

Musical Treasure Chest #27

One of the delights of working at WMHT-FM was my access to their record library (CDs were a new thing back in the early 80s!). With a collection that could rival any, there were shelf after shelf of LPs. And not just the familiar big labels such as Columbia and RCA, but obscure eastern European and Russian labels such as Supraphon and Melodiya. Working overnights allowed me unfettered access to this trove of music. Night after night, since I was allowed to do my own programming, I would select pieces that I wanted to discover, whether works that I did not already know of familiar composers or completely unknown (to me) composers and their repertory. I wasn't completely non-discriminate since I had a listening audience to keep in mind. In the library was a phonograph where we could preview the LPs, and I would make certain I picked accessible and good quality repertory. Over the six plus years I worked there, I "discovered" some quite wonderful composers and their music, and I thought today I would share two of those pieces.

Jan Hugo Vorisek was a Bohemian composer who lived from 1891-1825. He trained as a pianist and organist, spending most of his professional life in Vienna, where he hoped to meet Beethoven (and eventually he did). He worked, after reluctantly studying to be a lawyer and initial employment as one, as an organist and as a conductor for the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* (a prestigious musical society) in Vienna. He was well respected as both a performer and composer. His short life did not allow for a large musical output, but he left us with both an exciting Mass and a fabulous **Symphony in D minor**. The symphony, which demonstrates great compositional agility and promise could easily be mistaken for a Schubert symphony. With memorable melodies, great driving inner harmonies, brilliant instrumental writing and true compositional cohesion, this symphony deserves to be programmed on orchestral concerts. I give you a live performance with Reinhard Goebels, a musician who has done much to shine a light on some undeservedly neglected repertory and who is also a fantastic baroque violinist. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ck3GMJondxQ>

Sometimes labeled the Swedish Mozart, **Josef Martin Kraus** shares almost

exactly his dates—1756-1792—and a certain similarity to his style. Born in Germany and a great early talent, Kraus, like Vorisek, also was pushed to study law, but persevered and eventually (after a period of great poverty) established himself as a professional musician in the employment of King Gustav III in Stockholm. A fascinating man, who also penned poetry and wrote his own libretti for his sacred music and operas, Kraus at Gustav's expense was sent on a tour for five years of Europe to meet other musicians and artists. He spent time with Haydn at Esterhaza and while there wrote a symphony to be played by its orchestra. Dating from the mid 1780s, the work shares much in common with Haydn's *Sturm und Drang* symphonies. Haydn remarked to a Swedish diplomat years later: "The symphony he wrote here in Vienna especially for me will be regarded as a masterpiece for centuries to come; believe me, there are few people who can compose something like that." I concur! And it is that **C-minor symphony** which he wrote for Esterhaza, which I include today for you. The opening introduction with its slowly unfolding lines offers a bit of mystery, followed by a transition to the allegro section in a *piano* (soft) dynamic that grabs our attention. The slow movement could easily be mistaken for Haydn (and in fact some of Kraus's symphonies were published under Haydn's name in Paris). The exciting and unrelenting, almost breathless, last movement refers back to the slow melodic frame of the first movement introduction, which adds a great sense of unity to the work.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qg9CBBd3vZ8>