

Nearly Forgotten „Viola of Love“

When I listened to classical music on the *Czech Radio 3 - Vltava* lately, I pricked up my ears - they were giving music by Antonio Vivaldi, namely one of his six Concertos for Viola d'amore and stringed orchestra. Viola d'amore is almost forgotten instrument in Czech Republic; it is only Mrs. Dagmar Mašková, a violist of Prague Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra, who sometimes performs on this rare instrument.

First written remarks on the viola d'amore, which is characterized by sympathetic (or resounding) strings dates back to 17th Century. It was most popular in 18th Century and it remained in general awareness mainly thanks to its use in operas - especially in the solo in Meyerbeer's opera *The Huguenots*.

The classical form of the viola d'amore was created by Prague luthier Johann Udalricus Eberle (1699-1768). At the onset of romantics in 19th Century, there was decline of interest in this instrument, whose subtle tone was not suited for large concert halls. However, there was some renaissance of the viola d'amore in 20th Century owing to composers who were looking for new expression means. It was e.g. Paul Hindemith who performed on viola d'amore and wrote two interesting compositions for it. Czech composer Leoš Janáček “fell in love” in the viola d'amore probably thanks to Rudolf Reissig, professor at Prague Conservatory, who was also teaching at Organ School in Brno headed by Janáček. There are viola d'amore solos in several operas by Janáček and he also imagined the voice of viola d'amore when composing his *Symfonieta*. The “viola of love” also was the protagonist in the original version of his string quartet “Intimate Letters”.

Playing the viola d'amore is now promoted by The *Viola d'amore Society of America*, which organizes international congresses every second year, alternatively in United States and in Europe.

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