Bratislava), as mentioned previously. In the fall of 1928 he moved to Bratislava and began to teach, commuting to Prague (“sometimes even three times a week,” he recalls) until his graduation from the Master School in the spring of 1930. Between 1930 and 1932, Moyzes’s activities were partially halted due to the compulsory military service. In 1932, Moyzes married his former student Marta Březíková (a relative of Alois Hába; see note 34), and settled definitively in Bratislava.

His move to Bratislava and his ensuing activities contributed, on one hand, to the crystallization of
a more coherent and individual musical style in his compositions; on the other hand – and on a much larger scale – they exerted a profound and lasting influence on great part of twentieth-century Slovak music.

With the creation of the democratic Czechoslovak Republic in 1918 (the so-called First Republic), Bratislava – formerly known as Pressburg in German or Pozsony in Hungarian – became the administrative and cultural center of Slovakia, which was seen as an occasion for inverting the long and slow decline of the city. For centuries Bratislava had been an important cultural and political center, as capital of the Kingdom of Hungary from 1536 to 1783, seat of the Diet of Hungary and other institutions, as well as residence of numerous aristocratic families. As a consequence, Bratislava developed a mature and thriving musical life, in close contact with the musical life of Vienna, reaching its climax in late eighteenth century. Aristocracy held private orchestras and invited famous composers as Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. When the capital returned to Budapest, many aristocratic families moved back to Budapest or Vienna, marking the beginning of the city’s decline. Bratislava was still a frequent destination of renowned performers and composers (Liszt, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Bruckner, Rubinstein, von Bülow, Joachim, and others), but lacked any institutional or educational framework for sustaining an advanced musical life (philharmonic societies, conservatories, national theatres, and similar entities, mushroomed across Europe; the only exception was the Kirchenmusikverein at St. Martin’s Cathedral, founded in 1833 and active until 1952). After the Compromise of 1867, Bratislava lost the last crumbs of importance, becoming essentially a remote suburb of Vienna and ceasing to be a productive musical reality. It would not probably be an exaggeration to claim that Bratislava all but disappeared from the cultural map of Europe.

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50 Zdenka Bokesová, Dejiny slovenskej hudby [A history of Slovak music], (Bratislava: Vydavatelstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1957), 342.
51 Some anecdotal evidence: in the so-called “great” modern literature, I know of one and only appearance of Bratislava, Pozsony or Pressburg. Thomas Mann in his Doctor Faustus sets the crucial moment of Adrian Leverkühn’s life – his contraction of syphilis, establishing his contract with the
Known composers who were born, lived or studied in Bratislava, moved sooner or later to Vienna or Budapest (Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Johann Kaspar Mertz, Franz Schmidt, Ernst von Dohnányi or Béla Bartók). Apart from the activities of the mentioned Kirchenmusikverein, Bratislava’s musical life at the beginning of the twentieth century consisted primarily in semi-private music making and performances of the operetta-focused Municipal Theatre (abandoned by discouraged Bruno Walter after only one year). The situation became critical after World War I when, as a consequence of changed political relations, Bratislava lost a great number of Hungarian and German musicians.

One of the first conditions for the reversal of the decline was the creation of music institutions, in particular educational institutions. In 1919, the Music School for Slovakia was founded by Miloš Ruppelt; in 1920, the Slovak National Theatre. In 1921, it was the first department of musicology at the Comenius University. In 1926, under the direction of Frico Kafenda, the higher level of the Music School became the Academy of Music and Drama. The lack of professional musicians was solved by inviting a substantial number of Czech musicians, who became a stable presence in Slovakia until their forced departure in 1939 as a consequence of the division of Czechoslovakia orchestrated by Hitler.

These were the circumstances under which the twenty-two-year-old graduate from Prague Conservatory initiated his relentless activity as composer, teacher, writer and organizer. Immediately after his return from military service, he began to write essays and reviews for multiple papers and journals, in particular for Elán, the progressive magazine on contemporary literature and art, led by the young poet Ján Smrek and published in Prague. In his writings, Moyzes mercilessly criticizes the backward-looking provincialism and semi-dilettantism of Slovak music and insisted on professionalism as primary and indispensable condition for creating a viable and productive art music culture.

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52 An accomplished composer, one of the leading and best prepared Slovak musicians and pedagogues of his time. Frico Kafenda (1883-1863) studied in Leipzig with Teichmüller (piano), Nikisch (conducting), Kretzschmar and Riemann (music theory).
In our contemporary musical life, quite a number of people are guided by enthusiasm for the Slovak cause and by the praiseworthy intent to enrich our musical production, whose large gaps demand works of all genres. Regrettably, the tentative compositional activity of these people is largely non-professional or unknown. We call this dilettantism, which is a very important element of musical life; however, when dilettantism begins to influence the musical life actively, it usually causes harm… The reigning slogan is “Made in Slovakia” (sic)...

He was aware of the weak historical premises for a genuinely Slovak modern music and formulated them with disarming frankness, warning at the same time against inventing a false tradition:

Many complaints are heard about our musical situation, whether ancient, recent, or present. In first place, people look for an initiator of Slovak art music, of a purely autonomous musical art. It is supposed to be some sort of Slovak J.S. Bach. They also look for our Beethoven, Wagner or our Strauss, searching everywhere: in libraries, choir lofts, in attics. They find yellowed manuscripts of obscure organists, in which they recognize predecessors from this or that century. I do not know, if we will ever have our Beethovens, it seems impossible to me! We just have to accept it. We did not have the possibility of autonomous development; the deficit is therefore quite natural. Unfortunately, the situation of our music is quite poor, and let us be honest: among all branches of Slovak art, music is the one most behind.

A young, cosmopolitan composer against the backward-looking provincials, modernity against tradition, innovation versus conservation: this debate was but one of the numerous manifestations of the old dichotomy acculturation/self-identification, operating in many of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalisms (for example, the decades-long conflict between Westernizers and Slavophiles in Russia in the nineteenth century). As mentioned previously, recent studies have shown that this perception of Slovak musical situation, perpetuated for most of the twentieth century, was partially flawed by the widespread postwar bias toward the formerly dominant elements of urban

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56 In particular, articles by Lubomír Chalupka and Vladimír Godár, see Bibliography.
culture: Hungarian and German communities, now turned minorities. This bias resulted in ignoring or downplaying musical manifestations that were not strictly Slovak, in a way similar to Moyzes’s downplaying of the importance of other artists who followed paths different from his program. Moyzes did not seem to pay much attention to the activities of many accomplished musicians around him between the wars (Alexander Albrecht, Štefan Németh-Šamorínsky, Fraňo Dostalík, Ladislav Stanček, and others). In short, the situation was not as bleak as described on previous pages: after all, works as Shostakovich’s Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District or Mosolov’s Iron Foundry were performed in Bratislava shortly after their composition.

At any rate, Moyzes soon rose to the status of leader of musical life: his works were performed across Europe (in particular, his First Symphony, Op. 4, and his Wind Quintet, Op. 17) and published by prestigious music publishing houses as Universal Edition or Simrock. Between 1932 and 1936, he studied musicology, art history, and history of philosophy at Comenius University. Moyzes also wrote music for the new media, film and radio. In 1937, he became the head of the Music Section of the Slovak Radio, where he increased the frequency of live broadcasts, organized public concerts and transformed the small orchestra into a full-sized symphonic ensemble. At the Academy, he trained a new generation of composers (Dezider Kardoš, Andrej Očenáš, Ladislav Holoubek, Tibor Frešo, among others), assigning to some of them specific duties as part of his “great project of modernization and professionalization of the musical life in Slovakia.”

Moyzes continued this project even during the years of the Slovak Republic (1939–1945), Hitler’s puppet state, when he limited his compositional activities (he was mainly revising his older works – the Sonata in E Minor is a product of this period – and orchestrating pieces of other composers, such as Bach and Novák). His authority allowed him to maintain his position and use it at full advantage of Slovak music, without becoming compromised.

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with the regime, sometimes treading dangerous ground: when World War II forced Czech musicians to leave Slovakia, Moyzes rebuilt the orchestra and managed to appoint a Croatian conductor and partisan sympathizer Krešimir Baranović (paradoxes of war: from Tito’s Yugoslavia to the Germany-backed Slovak Republic); despite the diktat of Nazi ideology, he smuggled “undesirable“ Jewish and Russian composers into the broadcasting program of the state radio. These activities, together with Moyzes’s growing awareness of his own responsibilities as “national composer”, could not remain without consequences on the crystallization of his mature musical style, a direct product of which is our Sonata in E Minor. During the 1930s, Moyzes abandoned his most “cosmopolitan”, “avant-gardist” or “experimental” inspirations (these words were used almost interchangeably) and devoted more energy to folk-inspired and “functional” works, contributing to the final shaping of the so-called Slovak Musical Modernism, defined by Alexander Burlas as “historical-stylistic category of twentieth-century musical creation, a program of manifesting the national character of music through a specific use of means of musical expression; the main goal of this program is to make the music resonate, in a given sphere of reception, as a predominantly endogenous art with marked and intentional tendencies.” Based on what has been already stated, the main ingredients of the Slovak Musical Modernism, shared to various degrees by all its main representatives (Alexander Moyzes, Eugen Suchoň, Ján Cikker, Dezider Kardoš), could be thus summarized:

1. Reserved, at times openly negative attitude toward previous generations of composers, harsh criticism of dilettantism and provincialism; this attitude became gradually more conciliatory.

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2. Analytical study of folk material, research of “pure folklore” or folk expressions uninfluenced by urban life. Exploration of harmonic and melodic potential of the folk song.

3. Application of this potential: synthesis of modal diatonicism with extended tonal harmony; avoidance of the major/minor system, polymodality, quartal harmony, “diatonization of twelve-tone material”, according to Burlas.  

4. Monothematism or oligothematism, complex motivic work, contrapuntal writing, emphasis on strict compositional logic.

5. Sophisticated and rich instrumentation deriving from Novák’s post-impressionist school.

6. Preference for older, especially Baroque music forms.

7. Strong presence of program music.

After World War II and especially after the communist coup d’état of 1948, Moyzes’s position became uncertain. In fact, he was ousted from the Slovak Radio, but “the regime needs Moyzes, and the new era, conversely, shows a certain generosity toward musical institutions and supports Moyzes’s ideas and plans.”

Moyzes was soon involved in the creation of most institutions or ensembles existing today: the state music publisher Slovenský hudobný fond, the modern Academy of Music and Performing Arts (VŠMU – Vysoká škola múzických umení; the former Academy of Music and Drama was transformed into Conservatory in 1941), Union of Slovak Composers, the professional folk ensemble SĽUK (Slovak Folk Art Collective), and the Slovak Philharmonic. Moyzes also trained at least two more generations of composers: Ivan Hrušovský, Ladislav Burlas, Ivan Parík, Braňo Hronec, Peter Breiner, among many others.

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Moyzes’s authority until his death in 1984 was thus comparable to that of Shostakovich in Russia, which earned him the label of “regime composer.” Despite his embracement of the socialist realism doctrine in the 1940s and 1950s, this label appears unjust from a wider perspective, precisely as in Shostakovich’s case. Moyzes, for example, was among the few composers who publicly denounced the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by the armies of the Warsaw Pact (although only a few years later he again satisfied the regime by writing ideologically appropriate works).

Among his works written during and after World War II, his symphonies, reaching the total number of twelve, deserve a special mention. His Eighth Symphony, Op. 64 (1969), is a protest against the Warsaw Pact invasion: its performance was banned and its score destroyed. Very popular became his folk-inspired orchestra suites, similar in spirit to those of Kodály: Dances from Gemer, Op. 57 (1955), and Dances from Pohronie, Op. 43 (1950). His neo-Baroque Partita in Honor of Majster Pavol of Levoča, Op. 67 (1969), is considered by many one of his best works. As for his piano works, the only work able to compete with his Sonata in terms of scope is the folk-inspired and virtuosic Brigand Rhapsody, Op. 52, written in 1957. Chamber music is represented by his four string quartets, the last two of which (Op. 83 and Op. 84) were composed in the 1980s, constituting Moyzes’s creative epilogue. Beside these “concert hall pieces”, Moyzes wrote a remarkable number of didactic pieces,

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63 Tomáš Sika offers the following summary/critique of Alexander Moyzes’s late music: “In spite of the changes in the musical style of Alexander Moyzes in the individual creative periods, all his works show a characteristic persistence with the tradition of Romanticism with the evolutionary development of themes in the framework of crystallized form schemes. His symphonies can be considered problematic from the point of view of form. They suffer from excessive longwindedness, with overdoing of the musical process, especially in the final parts. This feature of Moyzes’ works is connected with his academic views on the final part as the weightiest part of a symphonic cycle. The last string quartets (Third String Quartet, Op. 83, 1981, Fourth String Quartet, Op. 84, 1983) can be regarded as more effective works of this composer, in which Moyzes solves the extent of individual parts more adequately. As concentrated and emotionally effective compositions, the last two string quartets are among the most valuable works of this composer.” Tomáš Sika, “Tvorba Alexandra Moyzesa v rokoch 1955–1984” [The musical creation of Alexander Moyzes in the period 1955–1984], Slovenská hudba, 1-2/2000: 58.
folk music arrangements, choral works, as well as music for radio, television, film and theatre. The diversity of his output can be seen in the attached list of selected works (see Appendices).

The artist’s creative arch came to an end on the eve of the Perestroika: Alexander Moyzes expired in Bratislava on November 20, 1984.
CHAPTER II: SONATA IN E MINOR, OP. 2

Well-sounding and technically well crafted, the Sonata in E Minor shall certainly become a popular repertoire number of ambitious pianists.

—Ernest Zavarský

History has proved Ernest Zavarský simply wrong: Moyzes’s Sonata is nowadays rarely performed. Having failed to enter the pedagogic canon of “homemade” repertoire required at Conservatories and Academies, it remains almost forgotten among young pianists in Slovakia. One of the reasons of this oblivion is undoubtedly the elevated – although not transcendental – difficulty of its final fugue; another reason may be found in its relative – although intentional – old-fashionedness for the postwar musical world, preoccupied with the idea of “progress” conceived as linear unfolding toward a major complexity.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the origins of the Sonata can be traced back to Moyzes’s Prague years, more precisely between 1926–1927, when he groups seven compositional studies into his unpublished Seven Piano Pieces, Op. 2a, consisting of a Prelude, a Scherzo, an Adagio, and four fugues. The first three pieces together with one of the fugues constituted a suite called “Sketches” or “Studies”, which Moyzes heavily revised – essentially recomposed – in 1942. We are able today to reconstruct about a half of the original version from several surviving manuscripts, which were made available to me by Vladimír Godár. The Prelude survives in three versions: two for piano (dated September 20, 1927, and 1927 with no exact date) and one for organ (dated March 19, 1928 – this version was premiered at Moyzes’s graduate organ recital in 1928); the Scherzo is complete, dated March 27, 1927; the Adagio and the Fugue are lost.

64 Zavarský, Súčasná, 35.
Moyzes introduced himself as a composer in Bratislava for the first time at a concert dedicated to his and his father’s works in November 1928, with a program including his *Vest Pocket Suite*, his song cycle *Colors on a Palette*, and the Prelude, Adagio and Scherzo from Op. 2, presented as *Three Piano Pieces*. The young critic Ivan Ballo, an important voice of the interwar musical life, appreciated the apparent talent and the advanced compositional craft of Moyzes, but dismissed *Vest Pocket Suite* and *Colors on a Palette* as “superfluous” and as “luxury experimentation” of “questionable inspiration”. On the other hand, he spared no praise for the Adagio:

> From among the performed pieces, I would put in highest place the Adagio for piano; it does not deny Novák’s influence, but bears nevertheless a mark of personality, displaying healthy musicality and piquancy, conciseness in form and logical harmonic structure. It is Slovak and modern at the same time. Other pieces, structurally cohesive and technically brilliant, also demonstrate the readiness of the young composer; we can only look forward to his artistic development.67

The actual Sonata in E Minor was completed in the fall 1942 and had two premieres: the first was a radio performance by Heinrich Baumgartner on May 11, 1944; the second, by Zita Strnadová-Paráková, was a public concert at the Chamber of Music in March 1946. In 1947, *Matica Slovenská* published the Sonata as the first, representative music publication of its music section.68 The final version preserves the original order, except for combining the last two movements into one by an *attacca*: Praeludium – Scherzo – Adagio e Fuga. Zdenka Bokesová, the first reviewer of the Sonata in 1944, does not fail to notice that this structure adds up to a Baroque *sonata da chiesa*, rather than to the traditional design of the sonata cycle as known from the eighteenth century onward. The absence of a movement in sonata-allegro form only confirms this description.69 The genesis of the Prelude is easy to follow, as we know its original core: a thematic fragment suggested by Moyzes’s composition teacher Otakar Šín:

68 Zavarský, *Súčasná* 35.  
In the 1927 Prelude, Moyzes develops this rather insipid snippet into a more interesting asymmetrical 5+3 phrase, which still betrays the preoccupations of a student of counterpoint; from an instrumental point of view, the pianistic writing of this Prelude is uninteresting:

The 1942 revision expands the fragment into a cantabile theme of unusual length (fifteen measures), with decidedly romantic character – although sober in expression, being subdued by the neoclassical moto perpetuo of the sixteenth-note accompaniment:
The second theme, again, is an expansion of a smaller motivic fragment from the earlier Prelude (Figure 13), but its lack of clear contours contributes to a somewhat amorphous effect. The relentless sixteenth-note pulsation (uninterrupted until the very end of the movement) mitigates the harmonic contrast between the first and the second theme, the first being almost entirely diatonic and the second featuring surprising chromatic twists, including Debussy-like progression of parallel augmented triads in measure 34 (Figure 12).
Figure 12. Second theme of the 1st movement of Moyzes’s Sonata, beginning in m. 31.

Figure 13. Alexander Moyzes: thematic fragment from the 1927 Prelude used in the second theme of the Sonata’s 1st movement (second measure of the example)
The overall form of the Prelude is A (16 mm.) – A’ (15 mm.) – B (16 mm.) – B’ (10 mm.) – B’’ (10 mm.) – A’ (15 mm.) – B’’’ (12 mm.) leading to Coda (last 6 mm.). The late-Romantic monumentality of the coda creates an impression of slight imbalance; after five pages of smoothly flowing neoclassical texture, Moyzes surprises us by a sudden explosion of sound notated à la Rachmaninoff, a clear emulation of the 1928 organ ending (Figure 15). The coda combines an emphatic statement of the modified first theme (mm. 83–4) with a derivative of the second theme (the line C-D-E-A in m. 85, Figure 14).

Figure 14. Alexander Moyzes: Prelude from the 1942 Sonata, coda.
Compared to the Prelude, the two versions of the Scherzo are notably closer to each other in terms of internal structure (traditional Scherzo – Trio – Scherzo design), thematic material and its development.

In the 1942 version, Moyzes adds a vigorous fanfare-like introduction, probably to match the somewhat bombastic ending of the Prelude, expands the ending into a spectacular coda and provides the main theme with another neoclassical accompaniment (Figure 16). The thematic material is rendered more explicitly modal and reharmonized, most visibly in the Trio.
Figure 16. Alexander Moyzes: opening of the Scherzo from the 1941 Sonata.
In the Scherzo, the modality – or polymodality – of Moyzes’s mature idiom is most pronounced. In her preface to the first edition of the Sonata in 1947, Zdenka Bokesová describes the theme of the Scherzo as Mixolydian, while the Trio as Dorian. Although several later authors adopted this description, I do not find it entirely convincing, partly for the insistent presence of a C natural in a supposedly Mixolydian E scale, partly because the label of polymodality appears more precise: simultaneous occurrences of conflicting modalities are quite frequent. One example can be found in the ascending C – D – E line in the right hand over the left-hand major dominant sonority in mm. 306 (Figure 18). The only arguable weakness of the Scherzo can be found in the imitative episode of the Trio, where a two-measure motive is repeated and transposed several times with almost no variation (Figure 19).

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70 Bokesová, Sonáta.
Figure 18. Alexander Moyzes: polymodality in the ending of the Scherzo from the 1942 Sonata.

Figure 19. Alexander Moyzes: repetition of the Trio episode in mm. 179–6.
The Adagio and Fugue constitute the focal point of the Sonata and affirm the general cumulative tendency of the entire composition, directing the growing complexity and tension toward the last grandioso statement of the fugue subject. The movement begins with one of the most charming and authentically Slovak ideas of the Slovak piano music, and represents undoubtedly the most inspired moment of the Sonata, as noted by reviewers (Figure 20; see the previously quoted comments by Burlas and Ballo). Burlas identifies the Slovak elements in the Adagio as follows:

The Adagio is remarkable: it is an attempt to write an artificially created, but Slovak-sounding melody, based on quartal-system melodics with touches of Dorian modality. Major subdominant in minor key and non-harmonic minor sixth degree before the major dominant complete harmonically the peculiar colouring of the lyrically mellow melody. This “alla slovacca” of Moyzes was a gleam of one of the dominant stylistic features of Slovak Musical Modernism.\(^1\)

The Adagio consists of a theme with three variations. Both the theme and the variations preserve the same structure A (2 x 6 mm.) – B (6 mm.) – A (6 mm.) – C (8 + 5 mm). The pristine simplicity of the theme becomes somewhat overbearing in the repeated fortissimo statements of the third variation, but the accumulated intensity is funneled through an ostinato into the last variation – the massive, three-part fugue, occupying eleven pages of the piano score (Figure 21).

The form of the fugue could be thus summarized: A (3 complete statements of the subject, mm. 130 166) – B (1st episode, mm. 166 179) – A’ (2 complete statements of the subject in major, mm. 180 203) – C (2nd episode, mm. 204 218) – A” (2 complete statements of the subject 219 242) – B’ (1st episode transposed, mm. 243–254) – Stretta (mm. 255 – 270) – Coda (2 statements of the subject in chordal polyphony, mm. 271–296).

\(^{71}\) Ladislav Burlas, *Slovenská*, 72.
Figure 20. Alexander Moyzes: opening of the Adagio from the 1942 Sonata.
The extended, twelve measures long subject of the fugue pays a clear homage to Bach: after a melodic and easily recognizable head follows a relentless motion of sixteenth notes featuring inner polyphony, quite similar to the subject of the fugue from Bach’s Toccata in E Minor, BWV 914, or from the famous D-minor Toccata and Fugue, BWV 565. This neo-Baroque layer is accompanied by references to Bach’s works.
to previous movements, contributing to the cohesive organicity of the whole: while the head of the subject is derived from the Adagio, its Bachian portion recalls the left-and accompaniment of the Scherzo (related, in its turn, to the accompaniment in the Prelude). Moreover, the second countersubject of the Fugue (appearing for the first time in m. 155, see Figure 22) is a direct quote of an episodic motive in the second-theme section of the Prelude, stated more prominently in its coda (see Figure 23).

The Sonata employs other elements of internal cohesion as well. One of them deserves mention, as it appears in a number of Moyzes’s works: namely, the parallel motion of major triads in close harmony on the tonic, most frequently downward. In the Sonata, this device is found for the first time in the second theme of the Prelude (F-sharp major to E major over an E-major triad in the bass, m. 31) and subsequently repeated at the next occurrences of the same subject (mm. 35, 47, 51, and 71). It springs up again in the second variation of the Adagio (mm. 75, 81, and 92), in a very similar context: its purpose seems to be to delicately animate the newly established tonality (Figure 24).
Figure 23. Alexander Moyzes: Prelude from the 1942 Sonata, ending. The bass line motive serves later as the second countersubject of the last movement’s Fugue.

Figure 24. Alexander Moyzes: descending parallel triads in a) Prelude; b) Adagio.

Figure 25. Alexander Moyzes: parallel triads in Brigand Rhapsody, Op. 52.
The overall structure of the Sonata, despite its internal logic based on the alternating design of the Baroque sonata da chiesa, may appear ineffective or unconvincing to a modern listener: after all, the two centuries—from Haydn onward—of the sonata genre as we commonly understand it, have trained us to expect the most substantial musical events in the first movement of the cycle (this fact also constitutes the greatest problem of the cyclical sonata form). Moyzes’s, conversely, proceeds from less substantial (the restrained and somewhat bland poise of the Prelude) to the most ambitious and substantial (the weighty final Fugue, which engulfs the previous movements).

In one of his memorable articles, G. B. Shaw quips: “The standard precept runs: —Learn thoroughly how to compose a fugue, and then don’t. This is not to suggest that Moyzes should have avoided the fugue at all, but more weight (more motivic, contrapuntal and variation work) in the first two movements and less fugue in the actual Fugue would have likely resulted in a more effective design. This lesser formal flaw—or feature, if you prefer—is nevertheless compensated by a wealth of fresh musical ideas and by the beauty of the lyrical themes, enhanced by an effective and idiomatic pianistic writing.

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CONCLUSION

The present work was motivated mainly by my interest in Moyzes’s Sonata in E Minor as work of music and by my belief that it deserves much more attention from performers and scholars alike, although the considerable space devoted to Alexander Moyzes’s life and the historical circumstances surrounding his figure in the period preceding World War II might indicate a primarily historical approach. The Sonata can be naturally regarded as a mere document of its time: after all, it was completed in the middle of the war, in the years of Prokofiev’s Sixth and Seventh piano sonatas and of Shostakovich’s Seventh Symphony, and its “disengagement” – private withdrawal into the world of absolute music – can be considered a historical example of a viable alternative to the so-called “war music”. It definitely is a primary document of Slovak Musical Modernism or, in a wider perspective, of interwar musical expressions of minor European nations still – and inevitably – entangled in century-old nationalisms. It most definitely testifies the blatant disinterest of the members of Slovak musical community for works that contributed to shape, however indirectly, their musical identity.

Be that as it may, the Sonata is above all a work of music. What makes a work great is its intrinsic musical quality capable of resonating outside and regardless of its original context. “It is about the individual style… It matters not whether it is described as contemporary or as traditional. What matters is whether there is quality achieved in it, and whether it is you alone in that quality” (see note 1). The conditions of individual quality and of the independence of this quality from the dichotomy contemporary (read: innovative, modern) / traditional, postulated by Moyzes in the epigraph to the Introduction, are undoubtedly satisfied by our Sonata in E Minor; the present work attempts to demonstrate it. The individuality of Moyzes’s mixture of impressionism and polymodality with an essentially Romantic rhetoric clad in Baroque and Classical forms, governed by a strict organizational

73 For music analysis I personally prefer the keyboard of my piano rather than of my laptop.
logic, is apparent from the first encounter with the Sonata.

But is it enough? Can a decidedly tonal sonata da chiesa from 1942 appeal to a public uninterested in problems of minor musical cultures? Let me quote Glenn Gould:

And all of this would come to pass for no other reason than that we have never really become equipped to adjudicate music per se. Our sense of history is captive of an analytical method which seeks out isolated moments of stylistic upheaval – pivot points of idiomatic evolution – and our value judgments are largely based upon the degree to which we can assure ourselves that a particular artist participated in or, better yet, anticipated the nearest upheaval. Confusing evolution with accomplishment, we become blind to those values not explicit in an analogy with stylistic metamorphosis.74

Observing the gradual – and welcome – eclipse of the described optics in the past few decades, my answer to the above question is positive.

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Scores


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CD Recordings


APPENDICES

List of Selected Works

The following list combines the catalogs created by Ladislav Burlas (covering Moyzes’s output until 1955)\(^75\) and Tomáš Sika (covering the period between 1955 and 1984),\(^76\) and compares them with the exhaustive catalog compiled by the Musical Center of Bratislava.\(^77\) It includes most compositions with opus number, while excluding earlier or alternative versions of the same opus numbers and selections or extracts thereof.

*Miesto venca* [Instead of a wreath], Op. 1, for men’s chorus, on poems by S. Hurban Vajanský, E. B. Lukáč, and M. Rázus (1924–25, rev. 1942)

*Ave Maria*, for voice and organ (1926, rev. 1980)

*Sedem klavírnych skladeb* [Seven piano pieces], Op. 2a (1926–27, rev. 1929)


*Dva zbory* [Two choruses], Op. 3, poems by E. B. Lukáč and J. Ferenčík (1927)

*Slow fox* for piano (1927)

*Charleston* for piano (1927)

*Dve štúdie vo forme Prelúdia a Fúgy* [Two studies in the form of Prelude and Fugue] for piano (1927, rev. 1970)


*Farby na palette* [Colors on a palette], Op. 5, for voice and piano, poems by L. Novomeský (1928)

*Vest Pocket Suite*, Op. 6, for violin and piano (1928)


\(^76\) Sika, 55–7.

String Quartet No. 1 in A Minor, Op. 8 (1929, rev. 1942)

*Dvanášť ludových piesní zo Šariša* [12 folk songs from the Šariš region], Op. 9, for voice and piano (1929)

*Symfonická ouvertúra* [Symphonic overture], Op. 10, for large orchestra (1929)

*Komorná suita* [Chamber suite], orig. Op. 11, for jazz ensemble (1930)

*O Martičke* [About Martička], orig. Op. 11, for piano (1930)

Divertimento, Op. 11, for piano (1930)

Divertimento, Op. 11, for small orchestra (1930)

*Demontáž (Sinfonia cantata)* [Dismantling], Op. 12, for tenor, choir and orchestra, text by Ján Rob-Poničan (1930–32)

*Detské pesničky* [Children’s songs], Op. 13, for voice and piano, poems by Ľudmila Podjavorinská (1930–32)

*Jazzová sonáta* [Jazz sonata], Op. 14, for two pianos (1930, rev. 1971)

*Na horách spievajú…* [They sing on the Mountains…], Op. 15, for solo voices and orchestra (1933)

Symphony No. 2 in A Minor, Op. 16, for large orchestra (1932, rev. 1941)

Wind Quintet in B-Flat Major, Op. 17a (1933)

Concertino, Op. 18, for orchestra (1933; revised in 1941, completed and orchestrated by Ivan Hrušovský in 1995 as *Piano Concerto*, Op. posth.)

*Cesta* [A journey], Op. 19, song cycle for higher voice and orchestra on poems by Laco Novomeský (1933, rev. 1943)

*Milan Rastislav Štefánik*, Op. 20, music for a film by Jan Sviták (1934)

*Jánošíkovi chlapci* [Jánošík’s boys], Op. 21, overture for orchestra (1934, rev. 1941)

*Nikola Šuhaj*, Op. 22, dramatic overture for large orchestra (1934)

*Ľudovít Štúr*, Op. 23, music for a radio drama by Ľudo Zúbek (1934)


*Svätopluk*, Op. 25, scenic cantata / radio opera for soloists, choir and orchestra, on text by Ľudo Zúbek and the composer, after Ján Hollý (1935)
Tri dvojspevy [Three duets], Op. 26, for children’s voices and piano, on texts by Mária Rázusová-Martáková (1935)

Dolu Váhom [Down the river Váh], Op. 26, suite for large orchestra (1945)

Hájnikova žena [Forester’s wife], Op. 27, music for a radio drama by Ludo Zúbek, after Pavol Országh-Hviezdoslav (1936)

Ludové piesne a tance zo zbierky Anny Szirmay–Keczerovej [Folk songs and dances from the collection of Anna Szirmay-Keczerová], Op. 28, for voice, flute, violin and guitar (1936)

Hamlet, Op. 29, music for a radio drama after Shakespeare (1935)


Hore dedinou [Up the village], Op. 31, folksongs for soloists and chamber orchestra (1937)

Šesti ľudových piesní [Six folksongs], Op. 32, for bass, flute and piano (1938)

Spievajú, hrajú, tancujú… [Singing, playing, dancing…], Op. 33, folksongs from eastern Slovakia from the collection of Karol Plicka, for soloists and orchestra (1938)

Žatva [The harvest], Op. 34, music for a short film by J. Filkorn (1942)

Poetická suita [Poetic suite], Op. 35, for violin and piano (1940)

Sinfonia da chiesa, Op. 36, for soloists, choir, organ and orchestra, (1941–42)

Symphony No. 3 in B-Flat Major, Op. 17b ("Little Symphony"), orchestration of the Wind Quintet, Op. 17 (1942)

Či organy hrajú [Are the organs playing], Op. 37, for men’s, women’s and mixed choir (1940–47)

Symphony No. 4 in B-Flat Major, Op. 38, for large orchestra (1947, rev. 1957)


Znejú piesne na chotári [Songs resound across the valley], Op. 40, suite for soloists, choir and large orchestra (1948)

Oživená hlina [Clay made live], Op. 41, music for a short film by Karol Skřipský (1948)

Hudba k prvému programu SLUK-u [Music for the first program of the Slovak Folk Art Collective], Op. 42, for soloists, choir and orchestra (1949)

Tance z Pohronia [Dances from Pohronie], Op. 43, for large orchestra (1950)
Hudba pre SLUK [Music for the Slovak Folk Art Collective], Op. 44, for soloists, choir and orchestra (1950-52)

Symphony No. 6 in E Major, Op. 45 (“Pioneers’ Symphony”) (1950–51)

Chceme mier! [We Want Peace!], Op. 46, people’s cantata for soloists, choir and orchestra (1951)

Hukostav si postavíme [We will build the Hukostav], Op. 47, workers’ song (1951)

Februárová [February Overture], Op. 48, overture for large orchestra (1952)

Mladé srdcia [Young hearts], Op. 49, music for a film by Václav Kubásek (1952)

Symphony No. 7, Op. 50, for large orchestra (1954–55)

Zbojnícka rapsódia [Brigand rhapsody], Op. 52, for piano (1957)


Ty krásna zem [Thou, the beautiful land], Op. 54, for men’s choir, text by Ján Rob-Poničan (1958)


V jeseni [In fall], Op. 56, song cycle for mezzo-soprano and piano (orchestra), on poems by Ján Kostra (1960)

Tance z Gemera [Dances from Gemer], Op. 57, suite for large orchestra (1955)

Malé trio [Little trio], Op. 58, for violin, viola and cello (1962)

Ranná rosa [Morning dew], Op. 59, song cycle for mezzo-soprano and piano (orchestra), on poems by Vojtech Mihálík (1963)

Udatný kráľ [The valorous king], Op. 60, opera, libretto by the author, after Ján Hollý’s Svätopluk, (1965–66)


Koledy [Christmas carols], Op. 62, for choir (1966)

Malá sonáta (Sonata piccola) [Little Sonata], Op. 63, for violin and piano (1967–68)

Symphony No. 8, Op. 64, for large orchestra (1968–1969)

Reworking of Mikuláš Moyzes’s Missa solemnis, Op. 65 (1968-69)

String Quartet No. 2 in D, Op. 66 (1969)

Symphony No. 9, Op. 69, for large orchestra (1970–71)

Stráž domova [Guard of the homeland], Op. 70, symphonic overture for orchestra (1972)

Vatry na horách [Beacons on the mountains], Op. 71, symphonic suite for large orchestra (1971)

Pesničky [Little songs], Op. 72, six songs for children’s choir (1974)

Musica Istropolitana, Op. 73, overture concertante for chamber orchestra (1974)


Sonatina, Op. 75, for flute a guitar (1975)

Povest’ o Jánosikovi [The legend of Jánošík], Op. 76, rhapsodic suite for large orchestra (1976)

Symphony No. 10, Op. 77, for large orchestra (1977–78)

Symphony No. 11, Op. 79, for large orchestra (1978)

Ej, dolina, dolina [Oh valley, valley], Op. 80a, for soloists, choir and orchestra (1980)

Hráme v našom orchestri [Playing in our orchestra], Op. 81, for string orchestra (1980)


Symphony No. 12, Op. 83, for large orchestra (1983)

String Quartet No. 4, Op. 84 (“Dedicated to Quartet of My Name”), (1983)
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