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Preface

Among the defining new musical genres of nineteenth-century Romanticism was the solo instrumental ballade. First championed by Frédéric Chopin in the 1830s, this genre of evocative works remained most significantly a pianistic one, though ballades for string instruments began to appear as early as the 1840s and with increasing frequency after 1860.¹ Similar works for woodwinds, however, remained rare until closer to the turn of the twentieth century, perhaps due in part to the scant attention paid to wind instruments at that time by composers in the parts of Europe where the ballade genre was most popular. The discovery of the present Ballade in E minor for bassoon and piano, written in the southeast of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1879, is therefore quite remarkable, especially given the relative scarcity of solo bassoon music in the mid-nineteenth century. This colorful, expressive work not only expands both the geographic and stylistic profiles of the late-Romantic bassoon solo repertoire but also sheds some light on a corner of nineteenth-century music history otherwise little represented in modern editions.

About the Composer

There were two nineteenth-century Czech musicians, a father and son, by the name of Josef Vendelín Hájek. Of Josef the elder (fl. 1862–84) little biographical information can be ascertained from available sources—even his birth and death years are unknown—and only a few details about Josef the younger (1855–93) can be established.² Although what little information about these two men has survived to the present day often confuses or conflates the two, the evidence suggests that Josef the elder was the more active composer and thus probably responsible for the present work.

The Hájek family apparently came from Prague. It is known that Josef the younger received his musical education at the Prague Conservatory,³ as likely did his father. Josef the elder did not remain in the city but instead embarked eastward on a career as a music pedagogue in the central and southeastern parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Beginning in 1862 he taught flute and violin at the newly opened conservatory in Vršac, Serbia, then went on to cofound a music academy in Timișoara, Romania, with his son-in-law and fellow composer, Franjo Vilhar-Kalski (1852–1928), around 1873.⁴ It seems that Josef the younger joined the rest of his family in Timișoara at about the same time; as such, it becomes difficult to discern whether subsequent references to “Josef Hájek” denote father or son. Regardless, the name appeared sporadically in newspapers into the early 1880s, usually cited as the conductor of ensembles associated with the Timișoara Philharmonic Association.⁵

In 1886 Josef the younger left Timișoara to work as a music pedagogue and conductor in Split, Croatia. There he continued to play chamber music with his brother-in-law, Vilhar-Kalski, who had returned to his native Croatia a few years earlier, and composed a handful of works for marching band. In 1892 he accepted a teaching position in Petrinja, Croatia, where he died the following year.⁶

Little is known of the Hájek’s compositional activities. Between 1877 and 1880, several pieces—all likely by Josef the elder—were published in the Viennese periodical *Deutsche Kunst- und Musik-Zeitung* (1877–1902), mostly light piano solos but also a few chamber pieces with strings. The only other Hájek composition known to survive, which musicologist Franz Metz also attributes to Josef the elder,⁷ is the *Scherzpolka “An das Mädchens Auge,”* op. 112, for male chorus and piano, composed sometime after the family’s move to Timișoara in 1872. On at least two occasions, one of the two men performed an original ballade for violoncello, once in 1878 and again during the summer of 1880.⁸ At the latter concert, in the Czech town of Litomyšl, he also played four of his own piano works. An anonymous review in the music magazine *Dalibor* commended whichever Hájek it was for “the depth and richness of his compositional ideas,” declaring him a very gifted composer and a promising talent.⁹ These contemporary accolades notwithstanding, no music by either Hájek appears to have been published after 1880, and almost none of their manuscripts are presently accounted for. Whether the remainder of their respective oeuvres are held in private collections, hidden away in archives, or have simply been lost over time is a question that remains to be answered.

The Music of the Edition

Hájek’s Ballade survives in two versions, one for bassoon and the other for violin, both labeled opus 151 and dating from 1879. Whether these are further adaptations of Hájek’s violoncello ballade or a separate composition is unknown. While the bassoon version exists only in manuscript, the violin version was published in the *Deutsche Kunst- und Musik-Zeitung*.¹⁰ The latter seems to have been written first: in several spots, its readings match those that are still visible but obviously later corrected in the bassoon manuscript. Both incarnations of the piece are tailored to the capabilities and characteristics of their respective solo instruments, particularly within the recitatives.

Like Antonín Dvořák’s popular opus 15 for violin and piano, composed a few years later in 1884, Hájek’s work belongs to the genre that musicologist James Parakilas labels the “sad-song ballade”: a relatively simple, melancholy solo instrumental work with accompaniment, with less technical virtuosity and “exotic”

Ballade in E Minor, Op. 151

Josef Vendelín Hájek
ed. Alex Widstrand

Recit.

Bassoon

Piano

4

tr.

allargando

rit.

tr.

*allargando*¹

rit.

12/8

8

Andante

p

Andante

p

12/8

11

1. zdlouha

14

14

p

p

This system contains measures 14, 15, and 16. It features a vocal line in the upper staff and a piano accompaniment in the lower two staves. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The piano part includes a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include piano (*p*) and a crescendo leading to piano (*p*).

ossia

17

ossia

17

This system contains measures 17, 18, and 19. It includes an *ossia* (alternative) version of the vocal line above the main vocal staff. The piano accompaniment continues with complex rhythmic patterns. Dynamics include piano (*p*) and a crescendo.

20

20

This system contains measures 20, 21, and 22. The piano accompaniment features a prominent bass line with a melodic line in the right hand. Dynamics include piano (*p*) and a crescendo.

23

rit. [a tempo]

p

rit. [a tempo]

p

mf

23

rit. [a tempo]

p

mf

This system contains measures 23, 24, and 25. It includes a *rit.* (ritardando) marking followed by *[a tempo]*. The piano accompaniment features a complex rhythmic pattern in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include piano (*p*) and mezzo-forte (*mf*).

Ballade in E Minor, Op. 151

Josef Vendelín Hájek
ed. Alex Widstrand

Recit.

4 *tr.* *allargando* *rit.* *tr.* 12/8

8 *Andante* *p*

12

ossia

16 *p*

21 *rit.* *a tempo* *p*