

Charles University

Faculty of Arts

Institute of Musicology



**“This is My Country”: The Politics of the Smetana Centenary
Celebrations on the Brink of the New Republic**

**„To je Má vlast“: Politika oslav Smetanova stoletého výročí
na prahu nové republiky**

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Prague, 14 January 2024

Pavel Kodýtek

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Abstract

Smetana's *Má vlast* (My Country) has long held a unique place in Czech national culture and is considered one of the constitutive elements of the Smetana myth in popular consciousness. Over forty years ago, in musicological discourse, Vladimír Léb1 and Jitka Ludvová (1981) advocated for “removing the layers” of the Smetana myth, challenging the prevailing notion of Smetana as the sole genius by mapping the contemporary roots of *Má vlast*. Only recently, however, have musicologists begun to uncover the layers of the myth to a more serious degree, among them Brian S. Locke (2006), Christopher Campo-Bowen (2016), and Kelly St. Pierre (2017).

This thesis contributes to this discussion by exploring the meanings of *Má vlast* and the Smetana myth in the context of the 1924 Smetana centenary celebrations. It reveals how the myth was repurposed by various stakeholders to justify diverse cultural policies and demonstrates that the different, overtly political interpretations were primarily a product of the ideologies and interests of these protagonists. The study also highlights the crucial role of the Czechoslovak government in enabling the celebrations and its use of them to achieve particular political objectives. Drawing on period sources, including archival materials, journal, and newspaper articles, as well as monographs, this study uncovers the dynamics of negotiation between various interest groups and the state in shaping the celebrations.

In broader terms, the study contributes to understanding how the identities of Czechs and Germans in the First Czechoslovak Republic were negotiated, and the role played by the consumption of Smetana's music in this process.

Key Words

Symphonic poem, Bedřich Smetana, *Má vlast*, My Country, Reception, Cultural politics, Nationalism, Czech, German, First Czechoslovak Republic

Abstrakt

Smetanova *Má vlast* zaujímá v české národní kultuře dlouhodobě jedinečné místo a je považována za jeden z konstitutivních prvků smetanovského mýtu zakotveného v obecném povědomí. Před více než čtyřiceti lety se v muzikologickém diskurzu Vladimír Lébl a Jitka Ludvová (1981) vyslovili pro “odstraňování nánosů” smetanovského mýtu a zpochybnili převládající představu o Smetanovi jako jediném géniovi zmapováním dobových kořenů *Mé vlasti*. Teprve v posledních letech však začali muzikologové vrstvy mýtu ve větší míře odkrývat, mezi nimi Brian S. Locke (2006), Christopher Campo-Bowen (2016) a Kelly St. Pierre (2017).

Tato práce přispívá do této diskuse zkoumáním významů *Mé vlasti* a Smetanova mýtu v kontextu oslav stého výročí Smetanova narození v roce 1924. Odhaluje, jak byl mýtus různými aktéry přetvářen k ospravedlnění různých kulturních politik, a ukazuje, že různé, veskrze politické interpretace byly především výsledkem ideologií a zájmů těchto protagonistů. Studie rovněž zdůrazňuje klíčovou roli československého státu při realizaci oslav a to, jak je využil k dosažení konkrétních politických cílů. Na základě dobových pramenů, včetně archivních materiálů, časopiseckých a novinových článků a monografií, odhaluje tato studie dynamiku vyjednávání mezi různými zájmovými skupinami a státem při formování podoby oslav.

V širším kontextu přispívá tato studie k pochopení toho, jak byly vyjednány identity Čechů a Němců v první Československé republice a jakou roli při tom hrála konzumace Smetanovy hudby.

Klíčová slova

Symfonická báseň, Bedřich Smetana, *Má vlast*, Recepce, Kulturní politika, Nacionalismus, Český, Německý, První Československá republika

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Motto

And the dead master walked his path anew.

Where he stepped, grew respect and fervor bright —

content, we read these tales of far and near

and praised him, undisputed in our sight,

for a nation poor, to the world unknown,

takes pride in each great son as its own gem

and claims his glory as its honor, shown...¹

J. S. Machar, “Bedřich Smetana”

¹ “A mrtvý mistr šel svou cestou dál. / Kam vkročil, rostl hold a nadšení — / my spokojeně četli zprávy ty / a chválili jej všichni nesporně, / neb národ chudák, světu neznámý, / se pyšní každým synem velikým / a slávu jeho za svou bere čest...” J.S. Machar, “Bedřich Smetana,” in *Příručka k Smetanovým oslavám ve škole*, ed. Bohumil Tožička (Praha: Ústřední nakladatelství a knihkupectví učitelstva československého, 1924), 16.

Translation by OpenIA's ChatGPT.

Introduction

The year 1924 brought one of the greatest musical celebrations in the modern history of the Czech lands—the celebration of Smetana’s centenary. On his birthday, 2 March, all Czech newspapers published special festive editions, with the opening page dedicated to the composer (see Figure 1). Typically, this featured his portrait accompanied by a profile. Some periodicals devoted several pages to articles about the composer or put out a separate supplement dedicated to him.

Throughout the year, large part of Czechoslovakia witnessed an unprecedented surge of interest in the composer and his music.² Across many locales in the country, festive performances of his works—from solo and chamber pieces to orchestral compositions and operas—were scheduled. His cycle of symphonic poems, *Má vlast* (My Country), was presented by both professional and amateur orchestras, with the cumulative number of performances estimated to reach one hundred (based on this author’s survey). Performances of Smetana’s music were often complemented by a narrative. Program notes to performances included interpretative texts. Talks were given, either accompanying performances, or scheduled separately. These often delved more into the significance of Smetana for the nation than into his music. Dozens of books on Smetana were published that year; in including several biographies, studies on specific compositions, and accounts documenting the centenary celebrations. Finally, several monuments dedicated to the composer were unveiled, and in Brno, the capital of Moravia, a foundation in his honor was established. Such a level of activity dedicated to a composer has not been recorded since in the Czech lands.

One is naturally prompted to enquire about the catalyst behind such colossal interest in a deceased musician, moreover, an interest that transcended social classes.

² The centenary celebrations were taking place in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia, but also in Slovakia. This study focuses on celebrations in Prague, Brno, and Moravia more generally, as well as in Aussig. Other locales are discussed to supplement the main arguments.

České slovo

V Praze v neděli 2. března 1924.

Číslo 23. Ročník XXX.

Ústřední orgán Republikánské strany zemědělské a malorolnické (č. 23)

V den sváteční.

TVŮRCE ČESKÉ HUDBY

BE. DRICH SMETANA. NAROZEN 2. BŘEZNA 1824 V LITOMŠLI.



FEUILLETON

VENKOV

V Praze v neděli 2. března 1924.

Číslo 23. Ročník XXX.

Ústřední orgán Republikánské strany zemědělské a malorolnické (č. 23)

V den sváteční.

TVŮRCE ČESKÉ HUDBY

BE. DRICH SMETANA. NAROZEN 2. BŘEZNA 1824 V LITOMŠLI.



FEUILLETON

NÁRODNÍ LISTY

V Praze v neděli 2. března 1924.

Číslo 61. Ročník XXXIII.

Ústřední orgán Republikánské strany zemědělské a malorolnické (č. 23)

V den sváteční.

TVŮRCE ČESKÉ HUDBY

BE. DRICH SMETANA. NAROZEN 2. BŘEZNA 1824 V LITOMŠLI.



FEUILLETON

RUDE PRAVO

V Praze v neděli 2. března 1924.

Číslo 7084. Ročník XXXIII.

Ústřední orgán Komunistické strany Československa (č. 23)

V den sváteční.

TVŮRCE ČESKÉ HUDBY

BE. DRICH SMETANA. NAROZEN 2. BŘEZNA 1824 V LITOMŠLI.



FEUILLETON

ČESKOSLOVENSKÁ REPUBLIKA

V Praze v neděli 2. března 1924.

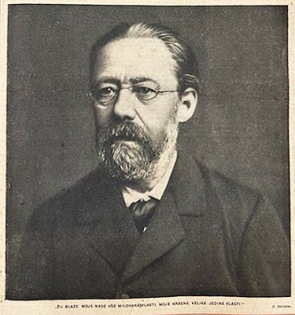
Číslo 61. Ročník CXXLV.

Ústřední orgán Republikánské strany zemědělské a malorolnické (č. 23)

V den sváteční.

TVŮRCE ČESKÉ HUDBY

BE. DRICH SMETANA. NAROZEN 2. BŘEZNA 1824 V LITOMŠLI.



FEUILLETON

LIDOVÉ NOVINY

V Praze v neděli 2. března 1924.

Číslo 116. Ročník XXXIII.

Ústřední orgán Republikánské strany zemědělské a malorolnické (č. 23)

V den sváteční.

TVŮRCE ČESKÉ HUDBY

BE. DRICH SMETANA. NAROZEN 2. BŘEZNA 1824 V LITOMŠLI.



FEUILLETON

ČESKOSLOVENSKÁ SAMOSTATNOST

V Praze v neděli 2. března 1924.

Číslo 174. Ročník XXXIII.

Ústřední orgán Republikánské strany zemědělské a malorolnické (č. 23)

V den sváteční.

TVŮRCE ČESKÉ HUDBY

BE. DRICH SMETANA. NAROZEN 2. BŘEZNA 1824 V LITOMŠLI.



FEUILLETON

NÁRODNÍ POLITIKA

V Praze v neděli 2. března 1924.

Číslo 41. Ročník XXXIII.

Ústřední orgán Republikánské strany zemědělské a malorolnické (č. 23)

V den sváteční.

TVŮRCE ČESKÉ HUDBY

BE. DRICH SMETANA. NAROZEN 2. BŘEZNA 1824 V LITOMŠLI.



FEUILLETON

ČESKOSLOVENSKÝ DENÍK

V Praze v neděli 2. března 1924.

Číslo 60. Ročník XXXIII.

Ústřední orgán Republikánské strany zemědělské a malorolnické (č. 23)

V den sváteční.

TVŮRCE ČESKÉ HUDBY

BE. DRICH SMETANA. NAROZEN 2. BŘEZNA 1824 V LITOMŠLI.



FEUILLETON

Figure 1 The opening pages of some Czech newspapers on the date of the centenary

Olga Mojžíšová, a Czech scholar specializing in Smetana, articulated in her 2012 text what can be labeled as the dominant interpretation of the centenary in Czech scholarly discourse:

The Smetana “cult” (in a positive way) came to life during the [World W]ar I, continued after the foundation of Czechoslovakia and culminated with celebrations of the 100th anniversary of Smetana's birth in 1924. They took place in the whole republic and on all levels of social and music life — in Prague and small villages, from top professional interpretation performances to amateurs. The peak was performances of all Smetana's concerts and operas, representing Czech art with important ensembles. Presence of foreign delegations, numerous productions of Smetana's works abroad and Smetana-related celebrations in some countries provided an international dimension to the anniversary. Monuments and plaques in Smetana-related places and a great exhibition in Prague were included in the celebrations, as well. We can consider these celebrations to be the absolute peak of Smetana activities, which have not been equaled since. It may be surprising that only one voluntary group [the Board for the Erection of a Monument to Bedřich Smetana in Prague] was the initiator and coordinator.³

In a recent publication, another scholar specializing in Smetana, Kateřina Viktorová, interpreted the celebrations as “an expression of the nation's respect for its own genius [Smetana].” She also attributed them to “the patriotism of the early period of the First Republic.” Furthermore, Viktorová underscored the omnipresence of the Board for the Erection of a Monument to Bedřich Smetana in Prague, the institution mentioned as key to the celebrations also by Mojžíšová, in the festivities, including unveiling plaques, delivering lectures, and publishing books and music editions.⁴ Much of the existing discourse that discusses the centenary celebrations focuses on activities of the Board with events taking

³ Olga Mojžíšová, “The Legacy of Bedřich Smetana — The Development and Changes in His Reception,” in *National Identity/ies in Czech Music*, ed. Lenka Dohnalová, 1st ed (Prague: Arts and Theatre Institute: Czech Music Council, 2012), particularly p. 38–39.

⁴ “Oslavy byly projevem úcty národa ke svému géniu a souvisely i s vlastenectvím počátečního období první republiky.” Kateřina Viktorová, “Dynamika recepce Smetanovy tvůrčí osobnosti a jeho operního díla do roku 1924 [The dynamics of the reception of Smetana's creative personality and his operatic work until 1924],” *Musicologica Brunensia*, no. 1 (2021): at 38–39, <https://doi.org/10.5817/MB2021-1-2>.

place mostly in Prague.⁵ While these accounts highlight the visible elements, they largely refrain from exploring the deeper significance for its actors and participants. When examining the driving forces behind the celebrations, the scholarly discourse frequently references the activities of the Board, yet almost never delves into a comprehensive analysis of the motivations of its actors, their goals, and the strategies they employed to achieve them. When activities in other parts of the country are discussed, the scholarly accounts usually stay on the surface.⁶ The resulting portrayal suggests festivities as if they emerged spontaneously from the nation's unadulterated affection for its great composer.

In my thesis, I argue against this image as a mythmaking simplification. It tends to overlook the complex interplay of negotiations between various actors that were the ones shaping the celebrations. It also neglects the role of key institutions—notably the government's critical financing role. And the focus on events in Prague risks unintentionally rendering the celebrations, which took place in many locales across the state (primarily in the Czech lands, but also in Slovakia), as a singular, homogenous event.

Drawing from a comprehensive examination of archival documents, contemporary media coverage, and the latest historiographical discourse, I aim to present a more nuanced perspective. The picture that emerges is of a multifaceted endeavor that not only underscores the centrality of classical music in shaping Czech national identity but also brings to light diverse notions of coexisting in and identifying with the new state. These notions, championed by different stakeholders varying in nationality, socio-economic status, political affiliations, and place of residence, witnessed varying degrees of success.

As observed by some, Czech musicology was for most of the twentieth century unable to look at the narrative around Smetana from a critical distance and largely replicated the

⁵ See particularly Jiří Křesťan, "Sbor pro postavení pomínku Bedřichu Smetanovi v jubilejním roce 1924 [Board for the erection of a memorial to Bedřich Smetana in the jubilee year 1924]," in *Od středověkých bratrstev k moderním spolkům: sborník referátů a materiálů ze 17. vědecké konference Archivu hlavního města Prahy, uspořádané [...] ve dnech 5. a 6. října 1999, Praha*, ed. Václav Ledvinka and Jiří Pešek (*Od středověkých bratrstev k moderním spolkům*, Praha: Scriptorium, 2000), the centenary celebrations are discussed on p. 299–304.

⁶ See for example Rudolf Pečman, *Vladimír Helfert, Osobnosti* (Brno: Nadace Universitas Masarykiana, 2003), 87–88.

historical myth rather than analyze it.⁷ One notable exception was Vladimír Lébl and Jitka Ludvová, who in their 1981 text, not only viewed *Má vlast* as a product of its time but also advocated for stripping away the layers of the Smetana myth in general.⁸ For this very reason, much of the recent musicological work that uncovered the layers of the meaning around Smetana and his compositions came from outside of the Czech Republic.

Brian C. Locke in his seminal *Opera and Ideology in Prague* focused on the political role of music in the first four decades of the twentieth century but also offered extensive insights into the surrounding cultural and political context. Generally, he underlined the importance of music in forming the collective identity in Prague at the time, which he said far surpassed its role in other European capitals of the time.⁹ According to Locke, three ideologies were intertwined in the discourse: nationalism, modernism, and art's social responsibility. As all these concepts were mere constructions, a lively discourse existed around what qualified as true national art and what did not. For instance, as Locke very aptly noted, the concept of modernism strangely froze in time and thus Smetana and some of his peers “were held by many Czech critics and composers to be ‘modern’ long past the currency of their style in the rest of Europe.”¹⁰ Locke fittingly described the dynamics of the transformation of the style of Smetana into the quintessence of Czechness during the nineteenth century:

[T]he musical ideologues of Prague [...] were [...] supported by a battery of like-minded journalists whose rhetoric helped to define and strengthen the terms of the discourse surrounding the concept of a modern “Czech” music. [...] Smetana’s followers very quickly converted the musical elements of the composer’s style that were, by and large, a personal variation on current Central European models into an ahistorical symbol of ethnicity.¹¹

⁷ Kelly St. Pierre, *Bedřich Smetana: Myth, Music, and Propaganda*, Eastman Studies in Music, v. 139 (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2017), 102–108.

⁸ See Vladimír Lébl and Jitka Ludvová, “Dobové kořeny a souvislosti *Mé vlasti* [Contemporary Roots and Context of *Má vlast*],” *Hudební věda* 18, no. 2 (1981): 100–141.

⁹ Brian S. Locke, *Opera and Ideology in Prague: Polemics and Practice at the National Theater 1900-1938* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 4.

¹⁰ Locke, 5.

¹¹ Locke, 7.

Christopher Campo-Bowen, focusing on Smetana's operatic repertory, provided a look into the "cultural diplomacy" in the times of the Czechoslovak Republic relating to the premiere of Smetana's *Prodaná nevěsta* (The Bartered Bride) in Paris in 1928.¹² This evidences the centrality of Smetana's music in the efforts of the Czechoslovak Republic to paint abroad a picture of a culturally mature nation. As will be demonstrated, this phenomenon was also relevant to the centenary celebration projects.

In her pioneering monograph on Smetana, Kelly St. Pierre investigated the formation of the Smetana myth. She accented the role of institutions, particularly the *Umělecká beseda* (Artistic society) and its *Matice hudební* (Musical League) in turning the composer into a national monument. She also aptly captured the changing narrative on the composer that was being adjusted to suit the current situation and the agenda of the participants in the discourse. In her own words, the Smetana legacy was a "dynamic political apparatus" that was tweaked multiple times to fit the political needs of the day.¹³ In her discussion of the "dispute over the meaning of Czech history," St. Pierre demonstrated how closely the discursive positions on Smetana were linked to the ideologies and political goals of its participants.¹⁴

With respect to the *Má vlast* cycle, St. Pierre asserted that its initial success can be attributed for the most part to the activities of *Umělecká beseda*. The individuals around the institution helped turn the cycle into an apotheosis of Czechness as early as during its emergence in the 1870s.¹⁵ Smetana's connection to Liszt and the fact that he based his major symphonic work on the form developed by the Hungarian–German composer, the symphonic poem, made a fitting basis for labelling Smetana as the Czech equivalent to Liszt. This was important at the time not only for showing that he followed the most progressive trends of the time, but also in elevating him to the sphere of the geniuses.

St. Pierre's also underlined the importance of some key personalities in shaping the Smetana myth. Otakar Hostinský's view on Smetana and the role of music in the nation

¹² Christopher Campo-Bowen, "An Operatic Locarno: The Paris Premiere of Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* and Czechoslovak-French Cultural Diplomacy," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 28, no. 3 (November 2016): 283–312.

¹³ St. Pierre, *Bedřich Smetana*, 2.

¹⁴ St. Pierre, 97–102.

¹⁵ St. Pierre, 27–45.

building was, as she asserted, modeled largely on the German musical discourse.¹⁶ She also discussed at length the activities of Zdeněk Nejedlý and Vladimír Helfert at the start of the twentieth century, who tweaked the myth to suit the political circumstances. She highlighted that both applied formalist methodologies rather than the poetic language used in the nineteenth century criticism. On the example of a text by Helfert from 1917 she, nevertheless, demonstrated that the results were equally teleological, if not more.¹⁷ In Nejedlý's reading, Smetana became a quintessentially Czech "artist-hero," who, facing adversity from public criticism and battling a debilitating illness, furnished the nation with its two musical apotheoses—*Libuše* and *Má vlast*.¹⁸

New scholarship has appeared in recent years on these seminal figures also in the Czech discourse. Jiří Křesťan in his monograph on Zdeněk Nejedlý "attempted to understand," as Maciej Górny put it,¹⁹ this central but controversial personality of Czech musicology and politics.²⁰ One of Nejedlý's traits, which Křesťan called the "dualistic way" of experiencing the world, proved to be particularly forming for Czech musicology. Personalities and movements were viewed in terms of binary oppositions.²¹ Compared to Křesťan's monograph, that by Rudolf Pečman's on Vladimír Helfert is smaller in scope and depth, but still provides a good overview of the breadth of Helfert's activities and his seminal role in the cultural circles in Brno. This was inscribed in his assessment of Czech music but equally so in the cultural policies he pursued. In the context of the former, Miloš Zapletal's analysis, using Hayden White's approach, of Nejedlý's picture of Czech music is particularly revealing.²² Zapletal demonstrated that Nejedlý's picture of Smetana, while free from religious

¹⁶ St. Pierre, 35–38.

¹⁷ St. Pierre, 85–93.

¹⁸ St. Pierre, 93–94.

¹⁹ Maciej Górny, "[Review of] Křesťan, Jiří: Zdeněk Nejedlý. Politik a vědec v osamění [Zdeněk Nejedlý. A politician and a scholar in solitude]," *Bohemia* 54, no. 2 (2014): 515–19.

²⁰ Jiří Křesťan, *Zdeněk Nejedlý: politik a vědec v osamění* [Zdeněk Nejedlý. A politician and a scholar in solitude] (Praha: Paseka, 2012).

²¹ Křesťan, 360.

²² Miloš Zapletal, "Martyrdom and Moral Perfection: Zdeněk Nejedlý's Conception of the Great Czech Composer," ed. Marcus Zagorski and Vladimír Zvara, *Musicologica Istropolitana*, *Musicologica Istropolitana*, 12 (2016): 69–89; Miloš Zapletal, "Mezi géniem a světcem: dekonstrukce Nejedlého koncepce velkého českého skladatele," *Musicologica Brunensia*, no. 2 (2015): 69–89, <https://doi.org/10.5817/MB2015-2-6>.

references, was modeled on the hagiographies of Christian martyrs. This helps to properly interpret Nejedlý's speech in a grand meeting that opened the celebrations and explain the controversy it aroused.²³

Establishing Czechoslovakia: A multinational state

At the close of World War I, the influential resistance group around Masaryk, self-dubbed “Maffie” (Mafia), successfully convinced the soon-to-be victorious powers to establish Czechoslovakia. They presented a vision of the country encompassing a significantly larger territory than the historical domain of Czech culture. In 1918, the nascent Czechoslovakia included not only the historical kingdom of Bohemia, entire Moravia, and part of Silesia but also the upper part of the Kingdom of Hungary (the “Slovakia”) and Carpathian Ruthenia.²⁴

Perceptions of Czechoslovakia's birth varied dramatically based on nationality. Many Czechs greeted it with excitement, anticipating a favorable turn of events. In contrast, German-speaking population were alarmed at the outlook that they would become citizens of Czechoslovakia. During October and November of 1918, four separate provinces were successively declared. These provinces, Deutschböhmen, Böhmerwaldgau, Sudetenland, and Deutsch-Südmähren, encompassing the territory with predominantly German-speaking population, sought to be part of Austria.²⁵ These ambitions were not fulfilled and the territories in question became part of Czechoslovakia. Facing this unexpected outcome, they were first promised equal citizenship—Beneš cited Switzerland as a model—but the reality fell far short of the promises.

The foregrounding of Czech history and culture in building the identity of the “Czechoslovaks” seemed a foregone conclusion, likely never debated. Elisabeth Bakke asserted that while for the Slovaks, the establishment of Czechoslovakia brought a rewriting

²³ Pečman, *Vladimír Helfert*.

²⁴ Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State That Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 20–47. Antonín Klimek, *Velké dějiny zemí koruny české* [The Great History of the Czech Crown Lands], ed. Marie Bláhová et al., vol. XIII. 1918–1929 (Praha: Paseka, 2000), 9–51. Johann Wolfgang Brügel, *Češi a Němci 1918-1938* [Czechs and Germans 1918-1938], trans. Petr Dvořáček, (Praha: Academia, 2006), 86–173.

²⁵ Heimann, *Czechoslovakia*, 40. Brügel, *Češi a Němci 1918-1938*, 95–100. Klimek, *Velké dějiny zemí koruny české*, XIII. 1918–1929:29–35.

of their history, for the Czechs it represented a need to add a few sentences about Slovakia at the end of their existing historical narrative.²⁶ While this oversimplifies the change in 1918, when Czech history needed to be also rewritten to portray Czechoslovakia as the culmination of “a century-long quest for independence,” it showcases the general degree of change in the different parts of the country.

Decades of Czech nationalist efforts portrayed their cultural output as on par with but distinct from German culture. Yet, in their quest to establish national institutions in Prague that rivaled Vienna’s, there was an ironic mirroring of the Austrian German centralized model of governance. And this mirroring continued even after the establishment of the new state. Then, the promise of a Swiss model was forgotten, and Prague continued to concentrate much of the administrative as well as cultural power.²⁷

The Czech ruling elites, deeply entrenched in the Czech cultural myths, sought to extend their influence across the new state. Civil servants and teachers educated in Bohemia were deployed to Moravia and Slovakia.²⁸ The impact of this cultural push was more pronounced the further east one traveled. Because, in these eastern regions, cultural connections were historically stronger with cities like Vienna and Budapest, rather than with Prague.

The state’s emphasis on Czech culture, part balancing act and part retribution against perceived German subordination, had significant political implications. The political use of culture reached a peak with the violent takeover of the Estates Theater from the Germans in 1920.²⁹ Yet, even in non-violent contexts, culture was a potent tool for political ends. This

²⁶ Elisabeth Bakke, “The Making of Czechoslovakism in the First Czechoslovak Republic,” in *Loyalitäten in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik 1918-1938: Politische, nationale und kulturelle Zugehörigkeiten*, ed. Martin Schulze Wessel (München: Oldenbourg, 2004), 35.

²⁷ Heimann, *Czechoslovakia*, 68–72.

²⁸ For instance, Vladimír Helfert became a professor at the newly established Masaryk University in Brno and Dobroslav Orel at the Komenský University in Bratislava.

²⁹ It is well known that in November 1920, the Czech mob broke into the Estates Theater, chased out the Germans and on the evening of the same day mounted a performance of Smetana’s *Prodaná nevěsta* (The Bartered Bride). In the eyes of the Germans, who had a valid contract to operate the theater, this was considered a criminal act. But the Czechoslovak justice sided with the Czechs and the Theater remained in their hands. For a comprehensive discussion see Christopher Campo-Bowen’s forthcoming book. The manuscript, generously provided by the author, delves into the role of the “village opera” in various socio-

is exemplified by how the Smetana centenary celebrations were conceived of and executed and how overtly political role they played. The Smetana myth here represented one from the longer list of myths that were repurposed from 1918 for building of a unified nation and of the state.

Brian C. Locke succinctly described the political role of music culture in the first years of the new republic.³⁰ Helfert and Nebuška published manifestos in 1918 that called to make the musical life more “healthy,” which naturally had Smetana’s personality at its center. This included financial support to the Czech Philharmonic, the nationalization of the National Theater and Prague Conservatory, and introduction of musicology as a separate program to the Czech part of Charles University. Helfert’s critique of the institutions at the time centered on their excessive Germanness, which led to an “alienation from Smetana’s ideals.”³¹

The state administration was very receptive to these calls: Locke showed that a five-point program developed by Jan Branberger, the head of the musical department at the Ministry for Education and Social Affairs from 1919, incorporated all the key proposals of Helfert and Nebuška, save for a transformation to the National Theater.³² However, it was also aiming to reach a balance between the alienated camps on the Czech musical scene. An artistic advisory panel was set up at the Ministry, which included Nejedlý and people from his circle but at the same time Leoš Janáček and people affiliated with *Umělecká beseda* like Otakar Šourek and Václav Talich. Aside from representing different camps, they also represented various professions around music, including performers.³³ This was a significant move, which, however, did not translate tangibly into the Ministry’s decision making relating to the centenary. As will become clear, the Ministry mostly relied on what it labeled as

cultural and political contexts of the Czech lands from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. See also Jiří Hilmera, *Stavovské národu! O tom, jak se Stavovské divadlo stalo součástí divadla Národního* [Estates Theater to the nation! About how the Estates Theatre became part of the National Theatre], (Praha: Stavovské divadlo, činohra Národního divadla v Praze, 1991).

³⁰ See Chapter 5 in Locke, *Opera and Ideology in Prague*, 110–154.

³¹ Locke, 112–115.

³² Locke, 115–166.

³³ Locke, 115.

“experts,” i.e. the people around Nejedlý, who became the first Czech full professor of musicology at Charles University in 1919.

One other important perspective on the histories of the post-Habsburg Empire states that has recently become the center of scholarly attention, is the level of rupture or continuity. Claire Morelon asserted that the standing narratives, largely a heritage of those built together with the new states, excessively accented the rupture and downplayed the many areas of continuity.³⁴ In her text on how the transition to Czechoslovakia was experienced in Prague, she put into a contrast the changes made apparent, including tearing down Habsburg monuments and renaming streets, with the prevailing continuity in the state administration and other areas. The expectations of some of the Czech-speaking citizens from the nation-state were not fulfilled and the continuing economic hardship, which did not end with the war, exacerbated it. The political and cultural environment in which the centenary celebrations took place was shaped by this dichotomy.

On the one hand, a rupture with the Monarchy was declared unequivocally. So much so that the purported allegiance to Austria and Vienna became an insult and a weapon. For instance, the demonstrations of citizenry in 1919 demanding a new government were accused of being stirred up by the monarchist clique.³⁵ A well-known example from the musical realm is the attack that Nejedlý led against composer Josef Suk in November 1918. In a review of a premiere of Suk’s works, he asserted that “there’s no place in this country” for a personality like Suk who “in the nation’s most trying moments was accepting from the Austrian government [...] decorations.” This led to the composer’s collapse and many counterattacks against Nejedlý.³⁶

³⁴ Claire Morelon, “Introduction,” in *Embers of Empire: Continuity and Rupture in the Habsburg Successor States after 1918*, ed. Paul Miller and Claire Morelon, Austrian and Habsburg Studies, Volume 22 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 4–5.

³⁵ Claire Morelon, “State Legitimacy and Continuity between the Habsburg Empire and Czechoslovakia: The 1918 Transition in Prague,” in *Embers of Empire: Continuity and Rupture in the Habsburg Successor States after 1918*, ed. Paul Miller and Claire Morelon, Austrian and Habsburg Studies, Volume 22 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 50–52.

³⁶ See Locke, *Opera and Ideology in Prague*, 124–132. Křesťan, *Zdeněk Nejedlý*, 142–145. This case is usually referred to as the “Suk Affair,” Locke talks of it as, in effect, a witch-hunt.

On the other hand, society inevitably continued replicating much of the existing patterns. The Czechoslovak President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk was positioned akin to the Austrian Emperor.³⁷ With his key role in the centenary celebrations, this deserves to be discussed at some length here. Often described is his initial arrival from exile in the nation's capital on 21 December 1918, which, in terms of political spectacle, bore resemblances to the entrance of the Habsburg monarchs, only with minor differences. Likewise, the President's birthday, though not officially a state holiday, was celebrated in a manner akin to that of the late Emperor Francis Joseph I. A study by Hájková and Horák offered detailed descriptions of these lavish celebrations, which were indicative of what one may refer to as a cult—complete with celebratory poems, songs, and merchandise featuring the president's image.³⁸ However, despite the apparent similarity to the former monarch's festivities, post-1918 rhetoric portrayed them as fundamentally different. This dichotomy was underscored by belittling the earnestness of the earlier imperial celebrations; for example, a 1919 chronicler in Litomyšl, Smetana's birthplace, dismissed the Austrian Emperors' former festivities as “faked and forced.”³⁹ The protagonists changed, but the rituals remained largely the same, with the surrounding rhetoric now linking them to different myths.

The First Republic's rituals and celebrations were then characterized by a consistent continuity in their substance and a noticeable shift in the rhetoric surrounding them. As will become clear, the Smetana centenary was informed by both.

In examining the material, I discern several narratives that offer a more nuanced understanding of the factors that drove various groups of the citizens of Czechoslovakia to get involved in the centenary. I aim to identify and elucidate the motivations of some of the actors in this historical tableau:

³⁷ See for instance Morelon, “State Legitimacy and Continuity between the Habsburg Empire and Czechoslovakia,” 2019, 46; Dagmar Hájková and Pavel Horák, “Narozeniny prezidenta republiky [Birthday of the President of the Republic],” in *Sláva republice! oficiální svátky a oslavy v meziválečném Československu*, ed. Dagmar Hájková et al. (Praha: Academia; Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, 2018), 136–78.

³⁸ For the description of the birthday celebrations of the President Masaryk see Hájková and Horák, “Narozeniny prezidenta republiky.” For a more exhaustive account of his myth refer to Ivan Šedivý, *T.G.M: k mytologii první československé republiky republiky* [T.G.M: to the mythology of the first Czechoslovak republic], (Praha: NLN, 2022).

³⁹ Hájková and Horák, “Narozeniny prezidenta republiky,” at 138–139.

- 1 The Board for the Erection of a Monument to Bedřich Smetana in Prague, inspired by the resonance of Smetana's music during wartime, aimed to realize its standing objectives of monumentalization of Smetana in the centenary, on the way strengthening its financial and social standing.
- 2 The government of the newly formed state intended to forge or reinforce the national identity of their citizens and present the new state abroad in a positive light.
- 3 The Moravian elite, sensing a detachment among their peers from the Czech cultural tradition, felt it their duty to "bring Moravians closer to Smetana," and thus contribute to the creation of the broader Czechoslovak identity with the legacy of the Bohemian culture at its core.
- 4 The Social Democrats in Aussig, one of the centers of the German-speaking culture, holding a firm belief that music could serve to bridge the divides between Czechs and Germans in Czechoslovakia.

While this list captures only select viewpoints from a broader spectrum, I am convinced they shed some preliminary light on the intricate dynamics underpinning the 1924 festivities that will be explored in the following chapters in more detail. Among them monumentization, which proved to be a common theme in many of the projects organized during the centenary.

Conspicuously, the perspective of the ordinary citizens is missing in the above list. Despite their significant role as participants in the festivities, it would be imprudent given the lacking material to start forming any overarching theories. Some discussion of the meaning of the celebrations for the general populace would, however, be offered in the case of Moravia.

My main thesis is that the Smetana myth was utilized by various players to address what they considered to be the burning issues in the new republic, to promote their ideology or carve out more power for themselves. The myth itself was secondary as it could be tweaked, consciously or unconsciously, to fit the desired outcome.

In Chapter 1, I seek to construct a general picture of Smetana prevalent in the media at the time of the centenary. The numerous profiles of the composer published on or around 1924—on top of several monographs, there was a short portrait of the composer and his meaning for

the nation printed in practically every Czech language newspaper—offer plenty of material to sketch such a comprehensive picture of the composer across the political spectrum. The focus will be on the depiction of Smetana’s personality, the reasoning for his significance, the characterization of his music, and its presumed role in the Czech society. The goal is to identify the characteristics of the myth of Smetana that were mostly fixed in the discourse, however, some significant divergences will also be mentioned.

This will lay ground not only for clarifying the mythological basis upon which the Czech narrative around the centenary was built, but also explain how various other interpretations were built, including by the Moravian elite and the Germans, and how they were received by the Czechs.

In the remainder of the chapter, a theme central to the celebrations, monumentality, will be introduced. An argument will be made that elements initially symbolic of festivity, expressed through mythical and poetic language, were later endeavored to be made real. This ambition clashed with the boundary between the ceremonial and the everyday, leading to many projects of the Board remaining unfinished.

Chapter 2 introduces the organization that spearheaded the celebrations, the Board for the Erection of the Monument to Bedřich Smetana in Prague, originally established by *Umělecká beseda* in 1909. As World War I progressed, several influential members of the Board sought to repurpose the organization. They envisioned it as a substitute for what they perceived as the failing *Umělecká beseda*, aiming to provide Smetana with the recognition he deserved, both in the form of physical monuments and through publications. The Board’s decision to lead the celebrations was motivated by the need to fundraise for these projects.

The chapter also explores the Board’s concept of the celebrations and argues that monumentality stood as its core. It informed the nature of their projects and was very palpable in their allocation of state-provided funds. It examines the philosophy behind their choices, tracing it back to the idea of building a national identity through music, a concept that originated in the German lands in the late nineteenth century.

Through archival sources, the dynamics between the Board and state bodies are analyzed. I argue that the Board’s success in gaining support from key politicians was not only due to the dexterity of its leadership but also because their concept of the celebrations aligned with the state’s cultural vision.

Chapter 3 explores the explicitly political connotations of Smetana's music in the early years of the Czechoslovak Republic. Using *Má vlast* as an example, it examines how Smetana's legacy shifted from the composer being viewed as a national prophet to a contributor to the establishment of the state. This redefinition not only elevated the composer and his advocates but also helped legitimize the new state as the culmination of centuries of effort by Czech luminaries.

The chapter argues that the connection between the state and Smetana's legacy developed over time, due in large part to the efforts of the Board and its ability to convince political leaders that their projects would align with the state's interests. The intimate relationship between the state and the Board, which effectively administered Smetana's heritage, is depicted in two case studies.

The first examines the Board's project of the composer's Collected Works. This ambitious undertaking aimed for volumes that were monumental in every respect, necessitating significant financial support. The society persuaded the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Edvard Beneš, to advocate for state-of-the-art equipment at the state printing shop, envisioning that the edition would showcase Czechoslovakia's cultural maturity abroad. However, the cost of the production was mounting up and the state also needed to contribute to them. When the first volume was finally released, its selling price was, moreover, prohibitively high, thwarting the Board's ambition for the edition to symbolize the patriotism of the "nation of Smetana." Further, the project encountered numerous issues and managed to release only one more of Smetana's works before its ultimate suspension. This ambitious endeavor reflects the state's desire to produce cultural works of the highest value, regardless of cost.

The second case study highlights the overtly political nature of the centenary celebrations by discussing the grand opening meeting, conceived by the Board and funded by the state. The entire political leadership, including the President, gathered in the National Theater, focusing more on speeches than music. State leaders presented their interpretations of the composer, linking his legacy to the Czechoslovak state. The main speaker, Zdeněk Nejedlý, sparked controversy with his lengthy address. The occasion effectively became a state act orchestrated by a private organization.

A competing concept of commemorating the composer will be introduced in Chapter 4, focusing on the activities of the circle around Brno's *Filharmonické sdružení Beseda Brněnská* (Philharmonic Society Brno Club), particularly those led by Vladimír Helfert. Their philosophy of the celebrations contrasted with that of the Prague Board, not in interpreting Smetana's role in Czech music history, but in translating his legacy into cultural policy. Though they never explicitly rejected the Prague Board's concept of celebrations (Helfert was a member of the Board, a student and close friend of Nejedlý, as well as his brother-in-law), they opposed monumentalism in their own plans. Unlike the Prague Board, which leaned towards commemorating the past, they emphasized contemporary living culture.

Helfert recognized that the Prague-centric celebration envisioned by the Board would not adequately serve Moravia and Silesia. Local patriotism deterred people from contributing to monuments in the nation's capital. Due to historical cultural ties with Vienna, Smetana did not symbolize the same thing in Moravia as he did in the Czech-speaking regions of Bohemia. It was vital to instill Moravian pride in Smetana, thereby fostering pride in the new state. To achieve this, Smetana's music had to be performed as widely and frequently as possible. The local amateur *Orchestrální sdružení* (Orchestral Association), led by Helfert, studied *Má vlast* and performed it seventeen times in the region during the centenary. Their focus on the social responsibility of art led to the publication of affordable brochures on Smetana and efforts to make "national art" accessible to as many people from all classes as possible. In what was likely the largest event of the centenary, a free open-air concert in the Brno stadium attracted huge crowds who enthusiastically listened to Smetana's cycle, despite the excruciating heat.

Separately, the Brno group established a foundation in Smetana's name to support contemporary national composers, which succeeded in amassing significant capital. However, this alternative celebration concept competed for the same funds earmarked by the Prague Board for their projects. While the Prague society publicly supported the Foundation, it covertly exerted its influence to prevent it from receiving additional government financing for its projects.

The juxtaposition of these two centenary projects, one conceived in Prague and the other in Brno, illustrates the varied forms of celebration that, despite their differences, were all underpinned by the same myth. This highlights that it was not the myth itself, but other

factors, such as notions of how a cultural nation manifests itself, that influenced the cultural policies these bodies promoted.

Chapter 5 delves into how the German population in Czechoslovakia received Smetana during the centenary. Unlike the unified Smetana narrative within Czech circles, as presented in Chapter 1, the German perspectives on Smetana were considerably more diverse and closely aligned with the political leanings of their proponents. Germans either diminished Smetana as a lesser Liszt or Wagner, or relegated him to the status of one of German music's Kleinmeisters. When acknowledged, his German musical and cultural influences were emphasized, portraying him as a *Böhmisch* composer. Though this interpretation might have seemed blasphemous to Czechs, it was deeply rooted in the shared Bohemian mythology—after all, *Böhmens Hain und Flur* (Bohemia's Woods and Fields) were also their *Vaterland* (Fatherland).

In Sudetenland, performances of Smetana's music organized by Czechs were not just concerts but declarations of national identity, even more than in the other Czech-speaking parts of the country.⁴⁰ These events were intended to demonstrate the nation's cultural maturity. When organized jointly by Germans and Czechs, the concerts assumed distinctly different connotations. This chapter will explore in detail a series of concerts organized by German and Czech Social Democrats in Aussig (Ústí nad Labem), featuring music by Smetana and Beethoven. The narrative surrounding this event sought to build a bridge between the Czech and the German communities through music. Here, the Smetana myth was adapted to serve this unifying purpose. It acknowledged Smetana's learning from German masters but portrayed it as a strength, not a weakness, asserting that his music was of the highest quality. They argued that what set Smetana apart from being a mere imitator of German music was his immense originality, infused with Czech folk elements—a common theme in Czech musical discourse.

Interestingly, the narrative in Aussig shared many similarities with the views of Nejedlý and his circle. Ironically, the Board overlooked these efforts, likely for ideological and personal reasons, rather than embracing them. With both Czech and nationalistic German

⁴⁰ In this study, the term "Sudetenland" will designate all areas of Czechoslovakia with a predominantly German-speaking population.

media turning their backs on the initiative, the Aussig concerts, despite their success with audiences, failed to make a lasting impact.

In this study, I argue that following the establishment of Czechoslovakia a shift in interpretation of Smetana's music, and particularly of *Má vlast*, came about. This shift can be demonstrated to have taken place in multiple aspects.

Firstly, the Smetana myth, particularly with reference to the meaning of *Má vlast* and *Libuše*, was updated to turn Smetana into a prophet and the founder of Czechoslovakia in the ideal rather than in the metaphysical sense. In other words, Smetana was said to have in his music expressed the idea of an independent national state of the Czechs that Masaryk then brought to realization. Such language appears as early as 1918 and returns frequently thereafter. This change put Smetana on the right side of history—opposing other personalities who were deemed to have been too forthcoming to the monarchy—and together with him all those who had been his fervent propagators. It also positioned his music as the state's composer.

Secondly, with the establishment of the nation-state, the new political elite seized the Smetana myth and incorporated it into its acts. This turned Smetana's music into a political tool. This is evidenced by the references in the politicians' speeches to Smetana's music, their attendance at performances of his music, and by the funding that the state provided to Smetana celebrations and projects.

Thirdly, while the base myth was standardized, the spectrum of meanings attached to Smetana's music have broadened, and together with it the implications of his music for cultural policy. These reflected the different ideologies of its proponents but also varying views on the role of music in the nation-state. This is well demonstrated by the different conceptions of celebrations of Smetana's centenary as well as the differing readings of *Má vlast* during the 1924 performances in different places around the country. Moreover, if the music had indeed been composed as national, as Philip V. Bohlman asserted, here it was often clearly taking on nationalistic characteristics.⁴¹ Its meaning then fully corresponded to the title of the cycle—this is My Country—and it has become an instrument of defining territorial boundaries.

⁴¹ Philip V. Bohlman distinguished between national and nationalistic music. The latter he described as a form of competition with other nations and in it music is used to “reinforce borders.” In the former, focus is on

All of this was enabled by the 1918 dissolution of Austria-Hungary and the establishment of Czechoslovakia. These changes opened possibilities and brought hunger for change. In broader terms, my thesis is about what role Smetana's music played in the early years of the Czechoslovak Republic, how it was re-conceived to fit the new circumstances and how it was used by various groups to achieve their goals. It also deals with the different meanings that were attached to the music and how these were reflected in the cultural policies of the state.

other things, particularly on the origin of nation and its culture. Bohlman cited Smetana's "Vltava" from his cycle *Má vlast* as an example of national and Smetana's music he listed as a "well-known case of national music's capacity to map the place of the entire nation." Philip V. Bohlman, *Focus: Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe* (Routledge, 2010), 58–63.

Chapter 1 Actualizing a Myth: The Monumentalization of Smetana

In his seminal work, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson explored the pivotal role of print media in the genesis of modern nations. He argued that the advent of the national newspaper was crucial in fostering a sense of belonging to a broader community, transcending previous local or regional identities. Anderson posited that the act of reading a national newspaper allows individuals, who might otherwise identify primarily with their immediate surroundings, such as a village, to connect with a larger, unseen populace. He described this phenomenon as a “mass ceremony,” wherein the simultaneous consumption of the latest edition of a paper created a shared experience across the nation. Although individuals may engage with the newspaper in solitude, the awareness of countless others partaking in the same ritual, evidenced by fellow commuters clutching the same publication, reinforces a sense of collective identity.⁴²

However, in the context of interwar Czechoslovakia, where newspapers often aligned with specific political parties or ideologies, the choice of newspaper could signify one’s political leanings rather than a shared national identity.⁴³ The primary unifying factor in these instances was the Czech language, rather than the content of the papers themselves. This dynamic shifted markedly on occasions such as 2 March 1924, Smetana’s centenary. On such occasions, the newspapers transcended their usual partisan narratives, echoing the early days of national consciousness formation described by Anderson. In these instances, the newspapers served as a unifying medium, fostering a sense of belonging to an “imagined community” reminiscent of the nascent stages of modern nation-building.

Though newspapers played a key role in sparking tremendous interest in Smetana during the centenary, the heart of the celebrations comprised several monumental projects. These included the “monumental edition” of Smetana’s works, a grand open-air performance of

⁴² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed. (London; New York: Verso, 2006), 32–34.

⁴³ See Martin Charvát and Jan Jiráček, “Prvorepublikové ‘budování’ médií a jeho reflexe,” in *Média v meziválečné publicistice: kapitoly z dějin českého myšlení o médiích 1918-1938 (II.)*, ed. Martin Charvát and Jan Jiráček (Praha: Togga : Metropolitan University Prague Press, 2019), 7–15.

Má vlast in Brno, and the establishment of a Smetana Foundation. Although, as will be revealed, the focus of each project differed significantly, they were all unified by an underlying theme of monumentality, stemming from Smetana's perceived "greatness." This chapter sets the groundwork for the discussion of monumentality in the context of each of the centenary projects.

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first one analyzes the narrative around Smetana as presented by Czech newspapers to their readers on the day of the centenary. This analysis will aid in later discussions about the shape of the centenary celebrations as envisioned by various stakeholders. The second part delves into the concept of monumentality, a key driving force behind the celebrations. Initially, the Board's journey towards achieving monumentality is explored, followed by a discussion of its implications using theoretical frameworks.

The Smetana Myth at the Times of the Centenary

The following analysis seeks to identify the common themes in the narrative across political divides as well as some notable variations from it. It is based on thirteen texts published on the day of the centenary in Czech newspapers (see Appendix 1 for a list). As anywhere else in this study, when individual compositions are discussed, the focus is primarily on the meaning ascribed to *Má vlast*.

Particularly in relation to these centenary accounts, the following five main themes emerge.

A national great in art and beyond

First, Smetana was considered a national giant, not only in music or art but in general. This positioned the composer as a personality beyond the sphere of art and turned him into a leader of the nation.

Moreover, he was "more talented than any composer before him," as K. B. Jiráček put it, adding that his Czech predecessors were merely "epigones of Viennese composers." His presumed originality and separation from the influence of Austrian music was an important prerequisite for becoming the national composer.

He was also universally labeled as one of the greatest artists and as one in the lineage of the greatest Czechs of all time.⁴⁴ Helfert asserted that “with the strength of his spirit, Smetana will always rank among the greatest creative figures ever”⁴⁵ and portrayed him as “[following] in the footsteps of our leading national heroes, beginning with Huss.”⁴⁶

Notably, unlike other composers and artists in general, whose legacy was questioned by some,⁴⁷ Smetana’s was embraced unanimously. Bartoš observed that Smetana “had no enemies; his victory today is unquestionable and complete.”⁴⁸ This, in turn, served to strengthen the myth, echoing the standard narrative of a hero’s ultimate victory. At the same time, it positioned the composer ideally to become the national and state symbol.

However, Smetana’s role went beyond art; he was also referred to as a politician. For instance, an author in *Tribuna* called him “a politician [that] cannot be weeded out from the political history of the country.”⁴⁹ This term, however, appeared in the centenary narratives in two meanings: firstly, as a leader of his nation at home, and secondly, as an emissary of the nation to the world. The latter role is covered in the following subsection, and the former is discussed next.

According to the discourse, the composer showed the direction to his nation; he even foretold it. Doležil called him “the clairvoyant prophet to the whole nation.”⁵⁰ Many texts mentioned the fulfilled prophecy of the formation of Czechoslovakia. Helfert said, “his

⁴⁴ “Byl právem nazván největším českým umělcem” (Jirák), “Je Smetana, jedním z největších českých lidí” (Šourek), “Oslavujeme našeho největšího hudebníka, našeho největšího umělce” (Nejedlý in *Var*), “Právem pak bývá Smetana nazván největším českým umělcem vůbec” (Jirák in *Nová svoboda*), “Smetana je nejen první, ale dosud největší náš skladatel — a vůbec umělec.” (Zich), “význam tohoto největšího českého umělce se nemůže nijak omezit na hudební nebo uměleckou obec českou” (r.), “největšího mistra české hudby a největšího českého umělce” (Doležil), “našemu největšímu umělci ubíralo jen čas tak drahocenný” (Bartoš).

⁴⁵ “silou ducha bude vždy patřiti Smetana mezi největší zjevy tvůrčí vůbec” “jde Smetana po stopách našich předních národních herou, Husem počínajíc” (Helfert)

⁴⁶ “V této věci jde Smetana po stopách našich předních národních herou, Husem počínajíc.”

⁴⁷ Notably the main contender for international fame, Dvořák. See the “Dvořák Affair” discussed in Locke, *Opera and Ideology in Prague*, 54–58.

⁴⁸ “on [Smetana] nemá nepřátel, jeho vítězství dnes jest bezesporné a naprosté”

⁴⁹ “z politických dějin našeho národa Bedřich Smetana, skladatel a kapelník, vymýtiti se nedá.”

⁵⁰ “jasnovidným prorokem celému národu” (Doležil in *ČSR*)

[Smetana's] prophetic faith in our independence has once been fulfilled."⁵¹ On occasions, the composer was made synonymous with the title character of the opera *Libuše*, in which the eponymous princess and oracle foretold the Czech nation's bright future. However, the prophecy was sought also in *Má vlast*, for instance, an author in *Tribuna* asserted that "those sacred chords of 'Vyšehrad' and 'Blaník' have come true: his nation is free and liberated."⁵²

The same author also underlined that Smetana's prophecy was understandable to the entire nation. This was echoed in some of the accounts comparing Czech composers to canonical German ones, particularly Beethoven and Wagner.

Providing music that is quintessentially national yet of global distinction

Second, he was deemed to have provided the nation with music that was original, thoroughly national, and free from foreign influences, while simultaneously absorbing all progressive trends in contemporary music. This notion positioned Smetana and his music to best represent the nation, both domestically and to foreigners. It was, however, also the one most often challenged by German nationalistic authors (see Chapter 5).

The double requirement of worldliness and national authenticity could be traced back to the middle of the nineteenth century. Christopher P. Storck positioned it within the cultural competition between Czechs and Germans in Bohemia. The latter would display their cultural superiority with reference to pan-German art. The Czechs were in search of art that would impress others but at the same time represent the "collective consciousness of the Czechs."⁵³ Smetana's music was one of the first products deemed to have fulfilled both requirements.

However, these two ingredients were, naturally, in danger of becoming at odds with each other. An important feat of the circle around Smetana, therefore, was that they succeeded in

⁵¹ "Již jednou jeho prorocká víra v naši samostatnost se splnila" (Helfert)

⁵² "prorocství se splnilo, ty posvátné akordy 'Vyšehradu' a 'Blaníka' se uskutečnily: jeho národ je volný a osvobozený" (r. in *Tribuna*)

⁵³ "Kollektivbewußtsein der Tschechen" See Christopher P. Storck, *Kulturnation und Nationalkunst: Strategien und Mechanismen tschechischer Nationsbildung von 1860 bis 1914*, Mittel- und Osteuropawissenschaften. [Cultural Nation and National Art: Strategies and Mechanisms of Czech Nation Building from 1860 to 1914. Central and Eastern European Studies] Reihe Geschichte, Bd. 2 (Köln: Wissenschaft und Politik, 2001), 22.

constructing an argument that Smetana balanced these two persuasively.⁵⁴ This argument represented the core of justifying the myth and was, therefore, reiterated during the centenary.

For Smetana to qualify as the one who single-handedly established modern Czech music (St Pierre talks of “lone genius”),⁵⁵ his predecessors and contemporaries had to be virtually erased. Doležil noted that before Smetana, there was “hardly any music” in the Czech lands as whatever existed was but “a faint glare of the music of the world” and outdated in style. Musicologists Lébl and Ludvová addressed the conscious deletion of everything before Smetana as setting the stage for the composer’s uniqueness in their 1981 text.⁵⁶ Another way of devaluing Smetana’s predecessors was to make them epigones of Vienna, as Jiráček did. Unlike them, Smetana supposedly managed to keep the necessary distance from the influence of his great models.

However, to fulfill the expectations of a world-wide relevance, Smetana was presented as having had an intimate connection to the most progressive music of his time. For instance, Doležil reported Smetana’s passion for Chopin, Liszt, and Berlioz, but he also had him “penetrate deeper and deeper into the mystery of the great Beethoven and [be] spiritually connected to Mozart.”⁵⁷ St. Pierre has discussed at length how Smetana was by his supporters incorporated into the progressive, Lisztian lineage of German music and at the same time rescued from the influence of Wagner.⁵⁸

In his musical language, Smetana was said to be the first composer to have captured the “nation’s soul,” as Kramář and many others put it, as opposed to having imitated the nation’s folk songs as his predecessors did. He achieved this by feeding his imagination on the spirit of the nation, to which he got access through the depth of his love for the nation’s people. Kramář asserted that “the great, eternal art” capable of such deeds needed to be “perfumed

⁵⁴ See particularly St. Pierre, *Bedřich Smetana*, 26–38.

⁵⁵ St. Pierre, 25.

⁵⁶ See Lébl and Ludvová, “Dobové kořeny a souvislosti *Mé vlasti*,” 99–101. Moreover, these two authors and St. Pierre pointed out that of Fibich’s symphonic poem *Záboj, Slavoj a Luděk* (premiered before the Smetana’s *Má vlast* poems) similar things were said. See Lébl and Ludvová, 125. and St. Pierre, *Bedřich Smetana*, 34–45.

⁵⁷ “proniká stále hlouběji do tajemství velikého Beethovena a s Mozartem je vůbec duchovně spřízněn”

⁵⁸ St. Pierre, *Bedřich Smetana*, 25–80.

and sanctified by a warm and burning love for [the nation].”⁵⁹ This quality correlated with his portrayal as a national giant and also as a national saint (see below).

Smetana’s feat of having extracted what was “an incarnation of Czechness,”⁶⁰ as Zich put it, provided a recipe that was reused by later composers to endow their music with national character. Zich turned this skillfully into an imperative to promote Smetana’s music abroad. He asserted that foreigners, without knowing Smetana’s music, only heard echoes of their own national music in the works of later Czech composers. Oblivious to Smetana, they failed to recognize what it was that was Czech in their works. Smetana’s music was according to him not just the beginning, it was the key and the only key to the Czech soul!

Aside from the nation’s soul, Smetana in his music also characterized *českou zemi a přírodu* (Bohemian/Czech land and nature) countryside, the character of Czech people, and hope in a better future. Doležil read the Czech character stored in the maestro’s music as follows:

In Smetana[’s music], we have a direct demonstration of the entire Czech national character, especially its emotional and perceptive components, such as the Czech tendency to carefree cheerfulness, trust in a good turn of fate even in the worst of difficulties, an optimistic view of the world and the benefits of humor, a conception of life that is more emotional and always concrete and real rather than rational and abstract. From Smetana’s art, the true Czech type of character speaks to us, a purely Czech soul [...]⁶¹

Doležil described the supposed Czech national traits, which, characteristically, negate some of the German ones—the presumed studied and philosophical nature of Germans was opposed to by the common-sensical and emotional Czechs. The literary theoretician

⁵⁹ “Jeho díla zůstanou národu nehynoucím svědectvím, že veliké, věčné umění, které má uchvátiti duši lidu, musí býti provanuto a posvěceno teplou a horoucí láskou k němu.” Karel Kramář, “Smetana a náš boj za právo a svobodu [Smetana and our struggle for law and freedom],” *Národní listy*, 2 March 1924.

⁶⁰ “inkarnací českosti”

⁶¹ “Ve Smetanovi máme přímo demonstrativně dānu celou českou národní povahu, zejména její složky citové a nazírací, jako je český sklon k bezstarostnému veselí, důvěřivost v dobrý obrat osudu i za nej horších svízeli, optimistický názor na svět a dobrodiní humoru, pojetí života více citové a vždy spíše konkrétní, reální, nežli rozumové a abstraktní. Z umění Smetanova mluví k nám pravý český typ povahový, ryze česká duše” Hubert Doležil, “Bedřich Smetana: K stému výročí jeho narození [Bedřich Smetana: On the centenary of his birth],” *Československá republika*, 2 March 1924.

Vladimír Macura pointed to this trope in nineteenth-century Czech nationalist discourse.⁶² For Doležil, the Czechness of Smetana's music went beyond the characteristic sound, it unequivocally communicated Czech-specific meaning.

This axiom of Smetana's music embodying the Czech soul made his music an extension of Czechness, the quintessence of Czech people. This widely-accepted trope explains the general agreement on its greatness—doubting its brilliance was doubting the nation itself—but also the intolerance of any foreign, particularly German, reservations towards the music, however small they may be. It also opened the door to the role of his music as a national symbol. Jiráek highlighted that Smetana's music was able to express during the war what words were not allowed to.

These two notions formed the basis for what was to follow.

Giving the national a legitimacy

Third, his music was said to have given the nation legitimacy vis-à-vis the “developed world,” thus he was the nation's foreign emissary. This was reflected in the foreign cultural policy of Czechoslovakia and impacted the agenda of the centenary celebrations.

In 1924, Smetana was positioned as venerated by virtually the whole world. Helfert stated that the composer was “listened to with respect throughout the educated world”⁶³ and added that before the war, his oeuvre was “one of the leading proofs of our cultural maturity.”⁶⁴ Bartoš and Doležil noted that “the whole educated world” was interested in and worshiping Smetana, respectively. In Šourek's account, “the whole world” joined the Czech nation in “bowing in ecstatic admiration and love before his [Smetana's] work.”⁶⁵ The “educated world” was thus represented by those who celebrated Smetana. Although these centenary texts generally omitted any proof of their claims of Smetana's international success, the papers during the centenary informed of performances abroad aplenty. For Czechs to matter, their music had to matter. Bartoš made this link explicit:

⁶² Vladimír Macura, *Znamení zrodu a české sny* [Signs of birth and Czech dreams], (Praha: Academia, 2015), 40–41.

⁶³ “je [mu] s úctou nasloucháno v celém vzdělaném světě”

⁶⁴ “bývalo z předních dokladů naší kulturní vyspělosti”

⁶⁵ “[dnes] sklání se před jeho dílem v nadšeném obdivu a lásce národ i svět”

He [Smetana] is our representative before foreign countries and at the same time someone who has never denied us. Whatever performances of his music have been given in the remotest parts of the world—and the whole educated world is now interested in his music—everywhere our name must be associated with his, for he has been inspired by us and is inconceivable without us, without our national efforts, without our highest national aspirations. He is one of us, though he was a genius. He spreads the glory of our name to all parts of the world.⁶⁶

Smetana was an ambassador: wherever his music went, it took with it the Czech nation. And it was not only its presumed Czechness but also the nationalistic myth of Smetana that went with it. His music was thus deemed not only foundational but also inseparable from national symbolism. This connection also permeated the agenda of the celebrations and how they were presented to the state to garner its support, for instance for the publications of Smetana's collected works in a monumental format.

The centenary writers generally missed the point that the significance of Smetana did not translate abroad. An outlier in this regard, Jirák, asserted that “all the foreign lands” now accepting Smetana's genius notwithstanding, only Czechs could ever truly comprehend his significance. He found the cause in the composer's “oeuvre [being] born in personal hardship and poverty, in a time of national oppression” and thus endowed with such national content and strength that would remain invisible to others.⁶⁷ Jirák may have failed to seize the consequences of his daring assertion. If, as established above, the “soul” of the Czech nation could genuinely be appreciated solely through Smetana's music, but at the same time the music's true significance was inaccessible to foreigners, then so was the Czech nation

⁶⁶ “Jest naším representantem před cizinou a při tom někdo, kdo nás nikdy nezapřel. Ať ho provozovali v nejdálnějších končinách — a o jeho hudbu zajímá se dnes celý vzdělaný svět — všude s jeho jménem spojovati musí naše jméno, neboť on se námi inspiroval a není bez nás myslitelný, bez našich národních snah bez našich nejvyšších národních vznětů. Jest jedním z nás, třebaže šlo o genia. Roznáší slávu našeho jména do všech dílů světa” Josef Bartoš, “Klasik podivuhodné životnosti [A classic of wondrous longevity],” *České slovo*, 2 March 1924.

⁶⁷ “Smetanovo dílo, vzniklé v osobním strádání a v bídě, v době národního útisku, hledělo neochvějně do budoucnosti, a také v budoucnosti teprve plně osvědčilo svou sílu. Jiným národům nemůže proto Smetana nikdy být tím, čím je nám. Radujeme se, že dnes i celá cizina ctí v něm geniálního umělce, kterým byl, ale národní význam Smetanův můžeme pochopiti pouze my.” Karel Boleslav Jirák, “Geniu Národa — Bedřichu Smetanovi [To the genius of the nation — Bedřich Smetana],” *Československá samostatnost*, 2 March 1924.

itself. Despite this, the reporting on foreign performances during the centenary was universally presented as proof of the nation's pre-eminence.

The foreign performances were also taken as proof of Smetana's music standing on the level of the most "cultural nations." Zich put the composer on par with Bach, Beethoven, and Berlioz. Doležil believed he earned "a separate chapter [in the history of nineteenth-century music]," side-by-side with Richard Wagner and the likes of him; and had Smetana beat Franz Liszt on his home turf—in the genre of symphonic poem. Most of the writers would share this view or put the composer even higher. For instance, Arne Novák had Smetana triumph over Wagner in making music "the property of the nation" rather than "[Bayreuth's] theatrical entertainment for the wealthy chosen ones,"⁶⁸ echoing the presumed understandability of his music to the nation that was discussed earlier. Naturally, the national hero, as a proxy for the nation, stood at the top of the world ranking in his field.

The centenary celebrations were directly followed by the concerts of the festival of International Society for Contemporary Music, which took place in Prague in the same year.⁶⁹ During the festival, much of the Prague Smetana centenary events were rerun, including a festive meeting to commemorate Smetana.⁷⁰ This is not the place to discuss the response at length, suffice to say that Smetana's reception by the foreign audience was taken as proof of his world-class standing.

⁶⁸ "co se v Bayreuthě zvrhlo v divadelní zábavu bohatých vyvolenců, to dovedl Smetana proměnit v profanní bohoslužbu skutečně národní"

⁶⁹ See Locke, *Opera and Ideology in Prague*, 150–153 for an overview of the ISCM 1924 festival and the related quarrels over modernism.

⁷⁰ Three official festival concerts were organized by ISCM, which included Smetana's *Pražský karneval*, Suk's *Zrání*, and Ostrčil's *Symfonietta*, next to other contemporary pieces by composers of all nationalities. During the festival, a series of concerts and events celebrating Czech music was also organized. In it, much from the centenary celebration's program was rerun: Talich's monumental *Má vlast* was performed on 27.5.1924; Smetana's operas—*Prodaná nevěsta*, *Dalibor*, *Libuše*, *Dvě vdovy* and *Hubička*—were given at the National Theater. A festive meeting commemorating Smetana was held on 2. June 1924. [Program koncertů] Mezinárodní hudební festival v Praze 1924 [International Music Festival in Prague 1924], Tisková dokumentace [Press Documents], The National Museum — Czech Museum of Music / Bedřich Smetana Museum.

An embodiment of moral excellence and indomitable spirit

Fourth, Smetana was portrayed as a paragon of virtues and strength of spirit. Throughout his life, he sacrificed for the nation, never doubting his chosen path or his principles. A hero who overcame all obstacles, each challenge made him stronger. For example, Zich talked of the composer's "heroic sacrifice," and Helfert of "the struggle of creative power and creative will with a hostile fate, for which there is no example."⁷¹ Vyskočil described Smetana's aim "to glorify his nation and, without great bitterness, make the greatest sacrifices for it, even at the cost of his own woes."⁷² These heroic narratives, reminiscent of a Greek drama, permeate practically all the accounts, placing the nation at the center of Smetana's focus.

Smetana's presumed qualities are well addressed in the scholarly discourse. In what is the most important recent contribution, the musicologist Miloš Zapletal, following the methodology of Hayden White, offered an analysis of the hero figure in Nejedlý's portraits of the great Czech composers, primarily Smetana. He cited qualities such as "simplicity, masculinity, gentleness, progressiveness, vitality, moral greatness, purity, spirituality, artistic seriousness, folksiness, spiritual aristocratism" and convincingly proved these traits to be of heroes (and martyrs) in Christian mythology.⁷³ Much of this is attributable to the role of nationalism as a replacement for civil religion.⁷⁴

⁷¹ "odehrává se v jeho nitru boj tvůrčí síly a tvůrčí vůle s nepřátelským osudem, jemuž není příkladu"

⁷² "[...] oslaviti svůj národ a bez velkých trpkostí přinést mu největší oběti i za cenu vlastních běd."

⁷³ See Miloš Zapletal, "From Tragedy to Romance, from Positivism to Myth: Nejedlý's Conception of the History of Modern Czech Music," in *Nationality vs Universality: Music Historiographies in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Sławomira Żerańska-Kominek (Newcastle up on Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 78.

⁷⁴ In addition to the literature provided by Zapletal, the following works discuss the connection between nationalism and civil religion. Jose Santiago, "From 'Civil Religion' to Nationalism as the Religion of Modern Times: Rethinking a Complex Relationship," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48, no. 2 (June 2009): 394–401, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2009.01455.x>; David Stevens, "Nationalism as Religion," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 86, no. 343 (Autumn 1997): 248–58; Martin Schulze Wessel, ed., *Nationalisierung der Religion und Sakralisierung der Nation im östlichen Europa*, *Forschungen zur Geschichte und Kultur des östlichen Mitteleuropa*, [Nationalization of Religion and Sacralization of the Nation in Eastern Europe. Research on the history and culture of Eastern Central Europe], Bd. 27 (Stuttgart: F. Steiner Verlag, 2006).

The biographies of Smetana border on hagiographies, and the composer's image on that of a saint. Almost all texts explicitly referred to him as a martyr,⁷⁵ some with explicit religious connotations. Doležil called the composer "the national saint of our greatest."⁷⁶ Novák spoke of Smetana's "almost religious cult of the nation" that led him to serve it, Helfert labeled this service as "a supreme, holy command" to him, which Smetana exercised with "joyous duty" and "such veracity" that was "passionate to the point of being religious." He also had Smetana "walk through the whole way of the cross of suffering" and said that during the war *Má vlast* and *Libuše* became "the Gospel of our future salvation."⁷⁷ Doležil used the term more generally to refer to the entire composer's art, which was to him "*the Gospel of genuine Czechness.*" (Emphasis original.)⁷⁸

The presumed virtues of the national composer were presented to the citizens of Czechoslovakia as a model. Sometimes explicitly, as when an author in *Tribuna* talked of the composer as a teacher and model, who knew nothing but "work and progress."⁷⁹

A source of strength for eternity

Fifth, the composer was said to be and would forever remain a source of strength for "the nation of Smetana," a phrase used repeatedly in the 1920s. The connection between the "immortal artist" and the nation sought to strengthen it.

An overarching theme in the contemporary accounts was the notion that Smetana, rather than being a historical figure, was "an artist of today," as Jiráček put it. His significance had increased recently, particularly during World War I, as many writers mentioned, when he was a source of strength and endurance. Ambros talked of the "might and bliss of the national fervor [expressed in his music], which animated us like a spring of living water in

⁷⁵ Those who called Smetana a martyr were Nejedlý, Šourek, Vyskočil, Helfert, Jiráček, Zich, and Ambros.

⁷⁶ "život nám dal národního svěťce z našich největších" (Doležil in ČSR)

⁷⁷ "Smetanův až náboženský kult národa a odtud plynoucí výhradná služba jemu" (Novák); "Sloužiti národu, pracovati pro povznesení našeho umění a tím i celé naší vzdělanosti, bylo mu nejvyšším, posvátným příkazem. Bylo mu *radostnou* povinností, již se oddával s opravdovostí, která má v sobě zanícení až náboženské."; "prochází celou *křížovou cestou* utrpení"; "co nám za válečné tísně znamenala Libuše a Vlast, kterak tenkrát tato díla stala se evangeliem příští naší spásy" (all Helfert)

⁷⁸ "Smetanovo umění je daleko více nežli jen hudbou, jen uměním; jest *evangeliem pravého češství*" (Doležil in ČSR) Emphasis original.

⁷⁹ "Znal jen jedno heslo, jednu snahu, jednu touhu: práci a pokrok."

the hard times of warfare, when the brain and the heart were dying.”⁸⁰ Bartoš had “Smetana’s music [help] to fire up the Smetana nation to fight against its enemies.”⁸¹ Kramář illustrated this with an anecdote. In it, he depicted how, while incarcerated for anti-Habsburg acts during the war, he heard that Smetana’s *Libuše* was being performed with great success at the National Theater. This transformed his surroundings in reflection of this news: “in our gloomy dungeon cell it was suddenly so light and so warm, as if we had heard a glorious, amazing Prophecy, and we bowed with unspeakable gratitude before the genius of Smetana and his great faith in the future of the nation.”⁸² St. Pierre interpreted one such evocation of the significance of Smetana, by Nejedlý, within the framework of Masaryk’s humanistic historiography.⁸³ Regardless, this repurposing of the myth can be observed across the ideological divides.

In broader terms, this echoes Ernst Renan’s legendary 1882 lecture “What is a Nation?” in which he fittingly observed that “suffering in common unites more than joy does. Where national memories are concerned, grief is of more value than triumphs, for it imposes duties, it requires a common effort.”⁸⁴ While this does not account for the choice of particular compositions to take on such a role during the war, it explains the extra layers of significance that the works like *Má vlast* and *Libuše* acquired during that time.

Smetana’s myth was inseparably connected to the nation, which now, having achieved freedom, was destined to live and thrive forever. Novák foretold how “just as today, centuries later, Czech people will still stand before Smetana’s life work and his personality

⁸⁰ “mohutnost a blaženství národního zápalu, který nás oživoval jako pramen vody živé v těžkých dobách válečného zápolení, kdy již mozek i srdce umdlévalo.”

⁸¹ “[...] Smetanova hudba pomáhá rozplameňovati národ Smetanův k odboji proti jeho nepřátelům [...]”

⁸² “A v té naší nevládné žalární cele bylo najednou tak světlo a tak hřejivě teplo, jako bychom slyšeli velebné, úchvatné Proroctví a my skláněli se s nevýslovnou vděčností před geniem Smetanovým a před jeho velikou vírou v budoucnost národa.”

⁸³ St. Pierre, *Bedřich Smetana*, 95.

⁸⁴ Ernest Renan, “What Is a Nation?,” in *What Is a Nation? And Other Political Writings*, ed. and trans. M.F.N. Giglioli, Columbia Studies in Political Thought / Political History (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), at 261.

with the same happy and joyful earthly piety.”⁸⁵ Kramář said the Czech soul will remain forever living in Smetana’s “immortal music.”⁸⁶ The soul of the nation was immutable, and its representation in Smetana’s music forever valid. Ambros went further and made the survival of the nation directly conditional upon its reverence for Smetana and following his example: “our nation will not perish [...] as long as it is the nation of Smetana!”⁸⁷ Music standing here for the nation had shown its longevity and strength, and when these were evoked, the nation’s own survival was ensured.

This analysis of the Smetana myth will form the basis for the discussion in the following chapters of the particular projects devised during the centenary. A simple interpretation would be that the common themes in the narrative served to cement the nation, while the deviations served as basis for promotion of particular ideologies. As the discussion in the following chapter shows, in reality this was often not the case: the same myths were utilized to justify varying cultural practices and the deviations from the core narrative were not always translated equally into them.

Of the outliers, Nejedlý’s interpretation of the Smetana myth warrants particular attention.

Nejedlý’s portrait of Smetana and the shifting of his *lidovost*

Zdeněk Nejedlý’s⁸⁸ stature surpassed that of his peers at the Board’s leadership. Following Hostinský’s death, Nejedlý positioned himself as the principal guardian of

⁸⁵ “A jako dnes bude ještě po stoletích český člověk před Smetanovým životním dílem a před jeho osobností stát s touž šťastnou a radostnou zbožností pozemskou.” Arne Novák, “Bedřich Smetana,” *Lidové noviny*, 2 March 1924.

⁸⁶ “V Smetanově nesmrtelné hudbě žije duše národa“

⁸⁷ “národ náš neskoná [...] dokud bude národem Smetanovým!”

⁸⁸ Zdeněk Nejedlý (1878–1962) was a prominent Czech musical critic, musicologist, and politician. He studied aesthetics with Otakar Hostinský and history with Jaroslav Goll at the Czech branch of Charles-Ferdinand University, before embarking on a teaching career in musicology there from 1905. In 1919, he became the first Czech full professor of musicology and went on to establish a musicological department. Throughout his academic career, he mentored generations of scholars, many of whom collaborated with him at the Board for the Erection of the Monument to Bedřich Smetana in Prague. A prolific yet controversial author, Nejedlý produced numerous books, including unfinished biographies of Smetana, Masaryk, and Lenin, as well as thousands of newspaper and journal articles. With the onset of World War II, he joined the Communist Party

Smetana's legacy and was portrayed by some as Hostinský's successor.⁸⁹ Understanding his interpretation of the composer's legacy is thus crucial for assessing his leadership of the Board.

Nejedlý was a student of the aesthetician Otakar Hostinský and historian Jaroslav Goll at the Czech branch of Charles-Ferdinand University. He became a private docent in musicology there in 1905, an associate professor three years later, and a full professor in 1919. During the interwar period, he chaired the musicological department⁹⁰, mentoring several generations of scholars, including Josef Bartoš, Josef Hutter, and Hubert Doležil, who later assumed roles in the Board. While his rigorous work ethic and argumentative skills undoubtedly contributed to his prominence, it was his formal qualifications that particularly bolstered his standing. His active involvement in both musical and political discourses—areas that often overlapped in his work—further enhanced his stature.

The Board members frequently emphasized Nejedlý's formal qualifications in public discussions, suggesting that they conferred upon him (and by extension, the Board) a special authority to speak on Smetana and his relevance. Actions undertaken by Nejedlý were often portrayed to the public as founded on expertise. For instance, when the program of the 1924 five festive concerts in Prague was discussed in the journal *Smetana*—published by Artuš Rektorys and edited by Hubert Doležil—as “the idea and work of Zd. Nejedlý,” it was asserted that “[i]n addition to the celebratory and representational purpose, there is also *always* a methodologically instructive and scientific purpose, so that the enterprise can serve

and emigrated to Moscow. After returning from exile, he held various ministerial roles, notably as the Minister of Education and National Enlightenment, until his death. His influence on the educational curriculum was significant and persisted well into the late twentieth century. Křesťan, *Zdeněk Nejedlý*.

⁸⁹ This myth had a long life as Miloš Jůzl's eulogy on Nejedlý from 1980 demonstrates. In it, he has Nejedlý “[bring] hope to Hostinský in his old age that his historical struggle for the orientation of Czech culture was not in vain and that it would be brought to an end.” “Hostinskému v stáří přinášel naději, že jeho historický boj o orientaci české kultury nebyl marný a že bude doveden do konce.” See Miloš Jůzl, “Vzájemný vztah Zdeňka Nejedlého a Otakara Hostinského [The mutual relationship of Zdeněk Nejedlý and Otakar Hostinský],” in *Velké osobnosti Filozofické fakulty Univerzity Karlovy: Zdeněk Nejedlý*, ed. Miloslav Brůžek, Acta Universitatis Carolinae. Philosophica et historica, no. 1/1980 (Praha: Univerzita Karlova, 1980), 99.

⁹⁰ See Růžena Mužíková, “Zdeněk Nejedlý - zakladatel české hudební vědy [Zdeněk Nejedlý - founder of Czech musicology],” in *Velké osobnosti Filozofické fakulty Univerzity Karlovy: Zdeněk Nejedlý*, ed. Miloslav Brůžek, Acta Universitatis Carolinae. Philosophica et historica, no. 1/1980 (Praha: Univerzita Karlova, 1980), 63.

as a model for the future” (Emphasis of this author).⁹¹ The use of “always” transformed this single act, where simply assembling a concert program became a scientific endeavor, into part of a series of exceptional, culturally significant achievements.

The subsequent section introduces Nejedlý’s positioning of Smetana and frames it within scholarly discussions on his use of the term *lidovost*. This will lay the groundwork for explaining the varied responses of his speech at the grand meeting on 2 March 1924 that inaugurated the celebrations, discussed in Chapter 3. It will also form basis for the discussion of his concept of the celebrations in Chapter 2.

Nejedlý’s contribution to the communist *Rudé právo* characteristically avoided religious connotations that other authors invoked. Instead, it provided ample references to *lidovost* and the working class, describing Smetana as “a true *dělník* (worker) in the field of his art.”⁹² In his narrative, Smetana was portrayed not only as a national awakener but also as someone empathetically connected to the working class. This affinity was depicted as an innate quality of the composer:

From childhood, he had a special love for lid (the people); we know about him that, as a boy, he preferred sitting with the brewery workers and then with farmhands, where he also welcomed all wandering artists and craftsmen who stayed with them regularly. He vividly felt his connection with these currents calling for the freedom of lid. He then infused his art with this spirit.⁹³

The pronoun “it” at the end of this citation, even in the original Czech, has an ambiguous connection to the preceding text. It is presumed that Nejedlý implied Smetana’s music resonated with calls for social justice. This concept in Nejedlý’s text is interwoven

⁹¹ “Celkové i detailní rozvržení koncertů, jež jest myšlenkou a dílem Zd. Nejedlého [...] Vedle účelu oslavného a reprezentativního sledován tu tedy vždy také cíl metodicky instruktivní a vědecký, takže i po této stránce může podnik býti vzorem do další budoucnosti.” See “Koncerty ze skladeb Smetanových v Praze [Concerts of Smetana’s compositions in Prague],” *Smetana* 14 (1924): 77. Emphasis by this author.

⁹² “Byl to pravý dělník na poli svého umění [...]”

⁹³ “Maje pak též od dětství zvláštní lásku k lidu, (víme o něm, že již jako hoch nejraději sedával s pivovarskou chasou a potom s chasou na jejich hospodářském dvoře, kde mimo to rád vítal i všeliké ty potulné umělce i řemeslníky, kteří u nich pravidelně přespávali), cítil živě svou souvislost s těmito proudy, volajícími po svobodě lidu. Tím pak naplnil i své umění.”

with national aspirations, making it often challenging to distinguish between them. One of his claims suggested that Smetana's view of the nation leaned towards the masses:

Smetana never and nowhere praises powerful individuals or powerful strata of the nation; rather, when he speaks of the nation, he envisions the innumerable ranks of *lid*, the mass with which he feels a close affinity and by which, even as an artist, he allows himself to be guided.⁹⁴

Here, Nejedlý expanded Smetana's concept of *lid* beyond the contemporary societal context. According to him, the composer also included "urban, working-class, proletarian people" under this term. Nejedlý stated that these groups, lacking ornate costumes and songs, were generally overlooked by "bourgeois artists." However, Smetana embraced them. He even embraced "*lůza* (the scum) of human society," particularly in *Braniboři v Čechách* (The Brandenburgers in Bohemia). For Nejedlý, this "scum" represented the true essence of the nation.⁹⁵

Nejedlý then posited *lid* as the sole catalyst for Smetana's creativity. He argued that Smetana's work was inspired by the *lidový* (people's) movements of the Czechs in 1848 and the 1860s. By using the word *lid*, earlier linked to workers, to describe the "*lid* speaking" in political movements, he effectively equated it with the proletariat. In flattening the social hierarchy, he not only underscored the influence of the "masses" on Smetana's music but also their political significance in the National Rebirth.

These political movements, said to have been initiated by the masses, supposedly inspired Smetana to create his main works, giving them definitive significance:

He [Smetana] composed "The Bartered Bride" as an homage to the healthy life of the people, "Dalibor" as a model of a true hero fighting against worldly powers, "Libuše" as the ideal representation of the ultimate desire for freedom, and finally, the cycle of symphonic poems "Má vlast," where he amalgamated all these ideas, desires, and

⁹⁴ "Smetana nikdy a nikde *neopěvá* mocné jedince neb mocné vrstvy národa, nýbrž při slově národ se mu vybavují ty nescíslné řady lidu, massa, s níž cítí úzkou spřízněnost a již se i jako umělec dává vésti." Emphasis original.

⁹⁵ "Nikoli ti páni nahoře, již soudí podle kabátu, *zlotřilého bohatého Tausendmarka* chrání a šlechtetného otrhance Jíru odsuzují k smrti, nýbrž ta 'luza' dole je tu Smetanovi vlastním národem."

hopes into a single, magnificent piece, akin to his artistic, educational, and political testament.⁹⁶

Thus, for Nejedlý, *Má vlast* with its thematic program was the pinnacle of Smetana's oeuvre, encompassing all major elements of what he perceived as a profoundly political agenda. Broadly, he referred to *Má vlast* as a "social paradise." His interpretation of the cycle extended beyond merely designating it as a symbol of national independence—it was also a manifesto for social equality.

Nejedlý's use of the term *lidovost* was central to his aesthetics and in flux, as Vladimír Macura suggested in a study on Nejedlý's application of the term in his writings on the National Rebirth.⁹⁷ Macura noted that two interpretations of *lidovost* coexisted at the beginning of the twentieth century: one denoting "folksiness" and the other "democratism," the latter associated with Masaryk's *Česká otázka* (The Czech Question). Macura argued that Nejedlý initially rejected the folksiness aspect in art, which he equated with the mere imitation of folk songs, and thus initially avoided the term *lidovost* in his discussions of Smetana. However, by the 1920s, Nejedlý's usage of *lidovost* evolved to reflect a world influenced by the masses. He also linked the term to *pokrokovost* (progressivism) and collectivism, recognizing values such as "combativeness, cheerfulness, optimism, and the health of the work" in it.⁹⁸ Discussing Nejedlý's post-WWII influence, Macura stated that his goal was to preserve nineteenth-century traditions so they could be revitalized and serve contemporary purposes.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ "Tvoří *Prodanou nevěstu* jako hold zdravému životu lidovému, tvoří *Dalibora* jako vzor pravého hrdiny, bojujícího proti mocným tohoto světa, tvoří *Libuši* jako ideální výraz vrcholné touhy po uskutečnění ideálu svobody, a konečně tvoří cyklus symfonických básní *Má vlast*, v němž shrnul všechny tyto své ideje, touhy i naděje v jediné, velkolepé dílo, v jakousi svou bibli uměleckou, buditelskou i politickou." The word "bible" here should clearly not be taken as a reference to anything religious, but to a canonical text in any field.

⁹⁷ Vladimír Macura, "Krystalizace pojmu 'lidovosti' v Nejedlého pracích o obrození [Crystallization of the notion of *lidovost* in Nejedlý's works on the revival]," in *Šťastný věk a další studie o literatuře a kultuře dvacátého století* (Praha: Academia, 2023), 64–71.

⁹⁸ "[...] kategorie bojovnosti, radostnosti, optimismu a konečně i zdraví díla apod." Macura, 68.

⁹⁹ Vladimír Macura, "Obrozenecký model v Nejedlého koncepci socialistické kultury [The Revivalist Model in Nejedlý's Conception of Socialist Culture]," in *Šťastný věk a další studie o literatuře a kultuře dvacátého století* (Praha: Academia, 2023), 72–76.

Consequently, Nejedlý's use of *lidovost* in 1924 and his overall rhetoric could have been interpreted in two distinct ways: as highlighting the social dimension or humanism as advocated by Masaryk,¹⁰⁰ representing a significant political trend in Czechoslovakia, or as reflecting Marxist philosophy, which was less palatable to some, particularly the political right-wing. This was especially true when invoked during what was essentially a state ceremony. This helps explain the varied responses to Nejedlý's 2 March 1924 speech, as discussed in Chapter 3.

The Smetana Board on a Path to Monumentality

On 11 May 1909, *Umělecká Beseda* (the Artistic Society; further referred to as "UB") met to commemorate Smetana on the eve of the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death. The meeting was attended by a wide range of personalities from academic, musical, and broader artistic circles. As the gathering was drawing to a close, Antonín Benjamin Svojsík, the head of UB, reflected on the satisfactory state of efforts dedicated to Smetana's legacy. The only issue that concerned him was UB's failure to install a memorial plaque for the composer. To address this, he announced the formation of a separate entity, the *Sbor pro zřízení Smetanova pomníku v Praze* (the Board for the Erection of a Smetana Monument in Prague; the Board). This entity, independent yet closely linked to UB, aimed to erect a "worthy monument" to Smetana in Prague.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Refer to the discussion of Masaryk's concept in the context of the Smetana narrative in St. Pierre, *Bedřich Smetana*, 97–102.

¹⁰¹ "[...] novému sdružení, jež běře si dnes za úkol zbudovati mistru Smetanovi v král. hlav. městě Praze důstojný pomník." Zdeněk Nejedlý, *Katalog Smetanovy výstavy v Praze 1917* [Catalogue of the Smetana Exhibition in Prague 1917] (Praha: Smetanova výstava, 1917), 5–10; [53–54] on the genesis of the exposition and on the people involved. "Pro pomník Smetanův [For the Monument to Smetana]," in *Zápisník* [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924," Box 2, SBS.

The main speaker, Otakar Hostinský, one of Smetana's earliest champions, articulated his vision for the monument.¹⁰² Hostinský believed that erecting a monument represented “the highest civic honor a nation can bestow.”¹⁰³ He envisioned it as:

A monument to him [Smetana] must be a work of perfect artistic value, worthy of the artist it represents. My personal, modest wish is for a bright, sunny, radiant apotheosis of the master and his work. The monument should resonate with the fanfares of “Libuše” and symbolize the triumphant Smetana. [...] If the monument cannot be surrounded by lush vegetation, it should at least allow views into nature. Greenery suits Smetana's oeuvre as well as the sun, air, and freedom. The National Theatre was Smetana's guiding star. Ideally, the monument should have a physical and ideological connection with the National Theatre.¹⁰⁴

This passage captures the aesthetician's musing on the ideal representation of Smetana, associating “greenery, sun, air, and freedom” with his music. The Board, in subsequent decades, endeavored to bring this monumental tribute to fruition.

¹⁰² Otakar Hostinský (1847–1910) was an important musical critic, an influential member of *Umělecká beseda*, and a passionate Smetana advocate. As professor of aesthetics at the Charles-Ferdinand University he impacted generations of scholars, including the members of Board Zdeněk Nejedlý, Otakar Zich, Vladimír Helfert, and Josef Bartoš. See Roman Dykast, “Hostinský, Otakar,” in *Český hudební slovník osob a institucí*, 3 December 2011, https://slovník.ceskyhudebnislovník.cz/component/mdictionary/?task=record.record_detail&id=8235. See also Locke, *Opera and Ideology in Prague*, 22–35 for a comprehensive picture of Hostinský's role in shaping the Czech musical aesthetics and his advocacy for Smetana.

¹⁰³ “největší občanská pocta, postavení pomníku, kterou může národ poskytnouti” Cited from “Pro pomník Smetanův [For the Smetana memorial],” in “Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924,” Box 2, SBS.

¹⁰⁴ “Pomník jeho musí býti výtvarnou hodnotou dílo dokonalé, důstojné umělce, ježž má zobrazit. To co bych dále žádal a ovšem je to jen mé osobní, skromné přání, byla by jasná, slunná, zářivá apotheosa mistra a jeho díla. Pomník ten musí být zobrazen jako fanfáry “Libuše”. Pomník vítězícího a vítězného Smetany. [...] Nebude-li moci pomník být obklopen svěží vegetací, budiž umístěn aspoň tak, aby od něho bylo možno zalétnout dále do přírody. Zeleň smavému dílu Smetanovu svědčí zrovna tak jako slunce, vzduch, volnost. Vůdčí hvězdou bylo Smetanovi Národní divadlo. Proto bych vítal, kdyby pomník přišel ve styk s Národním divadlem, nejen ideálně, nýbrž i místně.” Cited from “Pro pomník Smetanův,” in “Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924,” Box 2, SBS.

During World War I, the Board's first chair, historian Jaroslav Goll, proposed a less poetic but practical solution. The monument was to be modest in size, located on Žofín Island, with the renowned sculptor Josef Václav Myslbek commissioned for the design. Economically viable, the Board had amassed about two-thirds of the necessary funds.¹⁰⁵ However, doubts arose among some members, notably Nejedlý, questioning if this plan truly reflected the Board's original vision. In a pivotal 1917 General Meeting, Goll chose not to seek reelection, leading to new leadership under the writer František Táborský as chair and Nejedlý as vice-chair, steering the Board towards its role in the centenary celebrations. It is important to note that the Board never actually built the physical monument to Smetana in Prague. Yet, Hostinský's vision and the debates over what constituted a worthy commemoration remained significant. The question of monumentality became central to the Board's future projects.

As the new Board's leadership took the helm, the 1917 Smetana exhibition opened its doors to the public.¹⁰⁶ The proceeds from this single event, 20,000 K, reached nearly half of the amount accumulated over eight years!¹⁰⁷ The *Výbor* (Committee), an executive arm of the Board, elected in the May 1917 General Meeting, viewed this success as a sign of future prosperity.

Recognizing the need for substantial funds for the monument's erection, the Board intensified fundraising efforts. An extraordinary General Meeting in December 1917

¹⁰⁵ By 1917, the Board had secured approximately 45,000 K of the projected 60,000 to 70,000 K cost of the monument to be built on the Žofín Island. For the balances of assets see "Zápis o schůzi výborové konané dne 3. května 1917 [Minutes of the committee meeting held on 3 May 1917]," in "Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924," Box 2, SBS. For the cost estimate see Bohumil Benoni, "Pokladní zpráva [Treasury Report]," in *Výroční zpráva Sboru pro postavení pomníku Bedřichu Smetanovi v Praze [za rok 1920]* [Annual Report of the Committee for the Erection of a Monument to Bedřich Smetana in Prague [for 1920]] (Praha: [Sbor pro postavení pomníku Bedřichu Smetanovi v Praze], 1921), 8.

¹⁰⁶ Although initiated by the *Klub penzionovaných sólistů Národního divadla* (Club of Retired Soloists of the National Theatre), the 1917 Smetana exhibition was set up by Board members: sculptor Jindřich Čapek, museologist Karel Guth, visual artist František Kysela, and musicologists Helfert and Nejedlý—with Nejedlý also crafting the exhibition's catalogue. See Nejedlý, *Katalog Smetanovy výstavy v Praze 1917*, 5–10; [53–54] on the genesis of the exposition and on the people involved.

¹⁰⁷ Zápis o výborové schůzi konané 12. července 1917 [Minutes of the committee meeting held on 12 July 1917] in "Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924," Box 2, SBS.

amended the statutes to include organizing events and publishing works related to Smetana.¹⁰⁸ Nejedlý, justifying the proposal, highlighted the potential for significant earnings not just from donations but through diverse enterprises, especially publishing, a point that would later gain importance. These amendments empowered the Board to explore new opportunities.

Over the next couple of years, the list of the Board's projects grew significantly. When a detailed program for the centenary celebrations emerged in 1922, the Board's new objectives included acquiring Smetana's estate to establish a Smetana museum for preservation and research, along with the publication of a "monumental edition" of his works.¹⁰⁹ Soon thereafter, a monumental biography was added to their ambitions.

The Board essentially expanded its activities to "provide to Smetana" everything they believed a composer of "Smetana's greatness" deserved. In this role, the Board not only supplemented the UB as originally envisioned but also started to replace it. This shift occurred because, from the Board's leadership perspective, the UB had long ceased fulfilling its intended role, especially in relation to Smetana's legacy. Indeed, there was a palpable disdain from individuals associated with Nejedlý for the UB's leadership. For instance, when Vladimír Helfert was invited to join the UB's Committee in 1908, he sought advice from Nejedlý, stating in a letter, "I simply despise those people who are there today."¹¹⁰ Thus, the Board evolved into a conduit for actualizing a Smetana-centered vision of Czech musical culture. However, as will be demonstrated, this vision introduced a utopian element.

The scope of the Board's projects not only expanded, but their scale also increased. In public statements, they emphasized Smetana's growing stature during the war, where his

¹⁰⁸ "§ 2 [stanov] bude míti toto znění: 'K dosažení účelu toho slouží: a) příspěvky členů, dary, dobrovolné sbírky a výtěžky z uspořádaných k tomu účelu podniků, b) pořádání koncertů, divadelních představení, přednášek, výstav, slavností a podobných podniků, c) vydávání děl majících vztah ke Smetanovi.'" See "Zápis o mimořádné valné hromadě konané 2. prosince 1917" [Minutes of the Extraordinary General Meeting held on 2 December 1917], in "Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924," Box 2, SBS.

¹⁰⁹ *Program slavností B. Smetany v roce stých narozenin 1924* [Program of the festivities B. Smetana in the year of his centenary 1924] (Praha: Sbor pro postav. pomníku B. Smetanovi, 1922), 8–18.

¹¹⁰ "S těmito lidmi, kteří tam jsou dnes, jednoduše pohrdám, [...]." Vladimír Helfert in a letter to Zdeněk Nejedlý dated 15.11.1908. See Josef Hanzal, "Zdeněk Nejedlý a Vladimír Helfert v dopisech," in *Z bojů o českou hudební kulturu*, ed. Petr Čornej et al. (Praha: Academia, 1979), at 189. Cited also in St. Pierre, *Bedřich Smetana*, 84, whose translation is reproduced here.

music became a refuge and a symbol for many. Consequently, everything produced by them was also increasing in its monumental scale.

Moreover, they portrayed the composer's grandeur as if it were directly observable and objectively measurable. Bohumil Benoni, the Board's treasurer and a retired soloist of the National Theater, described the monument to Smetana as "grow[ing] in grandiose size and breadth [...] [b]efore the eyes of the new committee."¹¹¹ For them, the monuments were either to be grandiose in size or deemed unworthy of the composer, as if this was beyond the Board's control, despite it being a conscious decision of their own.

Additionally, they seemed to align past narratives with their agenda. When Hostinský's 1909 speech was referenced in a Board program in 1922, it was significantly edited to seem more decisive (see Appendix 2 for a comparison).¹¹² Hostinský's original statement, "*[w]hat I would ask for next—and of course, this is only my personal, modest wish—would be a bright, sunny, radiant apotheosis of the master and his work,*"¹¹³ was altered to, "*[i]t must be a clear and shining apotheosis of the master and his work*" (emphasis in both quotations by this author).¹¹⁴ Similarly, his comment that the National Theatre was a "guiding star" to Smetana,

¹¹¹ "Před očima nového výboru vyrůstá pomník Smetanův v grandiosní velikosti a šíři." Benoni, "Pokladní zpráva."

¹¹² The opening citation of Hostinský's from 1909 cited in this chapter comes from the minutes of the meeting of the Board, which appear to represent the words as spoken on the occasion. The text of the speech was also published in *Hudební revue* in June 1909, which appears to reproduce a written version of the text, which is more wordy and formal. The comparison of these two versions with that printed in 1922 in the Board's brochure can be found in Appendix 1.

For the source documents see "Pro pomník Smetanův" [For the memorial to Smetana], in "Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924," Box 2, SBS.; Otakar Hostinský, "Pro pomník Bedřichu Smetanovi [For a monument to Bedřich Smetana]," *Hudební revue* 2, no. 6 (1909): 305–8. Otakar Hostinský, "Pro pomník Bedřichu Smetanovi," *Hudební revue* 2, No. 6, 305–308. Emphasis in italics original; *Program slavností B. Smetany v roce stých narozenin 1924*, 8–9.

¹¹³ "To co bych dále žádal — a ovšem je to jen mé osobní, skromné přání, byla by jasná, slunná, zářná apotheosa mistra a jeho díla." See "Pro pomník Smetanův" [For the memorial to Smetana], in "Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924," Box 2, SBS. All italics in these quotations from the minutes of meetings and from the 1922 program are of this author.

¹¹⁴ "Musí to býti jasná a zářivá apotheosa mistra i jeho díla." *Program slavností B. Smetany v roce stých narozenin 1924*, 8–9.

and “I would welcome the memorial to come into contact with the National Theatre,”¹¹⁵ was changed to “the monument *should* come into contact with the National Theatre” (emphasis in both quotations by this author).¹¹⁶ This editing transformed the nature of his message from an open debate to a seemingly divine commandment.

While the Board’s aspirations were rooted in the nineteenth-century aesthetic of nationalism in culture, centralized and monumental, their concrete realization was uniquely their own product.

From Greatness to Bigness: Monumentalism as a Manifestation of the Solid

Speaking of nineteenth-century Germany, the musicologist Alexander Rehding asserted that “monumentality is better understood [...] as the imaginary link between musical bigness and greatness, and this link, in order to appear natural and self-evident, needs to be forever forged anew.”¹¹⁷ This implies that the link is not only an intrinsic quality of monumentality but also subject to continual reaffirmation.

What Rehding posited about music, in the context of the centenary, applied not only to music but also to its many other facets. When Rehding posited that “physical magnitude demonstrates that strength will be victorious,”¹¹⁸ Hostinský’s concept of a monument to “the winning and victorious Smetana”¹¹⁹ mentioned earlier comes to mind. It was naturally envisaged as enormous in size. A notable aspect of the Board’s concept for the celebrations, which will be elaborated in Chapter 2, is that much of what it envisioned as a “permanent monument” to Smetana had a subdued musical component. Minor changes in the speeches, statues, or plaques would have sufficed to commemorate a historian, painter, or writer instead. The contributions to the nation were paramount, overshadowing all else. Therefore, this section’s discussion will focus on monumentality serving the nation more broadly.

¹¹⁵ “Proto bych vítal, kdyby pomník přišel ve styk s Národním divadlem.”

¹¹⁶ “Proto měl by pomník přijít ve styk s Národním divadlem.”

¹¹⁷ Alexander Rehding, *Music and Monumentality: Commemoration and Wonderment in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 9.

¹¹⁸ Rehding, 28.

¹¹⁹ See Note 104.

Out of the various definitions of monuments, this study will use one by the memory studies scholar Aleida Assmann. She defined a monument as “an erected, endowed sign that encodes a message.”¹²⁰ According to her, a monument is stylized, indicating a deliberate enhancement of visibility. More crucially, it must “encode, beyond the property of stylization, a message addressed to fellow and posterity. Monument is what is destined to outlast the present and to speak in this remote horizon of cultural communication.”¹²¹ Thus, a monument addresses both the present and posterity.

The Board’s efforts, therefore, aimed to shape contemporary citizenship and send a message to the future. The communication on the contemporary plane was mainly connected to the Smetana myth.

The message to the future, however, can be interpreted in various ways. Alois Riegl, in his foundational 1903 work *Der moderne Denkmalkultus*, asserted that *gewollte Erinnerungswert* (intended commemorative value) of a monument “has the purpose, set from the beginning, i.e. from the erection of the monument, of never allowing a moment to become the past, so to speak, and of always keeping it present and alive in the consciousness of those who come after.”¹²² This “moment” can be tied either to Smetana himself or to the centenary when he was commemorated.

In the former case, the significance conveyed to contemporaries about the importance of Smetana would presumably extend into perpetuity. As mentioned earlier, a myth that was part of the narrative claimed that as long as the Czech nation remained the “nation of Smetana,” it would retain its independence. The monuments would thus symbolize the ambition to never let the Czechs forget Smetana.

¹²⁰ “ein aufgerichtetes, ein gestiftetes Zeichen, das eine Botschaft kodiert” See Aleida Assmann, “Kultur als Lebenswelt und Monument,” in *Kultur als Lebenswelt und Monument*, ed. Dietrich Harth and Aleida Assmann (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1991), 13–14.

¹²¹ “eine an die Mit- und Nachwelt gerichtete Botschaft kodieren. Monument ist, was dazu bestimmt ist, die Gegenwart zu überdauern und in diesem Fernhorizont kultureller Kommunikation zu sprechen.” Assmann, 14.

¹²² “hat überhaupt den von Anbeginn, das heißt von der Errichtung des Denkmals gesetzten Zweck, einen Moment gewissermaßen niemals zur Vergangenheit werden zu lassen, im Bewusstsein der Nachlebenden stets gegenwärtig und lebendig zu erhalten.” See Alois Riegl, *Der moderne Denkmalkultus: sein Wesen und seine Entstehung* [The modern cult of monuments: its nature and origins] (Wien: Braumüller, 1903), 38.

In the latter case, the message might seek to eternalize the honors bestowed upon Smetana during the centenary, and with them, the people who facilitated them. To illustrate, in its 1917 proclamation written by Nejedlý, the Board asserted that to prevent Smetana's feats from oblivion, they "must be perpetuated by a memorial that would tell future times what Smetana was to his people in this time."¹²³ This need did not diminish even after the war was over. When Doležil reported in 1925 about the first volume of the "monumental edition" (to be discussed at great length in Chapter 3), he spoke of the public's "obligatory gratitude to all those who have and will have merit for the accomplishment of so great a work."¹²⁴ The actors saw themselves as deserving honor alongside their idol.

Both "moments" were present. The centenary of Smetana aimed not just to enshrine his crucial role in establishing the national identity, but also to weave a meta-narrative, monumentalizing how the nation itself embraced and celebrated his legacy throughout the centenary.

Riegl's quote implies that both moments are to be retained in the nation's memory forever. In his interpretation, the monument's permanence, a utopia, is an inherent attribute. As has been made clear, the monumentization of Smetana fulfilled this need well, providing what was perceived as a lasting, proven certainty to the people.

Monuments were ideal for this purpose. By nature, they stand apart from the everyday. Assmann posited that a monument symbolizes the festive or "solid," contrasting it with the *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld), which represents the everyday, the fluid, based on phenomenology.¹²⁵ Interestingly, she also noted that "[the lifeworld context] is unable to absorb ruptures, cracks,

¹²³ [Smetana se stává] „v nejkritičtější chvíli nelepším mluvčím, prorokem i vůdcem svého národa, neboť nejlépe ukazoval cesty k uskutečnění národního ideálu, svou hudbou pak, radostnou a důvěřivou, nejvíce osvěžovali naše síly, aby nezemdlely. Tento veliký čin Smetanův nesmí býti nikdy zapomenut, nýbrž musí býti zvětšen památníkem, jenž by i příštím dobám vypravoval o tom, čím byl Smetana svému lidu v této době.“ Zdeněk Nejedlý, "[Provolání Sboru; Pronouncement of the Board]," *Smetana* 7, no. 10 (15 November 1917): 137.

¹²⁴ "Ale běží přece jen a hlavně doma o úspěch mravní, o náležitý ohlas a uznání enormního významu podniku, jež se strany naší veřejnosti budou zároveň osvědčením opravdu povinné vděčnosti k těm všem, kdož o provedení díla tak velikého mají a budou míti zásluhy. Hubert Doležil, "První svazek Souborných děl B. Smetany [The first volume of the Collected Works of B. Smetana]," *Smetana* 15, no. 1, 2–3 (1925): 12–13, 44–46.

¹²⁵ Assmann, "Kultur als Lebenswelt und Monument."

discrepancies, because these exceed the structures of self-evident normality and unquestioning givenness.”¹²⁶ This suggests that a rupture, such as the vacuum following the disintegration of Austria, needed to be filled only with the solid, the monumental. This supports the thesis made in Chapter 3 that, aside from the strength of the Smetana myth, the timing of the centenary, shortly after the establishment of Czechoslovakia, contributed to its grand scale.

In the context of the Smetana myth, where he was portrayed as a divine hero and savior, the factual accuracy of statements was secondary, as they were intended to be interpreted in the context of the festive. Their goal was to foster a shared identity and instill a value system in the citizenry. Thus, when Hostinský mused on the splendor of the future monument to Smetana in 1909, he felt compelled to add qualifications. However, when these qualifications were omitted by the Board in 1922 to better align his vision with the world of the “solid,” an ambition larger than life arose.¹²⁷

* * *

The centenary editions of newspapers depicted Smetana as a towering figure in the national landscape, akin to a saint who sacrificed for the nation. His music was celebrated as both uniquely original, capturing the distinct essence of the Czech soul, and in line with the most progressive musical trends of his era. His oeuvre was seen as having conferred legitimacy upon the nation in the international arena. Furthermore, it was considered an everlasting source of strength for the Czech people.

Readers greeted by Smetana's image on every front page of Czech newspapers on 2 March 1924 witnessed what could be termed a national “mass ceremony,” resonating with Anderson's concept.¹²⁸ In 1924, the concept of “imagining the community” was taken to new heights. Various events were organized throughout Czechoslovakia, many embodying a ceremonial essence. A prime example was the grand inaugural gathering at the National Theater on 2 March. In other instances, like the open-air concert in Brno on 29 May, the ceremonial aspect scaled up to a truly “mass ceremony.”

¹²⁶ “Brüche, Risse, Diskrepanzen vermag er [der lebensweltliche Kontext] nicht in sich auf zunehmen, weil diese die Strukturen der selbstverständlichen Normalität und des fraglosen Gegebenseins übersteigen.” See Assmann, 12.

¹²⁷ Assmann, 11.

¹²⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 32–34.

The efforts were fueled by a desire to honor a composer of such stature with a commemoration that truly reflected his grandiose contributions. Consequently, several monumental projects were launched around the centenary, striving to materialize the festive narrative surrounding Smetana into concrete achievements, thereby transforming the myth narrative into the physical world. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, this ambition often blurred the lines between the tangible and the conceptual, leading to the conception of projects that often surpassed what was practically achievable.

Chapter 2 The Board as the Guardian and Catalyst of the Smetana Legacy

The establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918 ushered in a wave of new agendas and priorities for many, as institutional structures of the new state began to take shape. Amidst these transformative events, the Board's Committee experienced an eleven-month hiatus in its activities between 1918 and 1919.¹²⁹ As they resumed their activity, they observed that with the war's end Smetana's star had slightly dimmed, leading to a reduced interest in participating in or supporting the Board. This had a direct impact on the financial standing of the Board.

At the end of 1920, just months before it announced that it would take responsibility for the centenary celebrations, the Board reported assets of 182,330 Kč¹³⁰ and 856 members.¹³¹ But the membership base was not growing: only 22 new members joined in 1920¹³² and of the existing members, as many as 626 were approached regarding their overdue fees.¹³³ The annual income from membership fees and private donations amounted to just couple thousand crowns.¹³⁴ The entity was kept alive with state subsidies (in 1920: 17,820 Kč) and royalties from performing Smetana's operas in the Prague National Theater (in 1920: 5,330 Kč). After accounting for the inflation surge that hit Austria during the war, the Board funds had significantly diminished in real terms. Consequently, the level of its assets and its income gave no prospect that even a portion of the ambitious plans that they conceived of in 1917 could come to fruition in the near future.

¹²⁹ The last meeting of the Committee before the revolution was on 4 July 1918 and the first one after it on 30 May 1919. See minutes from the meetings in "Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924," Box 2, SBS.

¹³⁰ Benoni, "Pokladní zpráva," 6.

¹³¹ Alois Waisar, "[Zpráva tajemníka]," in *Výroční zpráva Sboru pro postavení pomníku Bedřichu Smetanovi v Praze [za rok 1920]* (Praha: [Sbor pro postavení pomníku Bedřichu Smetanovi v Praze], 1921), 5.

¹³² Waisar.

¹³³ Information presented by secretary Waisar. "Zápis z výborové schůze konané dne 16 března 1921" [Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 17 March 1921], in "Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924," Box 2, SBS.

¹³⁴ The membership fees received amounted to 4,052 Kč and private donations to 1,574 Kč in 1920.

The Board's leadership was acutely aware of this and was forthright about it. Treasurer Benoni echoing the link between greatness of the composer and the size of a monument to him, articulated the situation in the Board's annual report from May 1921 as follows (emphasis added by this author):

Before the eyes of the new committee, a monument to Smetana grows in grandiose size and breadth. The reported wealth and its growth so far this year play a small role here. Judging by the present price of money, I do not see our great task being accomplished any time soon, and if it is not possible to show at least a threefold annual increase in the next few years, the erection of the Smetana Monument will be delayed until the time of our great-grandchildren.

[...] I consider it my duty to tell the General Assembly and *the Czech public what the finances of our Board should be in view of Smetana's importance for our nation, and what, unfortunately, they still are.* May the treasury report next year be more joyful, may it bring us closer to the goal of our beautiful task!¹³⁵

Benoni's text reveals the Board's philosophy. With the growing "greatness of Smetana," as if objectively measurable, the plans for the monument were enlarged. The treasurer said it outright that the Committee in its daydreaming about the monument ignored the actual balance that the entity had accumulated. They simply expertly assessed the "importance" of the master and reported: still not enough, contribute more! That they would have been picturing the monument in too grand proportions was out of the question.

Remarkably, the treasurer reported the dismal state of finances not only to the members of the Board, as might have been expected, but also to the "Czech public," for this was a matter for the entire nation. Everyone was expected to contribute and help the Board to make their vision a reality. Chair of the National Assembly Tomášek echoed this point when

¹³⁵ "Před očima nového výboru vyrůstá pomník Smetanův v grandiosní velikosti a šíři. Tu arciť hraje malou úlohu letos vykázané jmění a dosavadní jeho vzrůst. Podle dnešní ceny peněz soudě, nevidím v brzké době uskutečnění našeho velikého úkolu, a nebude-li lze v příštích letech vykázati se alespoň trojnásobným ročním přírůstkem jmění, bude oddáleno zřízení Smetanova pomníku do dob našich pravníků. [...] považuji za svou povinnost říci valné hromadě a české veřejnosti, jaké by měly být finance Sboru našeho vzhledem k Smetanovu významu pro náš národ, a jaké, žel, dosud jsou. Kéž jest pokladní zpráva v příštím roce radostnější, kéž nás více přiblíží k cíli našeho krásného úkolu!" Benoni, "Pokladní zpráva," 8.

in his speech during the grand meeting on 2 March 1924 posed the question whether the nation gave everything to Smetana as Smetana did give to the nation.¹³⁶

Except that the nation did not seem to hear it, or to care. As Benoni's tone suggests, the Board was bitter at the public that they either did not understand their debt to Smetana, or were not willing to honor it. In the report, he also complains that out of the thirty-one Czechoslovak financial institution that the Board asked to contribute, only a few paid money towards the monument (mostly negligible amounts, like 200 Kč) and a full twenty-seven of them "failed to respond."¹³⁷ No wonder thus that fundraising activities were a standing item on the agenda of the Board's committee at that time. Nevertheless, the Board continued to struggle to achieve a significant breakthrough. Public appeals that it published in the press yielded no noticeable results.

Drawing the First Line: The Board's Assertive 1921 Appeal

To combat its challenging financial situation and the waning public interest, the Board intensified their fundraising campaigns. Strikingly, it was this shift in focus that led them to announce the 1924 celebrations three years in advance. As the Committee's meeting on 17 March 1921 neared its end, discussions revolved around issuing another appeal to the nation, aimed at recruiting new members and soliciting contributions. It was the Board's secretary, Alfons Waisar, who suggested a novel framing—using the impending centennial as a lure to capture attention.¹³⁸ Surprisingly, until that moment, the meticulously kept Committee minutes included no reference to the centenary. This proclamation therefore seemed less a calculated move and more a spontaneous one to enhance their fundraising plea.

¹³⁶ "Věstník Sboru pro postavení pomínku B. Smetanovi: Oslavy Bedřicha Smetany v jubilejní den narození 2. března [Bulletin of the Board for the erection of Monument B. Smetana: Celebration of Bedřich Smetana on the anniversary of his birth on 2 March]," *Smetana* 14, no. 1, 2 (19 April 1924): 14.

¹³⁷ Benoni, "Pokladní zpráva," 8.

¹³⁸ "Tajemník Waisar navrhuje, aby Sbor otiskl k výročnímu dni 12. května ve všech českých novinách provolání, jehož hlavním účelem by bylo získávání nových členů a v němž by bylo zároveň upozorněno na blížící se jubilejní rok 1924." "Zápis výborové schůze, konané dne 17. března 1921 [Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 17 March 1921]," in "Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924," Box 2, SBS.

In the next meeting, Nejedlý was chosen to word the appeal.¹³⁹ As both a Smetana enthusiast and a skilled writer, his product was bound to go beyond merely highlighting the centenary. When it was printed on the front page of the May 1921 issue of *Smetana* journal and also, though less prominently, in various daily papers, it was clear that the Board had asserted a central role in leading the upcoming celebrations while also presuming an unwavering support from the public (see Figure 2).

The text not only marked the Board's initial step toward securing control over the centenary festivities but also illuminated the key ideas, arguments, and rhetorical strategies they would employ in subsequent pronouncements. Recognizing its significance, its detailed analysis will be presented here. While several points are introduced and briefly touched upon in this section, a deeper exploration of certain aspects is dealt with in separate chapters.

The opening paragraph of the text deserves to be quoted in full (original emphasis preserved in italics; parts of the text highlighted in bold discussed below):

On the day when the **attention** of the **entire nation** turns to the bright memory of the **greatest Czech artist** and creator of our national music, *Bedřich Smetana*, the Board for the erection of a monument to Bedřich Smetana reminds the **whole** of our **public** that in three years, in 1924, will be the *centenary* of the birth of our **great artist**. The **entire nation** will **surely** use this opportunity to **show** in respect and love what *Bedřich Smetana was and is to them*. The Board has therefore decided, as a **corporation called to do so in the first place**, to **now already take the lead** in these jubilee celebrations and **started preparatory work** for them.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ "Zápis výborové schůze, konané dne 29. dubna 1921 [Minutes of the committee meeting held on 29 April 1921]," in "Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924," Box 2, SBS.

¹⁴⁰ "V den, kdy se pozornost celého národa obrací k světlé památce největšího českého umělce a tvůrce naší národní hudby *Bedřicha Smetany*, připomíná Sbor pro postavení pomníku Bedřichu Smetanovy celé naší veřejnosti, že za tři léta, r. 1924, připadne již *stoletá památka* narození našeho velkého umělce. Celý národ zajisté použije této příležitosti, aby v úctě i lásce projevil, čím mu byl a jest Bedřich Smetana. Sbor se proto rozhodl, aby jako korporace k tomu na prvním místě povoláná postavil se již nyní v čelo těmto jubilejním oslavám a zahájil k nim přípravné práce." Emphasis original. "1824–1924," *Smetana* 11, no. 2–3 (25 May 1921): 21.

SMETANA

HUDEBNÍ LIST.

OBSAH: 1824—1924. — *Zdeněk Nejedlý*: Dvě Filharmonie. — *K. B. Jiráček*: K otázce zpěvackých spolků. — *Jos. B. Foerster*: Mahler. — Divadlo: Česká opera v Brně. (Z. N.) Koncerty: Česká Filharmonie v sezoně 1920—1921. (H. D.) — Pěvecká Sdružení (J. B.) — Beethoven Missa solemnis. (Z. N.) — Návštěvy cizích umělců (H. D.) — Knihy. — Hudebniny. — Z hudebního života. — Listárna redakční.

1824—1924.

V den, kdy se pozornost celého národa obrací k světlé památce největšího českého umělce a tvůrce naší národní hudby Bedřicha Smetany, připomíná Sbor pro postavení pomníku Bedřichu Smetanovi celé naší veřejnosti, že za tři léta, r. 1924, připadne již stoletá památka narození našeho velkého umělce. Celý národ jistě použije této příležitosti, aby v úctě i lásce projevil, čím mu byl a jest Bedřich Smetana. Podepsaný Sbor se proto rozhodl, aby jako korporace k tomu na prvním místě povoláná postavil se již nyní v čelo těmto jubilejním oslavám a zahájil k nim přípravné práce.

Sbor sám pomýšlí v tomto jubilejním roce položit základní kámen pomníku, jež podle svého programu vybuduje Bedřichu Smetanovi jako viditelný památník vděčnosti národa. Za tou příčinou vypíše k tomuto roku i uměleckou soutěž na pomník. Její výsledky pak budou tvořiti část Smetanovy výstavy, již po nezapomenutelné výstavě roku 1917 Sbor uskuteční v nové a zvětšené ještě podobě. Neméně však chce Sbor věnovati pozornost živému dílu Bedřicha Smetany, jeho mistrovským skladbám, jež hodlá za součinnosti všech našich nej přednějších umělců a uměleckých ústavů dáti provést ve

vzorných představeních operních i mimořádně skvělých večerech koncertních. Jako trvalou památku předloží pak Sbor v tomto roce první svazky Souborného díla Bedřicha Smetany, jež Sbor chystá ve vydání monumentálním po stránce vnitřní i vnější.

Všechny tyto podniky budou jistě středem všech Smetanových oslav v tomto jubilejním roce. Aby mohly býti uskutečněny za součinnosti všech umělců a institucí k tomu povolaných, a dále aby i všechny ostatní oslavné podniky (v Praze, v jiných městech, na venkově i v cizině) byly vedeny jednotným duchem, pozve podepsaný Sbor v brzké době zástupce jednotlivých korporací ke společné úradě, aby mohl býti ustaven komitét, jenž by byl vůdcem i střediskem všeho slavnostního ruchu v jubilejním roce 1924.

Oznamuje toto své usnesení veřejnosti, podepsaný Sbor prosí, aby je naše veřejnost vzala laskavě na vědomí a aby již v těchto prvních přípravných pracích byla mu nápomocna tak, jak toho význam Bedřicha Smetany pro náš národ a jeho kulturu zasluhuje. Rok 1924 budiž nám svátkem, ale i prací v duchu Bedřicha Smetany!

V Praze, dne 12. května 1924.

Za Sbor pro postavení pomníku Bedřichu Smetanovi v Praze:

Fr. Táborský, předseda.

Dr. Zdeněk Nejedlý, místopředseda.

Josef Jiráček, místopředseda.

Dr. Karel Guth, jednatel.

Dr. Josef Bartoš, II. jednatel.

Bohumil Benoni, pokladník.

Figure 2 The title page of *Smetana* journal with the Board's appeal to the nation

The text draws on the prevailing myth surrounding Smetana, a topic delved into in Chapter 1. This myth was seemingly so embedded in public consciousness that it warranted only a brief mention in the text. Notably, Smetana is anointed as the “greatest Czech artist,” positioning him not merely as a giant in music, but across all artistic domains. The recurrent use of the term “great(est) artist” combined with repeated references to the “entire nation” serves a rhetorical purpose. These repetitions are likely intended to reinforce and naturalize these concepts, echoing the way oral traditions commonly emphasized key phrases through repetition. The effect of this strategy is to elevate the beginning of the text from the realm of the living to the monumental, a transition discussed in Chapter 1.

In the opening paragraph, the narrative shifted from discussing the current events of the 1921 anniversary to anticipating the forthcoming events of 1924, while steadily heightening expectations for national participation in the Smetana celebrations. Initially focusing on the present, the text reported that on the anniversary of Smetana’s death, the “entire nation” reflected on his legacy. Hereby it redefined the nation, introducing the allegiance to the composer as the measure of true nationality.

Simultaneously, in this present context, the Board, acting as if it were a higher authority, directed the nation’s focus towards the grand anniversary in 1924. The newly defined nation is expected to listen attentively. The fact that the Board needed to “remind” it of the impending centenary suggests that the nation was either not sufficiently aware or not adequately demonstrating its awareness. It is clear from the minutes of their meetings, the Board’s Committee deduced this from the low and declining interest to contribute to their activities. Consequently, the Board acting as a parental figure or perhaps as the self-proclaimed guardian of Smetana’s legacy, found it necessary to raise a warning finger. By the end of the paragraph, the Board announced it would lead the centenary festivities, one could therefore argue that the implied inaction from the nation, potentially jeopardizing the celebrations, was to invoke a sense of approaching urgency.

By appealing to “what Smetana *was* and *is* to them [the entire nation]” (emphasis added), the text roots the composer’s contemporary relevance in his historical impact, underscoring a sense of continuity. And this at a time when public symbols were sifted through to separate

the quintessentially Czech from the Austrian and Imperial. The message was that Smetana was a true national “solid,”¹⁴¹ both before and after the 1918 revolution.

Looking ahead to the future, the narrative described what was to happen in 1924 almost as a matter of course: the “entire nation” would be demonstrating their love to Smetana. The word “surely” serves as a subtle prompt, encouraging everyone to fulfill what is implied as their duty; they were to prove their dedication to the composer through action. At the end of the text, the first request would be presented to the public: to stand ready to help the Board in preparing the centenary.

In the last sentence of the introductory paragraph, the text, back in the present plane, announces the Board’s decision to spearhead the centenary celebrations. The connecting clause is *proto* (therefore), a conjunctive adverb of cause and effect, one is, however, at a loss to understand what cause the writer had in mind. If the flow of the text is anything to go by, the Board decided to take the lead because it expected the whole nation to demonstrate in 1924 its allegiance to Smetana. Strange as it may seem, this reading is corroborated by the evidence in the archive that I have presented above. The Board brought up the centenary to incite public to (financially) support its activities. Of course, the public would not have been aware of this and would therefore simply slide over this illogical conjunction.

The text thereafter presents, almost as an afterthought, the Board’s self-professed “qualification” as its primary justification. But this raises a crucial question: In which domain does this qualification hold merit? Through the spectrum of activities proposed for the centenary, the Board aimed to project a specific image. They sought to persuade the public that their scholarly grasp of Smetana equipped them uniquely, endowing them with unparalleled expertise for all related undertakings. This included tasks like organizing concerts, where a scholarly understanding wasn’t traditionally a prerequisite. In essence, the Board was leveraging its academic credentials—its cultural capital—as a means to dominate areas that weren’t inherently scholarly in nature. As subsequent sections will illuminate, they largely succeeded in convincing many stakeholders of this somewhat novel perspective.

Last point to make about the opening paragraph is that whenever the name of the Board is mentioned, it omits the location detail (“...a monument to Bedřich Smetana [in Prague]”). The full name of the society is only printed at the foot of the text, above the names of its

¹⁴¹ See the discussion of the solid versus liquid in Chapter 1.

officials. In a text where the Board was putting itself at the head of the “entire nation” its local focus as captured in its full name was likely seen as a handicap. This signals that the Board (or at least Nejedlý) realized it was important to present their endeavor as not merely local but national.

To summarize, in the first paragraph of the appeal the Board incited the nation, now defined by its relation to Smetana, to keep in mind the upcoming centenary and demonstrate through actions their allegiance to the composer. The Board also put itself at the helm of the festivities, citing its unique qualification.

Next, the text presented what the Board was planning to do in 1924, briefly:

- Laying the foundation stone to the Smetana Monument and opening a competition for the monument’s design,
- Mounting the Smetana exhibition, on an even grander scale than that of 1917,
- Performing the masterworks of Smetana “in co-operation with all our foremost artists and art institutions,”
- Publishing the first volume of the Collected Works of Smetana in “a monumental edition both internally and externally.”

The Board added that “[a]ll these enterprises will surely be at the center of all Smetana celebrations in this jubilee year.”¹⁴² And they were right, at least geographically. Laying of the foundation stone, the exhibition and a cycle of five official concerts were, of course, to take place in Prague. All of the items were also to be, as the greatness of Smetana dictated, monumental. And in all of them the Board was to be the main actor. Even the artists set to perform Smetana’s music were relegated to a secondary role, for it was the Board who would, as the wording reads, “have them perform” the masterworks.

In the subsequent paragraph, the text announced that the Board would soon convene all interested parties to form a council. This body would serve as the center of all festivities during the Jubilee year of 1924, ensuring that every related celebration, whether in Prague, other towns, the countryside, or abroad, would resonate with a *jednotný duch* “uniform spirit”—see further discussion below. While the proposed meeting did occur a year later, no such council materialized. Instead, the Board assumed direct oversight of all events and thus solidified its influence over the narrative surrounding Smetana.

¹⁴² “Všechny tyto podniky budou jistě středem všech Smetanových oslav v tomto jubilejním roce.”

Finally, at the very end of the text, a plea comes that “our public kindly acknowledge [the Board’s resolution] and already in these preparatory works be of assistance to the Board to the extent that the significance of Bedřich Smetana for our nation and its culture deserves.”¹⁴³ Thus, masterly, the Board makes the legacy of Smetana its property, when a mere lack of assistance to the Board is deemed a sacrilege, of Smetana and the national culture alike. One can see that the text had laid foundation for this claim from its start. With Smetana being the greatest artist the nation ever had and the Board the most qualified to lead the centenary celebrations, how could one not assist it in any way one can?

One question that I would be asking in this text is whether all that the Board did to tailor its agenda to fit the entire nation was to occasionally suppress “in Prague” in its name. Specifically, did they conceive of a nation-wide blueprint of celebrations that would address the needs of the new republic? After all, the “Czechoslovak nation” was a much larger entity than those who had previously regarded Prague to be their cultural center.¹⁴⁴ With no debate within the Board on how best to celebrate Smetana in the new state, or at least no documented one, the initial plan for the centenary was likely put together by Nejedlý himself. As can be seen, in it he repackaged existing projects, namely the monument and an edition, and added the proven cash-cow of an exhibition as well as five festive concerts to take place in the capital. So it appears that the Board changed the shop sign while keeping most of the old wares within.

It could be argued that the Board presented the four points of the program in the appeal as its contribution to the centenary celebrations, with the expectation that other institutions would follow suit. At the same time, however, it usurped the right to lead the project and, as I will show, would direct most of the funds made available by the state for the celebrations to its own projects. Since the Board itself warned against fragmentation of the limited resources available for the celebrations, it must have been aware that no one would be able

¹⁴³ “[...] podepsaný Sbor prosí, aby je [usnesení Sboru] naše veřejnost vzala laskavě na vědomí a aby již v těchto prvních přípravných pracích byla mu nápomocna tak, jak toho význam Bedřicha Smetany pro náš národ a jeho kulturu zasluhuje.”

¹⁴⁴ See Jiří Fukač and Josef Válka, “Morava [Moravia],” in *Slovník české hudební kultury*, ed. Petr Macek, 1. vyd (Praha: Editio Supraphon, 1997), 568–71; Jiří Fukač, Olga Settari, and Jiří Vysloužil, “Brno,” in *Slovník české hudební kultury*, ed. Petr Macek, 1. vyd (Praha: Editio Supraphon, 1997), 78–83; Ivan Poledňák, “Slovensko [Slovakia],” in *Slovník české hudební kultury*, ed. Petr Macek, 1. vyd (Praha: Editio Supraphon, 1997), 844–47.

to initiate any large-scale and differently conceived celebrations outside of those devised by them. As the example of the Brno Foundation in Chapter 4 will show, it even found such enterprises a thorn in its side and sought to restrict their access to the funding by the Ministry.

As my analysis of the Board's 1921 appeal has demonstrated, the Board astutely positioned itself at the forefront of the centenary celebration plans. Announcing its leadership intention at a time when the event wasn't yet a common consideration, the Board gained a temporal edge. Should any other organization like UB, the National Theater, Czech Philharmonic, Pěvecká obec Československá, or other, come forward with alternative visions of how to celebrate Smetana on the national scale, they would have to reckon with the Board's prior claim. Any such challenges would likely face resistance from the Board's leadership, who might frame these as threats not just to the Board but to national interests.

The textual framing of the appeal portrays the Board's claim as an inherent right: they position themselves as the torchbearers for Smetana. However, this assertive stance seems more a result of the text's confident rhetoric than any formal entitlement. It is worth noting that the Board's official mandate was still solely to erect a monument in Prague and the expansion of their activities from 1917 was only to help fund it.

On the formal level, the text elevates the Board's decision to lead the centenary by using the term *usnesení* (resolution), lending an air of official gravity and well-planned intentionality. This choice of wording suggests a comprehensive, well-discussed plan. Yet, archival documents suggest the opposite. No evidence of discussions with third parties regarding celebration plans exists before the text's publication. Nor does any record of internal, structured discourse within the Committee.

The text's unanimous approval at the General Meeting where it was read by Nejedlý might seem like a resounding endorsement. However, of the mere sixteen Board members present, twelve were "insiders," affiliated with its administrative bodies either just before or after the meeting. The limited attendance at this crucial meeting points to two possibilities: an implicit trust in the leadership or sheer indifference to the Board's initiatives.¹⁴⁵ Yet, none

¹⁴⁵ Předseda Táborský zahajuje valnou hromadu o půl hodiny později než stanoveno, poněvadž nesešlo se než 16 členů." "Zápis řádné valné hromady, která se konala dne 11. května 1921 [Minutes of the Ordinary General Meeting held on 11 May 1921]" in "Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924," Box 2, SBS.

of this behind-the-scenes dynamic was recognizable in the public appeal that cemented the Board's influence over the celebrations.

To summarize, while the Board's presumed right to organize the centenary was conditioned on the Board's existing political and cultural capital (and of that of its key officials), it was also constructed through their acts and pronouncements, such as this one. In other words, any potential contenders—and Jiří Křest'an noted that the Board was not the only body to claim the celebrations their own and needed to “exercise certain effort to achieve the position of the sole coordinator”¹⁴⁶—were aware that they were entering a marked battlefield. For the certainty with which the Board claimed their leadership added to the fact that they were the first.

From Monumentality to a “Uniform Spirit”

As mentioned previously, the Board wielded significant influence over the narrative by promoting the idea that only a collective effort “uniform in spirit” would be worthy of Smetana. A crucial aspect of my thesis is understanding the complexities of translating myth or utopia into reality. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the use of the term “monumentality” in context of Smetana celebrations.

For that I will turn to Vladimír Helfert's critique of the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the composer's passing. Helfert, a recent Doctor of Philosophy graduate from the Prague university, likely voiced the sentiments shared by a broader circle of Smetanites. Among them of his teacher Hostinský, who is believed to have profoundly influenced the young scholar.¹⁴⁷

In the text that Helfert published in May 1909, he lamented the fragmented nature of the concerts and noted their inability to form a “cohesive celebration of Smetana, as the year's jubilee demanded.”¹⁴⁸ He articulated his vision for the celebrations as follows (original emphasis maintained in italics; text in bold highlights points discussed below):

¹⁴⁶ “Mezi existujícími spolky nebyl jediným možným uchazečem o uspořádání oslav a musel vyvinout jisté úsilí, aby si vydobyl postavení jediného koordinátora.” Křest'an, *Zdeněk Nejedlý*, 181.

¹⁴⁷ Pečman, *Vladimír Helfert*, 16–25.

¹⁴⁸ “nemohou vyústiti v jednotnou slavnost Smetanovu, jak by toho letošní jubileum žádalo” Vladimír Helfert, “K letošním Smetanových oslavám [To this year's Smetana celebrations],” *Pražská lidová revue*, May 1909, at 137. Helfert, at 137.

The celebration of Smetana's jubilee must, in its internal and external nature, **correspond to the significance Smetana** has achieved in our culture and art as our greatest and most individual artist. The celebration of Smetana's jubilee should be a **spontaneous manifestation of the entire nation** for the work of the founder of our modern music, an enthusiastic *Smetana festival* where the **respect and unconditional enthusiasm** of all of us for Smetana's life's work would manifest in a *unified, as if from a single throat, exuberant cheer*. This year's celebration of Smetana's jubilee should embody a grand, joyous national *musical celebrations in Smetana's honor, a Smetana festival*. Only in this manner, **only with the participation of all those to whom Smetana gifted his work and for whom his work is sacred**, can Smetana's memory truly be honored as it demands, only in this way can the celebration truly be **dignified, celebratory, and exceptional**, and only in this manner can the celebration manifest the entire nation's reverence and enthusiasm for our master.¹⁴⁹

The basic principle of celebrating Smetana as discussed in the text—monumentality—aligned with the Board's later conception. But monumentality here was expressed through a spontaneous manifestation of the entire nation, a nation-wide Smetana festival.

The vision appears utopian. Such a spontaneous demonstration mirrors revolutionary zeal, but it is hard to imagine it unfolding naturally and repeatedly. However, in the poetic language of the festival this ambition speaks of the desire to bring the nation together through Smetana's music. The word "unified" pointed to the nation celebrating Smetana as its symbol.

¹⁴⁹ "Oslava Smetanova jubilea má svým vnitřním i vnějším rázem odpovídati významu, který si dobyl Smetana v naší kultuře a v našem umění jakožto náš největší a nej individuálnější umělec; oslava Smetanova jubilea má být spontánní manifestací celého národa pro dílo zakladatele naší moderní hudby, nadšená *slavnost Smetanova*, kde by se manifestovala úcta nás všech a bezpodmínečné nadšení pro životní dílo Smetanova *jednotným, jakoby z jediného hrdla vyraženým nadšeným jásosem*: oslava letošního jubilea Smetanova měla by se vtělit ve velikou, radostnou národní *hudební slavnost Smetanovu, ve Smetanův festival*. Jen tímto způsobem, jen účastenstvím všech, komu Smetana dílo své daroval a komu dílo jeho je svaté, mohla by být uctěna památka Smetanova tak, jak toho vyžaduje, jen tím způsobem mohla by dopadnouti v pravdě důstojně, oslavně a mimořádně, jen tím způsobem mohla by oslava manifestovati pietu a nadšení celého národa pro našeho mistra." Helfert, at 138. Helfert, at 138.

In contrast to that, the demand for “uniform spirit” during the centenary envisioned, in my reading, a singular narrative on Smetana and his significance. A narrative naturally curated by the custodians of Smetana’s legacy, the Board.

The Board’s announcement from 1921 stood at the beginning of what could be called a three-year long campaign. It was centered on the musical press that people around Nejedlý controlled. Starting from January 1922, the Board began providing updates on its activities in every issue of their journal *Smetana*. While the journal also published texts from organizers outside the capital, the Board’s contributions took precedence. In these articles, as well as in others throughout the journal, the entity often emphasized its preeminence. For instance, when Josef Bartoš reported in the January 1922 issue of new editions of Smetana’s music by the incumbent music publishers, he preceded the discussion with a statement that “[o]nly the Board for the Erection of a Monument to B. Smetana takes this idea [of publishing Smetana’s music] most seriously and deeply.”¹⁵⁰ The Board was presenting itself as the only authoritative voice on the topic. It also propagated the Smetana myth and its own conception of how the myth was to be translated into reality, which in their case, included monumentality.

The Board also strove to increase its presence in media outside those that they controller. They dispatched their statements to major newspapers for publication. However, they lamented that not all outlets complied, deeming such omissions “unpatriotic.” Thus, not only were those who questioned Smetana’s unrivaled stature in Czech music criticized, but anyone who even slightly challenged the Board’s actions, or merely remained silent about them, were deemed not to be patriots.

But the push for a “uniform spirit” also revealed an inherent paradox. If, as the prevailing narrative suggested, Smetana’s music truly encapsulated the unique soul of the Czech nation, then all that was required were widespread performances of his compositions across Czechoslovakia. The primary responsibility of the Board would then be to encourage and possibly help fund festive performances by various entities throughout the country. However, as the rest of this chapter will elucidate, the Board’s aim was to maintain control over the funds and the discourse surrounding the music.

¹⁵⁰ “Nejvážněji a nejhlouběji pojímá tuto myšlenku jedině Sbor pro postavení pomníku B. Smetanovi [...]” Josef Bartoš, “Popularisace skladeb Smetanových [Popularization of Smetana’s compositions],” *Smetana* 12, no. 1 (25 January 1922): 12.

The publication of the “Smetana Reader,” which included texts and sheet music, and Nejedlý’s book on Smetana can be viewed as tools to guide schools and the general public. Yet there was a concerted effort of the Board’s leadership to have a physical presence and voice in as many venues as possible. In 1924, Nejedlý and others from his circle made extensive efforts to deliver numerous speeches about Smetana nationwide and the Board was renting a set of photographic slides with accompanying speaker notes. While they may have believed they were honor-bound to offer the greatest possible service to Smetana during his centennial, it is evident that the focus wasn’t solely on performing Smetana’s music. Instead, its textual interpretation was coming to the fore and with it an effort to monopolize it.

The Board’s Efforts to Control Resources and Gain Exposure

Over the rest of this chapter, the Board’s efforts to control the resources and gain exposure will be illustrated with several examples. First, the Board’s involvement in the Pilsen celebrations will be discussed, followed by their stance on building a physical monument to Smetana in Litomyšl. These examples will also shed light on what specifically it was that the Board aimed to achieve as they were striving for control.

In April 1923, upon discovering that the Pilsen town hall planned to unveil a Smetana memorial plaque on the composer’s birthday, Nejedlý addressed this at the Presidium meeting. The Presidium, a task force established by the Board’s Committee, was responsible for overseeing preparations for the celebrations.¹⁵¹ While its formal composition mirrored the Committee, it met more frequently and usually in a smaller circle. Zdeněk Nejedlý, Josef Bartoš, Jaroslav Kříčka, Karel Guth, and Hubert Doležil coordinated specific areas within it.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ “Zápis o výborové schůzi, konané dne 10. květen 1922 [Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 10 May 1922],” in [Zápisník Schůze presidia [Notebook of Meeting of the Presidium] 12.1.1923–20.3.1924], Box 2, SBS. Decision of the Committee in a meeting on 10 May 1922.

¹⁵² Minutes of the Presidium’s meeting, 12 January 1923. Nejedlý managed the edition of Smetana’s works and the planning of concerts in Prague. Bartoš and Kříčka were in charge of concerts in the country, while Benoni handled those abroad. Guth was tasked with organizing the exhibition, and Doležil coordinated the lectures. The name of the official responsible for the Prague monument was left blank.

The ensuing discussions led the Presidium to request Pilsen to postpone the unveiling, aiming to “enhance the significance of the Pilsen celebrations and so that they could be incorporated into the overall program.”¹⁵³ This request is difficult to fathom. Naturally, the choice of 2 March 1924, Smetana’s centenary, to unveil the plaque seemed ideal for the local commemoration. With Czech newspapers spotlighting the composer on this day, a substantial local turnout was anticipated. It is perplexing how, according to the Board, the event’s “significance” should be boosted by rescheduling, i. e., moving to less memorable day, or why it couldn’t be part of the main program if held on the day of the centenary.

Regardless, the Pilsen organizers moved the event to another notable Sunday, 11 May, the day before the anniversary of Smetana’s death. However, the Board remained unsatisfied even with this new date. They requested a rescheduling yet again, this time citing the desire for the Board’s representatives to participate in the celebration.¹⁵⁴ Though there was no mention of anyone from the Board’s Commission aspiring to give a talk at the unveiling, a brief consultation of the programs of similar occasions in 1924 where the Board was present suggests that this would follow.¹⁵⁵ Unyielding, Pilsen held firm to the 11 May date. In spite of the Board’s initial warnings, the event earned a mention in the master program when published, albeit tucked away in the “V. Celebrations outside of Prague” section, without

¹⁵³ “Usneseno požádati je [plzeňské], aby tuto slavnost odložili na dobu pozdější, aby byl povýšen význam plzeňských slavností a aby mohla býti zařazena do celkového programu.” “Zápis o schůzi presidia, konané dne 18. dubna 1923 [Minutes of the presidium meeting held on 18 April 1923],” in [Zápisník Schůze presidia [Notebook of Meeting of the Presidium] 12.1.1923–20.3.1924], Box 2, SBS.

¹⁵⁴ “Usneseno doporučiti Plzni, aby odložila odhalení pamětní desky ze dne 11/5. 1924 tak, aby se slavnosti mohli zúčastniti i zástupci Sboru.” “Zápis o výborové schůzi konané dne 19. prosince 1923 [Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 19 December 1923],” “Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924,” Box 2, SBS.

¹⁵⁵ The Library at the Czech Academy of Sciences holds a volume of program notes from the 1924 centenary celebrations. It is unclear when and by whom this volume was put together but judging from the unified layout and the mentions of the Board’s members, they represent major events which the Board organized or in which it participated. Nejedlý spoke on 2 March and 11 May in Prague, during unveiling of the monuments: in Litomyšl on 22 May and in Lamberk on 25 May (program of unveiling of the memorial stone in Růžkovy Lhotice is not included). He also authored the program notes for the concerts, where any were included. See “Program jubilejních slavností Bedřicha Smetany pořádaných pod protektorátem pana presidenta republiky T. G. Masaryka [Program of the Bedřich Smetana jubilee celebrations organized under the auspices of the President of the Republic, T. G. Masaryk],” n.d. Shelf mark E 29223.

indication of a date.¹⁵⁶ When the plaque was unveiled on 11 May, featuring a speech by composer Josef Bohuslav Foerster,¹⁵⁷ it was a success and earned a mention in the nationwide press.¹⁵⁸

The Board's often cited appeal to local officials outside of Prague, which likely dates from 1922, cautioned them "not to be carried away by the mood and thus fragment our great central undertaking by their separate undertakings."¹⁵⁹ Here the matter was physical monuments, which they considered a "costly enterprise these days," and hence the effort to build memorials to Smetana in many places could result in erecting "tiny monuments which could hardly be considered worthy of Smetana."¹⁶⁰ The nation needed one, grandiose memorial in its capital, with the Board forever inscribed in its commemorative plaque.

But soon, certainly encouraged by the spirit of celebration that the Board stirred, local bodies in various towns across Czechoslovakia started devising their own plans for memorials. Among them was Litomyšl, Smetana's birth town.

¹⁵⁶ "Program jubilejních slavností Bedřicha Smetany pořádaných pod protektorátem pana presidenta republiky T. G. Masaryka."

¹⁵⁷ The text of the speech is reproduced in *Čtvrtá výroční zpráva Městské hudební školy v Plzni za školní rok 1923-24* [Fourth Annual Report of the Municipal Music School in Pilsen for the School Year 1923-24], (Plzeň: Kuratorium městské hudební školy, 1925), 3–6.

¹⁵⁸ Pilsen's celebrations extended beyond the plaque unveiling. Their plans were announced nationwide, e.g., in the *Československá republika* daily, 22.2.1924, p. 6.

¹⁵⁹ It is included in the brochure called *Program slavností B. Smetany v roce stých narozenin 1924* that the Board likely put out in connection with the meeting of all interested parties in 1922 that was to ensure the "uniform spirit" of celebrations. Interestingly, the title page of the document bear the date 1922 but the text itself at its end is dated May 1921. As if the Board had the program completed when it was announcing its decision to lead the celebrations but then kept it in a drawer for the next year. See *Program slavností B. Smetany v roce stých narozenin 1924*.

¹⁶⁰ „Není pochyby, že s myšlenkou oslav B. Smetany r. 1924 vznikne i v jiných městech a místech plán, postavit tam Smetanův pomník. Aniž by Sbor ovšem chtěl zakřiknouti takové činy piety, upozorňuje přece v zájmu věci, že přílišné tříštění sil tímto směrem mohlo by Smetanovu oslavu r. 1924 spíše oslabiti než posílit. Postavit pomník jest zajisté podnik dnes velmi nákladný, a to tím spíše, má-li to býti pomník důstojný Smetanovy velikosti. Jest tedy oprávněná obava, že mělo-li by se postavit pomník několik, nepostavil by se nakonec pro nedostatek prostředků žádný, nebo že by byly postaveny pomníky, jež by sotva bylo možno pokládati za důstojné památníky Smetanovy.“ *Program slavností B. Smetany v roce stých narozenin 1924*, 12–13.

Křest'an describes how the Board's chairman Táborský got angry when in July 1922 he learned from the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment that the Litomyšl Festive Committee for Smetana Celebrations was asking for funding of a monument in the composer's birth-town. In a letter addressed to Nejedlý he wrote: "That puts the lid on it! [...] You negotiated with them, write to them, explain, talk them out of their megalomania!"¹⁶¹ Křest'an suggests that this "megalomania" spreading over the country created a problem for the Board and that "[t]here was a threat that forces, which were to be concentrated on the central celebrations in Prague, would be fragmented."¹⁶² This interpretation appears to me deficient in two ways.

Firstly, it neglects to acknowledge that the problem was of the Board's own making—it is certainly no coincidence that the first proposal for the erection of the monument in Litomyšl was made at a city council meeting in June 1921, a month after the publication of the appeal of the Board.¹⁶³ As a utopia, the entire nation rising up to cheer Smetana sounded enticing, but in its realization it collided with the natural interest of citizens, and especially local officials, to replicate central celebrations in their communities, which increased the demand for limited resources.

Secondly, by adopting the Board's rhetoric of "fragmentation" it subscribes to their centralized model of the endeavor as the only possible and leaves no space for questioning its tenability, not to speak of its desirability. If the model promoted by the Board is taken as default, much of the activity across Czechoslovakia is deemed a nuisance rather than analyzed for what it is, an expression of interest to participate in shaping the identity of the nation, but also to be at the center of events at the local level. Such activity of the local officials replicated on a smaller scale the aspirations of the Board, with which it therefore inevitably came into collision.

The question that needs to be asked, therefore, is whether what the Board had in stock for the rest of the country was, simply put, enough. In the case of Litomyšl, the master

¹⁶¹ „Vrchol všeho! [...] Vy jste s nimi vyjednával, dopište, vysvětlete, vymluvte jim jejich megalomanií!“ Letter from Táborský to Nejedlý, dated 11 July 1922, cited in Křest'an, *Zdeněk Nejedlý*, 181.

¹⁶² "Problém vyvstal paradoxně i v důsledku toho, že v českých městech, městečkách i malých obcích propukla obrovská vlna nadšení. Hrozilo, že síly, jež měly být soustředěny na ústřední oslavy v Praze, budou tříštěny." Křest'an, 181.

¹⁶³ František Věcovský, ed., *Památník vydaný k stému výročí narozenin tvůrce české hudby Bedřicha Smetany péčí slavnostního komitétu oslav Smetanových v Litomyšli* (Litomyšl: Slavnostní komitét, 1924), 63.

program included, aside from performances of Smetana's works by artists from Prague, "a general excursion to Litomyšl and a visit to Smetana's birthplace, which we [the Board] are willing to help arrange in agreement with the Litomyšl town council in a dignified manner."¹⁶⁴ Thus, in their conception, the birth place would celebrate its native hero by welcoming a delegation from Prague, in which the Board officials would certainly be well represented, and the Board would help to fix the place up beforehand in order to preserve appropriate decorum.

In a letter that Táborský wrote to the Ministry (dated three days before the one he wrote to Nejedlý) he cited the above passage from the printed program as proof that Litomyšl was dutifully considered in their plan of celebrations. He argued that in order for the Board to be able to realize its "serious, substantial, truly nationwide, educational and vigorous" program, "it urgently needs a concentration of forces throughout the nation." While he also said that the Board did not "want to be some kind of usurper of all rights," he asked, in effect, that the Litomyšl's request be rejected.¹⁶⁵ However, Táborský indicated in the letter that he had a compromise up his sleeve, ready to be proposed if Litomyšl were reluctant to abandon their own memorial plans. He would propose a more cost-effective alternative: a bust for Litomyšl could be cast from a Myslbek mold, originally designed for memorials in Lamberk and Jabkenice. His readiness to start negotiating implies that he was aware that the Board's initial plan might not make the Litomyšl elite entirely happy.

Owing to the influential status the Board had established with the Ministry for Education and National Enlightenment, the authority of the Board's chairman took precedence, albeit temporarily. Following Táborský's letter, the Ministry promptly rejected

¹⁶⁴ *Program slavností B. Smetany v roce stých narozenin 1924*, 23–24.

¹⁶⁵ "všeobecný zájezd do Litomyšle a návštěva rodné světnice Smetanovy, již jsme ochotni v souhlase s radou města Litomyšle pomoci i důstojně upravit [...] Aby tento svůj program, zajisté vážný, věcný, opravdu celonárodní, osvětový a činorodý, náš Sbor provedl, potřebuje nutně soustředěnosti sil v celém národě. [...] nijak nechtěje býti nějakým uchvatitelem všech práv, ale nutně uznává, že tu nevyhnutelně musí býti jednotné, cíle svého vědomé vedení. Na slavnostní schůzi dne 14. 5. 1922 to bylo uznáno." Case No. 79.488/1923; „Litomyšl, slavnostní výbor oslav Smetanových, subvence státní [Litomyšl, festive committee of the Smetana celebrations, state subsidies] [Letter by J. Táborský]" 15.7.1922, Fund No. 371, Box 2942, Item No. 1696 III+Smetana, MŠANO.

the Litomyšl request for money, recommending that they get in touch with the Board,¹⁶⁶ which they did shortly thereafter.¹⁶⁷ It was only in April 1923, more than half a year later, that the Board concluded their negotiations with Litomyšl¹⁶⁸ and resent Litomyšl's request from September 1922 to the Ministry with an affirmative opinion.¹⁶⁹ In the end, a statue dedicated to Smetana was unveiled in the town on 22 June 1924 with Zdeněk Nejedlý standing out as not just the main speaker but the only one, since the speeches of everyone else were cancelled due to rain. While the final outcome was more aligned with Litomyšl's initial position than the Board's, it was a win for both parties. The unveiling spotlighted Smetana's birthplace and its local dignitaries, and simultaneously, with Nejedlý—a native of Litomyšl—as the key speaker, the Board also enjoyed prominent representation.

State Subsidies and Cultural Policy: The Board's Imprint in the Celebrations

The allocation of state funds had a major influence on the shape of the celebrations. The state, in agreement with the Board, earmarked 400,000 CZK.¹⁷⁰ This amount was then allocated by the Board to individual projects. The allocation and its reasoning provide valuable insights into the Board's concept of the celebrations and its connection to the Smetana myth.

In July 1923, the Board sent a letter to the Ministry with a proposed allocation of the 400,000 Kč state subsidy that was earmarked for the celebrations in the state budget. It also

¹⁶⁶ Draft of a letter from the Ministry to the Litomyšl Committee dated 2 August 1922. "Case No. 79488/1923; Litomyšl, slavnostní výbor oslav Smetanových, subvence státní" 15.7.1922, Box 2942, Item No. 1696 III+Smetana, MŠANO.

¹⁶⁷ In a letter dated 15 September 1922. Case No. 20.312/1923; "Slavnostní výbor Smetanových oslav v Litomyšli, subvence [Festive Committee of the Smetana Celebrations in Litomyšl, subsidies]" 15.7.1922, Box 2942, Item No. 1696 III+Smetana, MŠANO.

¹⁶⁸ See Zápis ze schůze presidia dne 11. dubna 1923 [Minutes from meeting of the Presidium held on 11 April 1923], in [Zápisník Schůze presidia [Notebook of Meeting of the Presidium] 12.1.1923–20.3.1924], Box 2, SBS.

¹⁶⁹ Letter from the Board to the Ministry dated 17.4.1923 in Case No. 50.312/1923, "Slavnostní výbor Smetanových oslav v Litomyšli Subvence [Festive Committee of Smetana Celebrations Subsidy]," in Box 2942, MŠANO.

¹⁷⁰ Initially, 200,000 K out of the 400,000 K was to be used for purchase of the Smetana estate. Zápis o schůzi presidia konané dne 21.3.1923, [Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium held on 21 March 1923], [Zápisník Schůze presidia [Notebook of Meeting of the Presidium] 12.1.1923–20.3.1924], Box 2, SBS.

included the justification for the breakdown.¹⁷¹ See Table 1 for an overview. According to the minutes of the Board's meeting, the allocation was the work of Táborský, Nejedlý, and Waisar, with the justification authored by Nejedlý.¹⁷²

In its proposal to the Ministry, the Board apportioned the festive undertakings into three groups.

The title “Musical Celebrations Proper” of the first group suggests what the Board's leadership saw as the most significant part of the centenary festivities: events in Prague and extra-musical narratives. They allocated more than half of the total budget to it. These festivities were to be spectacular, featuring the most notable artists. Therefore, they argued, no private funds could suffice, and the state needed to bear the cost. It was to be a homage from the nation and the state to Smetana.

This first group distinctly prioritized a diverse array of narrative elements and tangible memorabilia related to Smetana. These spanned from festive meetings and exhibitions to lectures and enlightening material, rather than solely focusing on musical performances. Many of these events were intended to represent Czech culture and the state well. Besides musical performances, this “proper” part included the opening grand meeting that turned out to be more of a political than a musical event (see Chapter 3). It also included the Smetana exhibition and lectures on the composer and his work. This further supports the claim in Chapter 2, namely that the narrative around the music was considered at least as important as its performance, if not more. The need to instill a particular reading of the composer on the public, to attach an interpretation to his oeuvre, was noticeable.

One-fifth of the budget was allotted to the second group, which consisted of memorials to the composer. Since the Prague monument project was behind schedule, smaller memorials were to be installed during the centenary.

¹⁷¹ Letter from the Board to the Ministry for Education and National Enlightenment dated 15.7.1923 and its appendix. Folder “22 III Smetana,” Box 2946, MŠANO.

¹⁷² Zápis o výborové schůzi konané dne 11. května 1923 [Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 11 May 1923]“ in Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924,” Box 2, SBS.

I. Musical celebrations proper	Amount in Kč
Festive meeting on 2 March 1924	10 000
Five festive concerts	30 000
Choir concert	15 000
Three free people's concerts	30 000
Festivities in Litomyšl	15 000
The Smetana exhibition	50 000
Lectures, brochures and other enlightenment	25 000
Posters for all above	30 000
Administration	20 000
Musical celebrations proper in total	225 000
II. Homage to Smetana in visual arts	
Monument in Litomyšl	30 000
Memorial plaque on Lažanský Palace	20 000
Memorial stone in Růžkovy Lhotice	10 000
Memorial stone at Lamberský	10 000
Plaque and buste	10 000
Homage to Smetana in visual arts in total	80 000
Extraordinary undertakings	
To Pěvecká obec československá	25 000
Support of Czech Philharmonic concerts in the country	25 000
Support of young soloists and chamber ensembles to perform in the country	15 000
Celebrations in Slovakia	30 000
Extraordinary undertakings in total	95 000
Grand total	400 000

Table 1 The allocation of the state subsidy as approved at the Board meeting on 11 May 1923

Only in the third group, titled *Mimořádné podniky* (Extraordinary Undertakings) and taking the remaining quarter of the budget, were events that promised to bring Smetana's music to places outside of the capital. These included subsidies for choral societies, a tour of the Czech Philharmonic around the country, a similar program for conservatory students,

and festivities in Slovakia, but not in Moravia or Silesia.¹⁷³ The centenary was inherently an extraordinary and unprecedented event. Therefore, the term “extraordinary” was used to position the third group of events within the entire program. These celebrations, held outside Prague, were seen as both peripheral to the main festivities and beyond the norm. Essentially, they were framed as supplementary to the *vlastní* (proper) celebrations. The Board’s letter, justifying the proposed subsidy allocation, provides further insight. It contrasted the nationwide Smetana festivities, expected to occur in 1924, with the “representational” celebrations led by the state and involving the entire public.¹⁷⁴ The Board indicated that it was also preparing its own festivities at its expense and expressed its willingness to organize the “central jubilee celebrations.” Therefore, according to the Board’s perspective, local celebrations did not require state support, except for the “extraordinary” projects they outlined.

The Ministry approved the Board’s proposal for the allocation of the subsidy without any comments. A handwritten note by the head of the Musical Department of the Ministry for Education and National Enlightenment, Branberger, recommended approval, arguing that “they [the subsidies] are all very purposeful and professionally considered and well thought through.”¹⁷⁵ The term “professionally” undoubtedly pointed to the Board’s formal qualifications, as discussed earlier. Here too, Nejedlý’s education, his position at Charles University, and his presumed expertise on the composer were equated with expertise on how best to celebrate Smetana and, more broadly, what celebrations Czechoslovakia needed.

There is evidence indicating that the Ministry took the 400,000 Kč budgeted at the instigation of the Board to cover the celebrations as a whole. Or more precisely, it was not planning to release any additional money from the central budget. This is evidenced by the

¹⁷³ To illustrate the relative size of the lands. As reported in 1925 following census data from 1910, Bohemia had 6.8 million people, Moravia 2.6 million, Silesia 0.6 million, Slovakia 2.9 million and Carpathian Ruthenia 0.6 million. Though data from 1910 census were used, the delimitation of the borders of the individual lands was in the 1925 reporting adjusted to reflect the situation in 1921. Newer census data were then unavailable. *Statistická příručka republiky Československé* [Statistical Manual of the Czechoslovak Republic], vol. 3 (Praha: Státní úřad statistický, 1928), 19, <https://ndk.cz/uuid/uuid:55c30a70-17f6-11e9-a8be-5ef3fc9bb22f>.

¹⁷⁴ “*slavnost reprezentační*, již by neprováděla jednotlivá korporace, nýbrž celá veřejnost, se státem v čele, jako vlastní, ústřední slavnost jubilejní.”

¹⁷⁵ “navrhuji vyslovit souhlas s navrženými subvencemi, neboť všechny jsou velmi účelně a odborně uváženy a promyšleny.” A note in hand in the Case No. 92599/1923 dated 15.7.1923, Folder “22 III Smetana,” Box 2946, MŠANO.

fact that the amount formed a majority of what was earmarked for support of non-recurring musical activities in fiscal year 1923.¹⁷⁶ Little money was left. Furthermore, entries by Ministerial officials in the case files related to the centenary indicated that they assumed the Board would allocate funds to individual stakeholders.

Be that as it may, any requests for additional subsidy received by the Ministry were forwarded to the Board. Rarely did the Board decide to make changes in response to these requests. Most of the time, the Board justified to the Ministry why the project was *not* to be financed from the state budget. Its decision regarding the Brno Smetana Foundation, discussed in Chapter 4, is a prime example.

However, in some cases, the Board proceeded to adjust the original allocation. Most notably, it reallocated 25,000 Kč to celebrations in Moravia and Silesia. Additionally, 20,000 Kč was newly earmarked for *Matice hudební* to finance the publication of Nejedlý's Smetana biography, referred to in the minutes as a *veliké dílo* (great work). This latter decision was made by the Presidium, which met in Nejedlý's office and, on this occasion, consisted of Táborský, Nejedlý, Jiránek, and Urbánek.¹⁷⁷ Although its decisions were subject to later approval by the larger Committee, in its meetings, dozens of the Presidium's decisions were typically approved without issue. This example highlights how a small group within the leadership, particularly the Presidium, was increasingly making critical decisions as the festivities' preparations progressed. It also underscores Nejedlý's central role in the process and the high regard in which his writings on Smetana were held by the others.

To balance the total amount after these changes, funds were reallocated from elsewhere. This was not without difficulty. The Board cut the money allotted to Slovakia from 30,000 to 15,000 Kč, and the 25,000 Kč for *Pěvecká obec československá* (Czechoslovak Choral Union; POČ) was completely removed from the list.¹⁷⁸ This decision drew criticism from POČ

¹⁷⁶ The respective budget item amounted to 572,000 K. See Kapitola [Chapter] XIII, titul [Title] 11, paragraf [Section] 3, mimořádné věcné výdaje [extraordinary věcné expenditure], položka [Item] 4 in "Zákon č. 372/1922 Sb. z. a n., finanční zákon republiky Československé ze dne 15. prosince 1922, kterým se stanoví státní rozpočet a rozpočet státních investic pro rok 1923," in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení států československého*, vol. 141, 1922, 1705.

¹⁷⁷ Zápis o schůzi presidia konané dne 22. listopadu 1923, [Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium held on 22 November 1923], [Zápisník Schůze presidia [Notebook of Meeting of the Presidium] 12.1.1923–20.3.1924], Box 2, SBS.

¹⁷⁸ To balance the budget, 5,000 Kč was shaved off the Lectures and brochures item.

representatives, who accused the Board of misinforming the Ministry. The Board communicated to the Ministry that POČ had decided to abandon organizing the choral festival.¹⁷⁹ The Board defended itself against the accusation, citing technicalities in POČ's request, and criticized POČ for significantly inflating their celebrations budget.¹⁸⁰ The Board also sought ways to save on costs. When treasurer Benoni proposed increasing the number of free-of-charge concerts from three to five, the idea was approved.¹⁸¹ However, when additional costs became apparent, attempts were made to negotiate with the Czech Philharmonic to waive the fee for one of their two performances.¹⁸² This was supposedly for the remuneration of the orchestral players, as the waiving of fees for soloists and conductors had been requested by the Board and previously agreed upon.

In all these interactions with applicants for state subsidy, the Board was the decision maker. The Ministry merely replicated their resolutions and sent them back to the applicants. How did the Ministry understand the role of the Board in this process, which essentially outsourced the allocation of state subsidies to a private entity?

The archival materials from the Ministry for Education and National Enlightenment and the Bedřich Smetana Society, both housed at the National Archives, provide insight into the dynamics between the Board and the state. They also elucidate the high level of autonomy the Board had in deciding on the allocation of state subsidies.

Although the celebrations in Slovakia are not the primary focus of this study, an exception will be made in the following text. The process of allocating part of the subsidy to Slovak organizers, briefly discussed in the following section, illustrates well the

¹⁷⁹ Letter from the Pěvecká obec československá to the Ministry for Education and National Enlightenment dated 7 December 1923. Case No. 8899/1924, Folder "22 III Smetana," Box 2946, MŠANO.

¹⁸⁰ Letter from the Board to the Ministry for Education and National Enlightenment dated 12.1.1924. Case No. 8899/1924, Folder "22 III Smetana," Box 2946, MŠANO.

¹⁸¹ Zápis o schůzi presidia konané dne 26. září 1923, [Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium held on 26 September 1923], [Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium held on 22 November 1923], [Zápisník Schůze presidia [Notebook of Meeting of the Presidium] 12.1.1923–20.3.1924], Box 2, SBS; later confirmed in the Committee see Zápis o výborové schůzi konané dne 21. října 1923 [Minutes of the committee meeting held on 21 October 1923], "Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924," Box 2, SBS.

¹⁸² Zápis o schůzi presidia konané dne 7. listopadu 1923, [Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium held on 7 November 1923], [Zápisník Schůze presidia [Notebook of Meeting of the Presidium] 12.1.1923–20.3.1924], Box 2, SBS.

considerations of state authorities in awarding subsidies for the centenary and the position of the Board in the process.

In February 1923, before the subsidy allocation was proposed by the Board, *Prezídium ministerstva pre správu Slovenska* (Presidency of the Ministry for Administration of Slovakia) appealed to the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment for financial support of Smetana celebrations in Slovakia. It argued that in Slovakia, “the promotion of Smetana’s works is one of the conditions for the education of the population.”¹⁸³ This argument underlines the thesis of the central role of Smetana’s music in forming a common cultural identity in Czechoslovakia, as discussed in the Introduction. This policy of “Smetanization” of the public, in order to educate it, was certainly not limited to Slovakia.

This request by one state office to another was forwarded for resolution to a private society, the Board. According to a note by Branberger, the Board was to propose an amount of subsidy that would go to Slovakia. He also added a justification for forwarding the letter to the Board. He argued that “only in this way can the resources be allocated to all the actors involved.”¹⁸⁴ This is important for two reasons. First, it confirms the assertion made earlier that the Ministry considered the 400,000 Kč subsidy to cover all projects in the country, as needed, and not solely the central celebrations. Second, it demonstrates that the Ministry viewed the role of the Board as a coordinator of this nationwide undertaking. In other words, that the Board would balance the interests of all the bodies involved in the nationwide project.

The Ministry official noted down also why it was the Board to decide here. He posited that “the Board is generally recognized by all our public as the official organizer of all Smetana celebrations throughout the republic.”¹⁸⁵ Consequently, it was not a government

¹⁸³ “vzhľadom na pomery na Slovensku, kde propagovanie Smetanových diel je jednou z podmienok vzdelania obyvateľstva” Letter from *Prezídium ministerstva pre správu Slovenska* [Presidency of the Ministry for Administration of Slovakia] to the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment dated 12.2.1923, Case 20439/1923, Folder “22 III Smetana,” Box 2946, MŠANO.

¹⁸⁴ “Navrhují vyžádati si návrh na výši subvence od Sboru pro postavení pomníku Bedřichu Smetanovi v Praze (k rukám ředitele Fr. Táborského). Sboru nutno dotázati se z toho důvodu, poněvadž jedině tím způsobem lze rozvrhnouti dané prostředky na všechny účastněné činitele. Sbor uznávám je všeobecně v celé naší veřejnosti za oficiálního pořadatele všech Smetanovských oslav v celé republice.” A note by Jan Branberger dated 22.2.1923 in Case 20439/1923, dated 12 December 1923, Folder “22 III Smetana,” Box 2946, MŠANO.

¹⁸⁵ See Note 184.

mandate to the Board to coordinate the undertaking, but rather the public's recognition of the Board as the leader. This points back to the earlier discussion of the Board's strategy to maintain control over the centenary. The unique position of the Board was, in addition to the formal qualifications and positions of the leadership, also attributable to the perceived general acceptance of its leadership in the cultural domain.

In contrast to the treatment of the Board, other petitioners were dealt with less favorably. For instance, when the Brno Council asked for money for new productions of Smetana's operas in the Brno National Theater, claiming that the current ones were outdated and unworthy, it was rejected. The request was forwarded to the Ministerial Council, Jindřich Vodák, a seminal figure in Czech teatrology and a left-leaning intellectual.¹⁸⁶ Vodák completely dismissed it. He found it lacking merit, arguing that productions of Smetana's operas had always proved to be profitable. He also noted that the request was not accompanied by "concrete data and documents" and asserted that the Council "apparently wanted to demonstrate some activity and so it approached the state."¹⁸⁷ The Ministerial file on the Board does not include anything even remotely close to this level of dismissal and mistrust.

One tempting explanation, that it may have been a shared ideology between the Board leadership and the officials of the Ministry for Education and National Enlightenment, appears unlikely. As discussed in the Introduction, the head of the Musical Department of the Ministry, Branberger, was aiming for a balanced representation of the musical circles in the Ministry's advisory Board. The difference in treatment is therefore largely attributable to the position that the Ministry perceived the Board had in the Czech musical domain and likely also to the Board's access to prominent politicians.

To summarize, while the Ministry for Education and National Enlightenment treated the Board as the expert body that impartially coordinated the requests of individual stakeholders, it was not the case. The allocation of money reflected primarily the views of

¹⁸⁶ Otto Drexler, "Vodák, Jindřich," in *Česká divadelní encyklopedie*, 2019, https://encyklopedie.idu.cz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3613:vodak-jindrich&Itemid=286&lang=cs.

¹⁸⁷ "Podání nemá významu ani smyslu, poněvadž není doprovázeno určitými daty a doklady; 'Sbor pro oslavy 100. nar. Bedřicha Smetany' patrně chtěl vykázat nějakou činnost a dokročil si tedy na stát." Case No. 52397/1923, dated 21 April 1923, Folder "22 III Smetana," Box 2946, MŠANO.

the Board's leadership, particularly Nejedlý, of what the celebrations of Smetana were to look like rather than a wide consensus among the cultural elite of Czechoslovakia.

That the Board had not originally earmarked any money for Moravia and Silesia demonstrated, at a minimum, a disconnect of the budget's authors from these lands and their musical life. This oversight was particularly glaring given that the Brno Council had been regularly reporting its plans to the Board, which were then published in the *Smetana* journal.¹⁸⁸ The subsequent reallocation of the money can be read as a sign of recognizing the original exclusion of these two lands was a mistake.

In what the Board labeled as “musical celebrations proper,” propagating a particular interpretation of the composer's work was rather heavily funded.

* * *

In the early 1920s, the Board aspired to realize several monumental projects but lacked the necessary funds. This led them to announce the centenary celebrations three years in advance, successfully claiming preferential rights to anything related to Smetana and creating a platform to engage the public and political elite. Framed as an event of nationwide significance, their initiatives gained prominence and their voices, greater reach.

By far the biggest opportunity to make an imprint on the shape of the celebrations was the mandate they received from the Ministry to allocate the state subsidy to individual projects. In their conception, the celebrations were largely centralized to the state's capital and manifestly monumental.

Beyond controlling monetary resources, they endeavored to dominate the narrative around Smetana. However, this contradicted their claim that the celebrations were solely about Smetana's music. Through various pronouncements and speeches, they advocated for their visionary approach, aiming to turn it into reality. I argue that their visions were utopian and inherently contradictory. For example, the aspiration for the entire nation to celebrate Smetana was incompatible with their desire to direct all available resources exclusively to their projects.

The chapter also raised a broader question: were the celebrations, as envisioned by the Board, “truly nationwide” as they claimed, or did they fail to meet the needs of the citizens of the newly established republic? This point will be revisited in subsequent chapters.

¹⁸⁸ Texts on the Brno Council's establishment and activities were published in *Smetana* 13, No. 1 (10.3.1923), p. 13 and No. 3–4. (21.6.1923), p. 60.

Chapter 3 Statecraft and Mythmaking: The Interweaving of Smetana's Legacy in Czechoslovak Nation-Building

On the morning of March 2, 1924, just before ten o'clock, an audience of state officials, ambassadors from foreign lands to Prague, and members of the Board filled the seats of the National Theatre. They were greeted by a magnificent sight: a monumental gold bust of Bedřich Smetana, decorated with a large wreath in national colors. On both sides of the bust were members of Prague's choral societies, dressed in black, with the day's speakers positioned in front. The arrival of President Masaryk, heralded by fanfares from *Libuše*, marked the beginning of what resembled a near-religious ceremony. Though the theatre's orchestra was present, the event was marked more by speeches than music. Top politicians embraced the myth of Smetana as a prophet, using it to foster proper patriotism. The main speaker, Zdeněk Nejedlý, delivered a lengthy speech that sparked controversy in the press and was almost unbearably long. During his speech, several choir members collapsed from exhaustion.

This chapter examines how Czechoslovakia's top political figures contributed to the extraordinary nature of the celebrations. They did so firstly by securing funding for the Board's grandiose projects, and secondly by actively participating in the celebratory events, as will be evidence in two case studies.

The first case study tackles the project of the "monumental edition" of Smetana's works that the Board initiated during the centenary, and which was generously financed by the government. It illustrates the ambition of the elite, sanctioned by the state, to demonstrate it can culturally compete with other developed nations. In this case this broader ambition translated into a utopian project of an edition of incomparable grade. The edition was, as a result, extremely costly and time-consuming to produce, and was discontinued after two volumes.

The second case study examines the grand meeting that commenced the centenary celebrations on the day of the anniversary. While it bore the traits of a state event, it was organized and choreographed by a private entity, the Board. This duality led to tensions and

sparked debates over whether the occasion was co-opted for partisan purposes. Analyzing this debate helps to define the boundaries of the Smetana interpretation universally accepted by the nation. It also challenges the state officials' portrayal of the Board as an expert body with a widely accepted interpretation.

Before delving into the two case studies, I will briefly outline how Czechoslovakia, and its president as the nation's highest representative, became intertwined with the Smetana myth from its inception. Additionally, I will illustrate how the myth of Smetana evolved during the revolutionary period, shifting from a prophecy of the nation's bright future to portraying Smetana as a spiritual founder of Czechoslovakia through his music.

The endeavor to utilize the Czech national myths in building the identity of "Czechoslovaks" can be observed from the state's inception. Dagmar Hájková noted that Huss and Hussitism "were one of the pillars on which Czechoslovakia built its new state traditions."¹⁸⁹ Aside from Huss, the heroes most often pictured in the first years of the republic included John Amos Comenius, Jan Žižka, and President Masaryk.¹⁹⁰

That the Smetana myth was part of building identity of the nation can be evidenced in several ways. One such piece of evidence is the choice of Smetana's music for the festive performances given in the presence of President Masaryk after his arrival in Czechoslovakia: both *Libuše* and *Má vlast* were programmed. While one may consider these events to be merely a continuation of the significant role that the composer's music played during the war,¹⁹¹ much in the event's set up and the narrative around them made them into acts of the state. Anecdotally, the role of Smetana in the First Republic's state cultural agenda can be evidenced by the width of the folders stored in the National Archives, which houses the files

¹⁸⁹ "Český mučedník Jan Hus a husitství představovali jeden z pilířů, na kterých Česko slovensko postavilo nové státní tradice." Hájková, "Rok Husova výročí [The year of Huss's anniversary]," in Dagmar Hájková and Pavel Horák, eds., *Republika československá: 1918-1939* (Praha: NLN, 2018), 391–400, at 391.

¹⁹⁰ Dagmar Hájková, "Republika slaví deset let [Republic celebrates ten years]," in *Republika československá: 1918-1939*, ed. Dagmar Hájková and Pavel Horák (Praha: NLN, 2018), 452–63.

¹⁹¹ See for instance the account of Otakar Šourek, *Smetanova Má vlast* [Smetana's *Má vlast*] (Praha: Topičova edice, 1940).

of the Ministry for Education and National Enlightenment relating to national celebrations of various personalities. The Huss and Smetana binders are the thickest.¹⁹²

The legacy of these national heroes was, among other things, utilized to give legitimacy to the newly created state. For instance, Masaryk, in his inaugural address to the nation on 22 December 1918, cited and reflected on Comenius's words. The President invoked the *Kšaft umírající matky Jednoty bratrské* (The Bequest of the Dying Mother Unity of Brethren) from 1650. In this work, the early modern philosopher and theologian Comenius stated, "the rule of thine affairs shall again be restored to thee, O Czech people!"¹⁹³ Masaryk followed this by his own proclamation that "The prophecy-prayer of Comenius has been fulfilled literally; our nation is free and independent, entering into the company of European nations respected and supported by universal sympathy."¹⁹⁴ This moment was deemed to mark not just the end of a historical struggle but the realization of Czech national aspirations.

On the evening of 22 December, Masaryk attended a performance of Smetana's festive opera *Libuše* at the National Theater.¹⁹⁵ The following day, he was present at Neues Deutsches Theater for a performance of Beethoven's *Fidelio* conducted by Alexander Zemlinsky, where he reaffirmed his commitment to protecting German art throughout the state.¹⁹⁶ Three days later, on Christmas Day 1918, two more festive performances were held at the National Theater in Masaryk's honor: Smetana's *Má vlast* in the morning and Alois Jirásek's play *Jan Hus* in the evening.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² Inv. No. 1696, Boxes 2943–2946. MŠANO.

¹⁹³ "[...] vláda věcí Tvých k Tobě zase se navrátí, ó lide český [...]" Translation following John Amos Comenius, *The Bequest of the Unity of Brethren*, trans. Matthew Spinka (Chicago: National Union of Czechoslovak Protestants in America, 1940), 31–32.

¹⁹⁴ "Proroctví-modlitba Komenského vyplnila se do slova; náš národ je svobodný a nezávislý a vstupuje vážen a podepřen všeobecnou sympatií do společnosti evropských národů." Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *Poselství Presidentova*, [Messages from the President] (Praha: Státní školský knihosklad, 1920), 3.

¹⁹⁵ "*Libuše* (Opera), dne [on] 22.12.1918 v 19:00 [at 7 pm]," Archive of the National Theater, accessed 1 January 2024, <http://archiv.narodni-divadlo.cz/predstaveni/31031>.

¹⁹⁶ Jitka Ludvová, *Až k hořkému konci: pražské německé divadlo 1845-1945* [To the Bitter End: the Prague German Theatre 1845-1945] (Praha: Academia: Institut umění — Divadelní ústav, 2012), 307–8.

¹⁹⁷ Alois Jirásek (1851–1930) wrote many historical novels mythicizing and idealizing the history of the nation. He was also given the honor to welcome Masaryk with a speech upon his arrival to Prague in December 1918.

These programming choices were imbued with profound significance. While the Germans showcased a work by their universally acclaimed composer, the Czechs presented Smetana's opera, in which a mythical Přemyslid ruler prophesies a thriving future for the Czech nation. The selection of the play about John Huss was not only a nod to Protestantism over Catholicism but also an endorsement of the myth of Hussitism as a glorious chapter in Czech history. In accenting Protestantism over Catholicism, Masaryk, who himself left the Catholic Church during his Vienna years, angered the Vatican as well as the German citizens, who were largely Catholic.¹⁹⁸ The mythization of Hussitism reaches deep into the past but in the nineteenth century it became the cornerstone of Czech identity in the works of Palacký and Tomek.¹⁹⁹ This same myth was the foundation for the last two symphonic poems of Smetana's *Má vlast*. Smetana's music, therefore, played a pivotal role in these events, its meaning dynamically adapted to resonate with the contemporary context.

Smetana on the right side of history: Update of the myth in 1918

Beyond its strong political resonance with the public, the 25 December 1918 performance of *Má vlast* was also pivotal in shaping the narrative the media would propagate. Masaryk seized the opportunity during both performances that day to establish connections with chief editors and cultural correspondents of major Czech newspapers. As reported by multiple journalists, the discussions during the intermission of the Smetana concert centered on the war's impact on Czech music.²⁰⁰ According to one report, it was said at the meeting that during the war music was “the only means which, unrestrained by Austrian censorship,

¹⁹⁸ Dagmar Hájková, “Uzákonění dne mistra Jana Husa [The enactment of the day of Master John Huss],” in *Republika československá: 1918-1939*, ed. Dagmar Hájková and Pavel Horák (Praha: NLN, 2018), 394–99.

¹⁹⁹ See Petr Čornej, *Historici, historiografie a dějepis: studie, črty, eseje* [Historians, historiography and history: studies, features, essays], (Praha: Univerzita Karlova v Praze, Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2016), 31–90 for the discussion on the role of the myth in the Czech National Rebirth. See Čornej, 91–202 for how this translated into the so-called Czech Question and Masaryk's own perspective.

²⁰⁰ See Artuš Rektorys, “Smetanova *Má vlast* [Smetana's *Má vlast*]” *České slovo*, 27 December 1918; Antonín Šilhan, “Presidentův Boží Hod [President's Christmas day],” *Národní listy*, 27 December 1918; “Na počest presidenta Masaryka [In honor of President Masaryk],” *Právo lidu*, 27 December 1918; “Národní divadlo presidentu Masarykovi [The National Theater for President Masaryk],” *Venkov*, 27 December 1918. The last report was attributed to the Czech Press Agency ČTK.

could express Czech thought, feeling, and aspirations.”²⁰¹ Music was thus presented as the sole free medium through which true nationality could be expressed, elevating it above other arts and making it more potent than the word, which was subject to censor.

The most comprehensive report of the occasion comes from Artuš Rektorys, director at *Pražská úvěrní banka* [Prague Credit Bank] and an official at the Board as well as an avid follower of Nejedlý.²⁰² In his article for *České slovo*, a daily affiliated with the National Socialists, he described *Má vlast* as:

a work which, alongside *Libuše*, represents the most demanding and magnificent possession of the nation, its greatest boast, and its grandest expression: a work that praises the great past of the nation, yet simultaneously manifests the firmest faith in its great and happy future, accentuating its solidity and granite nature [sic] with all the weight of its deepest convictions. What we have now witnessed was predicted by Smetana half a century ago, and he instilled such fervent faith in it that these works — the only ones of all our musical literature — have become the sole and most potent source from which we drew our faith in victory during the war.²⁰³

Rektorys, like many others, pointed to music as the nation’s source of strength during the war and singled out only Smetana’s pieces as possessing such power. If the number of performances is any indicator, Smetana’s music indeed served as a vent for national feelings during the war. *Má vlast* was performed by the Czech Philharmonic more frequently than

²⁰¹ “hudba byla jediným prostředkem, jenž nespoután rakouskou cenzurou, mohl vyjadřovati české smýšlení i cítění a české tužby. Za války pak nejširší kruhy přilnuly k české hudbě, která jim mluvila z duše.” “Prezidentův Boží Hod [President's Christmas Day],” *Národní listy*, 27.12.1918, p. 1.

²⁰² Gracian Černušák, “Rektorys, Artuš 1),” in *Československý hudební slovník osob a institucí. Sv. 2: M–Ž*, ed. Gracian Černušák, Bohumír Štědroň, and Zdenko Nováček (Praha: Státní hudební vydavatelství, 1965).

²⁰³ “[...] dílu, jež vedle »Libuše« znamená nejnáročnější a nejvelkolepější majetek národa, jeho největší chloubu a jeho nejmohutnější vyjádření: dílo, které opěvá velikou minulost národa, ale zároveň projevuje nejpevnější víru v jeho velikou a šťastnou budoucnost, dílo, které svoji pevnost a žulovost [sic] akcentuje s celou váhou svého nejhlubšího přesvědčení. To, čeho jsme se nyní dožili, to předpovídal Smetana již před půl stoletím a do svých děl vložil o tom tolik horoucí víry, že díla tato — jediná z celé naší literatury hudební — stala se jediným a nejvydatnějším zdrojem, z něhož jsme za války čerpali svoji víru ve vítězství.” *Rektorys*, “Smetanova *Má vlast*.” The authorship is implied by Rektorys being listed in multiple accounts as the journalist representing *České slovo* in the meeting with the President during the concert’s intermission.

ever before: the complete cycle was given 66 times, surpassing the total number of performances from 1901 until the start of the war.²⁰⁴ The head of the Philharmonic, Vilém Zemánek, known for programming audience favorites,²⁰⁵ was unlikely to have featured the cycle so prominently if not for public demand. This suggests that audiences found a sense of community and hope, or at least a respite from the war, in listening to this music.

Returning to Rektorys, he lauded *Má vlast* and *Libuše*, the two pieces performed for Masaryk after his return, as the supreme possessions of the nation, fully expressing its soul and a source of pride before other nations. He emphasized the optimistic, forward-looking narrative of the cycle and described it as unyielding, like stone. Most importantly, his account presents an update of the myth by portraying Smetana as having foretold the establishment of Czechoslovakia.

A similar update appeared already a month earlier, in a text by Nejedlý in his journal, *Smetana*. He claimed Smetana “had worked his way to such independence that he already created our state, at least in his ideal vision.”²⁰⁶ He saw this state embodied in Smetana’s cycle of symphonic poems:

²⁰⁴ One may consider whether other factors, such as the proficiency of the audience to consumer the complete cycle could have played a role. However, the Czech Philharmonic was performing the cycle about half as often after the war as during it. The number of performances between the end of the war and February 1923, a period which in its length corresponds to that of the war, was 33. Between 1901 and July 1914 when the war started, there were 62 performances. There was to be an even higher peak in 1924 during the centenary celebrations, which will be dealt with later in the text. Data derived by the author from the “Portaro” database of the Czech Philharmonic. Appreciation is extended towards the orchestra archivist Pavlína Landová who kindly provided access.

²⁰⁵ The Czech Philharmonic orchestra was then a private entity and Zemánek therefore could not afford to program pieces that would not attract audience. Helfert in a rather biased account of Zemánek’s fall in 1918, he was one of those asking to him to be removed from the helm of the orchestra, complained that while concerts were “always sold out” the members of the orchestra were paid poorly. Vladimír Helfert, *L.V. Čelanský a Česká filharmonie: dokument k hudebním poměrům 1918-19* [L.V. Čelanský and the Czech Philharmonic: a documentary on musical conditions 1918-19], (Praha: V. Helfert, 1919), 14.

²⁰⁶ “Bylo u nás málo těch, kdo by byl měl tak neochvějnou víru v národ jako Smetana, kdo by byl se sám již vypracoval k takové samostatnosti jako Smetana, a kdo by byl náš stát tak již dříve vytvořil aspoň ve své ideální vidině, jako Smetana.” Zdeněk Nejedlý, “Svoboda [Freedom],” *Smetana* 9, no. 1 (1918): at 2.

Isn't Czech independence already complete in *Má vlast*? Is not our nation and our country here a sovereign free unit, over which no foreign power rules? And is it not done with such genuineness that not a shadow of doubt falls upon it as to the reality of this freedom?²⁰⁷

Nejedlý's interpretation, while lacking specific evidence, suggested an obvious conclusion, positioning Smetana's music as a precursor to the nation state. To be clear, this update built on the existing myth of Smetana as a prophet, foretelling the bright future of the nation in *Libuše* and *Má vlast*. For instance, Adolf Piskáček writing before WWI put Smetana's role in *Má vlast* as of "poet, oracle, prophet."²⁰⁸ The novelty in 1918, which was patently obvious, was in marking the prophecy as fulfilled. This sought to strengthen both the Smetana myth as well as the legitimacy of the new state.

Some other reports from the Christmas performances of *Má vlast* echoed similar sentiments. Antonín Šilhan in *Národní listy*, affiliated with the Young Czech Party, referred to the cycle as a *hymna na českou vlast* (a hymn to the Czech homeland). He noted how "Blaník" was perceived during the war as a prophecy of a brighter future, adding that now, during the Masaryk concert it sounded like "a signal announcing the victory of Czech efforts for freedom and independence,"²⁰⁹ and mentioned that it received massive applause from the audience.

Indeed, the performance heard in the President's presence likely evoked a profound and complex array of emotions among the Czech audience. This moment of emotional catharsis probably fostered a sense of unity, triumph, and hope for the future, with these feelings projected onto the music. However, *Má vlast* in this performance may not have been so much presenting these ideas, but rather acquiring them. The program notes to the 1918 concert lacked any such actualization and presented a slightly shorted and commented *krátký nástin*

²⁰⁷ "Či není v »Mé vlasti« česká samostatnost již hotova? Není tu náš národ a naše země svrchovanou svobodnou jednotkou, nad níž nevládne žádná moc cizí? A není to provedeno s takovou opravdovostí, že na to nepadá ani stín pochybností o skutečnosti této svobody?" Nejedlý, 2.

²⁰⁸ "Zde je Smetana básníkem, věštcem, prorokem." Adolf Piskáček, *Má vlast: Cyklus symfonických básní Bedřicha Smetany* [*Má vlast: Cycle of Symphonic Poems by Bedřich Smetana*], 5th ed., Knihovna Smetany, čís. 14 (Praha: Fr.A. Urbánek a synové, 1913), 30.

²⁰⁹ "signál, ohlašující vítězství českých snah za svobodu a samostatnost" Šilhan, "Presidentův Boží Hod."

(short outline) by the composer from 1879 (see Figure 3).²¹⁰ Presumably, the meeting of the music correspondents of the papers with the President during the intermission informed their reading of it. However, there appears to be more at play.

While Šilhan's report may seem like Rektorys's on the surface, it differs in its language. Šilhan's account was factual, discussing contemporary audience's interpretation without attributing it to Smetana. In contrast, Nejedlý and Rektorys, using festive language, transformed Smetana into a prophet by updating the myth. Furthermore, Nejedlý used this notion in the rest of his article to divide the nation and place himself on the right side of history. On one side were those who had correctly understood Smetana's prophecy, like himself, and on the other, *zjevny zcela slabošské* (completely weak personalities) who had been turning to Vienna for protection.²¹¹ The update of the myth therefore served in the first instance not so much to legitimize Czechoslovakia, but to further enhance Smetana's standing, now as the architect of the nation's independence, and that of his proponents, including the people around Nejedlý.

In short, following its strong resonance during the war, the cultural elite naturally selected these meaningful pieces to honor President Masaryk, thereby strengthening their nationalistic message and tying it to Czechoslovakia and its President. Simultaneously, Nejedlý's circle seized the opportunity to elevate the myth, positioning themselves on the right side of history. As will be seen, this reinterpretation quickly permeated political discourse.

²¹⁰ For the various nineteenth century texts of the cycle's program see Jaroslav Smolka, *Smetanova symfonická tvorba* [Smetana's Symphonic Works], (Praha: Supraphon, 1984), 137–146.

²¹¹ Nejedlý, "Svoboda [Freedom]."

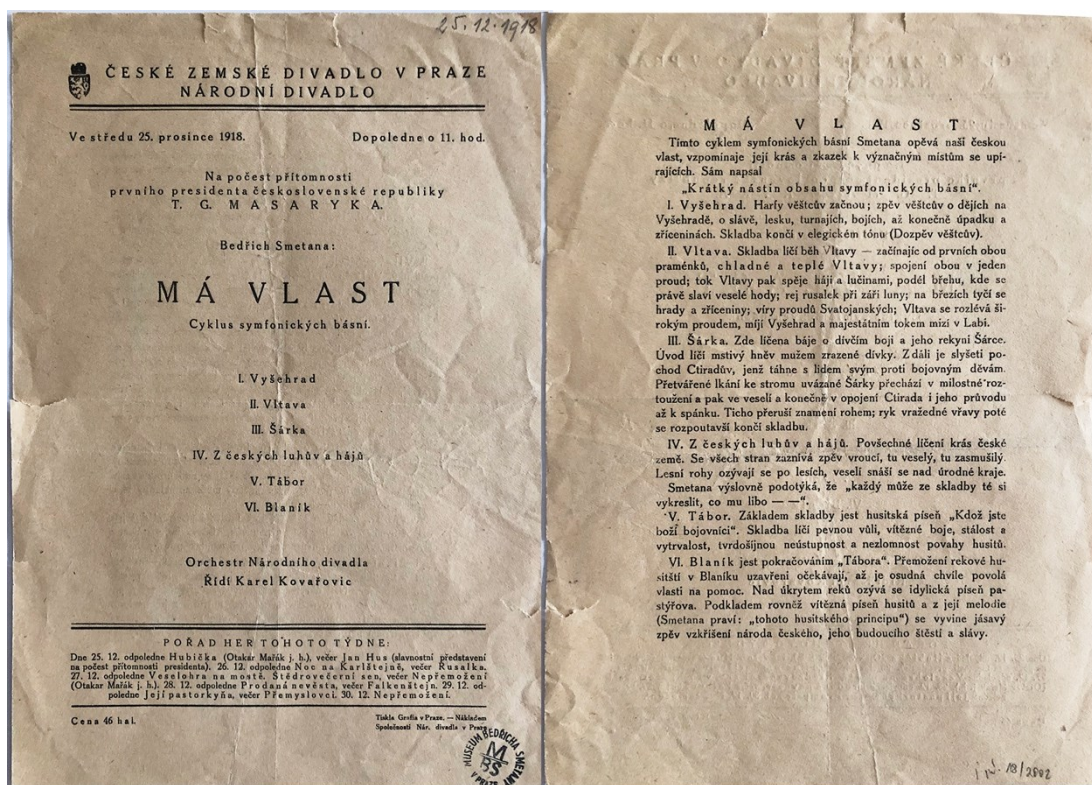


Figure 3 The recto and verso pages of the 25 December 1918 program leaf

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Making Smetana a Property of the State: A Gradual Process

While in the events of December 1918 Smetana’s music was very visible, it did not, with the establishment of Czechoslovakia, instantly become a state symbol among the Czechs, not even in Bohemia.²¹² The celebrations in 1918 were a reflection of the euphoria surrounding the new state’s existence and as such were hinting at possibilities rather than establishing a concrete and fixed association between the state and the music.

It is true, though, that moments of rupture, like the dissolution of Austria, invite the questioning and renewal of legacies. Existing values, customs, and heroes are tested, replaced, or redefined. Often, the framing is crucial in determining what is associated with the decaying monarchy and what resonates with the “vital soul of the Czech nation.” This “new normal” is negotiated through the actions of politicians, media, and the public. For

²¹² See the discussion of the situation in Moravia in Chapter 5.

Smetana's music in the new state, the process was protracted, requiring his position to be repeatedly reaffirmed.

Despite the revolutionary fervor, distancing from the Austrian monarchy was complex, as evidenced by the handling of state holidays. Czechoslovakia's adoption of Austria's complete legislation in 1918 included all its Catholic holidays, contrary to what the leadership of the "nation state" might have preferred. Early attempts to alter the holiday schedule were unsuccessful, and in 1919, the only new holiday legislated was 28 October.²¹³ That year, a festive performance of *Libuše* was held at the National Theater on this day. However, in subsequent years, while the opera was performed several times annually, it was not on 28 October, the most important state holiday.²¹⁴

In other words, transforming Smetana into a state symbol was a gradual process, necessitating a concerted effort from Smetanites. The Board's leadership played a critical role in this, persuading the President and other key figures to demonstrate closer affinity with Smetana. Much of this was orchestrated behind the scenes, as I will discuss later, but some efforts were also made through public pronouncements.

For instance, in March 1922, Nejedlý, in his journal *Var*, challenged the President's role in the state. He criticized the ceremonies at Prague Castle as overly monarchic, advocating for simplicity befitting "a 'Hussite' nation, a nation of common people"²¹⁵ because "[o]ur reverence has always been especially for simple appearances, without all pomp. No one could have enjoyed more respect than Palacký or Smetana. Nor has any monarch ever enjoyed

²¹³ On 28 October 1918, the pronouncement by the Austro-Hungarian Emperor granting autonomy to its constituent nations was widely yet mistakenly received in the Czech lands as an acknowledgment of Czech national independence. Jubilant crowds thronged the streets, celebrating and removing German street signs. By evening, the *Národní výbor* (National Committee) had enacted its inaugural law, proclaiming the establishment of an independent state. Dagmar Hájková and Miroslav Michela, "Oslavy 28.října [Celebrations of 28 October]," in *Sláva republice! Oficiální svátky a oslavy v meziválečném Československu*, ed. Pavel Horák et al. (Praha: Academia; Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, 2018), 75–135.

²¹⁴ For instance, in 1920, *Libuše* was performed to mark the rally of national gymnastic union "Sokol" (25.6. and 29.6.), the 300 years since the battle on the White Mountain (7.11.), Jan Amos Comenius (14.11.), Jubilee of the Ústřední Matice školská [Central School League] (12.12.). See Archive of the National Theater at <http://archiv.narodni-divadlo.cz>, accessed 11 December 2023.

²¹⁵ "my, 'husitský' národ, národ prostých lidí" Zdeněk Nejedlý, "President," *Var* 2, no. 2 (15 December 1922): at 39.

such respect.”²¹⁶ He particularly lamented the President’s absence at Smetana events, arguing that the President, as the republic’s first citizen, should attend these events out of personal necessity rather than obligation, instead of being taken to “cinemas and similar spectacles.”²¹⁷

Nejedlý was cautious not to directly blame Masaryk but instead targeted those around him, especially his chief of protocol, Dr. Jiří Stanislav Guth–Jarkovský, whom he accused of importing aristocratic customs from his previous roles.²¹⁸ Guth–Jarkovský, in his memoirs, refuted this, asserting that the state protocol was modeled after Western democracies.²¹⁹ Despite this, Nejedlý may have had a point about the ceremonies’ monarchic inspirations, more than the administration was willing to admit. (That Guth–Jarkovský subtitled his memoirs *Na dvoře republikánském* [At the Republican Court] betrays his own point.) However, Nejedlý’s stated preference for simpler celebrations starkly contrasts with the elaborate events the Board organized for the Smetana centenary in 1924 and with the grandiose Smetana monuments. Unlike Křest’an, who believed that the Board during the time of preparing the centenary celebrations gradually succumbed to monumentalism (he talks of megalomania),²²⁰ I find it in their projects from 1917 at the latest. I am inclined to think therefore that while Nejedlý was challenging the form of the festivities, his primary concern was their content. When Smetana was placed at the center of the festivities, no pomp was

²¹⁶ “Naše úcta nesla se vždy jistě především k zjevům prostým, bez vší okázalosti. Nikdo nemohl se těšiti větší úctě než Palacký nebo Smetana. Ani žádný panovník nepožíval nikdy takového respektu.” Nejedlý, at 39.

²¹⁷ “Jest na př. málo dní u nás tak opravdu slavnostech a při tom lidově národních jako jsou dni, kdy vzpomínáme Smetany. Zvláště v úmrtní den mistrův, 12. května, schází se celý kulturní svět do Národního divadla, jež ten den také umělecky slaví svátečně. Jak by krásně působilo, kdyby v takový den byl tu i prezident. A ne jen tak, že by byl pozván a sem oficiálně přiveden, ale kdyby jako první občan republiky ze své *vlastní* potřeby byl tu přítomen. Místo toho však naši ceremoniáři vodí presidenta po biografech a podobných velkolepostech.” Nejedlý, 39.

²¹⁸ Jiří Stanislav Guth–Jarkovský (1861–1943) was a writer. From 1919 to 1922 he was the head of the diplomatic protocol at the Office of the President of the Republic. Ludmila Lantová, “Jiří Stanislav Guth–Jarkovský,” in *Lexikon české literatury: osobnosti, díla, instituce*, ed. Vladimír Forst (Praha: Academia, 1985), 833–836, <https://kramerius.lib.cas.cz/uuid/uuid:be9058c6-806d-4141-abf9-d0af37159736>.

²¹⁹ Jiří Stanislav Guth–Jarkovský, *Paměti, Díl III: Na dvoře republikánském 1919–1925 : vzpomínky a dojmy (výpisky z deníku)* (Praha: Hejda & Tuček, 1929), 52–54.

²²⁰ See Note 162.

too big. The genesis of the collected edition of Smetana's works illustrates this point convincingly.

Proving the national maturity: The failed project of the monumental edition

One of the projects at the top of the Board's agenda was the publication of a monumental edition of Smetana's works.²²¹ The narrative behind the creation of the two volumes that were published paints a vivid picture of the nationalistic fervor within the cultural elite during the early years of the Czechoslovak Republic. This effort was building on the endeavors of the National Rebirth to assert the nation's maturity by birthing a composer whose music could rival that of more developed nations. In the new state, this aspiration extended to the realm of music editing and publishing. Naturally, the end-product had to be of unparalleled greatness, but this aspiration became a significant hurdle for the project. Despite generous state funding, it proved economically unviable. Furthermore, its reliance on the "nation of Smetana" purchasing these lavish tokens of nationalism en masse turned out to be utopian.

This project was unprecedented in the Czech lands. Previous editions of Smetana's works were commercially oriented, prioritizing practicality and affordability. The new edition was to be the antithesis, characterized by both grandeur and scientific rigor. This was to be provided by Nejedlý, who was portrayed by the Board as the supreme expert on Smetana. He took up the role of the editor of the series and of the first volume.

The quality of the publication was paramount, befitting a project representing the nation and the state, aiming to rival similar undertakings abroad. One of the members of the Board leadership and editor of the journal *Smetana*, Hubert Doležil, in his text for the periodical listed musical editions that he saw as models. Among them were those of nine composers from the German cultural realm, two from the French, and one from each of the Italian and

²²¹ Officially titled *Souborné dílo Bedřicha Smetany* [Collected Works of BS], discussions about the edition in the journal *Smetana* and elsewhere often referred to it as "monumental."

the Russian.²²² As in many other cases, the benchmark for the Czech nation was how the nation's greatest had been served in the German realm.

Similarly to other Board's projects, the quest to match international models and produce a work commensurate with Smetana's greatness presented significant production challenges, leading to delays and increased costs. Yet, the imperative of achieving "the true monumentality" allowed no room for compromise.

Early on, the Board resolved that the edition was to be printed in Czechoslovakia, despite the country lacking state-of-the-art music printing technology. While Leipzig, still a central European hub for music publishing, was well equipped to handle the project, this option was deemed "unworthy of a national monument" and "incompatible with the spirit of Smetana."²²³ Doležil in this article clarified that this was not a result of anti-Germanness, but that the "causes lay much deeper."²²⁴ It was essential to demonstrate not only the nation's ability to produce the music but also to prepare and print its edition.

Thus, from the project's inception, the Board recognized the high cost that would be involved. While they initiated campaigns to encourage Czech citizens to contribute to all their Smetana projects, they understood that substantial government funding was indispensable to get the edition off the ground. In April 1921, the Board's chairman, Táborský, and vice-chairman, Nejedlý, visited Minister of Foreign Affairs Edvard Beneš to present the concept of a "representative edition" of Smetana's works. They argued that the state could use this edition "to represent itself before foreign countries."²²⁵ Beneš

²²² Doležil listed the editions of works by the following composers as benchmarks for the Smetana edition (in this order): Bach, Berlioz, Beethoven, Händel, Gluck, Grétry, Mozart, Palestrina, Rameau, Schubert, Schumann, Schütz, and Bortniansky. "Doležil, "První svazek Souborných děl B. Smetany," at 43.

²²³ "To jsme však pokládali za nedůstojné národního pomníku, jež touto edicí chceme Smetanovi budovati, i za neslučitelné s duchem Smetanovým." Bedřich Smetana, *Skladby z mládí do r. 1843* [[Compositions from his youth until 1843], ed. Zdeněk Nejedlý, Souborné dílo Bedřicha Smetany 1 (Praha: Státní nakladatelství, 1924), n.p.

²²⁴ "nebyla to zaujatost protiněmecká, nýbrž příčiny daleko hlubší, jež vedly zde na prvním místě k tomu, abychom si edici takovou v plné a bezvadné formě mohli poříditi doma i svou vlastní prací technickou" Doležil, "První svazek Souborných děl B. Smetany," at 43.

²²⁵ "[Táborský a Nejedlý] Upozornili ministra zahraničí na chystané reprezentativní vydání děl B. Smetany, jímž by mohl i stát representovat se před cizinou a jichž by mohl používat jako darů. Upozornili ho dále na

enthusiastically pledged his support. Then they managed to persuade him that the editions needed to be printed domestically, suggesting that the state acquire the necessary equipment, possibly through the state printer. Beneš promised to draft a memorandum on the matter, and the state printer indeed procured and installed the equipment.²²⁶

Doležil commended generosity of the state, noting that such support would have been impossible under Austrian rule or, if it were possible, it would be “under circumstances humiliating for us.”²²⁷ His remark underlines Czechoslovakia’s willingness to massively invest in such a project to pursue its culturally political objectives, regardless of the efficiency of spending. This was largely attributable to the perceived need that the nation was to prove itself in front of its allies, the western democracies, on the cultural front.

With the question of funding off the table for the time being, the central challenge of the project lay in “the question of the true monumentality of the publication,” which, to Doležil, symbolized a demand for “dignified proportion” between the publication of a composer’s life’s work and his significance. He asserted that “any modesty would be pettiness and would be ingratitude, a lack of love and again of national pride in an artist so great.”²²⁸ A less than grandiose edition would have belittled Smetana’s stature compared to canonical composers or demonstrated the lack of the nation’s gratitude toward such a luminary. In either case, the nation’s aspiration to prove itself through music would have been diminished.

The choice of work to initiate the series carried significant symbolism. Nejedlý, as the head of the publishing commission, selected Smetana’s most successful opera, *Prodaná nevěsta* (The Bartered Bride). This was the composition that initially brought Smetana fame

důležitost, jakou by mělo zřízení tiskárny not v republice (třeba při státní tiskárně) a doporučili mu memorandum v tom smyslu. Pan ministr slíbil všemožnou podporu.” The meeting took place on April 23, 1920. See “Zápis výborové schůze konané dne 29. dubna 1921 [Minutes of the meeting of the Committee dated April 29, 1921],” in “Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924,” Box 2, SBS.

²²⁶ This author attempted to locate the memorandum in the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but was unsuccessful.

²²⁷ “za okolností pro nás ponižujících” Doležil, “První svazek Souborných děl B. Smetany,” at 44.

²²⁸ “[...] otázka pravé monumentálnosti vydání, která tu není jen choutkou po representaci, nýbrž požadavkem důstojné úměrnosti mezi publikací celého životního díla a zjevem i významem jeho tvůrce. Zde každá skromnost byla by malostí a byla by nevděkem, nedostatkem lásky i zase národní hrdosti z umělce tak velikého.” Doležil, at 43.

domestically and paved the way for his international recognition following its success at the 1892 Vienna Exhibition. Initial reports to public were overly optimistic—after its General Meeting in May 1922, the Board announced that *Prodaná nevěsta* would be published by Christmas of 1923 and that the Board would strive for a “relatively low price.”²²⁹ However, with the big score of some 700 pages, the work on the edition progressed slowly until it became evident that it would not be ready even a year later. That the edition could not be launched during the centenary would be a blunder.

Consequently, Nejedlý altered the order of publication for the series. Instead, a volume edited by Nejedlý comprising Smetana’s early pieces was chosen to inaugurate the series.²³⁰ Even this one, five times smaller in its extent than the opera, proved to be a challenge to complete in time. The finished books were ready for distribution only in early 1925. To maintain the symbolic significance of the 1924 date, one printed copy was displayed in the Urbánek bookstore’s window during the 1924 Christmas season.²³¹ When at last available, the volume was indeed impressive in its workmanship. Doležil confidently ranked the volume “among the world’s foremost publications of its kind,” praising its modernity, technical finesse, high-quality materials, artistic decoration, and luxurious cover—all enclosed in a protective cardboard box. Remarkably, he found no trace of “superfluous luxury.” When representing the nation through Smetana, no level of luxury was deemed excessive.

However, the project’s cost was exorbitant. In addition to the purchase of the equipment, the state needed to subsidize the production costs, which it did through the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment. In undertaking this project, the state was not only helping the edition materialize, it was also actively communicating its cultural policy to the citizenry. This is most evident in the involvement of President Masaryk.

During a Board leadership visit to the President in February 1924 he announced he would himself donate 100,000 Kč to the project. (It should be clarified that the President, in addition to having an annual salary of 1,000,000 Kč, also was allotted the amount of

²²⁹ Smetanovo jubileum. R (hudba), 15.5.1922. Newspaper clipping in Folder “63 Zd. Nejedlý/B. Smetana,” Box 25, SBS.

²³⁰ Smetana, *Skladby z mládí do r. 1843*.

²³¹ Doležil, “První svazek Souborných děl B. Smetany.”

2,000,000 Kč for official expenditures. From this fund he supported various activities.)²³² The President gave only rough guidelines on how the money was to be spent: on the Smetana monument, on the purchase of Smetana's estate, or distributed among celebrations in Prague, Brno, Bratislava, and Litomyšl. The Prague Board, tasked with allocating the donation, opted for a compromise, distributing the funds across these projects, with the majority allocated to their own endeavors.²³³ On the very day that the Board's Committee was deciding on where to allocate the amount, it received news from the Office of the President that an additional 100,000 Kč had been earmarked by the President specifically for the "permanent commemoration of Smetana in Prague."²³⁴ The donations by President Masaryk garnered widespread press coverage and, aside from inciting interest in the forthcoming celebrations, they served to strengthen the link between the national identity and Smetana's name on the one hand and the link between the two personalities on the other. This impression was further underlined by the President's presence at all of the official Smetana events in Prague that will be covered in the next subchapter.

This, together with the activities of Minister Beneš, was presented by the Board as a turning point in the support of the "monumental edition" by the political establishment. Doležil wrote that the President's decision "gave a directive" by contributing significantly to the project.²³⁵ Křest'an cited this view but did not challenge the temporal inconsistencies.²³⁶ Masaryk's gift was announced in early February of 1924. Beneš promised the support to the project by advocating for a new printer three years earlier. In 1922, first samples of printed

²³² "Zákon č. 372/1922 Sb. z. a n.," 1673.

²³³ The Prague Board's Committee in a meeting held on 23 February 1924 allocated the first 100,000 Kč provided by President Masaryk on 9 February 1924 as follows: 18,000 Kč to each of its three projects: the Prague monument, the purchase of the Smetana estate, and the monumental edition. The same amount was to go to each of the Brno and Bratislava organizations. The remaining 10,000 Kč was to be provided to the Litomyšl Committee. Zápís o výborové schůzi konané dne 23. února 1924 [Minutes of the committee meeting held on 23 February 1924] in "Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924," Box 2, SBS.

²³⁴ "Zápís o výborové schůzi konané dne 23. února 1924 [Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 23 February 1924]" in "Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924," Box 2, SBS.

²³⁵ Doležil, "První svazek Souborných děl B. Smetany."

²³⁶ Křest'an, "Sbor pro postavení pomínku Bedřichu Smetanovi," 309n57.

pages were available.²³⁷ If the President gave an incentive for the institutions to generously finance the project, it was not with the February 1924 contribution.

Despite all the generous funding, the project progressed far slower than everyone hoped for. The extended timeline is well exemplified by the second volume, *Prodaná nevěsta*, which Doležil reported as in majority “technically complete” by early 1925, presumably meaning that a larger portion of the plates had been prepared.

Nevertheless, the volume was released in three parts from 1932 to 1936, a decade later. It also turned out to be the final volume to be completed, leaving the “monumental edition” of Smetana’s works, originally envisioned as 18 volumes, with only two volumes in existence.²³⁸ In retrospect, the project fell short of its ambitious goals, to provide Smetana with the recognition bestowed upon significant composers in other nations. The production of two volumes over 15 years paled in comparison to the projects that served as its models. When juxtaposed with undertakings initiated under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, such as *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich*,²³⁹ the “monumental edition” surpassed them in paper quality, printing, and artistic decoration but lagged significantly in terms of output. Over the same period of 15 years, *Denkmäler* produced 21 more volumes and reached volume number 81. The undertaking fared similarly poorly compared to the editions of canonic Western composers.

The project’s failure can be attributed to several factors, all converging on one central point—the insistence on monumentality. This led to prohibitive costs, despite significant state funding, resulting in an edition of music priced as a luxury item. The first volume (with 130 pages of music) cost 220 Kč, equivalent to one-fifth of the average monthly salary.²⁴⁰ Though installment sales were offered to reduce the one-off impact on family budgets, it

²³⁷ Křestán, 309n56.

²³⁸ Some of the projected volumes were to be split into multiple parts, as was the case for *Prodaná nevěsta*. When the physical volumes are counted, the total that was ever published amounts to four. However, as this number cannot be compared to the original ambition, I have opted to use the term “volume” to represent the logical composition of the series as originally conceived rather than its physical volumes.

²³⁹ “Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich [Monuments of musical art in Austria],” 12 January 2023, <http://www.dtoe.at/Publikationen/Denkm.php>.

²⁴⁰ The average monthly salary of a coal miner was 10,230 Kč. *Statistická příručka republiky Československé*, 3:52.

still presumed that citizens would allocate a substantial portion of their income to purchase a music score. In addition, the time-consuming production process was more suitable for an isolated representational volume but impractical for the series of such magnitude. Consequently, the *Bedřich Smetana society*²⁴¹ refocused on the *Studijní vydání* (Study Scores) of Smetana's works, with the first volume coming out in 1940. These editions foregrounded content over lavish presentation. The "monumental edition" was later never revived, not even during Nejedlý's tenure of the Minister of Education.

The project, despite falling short of its aspirations, helped gain recognition for the Board. It succeeded in securing state financing for its cause and raising awareness of Smetana, particularly within musical circles.²⁴² Both achievements contributed to solidifying Smetana's status as the nation's preeminent composer.

For the state, the Smetana project had a two-fold objective. Apart from helping to instill a shared identity of the "Czechoslovak" nation, it was to represent the newly independent nation-state abroad. The government's funding of the project had a wide publicity and, as a result, further enshrined Smetana as a national treasure, underscoring the state's commitment to preserving and promoting his legacy.

Smetana's music was also featured in the program of the festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music that immediately followed the Smetana celebrations.²⁴³ Moreover, as correspondence stored in the archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs shows that the state was also incentivizing and financially supporting performance of Smetana's music abroad.²⁴⁴ While this aspect falls outside of the scope of this thesis, focused on the

²⁴¹ *Bedřich Smetana society* was the new name of the Board that it adopted in 1931. See Olga Mojžíšová, "Společnost Bedřicha Smetany [Bedřich Smetana Society]," in *Český hudební slovník osob a institucí*, 16 July 2019, https://www.ceskyhudebnislovník.cz/slovník/index.php?option=com_mdictionary&task=record.record_detail&id=1543.

²⁴² The author encountered the two volumes of the monumental edition in the library of the Czech composer Jaroslav Ježek, located in his renowned "blue room," now a museum. These volumes were meticulously preserved in their original cardboard packaging.

²⁴³ See Locke, *Opera and Ideology in Prague*, 150–53.

²⁴⁴ The Ministry was subsidizing the tours of Czech performers but also paying for sheet music provided to foreign institutions. For instance, the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment directed a letter to

Smetana celebrations in Czechoslovakia, it reinforces the conclusion that promotion of Smetana's music became an important part of the state's cultural policy.

Affirming Smetana's greatness in a political setting

The centenary celebrations commenced with a grand meeting on the day of the centenary, 2 March 1924 at the National Theater. This event, notably political, provides substantial material for analyzing the political dimensions of the celebrations, evident on several levels. In discussing the event, three major aspects warrant an upfront introduction.

Firstly, the presence of President Masaryk, along with government ministers and other state officials, as well as foreign emissaries, elevated the event to a state act. Particularly, President Masaryk's presence, given his exceptional stature in the First Republic, lent the event a unique significance. The correspondent of *Listy Hudební Matice*, likely its editor Boleslav Vomáčka,²⁴⁵ expressed how the President's mere presence symbolized a spiritually profound moment for the nation:

The presence of the first man in our republic, busy with all sorts of affairs of state, and the attention he paid to the performance of all the works of Bedřich Smetana, were of great intrinsic importance. I sensed the greatness of the times in which we live and wished in my mind that all the participants in the celebration would remember that we

publisher Urbánek on 9 April 1924, asking him to send to the Czech Embassy in Poland what appears to have been (given the quote price of 1,200 Kč) the full score and parts of Smetana's opera *Hubička*. The bill was to be paid by the Ministry. Folder "Oslavy Smetany [Smetana Celebrations] 1924," box 828, Fund "III. sekce [section] 1918–1939," Archives of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

²⁴⁵ Boleslav Vomáčka (1887–1965) was a composer and music critic. Between 1920 and 1940, he served as an executive [jednatel] at the Music Department of UB. He graduated in composition from the Prague Conservatory under Vítězslav Novák and also earned a degree in law from Charles University. Starting in 1919, he was an official at the Ministry of Social Welfare and served as an editor (1923–1926) and later as a co-editor (1927–1935) of *Listy Hudební Matice*. Additionally, he contributed articles on music and various other subjects to publications such as the German-language *Auftakt* and the daily *Lidové noviny*. Gracian Černušák referred to him as "one of the most exceptional figures in our [Czechoslovak] music criticism between the two World Wars." [Mezi dvěma válkami jeden z nejvýznamnějších zjevů naší hudební kritiky.] As a composer, he composed numerous works, including three operas." Gracian Černušák, "Vomáčka, Boleslav," in Gracian Černušák, Bohumír Štědroň, and Zdenko Nováček, eds., *Československý hudební slovník osob a institucí. Sv. 2: M–Ž* (Praha: Státní hudební vydavatelství, 1965), 901–903, at 903.

were listening to the work of the spiritual creator of our freedom in the presence of the founder of our state. The connection of these two personalities was then filled with a content of true culture that distinguished the course of all the festive concerts.²⁴⁶

He also alluded to a narrative linking Smetana as the nation's freedom architect in the realm of ideas and Masaryk as the one who realized these aspirations. This had a dual significance: it positioned the President at the culmination of the line of Czech "national awakeners," and it bestowed upon Smetana a special importance within this lineage.

Secondly, the event was seen as a significant affirmation of Smetana's greatness. An anonymous correspondent of *Národní politika* noted it was the first time that "representatives of all the cultured nations of the world: the French, English, Yugoslav, American, Italian, Bulgarian, Belgian, Dutch and other allied nations"²⁴⁷ celebrated Smetana's preeminence. The list opened with the Entente powers and inserted among them Yugoslavs as the Slavic nation with which Czechoslovakia had the closest links. Conspicuously, Germans or Austrians were not listed. The level of "culturedness" was measured by the closeness of affiliation to Czechoslovakia. Not only here was the composer a proxy for the nation. The logic was, however, circular: foreign emissaries' participation in a state act was interpreted as veneration for Smetana and, by extension, the entire nation.

Third, some media tension arose from the fact that, despite being a state ceremony fully funded by the state, its dramaturgy was set by a private society, the Board. Notably, the celebration, while honoring a composer, emphasized speeches over music. Although all of them revered Smetana, they also made political statements. How they were reflected in the media reports illuminates the various threads of meaning attached to the Smetana myth,

²⁴⁶ "Účast prvního muže v naší republice, zaneprázdněného všelikými starostmi státnickými, a pozornost, kterou věnoval provedení všech děl Bedřicha Smetany, to mělo veliký vnitřní význam. Vycítil jsem velikost doby, ve které žijeme, a přál jsem si v duchu, aby všichni účastníci slavnosti si zapamatovali, že posloucháme dílo duchovního tvůrce naší svobody v přítomnosti zakladatele našeho státu. Spojitost těchto dvou zjevů obsahově pak naplněna byla opravdovou kulturou, kterou vyznamenával se průběh všech slavnostních koncertů." "Jubilejní slavnosti Bedřicha Smetany [Jubilee celebrations of Bedřich Smetana]," *Listy Hudební Matice* 3, no. 6–7 (20 March 1924): 229–31.

²⁴⁷ "[...] po prvé za účasti povolaných zástupců všech kulturních národů světa: vyslanci francouzský, anglický, jihoslovanský, americký, italský, bulharský, belgický, holandský a ostatních spřátelených států plnili lože a křesla hlediště."

distinguishing between those perceived as legitimate and those seen as misappropriations of a state act for political propaganda.

The choice of location and music was deliberate, representing the pinnacle of national cultural efforts and linking past to present. The theater's orchestra, led by Otakar Ostrčil, opened the event with Smetana's *Slavností předebrá C dur* (Festive Overture in C), composed for the 1868 foundation stone ceremony of the National Theater.²⁴⁸ This reference to the past underscored Smetana's historical role in the nation's leading cultural institution, described by art historian František Žákavec in 1918 as "the temple of rebirth."²⁴⁹ It also linked the current event to its historical counterpart, elevating it to a significant moment in the nation's journey to self-rule, as can be read in K. B. Jiráček report that the overture captured the "sacredly festive mood of the moment."²⁵⁰

The theatrical setup further accentuated the sanctity of the event, as the reporter in *Listy Hudební Matice* described:

The invited audience of political dignitaries, cultural workers and members of the Board for the Erection of the Smetana Monument formed a ceremonial counterpart to the equally ceremoniously attuned scene, on which, in front of a dark blue background, a row of black-clad singers from Prague's singing societies piled up, surrounding a golden bust of Bedřich Smetana on a block pedestal, above which floated a huge wreath with ribbons in the national colors.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ In the program of the event, the piece was for some reason listed as *Slavnostní pochod* [Festive March], but the piece is clearly identified by the explanatory note "k otevření Národního divadla roku 1868" [for the opening of the National Theatre in 1868]. That in 1868 its foundation stone was laid and the National Theater was opened only in 1881, adds to the confusion. Quite unexpected for an event of utmost importance where everything must have been prepared under the supervision of Nejedlý.

²⁴⁹ František Žákavec, *Chrám znovuzrození: o budovatelích a budově Národního divadla v Praze* [The Temple of Rebirth: about the builders and the building of the National Theatre in Prague], (Praha: Jan Štenc, 1918).

²⁵⁰ "neobyčejně šťastně vystihující posvátně slavnostní náladu okamžiku"

²⁵¹ "Pozvané občanstvo z řad politických hodnostářů, kulturních pracovníků a členů Sboru pro postavení Smetanova pomníku tvořilo obřadný protějšek k neméně obřadně naladěné scéně, na které před temně modrým pozadím kupila se do výše řada černě oděných pěvců a pěvků z pražských pěveckých spolků, obklopujíc zlatou bustu Bedřicha Smetany na kvádřovém podstavci, nad níž vznášel se obrovský věnec se stuhami v národních barvách." "Jubilejní slavnosti Bedřicha Smetany."

The audience, comprising political and cultural elites along with numerous Board members, and the performers, both representing Smetana and shielded by him, formed counterparts in the ensuing ceremony. The audience included, besides the political and cultural elite, also numerous Board members, who thus gained access to the *crème de la crème* of society. This further reinforced the perceived power of the organization as discussed in Chapter 3.

The singers, from Prague Hlahol choir, once led by Smetana, joined the National Theater orchestra to conclude the ceremony with Smetana's *Česká píseň* (The Czech Song). Seated beneath the choir were two groups of speakers. On one side were the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, František Tomášek, speaking "on behalf of the nation," Minister for Education and National Enlightenment, Rudolf Bechyně, representing the government, and composer J. B. Foerster, representing the music world, all delivering festive speeches. Opposite them sat Board officials—chair Táborský and vice-chair Nejedlý. The setup juxtaposed the nation, government, and cultural elite against the Board's leadership. Nejedlý, through the event's dramaturgy and his extended speech, ensured the Board's prominent role in the ceremony. But the guest speakers were first to address.

Speaker Tomášek expanded on the 1918 update to the Smetana myth by Nejedlý's circle. He asserted that Smetana's work paved the way for the national revolution and provided it with a clear program. He referenced the motifs of the Hussite song "Ktož jsú boží bojovníci" (Who are the Warriors of God), which inspired Smetana's "Tábor" and "Blaník," the concluding symphonic poems of the cycle *Má vlast*. Tomášek interpreted this as Smetana's prediction that the nation would achieve triumph through the army of the Hussites.²⁵² He then drew parallels between the Hussites and the Czechoslovak Legions, noting that some Legion regiments adopted Hussite names.²⁵³ In this context, what was originally a nod to national tradition by the soldiers (other regiments bore names of historical

²⁵² According to the myth, Czech soldiers from historically lost battles were sleeping in Blaník mountain, destined to emerge and save the land in its darkest hour.

²⁵³ The Czechoslovak Legions were composed primarily of Czech and Slovak volunteers and fighting alongside the Allies during WWI. Masaryk's Mafia exercised significant influence over the Legions, bolstering a strong negotiating position in post-war discussions with the Allies. Milan Mojžíš, ed., *Československé legie 1914-1920: katalog k výstavám Československé obce legionářské* [Czechoslovak Legions 1914-1920: catalogue for exhibitions of the Czechoslovak Legionary Community], 2nd ed. (Praha: Epoque, 2017).

figures outside of the Hussite tradition) and a reflection of popular myths by the composer became interpreted as a “clairvoyant prophecy.”²⁵⁴ Tomášek concluded his speech by exhorting that Smetana remain “a leader, and an educator to the nation, [and] become an ever-flowing spring of rejuvenating water for eternity.”²⁵⁵ Minister Bechyně echoed some of Tomášek’s points but added that if the nation followed the path of its national leaders, including Smetana, it would maintain its independence. The historical figures were thus presented as models for the citizenry, whose emulation would ensure the nation’s continued success.

Composer Josef Bohuslav Foerster described Smetana in poetic superlatives, his characterization of the composer as “a miracle, perfection itself” bordering on sanctification. He identified love for the nation as the sole source of Smetana’s creation and his only desire to serve the nation. Foerster praised Smetana for elevating Czech music to a global level and for having “sung the victorious song of liberation in *Dalibor*, ‘Blaník,’ and *Libuše*.”²⁵⁶ To him, Smetana was a leader, teacher, and model.

Then came Nejedlý’s turn as the main speaker. His speech, unscripted and unbearably long to some, tested the endurance of the singers on stage. A report in *Listy Hudební Matice* noted that “[s]everal ladies, who had been standing on the platform all this time [and who] fainted with fatigue.”²⁵⁷ The speech was briefly interrupted but then Nejedlý resumed. It was his moment in the spotlight, and he was determined to make the most of it.

Nejedlý’s speech was unique not only in length but also in content. While reports on the speeches by political representatives were consistent across the media, coverage of Nejedlý’s speech varied. *Národní listy* was the only paper to explicitly criticize him, deeming his speech “superficial, unprepared, and disorganized,” and unsuitable for the occasion and the

²⁵⁴ Lébl and Ludvová explored the nineteenth-century popularity of this myth and its artistic representations. See Lébl and Ludvová, “Dobové kořeny a souvislosti *Mé vlasti*” pp. 114–115.

²⁵⁵ “[Smetana] nechť zůstane vůdcem, a vychovatelem národu i nadále. Zdravá, silná, čistá, radostná hudba, nechť zpívá a jásá, září a svítí národu na cesty, nechť sílí a živí jeho duši, nechť zkrásňuje a zušlechťuje jeho tužby a snahy, nechť stane se nepřebnaným pramenem stále ohrožující živé vody po věčné časy.” “Národní divadlo památce Smetanově [National Theater in memory of Smetana],” *Národní politka*, 3 March 1924.

²⁵⁶ “zpíval vítěznou píseň osvobození v *Daliboru*, ‘Blaníku’ a v *Libuši*”

²⁵⁷ “Několik dam, které po celou tu dobu stály na tribuně, únavou omdlévalo.” “Jubilejní slavnosti Bedřicha Smetany.”

present.²⁵⁸ The paper accused Nejedlý of trying to assign a class-based significance to Smetana and his oeuvre.²⁵⁹ Certainly, all speeches were ideological and activist, fitting the late composer into a preconceived framework and using his myth for a point. When the ideology was Czech nationalism, it was warmly received. When Nejedlý infused the myth with elements of communist rhetoric, he elicited outrage. Yet, what was reported from his speech mostly pertained to the former. He proclaimed Smetana the greatest leader of all musicians (not only in Czech lands) and a proponent of democracy and progress. His music was “in service of life, as science and politics [are].”²⁶⁰ He drew parallels between Smetana’s contributions to the National Theater and the building of the Czechoslovak Republic. Above all, he portrayed Smetana as always fighting alongside the people.

Judging Nejedlý’s speech from the snippets reported by media is challenging, as they do not sound markedly different from the prevailing narrative of the time. Either the citations were selectively curated, or the *Národní listy*’s correspondent projected his broader stance onto Nejedlý’s speech, including his article in the communist paper *Rudé právo* published the same day.²⁶¹ Nejedlý himself addressed this in his journal *Var*,²⁶² where he linked the journalist’s criticism of his speech to his own article in *Rudé právo*, suggesting the journalist’s outrage stemmed from Nejedlý writing for a communist paper rather than a patriotic one. While the *Národní listy* did mention some of Nejedlý’s remarks from his newspaper article, particularly that Smetana’s music was performed at a Communist International congress, the *Národní listy* correspondent’s alleged indignation over Nejedlý’s choice of publication seems to be a conjecture.

²⁵⁸ “povrchní, nepřipravený a neurovaný” See K. J. V., “Smetanovy oslavy. V Národním divadle [Smetana celebrations. At the National Theatre],” *Národní listy*, 3 March 1924.

²⁵⁹ In his later response, a long article in *Var* in which he ridiculed *Národní listy* and their correspondents’ reporting of the Smetana centenary, Nejedlý took exception to the fact that he was supposed to have followed a class-based reading of Smetana in his speech. He argued that Smetana belonged to urban bourgeoisie and not to proletariat and used this to portray his opponents as ignorants. See Zdeněk Nejedlý, “Národním Listům [To Národní listy],” *Var* 3, no. 8–9 (15 August 1924): 259–73.

²⁶⁰ “jeho hudba [...] stojí ve službách života právě tak, jako věda či politika.”

²⁶¹ Zdeněk Nejedlý, “Bedřich Smetana,” *Rudé právo*, 2 March 1924.

²⁶² Zdeněk Nejedlý, “A ještě takt a také vzdělanost [And more tact and also knowledge],” *Var* 3, no. 5 (1 May 1924): 160.

Křesťan, following Nejedlý's own interpretation, attributed the criticism in *Národní listy* to historical disputes between its writers and Nejedlý, and claimed that other newspapers reported the centenary events "rather factually and objectively."²⁶³ However, a review of other reports suggests a broader perception of Nejedlý's contribution as problematic. Otakar Šourek of the agrarian *Venkov*, for instance, devoted only a single sentence to Nejedlý's speech in his otherwise comprehensive account. This minimal coverage may extend beyond political differences and could also be attributed to historical disputes.²⁶⁴ However, since Šourek was also a Board member and a Smetana admirer, as evidenced in his depiction of the composer in the centenary issue of *Venkov*,²⁶⁵ this observation underlines the diversity of perspectives within the Board regarding the proper utilization of Smetana's legacy. The case discussed here illustrates the differing opinions on the appropriate level of politicization of the Smetana myth in public discourse and rhetoric. In contrast, Chapter 4 presents a different dimension of this issue, pertaining to the practical application of Smetana's legacy.

It's difficult to discern the exact motivations behind the event's coverage a century later. For example, *České slovo*, aligned with the Czech National Socialist Party, focused solely on the music, omitting mention of the ceremony's political aspects.²⁶⁶ This omission could reflect tensions with the President or disagreement with Nejedlý's speech, though such

²⁶³ "Polemické výpady Národních listů byly devalvovány často značnou mírou neobjektivit, vyplývající z dávných či nedávných střetů referentů s Nejedlým (spor o Knittla, polemika o Dvořákově díle. Suková „aféra“). Celkově lze konstatovat, že polemika Nejedlého s Národními listy pohled veřejnosti na smetanovské oslavy v roce 1924 významněji neovlivnila. Většina dobových kritik byla psána spíše věcně a objektivně." Křesťan, "Sbor pro postavení pomínku Bedřichu Smetanovi," 301.

²⁶⁴ Šourek, a proponent of Dvořák, disliked Nejedlý for his anti-Dvořák stance during the so called "battles for Dvořák" of the 1910s.

²⁶⁵ Otakar Šourek, "V den sváteční [On the day of the festival]," *Venkov*, 2 March 1924.

²⁶⁶ See V.H., "Smetanovy oslavy v Praze. I. [Smetana celebrations in Prague I.]," *České slovo*, 4 March 1924. The identity of the author is unclear. Perhaps it was Vladimír Helfert, however his writing for *České slovo* generally fell between 1918 and 1921. See Ondřej Pivoda, "Helfert Vladimír 24.3.1886-18.5.1945," in *Biografický slovník českých zemí*, accessed 14 January 2024, http://biography.hiu.cas.cz/Personal/index.php?title=HELFFERT_Vladimír_24.3.1886-18.5.1945&oldid=123751.

assumptions might be presumptuous.²⁶⁷ Interestingly, only *Listy Hudební Matice* reported the incident of choir members fainting during Nejedlý's lengthy speech. The correspondent framed it as personal disappointment, making it a collective sentiment. He lamented the lack of emotional catharsis that the audience anticipated, which was instead delivered by the performance of *Česká píseň*. This coverage might reflect an effort to maintain a positive relationship with the Board and Nejedlý, despite past tensions.

The media's portrayal of the event and the ensuing dispute highlights contemporary views on the proper use of the Smetana myth. The complete politicization of the myth in service to the Czechoslovak Republic was widely accepted. However, using the myth to further a specific political agenda, especially one outside the mainstream, was met with criticism. Central to the contention was the perception of the ceremony on 2 March 1924 as a state event. Though it was a state-funded event, involving the entire political and cultural elite, it was entirely orchestrated by a private society, which imprinted on it its own ideology and aesthetics. This outsourcing of a political event to the Board, with Nejedlý at the helm, elicited a subdued response, possibly reflecting a reluctance to critique a state ceremony and an avoidance of direct conflict with what was becoming a powerful organization.

* * *

To summarize, this chapter investigated how the Smetana myth was utilized in building the Czechoslovak national identity. It presented two cases, in which Smetana-related projects received generous funding from the government to inform the cultural identity of the nation. Kelly St. Pierre in her monograph outlined how after the 1948 coup Smetana turned from a symbol of the nation into a vehicle of the state.²⁶⁸ My analysis posits that the roots of this phenomenon trace back to the times of the First Republic. Already then, the cultural elite represented by the leaderships of the Board entered a mutually beneficial relationship with the government. Their activities, now generously financed by the state, were promoting Smetana as the creator of Czechoslovakia in the world of ideas. This was part of the broader effort to link the new state to Czech myths.

²⁶⁷ On the relationship of Masaryk and Czech National Socialist Party see Jacques Rupnik, "Masaryk and Czech Socialism," in *T. G. Masaryk (1850–1937). Vol. 2: Thinker and Critic*, ed. Robert B. Pynsent (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1989), 134–48, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-20366-6>, particularly 143–144.

²⁶⁸ St. Pierre, *Bedřich Smetana*, 102.

The project of the collected edition of Smetana's works was to prove that the nation could produce tangible cultural goods comparable to or exceeding that of the allied nations. The ambition was, however, set so high that they were bound to fail.

The grand meeting, which opened the centenary celebrations, was connecting past and present, on the way both legitimizing the Czechoslovak Republic and further mythizing Smetana. The varied reception of Nejedlý's speech presents him as standing outside the mainstream of Smetana mythization. Despite that, the symbiotic relationship with the state wielded the society with unprecedented power.

As became clear, the political representation sought to utilize the centenary politically, linking the Smetana myth and the state even more closely. This is not to say that the relationship between the Smetanite cultural elite and the government did not undergo a fundamental transformation following the 1948 coup or World War II. What had previously been a symbiotic alliance then evolved into a more direct form of control: the Smetanite elite, once exercising their power by influencing the government, began to wield executive power themselves. This way it integrated more closely with the state apparatus.

Chapter 4 The Brno Council: A different format of celebrations built on the same myth

When the Brno daily *Svoboda* (Freedom) reported on a large event that took place in the city on 29 May 1924 at 10 am, it sounded like a description a sports event:

The audience [...] from nine o'clock onwards flocked in crowds to the stadium, where they were sorted by members of the [physical education club's] Sokol: soldiers and adults on the right, youth on the left. By half past nine all the seats were already occupied and the seats in the gallery were slowly filling up.²⁶⁹

However, it was not a football match that took place at the stadium on the hot Thursday morning; instead it was a performance of *Má vlast* that attracted what was possibly the largest audience for any event across Czechoslovakia during the centenary celebrations.

This chapter delves into the strategies employed by the Brno Council in organizing these celebrations, examining how they leveraged available resources to foster a shared identity among citizens of Moravia and Silesia through Smetana's music. It reveals that, while rooted in the same cultural myths, the Council's approach to the festivities markedly diverged from that of the Prague Board. The focus was more on living music, including a large open-air concert accessible to all social classes, rather than on monumentalization. This variance is attributable partly to differing local conditions in Brno as opposed to Prague. Brno had historically close cultural ties to Vienna and the Smetana myth was not so deeply rooted there. The different approach to the celebrations was, however, also a result of a distinct interpretation of the significance of Smetana's music in contemporary Czechoslovakia. The Smetana's effort to build living musical culture at his time was used as a model to replicate in the conditions of the Czechoslovak Republic. Furthermore, the philosophy reflected the broader involvement of local musical elites in shaping the celebrations, namely their participation in the leadership of the Brno Council.

²⁶⁹ "Obecenstvo [...] již od devíti hodin v zástupech hrnulo na stadion, kde je rozřídováli členové Sokola: vojáky a dospělé vpravo, mládež vlevo. Do půl desáté byla již všechna sedadla obsazena a pozvolna plnila se také místa v ochozu [...]." "Bezplatný lidový koncert [Free people's concert]," *Svoboda*, 30 May 1924.

Importantly, the discussion in this chapter challenges the commonly, though tacitly, accepted notion that the centenary celebrations were a homogenous undertaking, directly informed by the Smetana myth. As with other parts of this text, the focus remains predominantly on performances of Smetana's *Má vlast*.

The many facets of the Council's diverging approach to the centenary

At about the same time as at the Board in Prague, in mid 1921, a discussion of the upcoming centenary celebrations started in the Moravian metropolis Brno. The idea was developed in "Hudební Budeč," a pedagogical branch of the *Filharmonické sdružení Beseda Brněnská* (Philharmonic Society Brno Club), however, a separate entity, a temporary festive committee, was established to organize the celebrations. Though its name *Sbor pro oslavu stých narozenin Bedřicha Smetany na Moravě a ve Slezsku* [Board for the celebration of the 100th birthday of Bedřich Smetana in Moravia and Silesia] was a nod to the nation-wide organizer, the Prague Board, in its set up and program it diverged considerably from the Prague's namesake. To differentiate the two bodies, the Brno organization will be referred to as the "Council" in this chapter while the Board will remain to represent the Prague entity.

Vladimír Helfert, one of the leading forces in defining the program of the celebrations, described in a 1927 publication the philosophy that stood behind the program. The ambition, as in Prague, was to honor the memory of Smetana and leave a permanent trace. The myth dictated that the aspiration be linked to the significance of Smetana who was to become the center-point of the cultural life. Though the Council articulated the same goals as the Board, the paths that it chose to achieve them were remarkably different. An investigation of the deviances and their justification that follows reveals much more than two bodies diverging on a common path. In demonstrating that Smetanites of close views, like Helfert and Nejedlý, could have accentuated radically different aspects of the celebrations or, where their programs overlapped, would have executed them differently in significant details, the arbitrariness of the connection of the program to the myth is unmasked.

The presentation of the program of the festivities in Moravia and Silesia contrasts markedly with that of the Board. The document opened with a one-page manifesto (see Figure 4). In it, the Council presented the main goals of the enterprise—bring Moravians of all strata to Smetana and

establishing a Foundation in his name. Then a listing of the Council's 42 branches in various places across the region and of 17 cooperating organizations is presented. (The number was to grow further before the celebrations were to end.) From the outset, the project was presented as decentralized.

Listing of the individual events that followed accented living music over monuments. And it also aimed to make the music and narrative accessible to all classes. When the planned performances of Smetana's compositions were listed, they were ordered by genre rather than by location. In a detailed list, the performers and locations were given but no dates. The participation of the conservatory teachers and students is mentioned separately as well as celebrations aimed at the youth. Lectures on Smetana's life and oeuvre come only right before the end of the four-page document, with an announcement that individual branches would hold these. In addition, Helfert's thin publication on Smetana²⁷⁰ priced at 2 Kč is recommended and an offer to lend slides is made. Only in the last group, titled "Extraordinary celebrations," exhibitions and memorials are listed.²⁷¹ The sequence in which events are presented, and hence given significance to, is the opposite to that of the Board.

The compositions of the executive leadership of the organization newly set up to coordinate the celebrations starkly contrasted with the situation in Prague (see Chapter 2). In the Council, all the major constituents of the local musical life were represented. The leadership consisted of chairman Josef Kolbinger, Chief Financial Council and the chair of Filharmonická Beseda Brno, the vice-chairmen were Ferdinand Tomek, an attorney at law and the chair of choir "Žerotín" in Olomouc, František Neumann, the head of opera at National Theater in Brno, and Vladimír Helfert.²⁷² Though all the men were members of the

²⁷⁰ Vladimír Helfert, *Bedřich Smetana* (Brno: Nový Lid, 1924).

²⁷¹ Program jubilejních slavností Bedřicha Smetany pořádaných "Sborem pro oslavu 100. narozenin Bedřicha Smetany na Moravě a ve Slezsku" se sídlem v Brně [Programme of the Bedřich Smetana jubilee celebrations organised by the "Council for the celebration of the 100th birthday of Bedřich Smetana in Moravia and Silesia" based in Brno]. (Brno: Sbor pro oslavu 100. narozenin Bedřicha Smetany na Moravě a ve Slezsku, n.d.).

²⁷² Other members of the leadership at the Brno Council were Antonín Kolář, Chief Accounting Council as executive and Bedřich Řezníček, a proxy holder at a bank, as treasurer. See Vladimír Helfert, "Myšlenka uctění Smetanova jubilea na Moravě a ve Slezsku [The idea of commemorating Smetana's jubilee in Moravia and Silesia]," in *Oslava stých narozenin Bedřicha Smetany na Moravě a ve Slezsku* [Celebration of Bedřich Smetana's centenary in Moravia and Silesia], (Brno: Sbor pro oslavu stých narozenin Bedřicha Smetany na Moravě a ve Slezsku, 1927), 12.

elite, they covered, unlike in Prague, various bodies from the Moravian musical life. This likely contributed to the more balanced coverage of the interests of individual institutions and related allocation of funds.

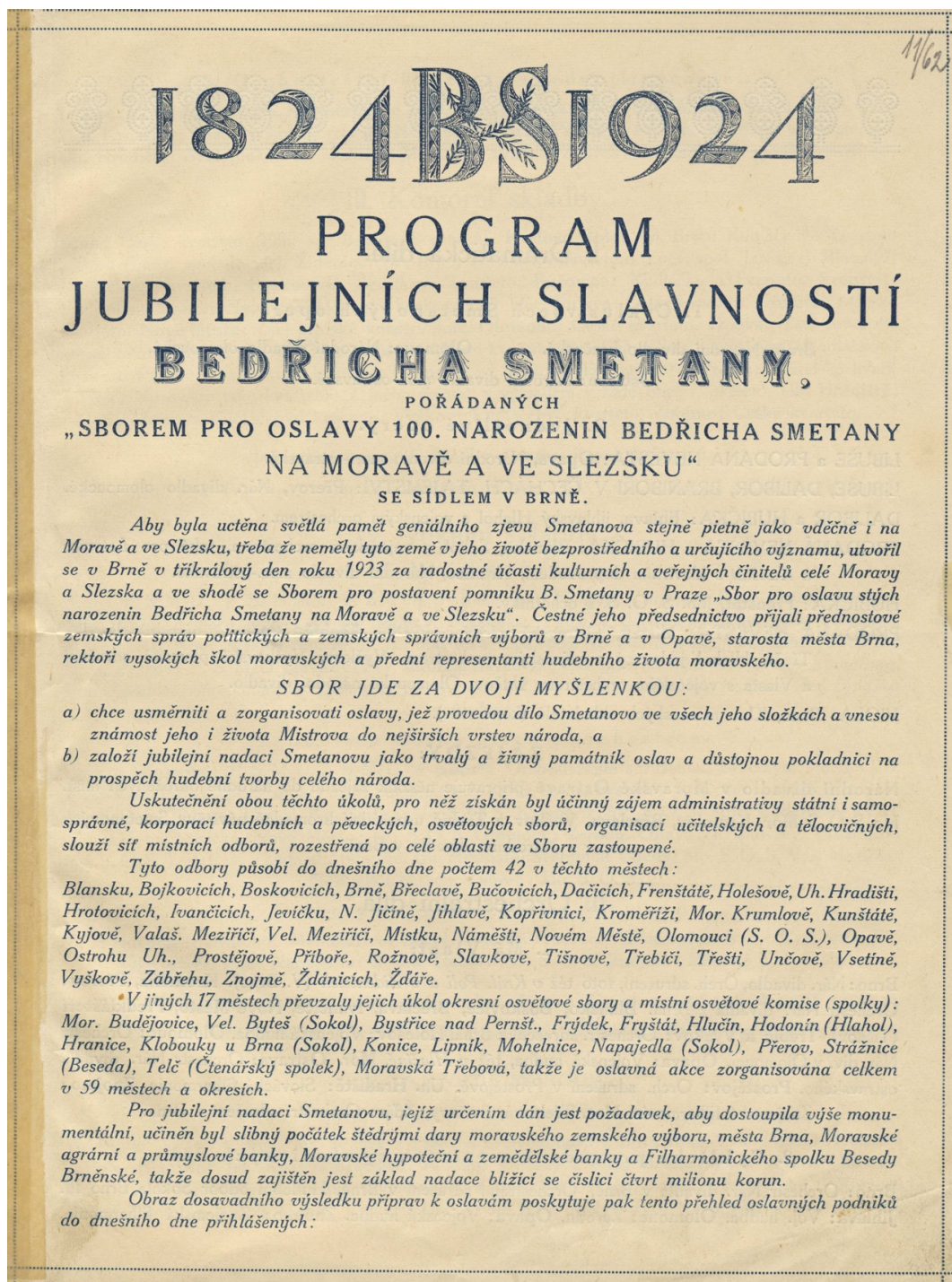


Figure 4 The opening page of the program of the centenary as put forward by the Brno Council

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Bedřich Smetana Museum (j. př. [Acq. No.] 11/62, Fund "Tisková dokumentace [Print Material]")

In terms of organization, there was one parallel with the Prague Board's approach. It was that the patronage of the relevant political elite was obtained. An honorary board of the Council was set up with the land presidents of Moravia and Silesia, the mayor of Brno, the rector of the Brno Masaryk University, Leoš Janáček for creative artists and others.²⁷³ This ensured sufficient credibility of its undertakings and facilitated collection of contributions.

Using state funds: Performance of music rather than memorials

The Council planned, in cooperation with its sub-councils spread across Moravia and Silesia, a range of performances. In its summary report published in 1927, it lists, aside from Brno, 80 local organizations that put together concerts, ranging from solo, through chamber music to symphonic music and opera, but also mounted other productions to help fund the Foundation (see further in text).²⁷⁴ Many of organizational units made concert tours to nearby towns, therefore the total number of places in the region where Smetana's music was performed could be counted in hundreds.

Forces from the top and bottom, the Council in Brno and similar organizations set up in many towns across Moravia, were intertwined in making the centenary celebrations the rich offering of Smetana-related events. Same in Moravia and Silesia as in Bohemia, the credit for this cannot be given solely to one body. What can be, however, compared, is how the two bodies used the funds that the central authorities provided. The amount, of 65,000 Kč, that the Council ended up receiving (through the Board) was an order of magnitude smaller than what the Prague Board kept for its projects. It was spent mostly to fund centenary performances of Smetana's music, with only one-third of it given to the Foundation. See Table 2. The different philosophy of the Council that was emanating from the program of celebrations can be confirmed by its use of the state funds.

²⁷³ Helfert, 12.

²⁷⁴ See the statistics in *Oslava stých narozenin Bedřicha Smetany na Moravě a ve Slezsku* (Brno: Sbor pro oslavu stých narozenin Bedřicha Smetany na Moravě a ve Slezsku, 1927), 41–50.

Purpose of use	Kč allocated
Centenary celebrations	25,000
Free concerts	9,000
Concerts where Czechs in minority	8,000
Concerts of conservatory musicians	5,000
Contribution to Foundation	18,000
Total state funds	65,000

Table 2 Overview of the use of the subsidy from the central authorities allocated to the Brno Council²⁷⁵

To be sure, the allocation of funds was also very political in Brno as it was in Prague, but distinct aspects were accented. Here it was the accessibility of the performances to all social strata, including workers, students, and soldiers. Seven free concerts were organized, one of which will be discussed in detail in the following subsection. Part of the subsidy was preferentially allotted to areas where Czech speakers represented a minority and would be unable to fully bear the cost a Smetana ²⁷⁶

Eschewing memorials

In terms of the cultural policy, one of the most significant deviations from the philosophy adopted by the Prague Board was that memorials were not to be a key component of the celebrations in Moravia and Silesia. Neither local ones, nor one in the state's capital. The reason for the rejection of these will be discussed in turn.

Supporting the Board's Prague project of the Smetana monument was ruled out, as Helfert clarified that "those who know the conditions in Moravia need not be told that it would be simply impossible to arouse the necessary degree of sacrificial enthusiasm in

²⁷⁵ Data drawn from *Oslava stých narozenin Bedřicha Smetany na Moravě a ve Slezsku*, 27–28 and 38–39.

Agreed to Prague Board's communication in a letter to the Ministry for Education and National Enlightenment dated 11 March 1924. Case No. 36.890/1924, "Jihlava – Sbor pro oslavu stých narozenin B. Smetany – Podpora [Jihlava – Council for the celebration of the centenary of B. Smetana — Support]" Folder "22 III Smetana," Box 2946, MŠANO.

²⁷⁶ The support was provided for concerts in Mohelnice, Šternberk, Šumperk, Uničov, Bílovec, Hlučín, Krnov, Mikulov, Hustopeče and Moravská Třebová. See Antonín Kolář, "Organisace oslav [Organization of the celebrations]," in *Oslava stých narozenin Bedřicha Smetany na Moravě a ve Slezsku* (Brno: Sbor pro oslavu stých narozenin Bedřicha Smetany na Moravě a ve Slezsku, 1927), 27.

Moravia for a monument to Smetana in Prague.”²⁷⁷ In other words, Moravians did not care whether there was a Smetana monument in Prague or not. This demonstrates that to Czechoslovak citizens outside of Bohemia, the symbolic value of monuments in the capital was limited. This in turn puts into question the need to erect such a memorial in the first place if the government’s priority were to unify the new state through culture.

This is a significant point and a discussion of the underlying reasons for the Moravian’s views is warranted, because they informed the Council’s program of the celebrations in significant ways. Two explanations are given in the literature.

For one, Moravian musical culture was historically connected more towards Vienna than to Prague.²⁷⁸ This was true particularly in Brno, which until the war was largely a German-speaking town, dubbed the “suburb of Vienna.”²⁷⁹ Hence Smetana’s music did not have a strong footing there. The Czech Philharmonic, the nation’s preeminent orchestra, based in Prague, performed by end of 1920 nearly 40 concerts in Brno, however, it was more likely to give a Dvořák program than a Smetana one.²⁸⁰ All in all there were by then only four performances of the complete *Má vlast*.²⁸¹ For two, and more importantly, within the region

²⁷⁷ “kdo zná poměry na Moravě, tomu není třeba blíže vykládati, že pro Smetanův pomník v Praze by bylo prostě nemožno vyvolati potřebnou míru obětavého nadšení na Moravě.” See Helfert, “Myšlenka uctění Smetanova jubilea,” 6.

²⁷⁸ See Fukač and Válka, “Morava.”

²⁷⁹ See for example Robert Smetana, “Vladimír Helfert a Brno [Vladimír Helfert and Brno],” *Opus musicum* 17, no. 5 (1985): 132 on the description of the environment into which Vladimír Helfert arrived after the revolution.

²⁸⁰ Between 1896 and 1920 there were seven concerts devoted solely to Dvořák’s music, there were four to Smetana’s. Between 1896 and 1920, Dvořák’s music was performed in 21 of the Czech Philharmonic’s concerts in Brno, Smetana’s in 12. Queried by this author in the “Portato” database of the Czech Philharmonic.

²⁸¹ Out of total 39 concerts of the Czech Philharmonic in Brno in the period 1896 and 1920, there were four complete performances of the *Má vlast* cycle: on 27 April 1912 and 28 April 1917 conducted by Vilém Zemánek (both organized by Beseda Brněnská), and on 6 August 1918 and 12 November 1918 conducted by Ludvík Čelanský. One more concert, on 23 January 1911 included “Vltava” among pieces by other composers. There were multiple concerts in which a piece by Smetana was programmed: on 25 April 1909 it was “Scherzo” from the *Triumphal Symphony*, on 22 October 1911 a medley from *Prodaná nevěsta*, on 1 October 1912 *Česká píseň*, on 22 September 1918 *Waldstein’s Camp*, on 23 September 1918 the “Overture” to *Prodaná nevěsta*, on 13 November 1918 the “Overture” to *Libuše*, and on 22 April 1920 symphonic poem *Richard III*. Queried by this author in the “Portato” database of the Czech Philharmonic.

the Czech identity was complemented by Moravian patriotism. This contrasted to Bohemia where, among Czech speakers, no difference was being made between allegiance to Bohemia and to Czech culture. Moreover, Smetana's music was rooted in Bohemian myths and localities and lacked any reach to Moravia or Silesia's own content. For instance, *Má vlast* purports to depict without exception the Bohemian countryside (in "Vltava," and "From Bohemian Woods and Fields") and even the myths and mythicized history is linked to places in and around of Prague (Vyšehrad and Šárka) and in interior Bohemia (Tábor and Blaník). With its content, it was easier to identify with for a German-speaking inhabitant of Bohemia than to a Czech speaking person from Moravia. In the absence of a performance tradition and an existing narrative link through which the people in the region would be able to identify with the music, the task that the Council had, to open up "the minds and hearts" of Moravians to Smetana, was the more difficult.

The Board in Prague failed to see either of these points, or, if it saw them, it neglected to reflect them in their original plan for the celebrations, prioritizing other projects (refer to the discussion in chapter 3). In this light, the memorials to Smetana that the Board conceived of in, to paraphrase Nejedlý, "little known places," like Ružkova Lhotice, that the Ministry funded appear to be an antithesis to what the Brno Council was aiming to achieve. Maximizing the impact on the public of what little resources it had to its disposal.

Having ruled out the option of asking Moravians and Silesians to support the nationwide monument in Prague, the Council could have opted to build a memorial to Smetana in Brno. However, Helfert argued against it, not only for its mere local significance, but, more importantly, because "a monument is something from which musical life does not directly benefit."²⁸² Here he voiced a position contrary to the Board's conception of the celebrations on two levels. Firstly, he questioned the value of local monuments to the composer. Secondly, Helfert prioritized living music over memorials. As will become clear, this did not only encompass performances of Smetana's music but also the question of how to support musical life in general.

Many of the points that Helfert saw from Brno, Nejedlý (and others who subscribed to his conception) did not see from Prague. In regions where Czech musical culture did not

²⁸² "pomník je něco, z čeho hudební život bez prostředně nemá užitku." Helfert, "Myšlenka uctění Smetanova jubilea," 6.

have a strong footing before the war, a concentrated effort was needed to firstly help revive the musical life and secondly to introduce the linchpins of Czech music to the audience. The Board reflected this need somewhat in its allocation of funds to Slovakia, asserting that there “musical conditions are quite extraordinary and [...] local institutions would not be able to bear the cost of these festivities alone.”²⁸³ The word “extraordinary” was surely pointing to the perceived cultural underdevelopment. But if this meant lacking basic musical institutions, then it was applicable also to Brno.

Though Brno had, since 1884, a National Theater, even after the establishment of Czechoslovakia it lacked a professional symphonic orchestra.²⁸⁴ The Board may have relied on the Czech Philharmonic’s tour over the country to mitigate this deficiency, but this orchestra could only take so many engagements during the time of the festivities. Then there were army bands, but their small size made it impossible to make a performance of the cycle an appropriately impressive spectacle, as the Smetana myth required. The solution to that was the engagement of amateur ensembles or, in some cases, their very formation.

Amateur orchestras bring Smetana’s spirit to Moravia

The engagement of amateur orchestras fulfilled two important goals at once — it enabled Smetana’s symphonic compositions to be performed in a way that was considered worthy of his memory, and it made it possible to stir up musical life. Though the following section discusses primarily the engagement of existing ensembles, it is important to note that the wide demand for performing forces was an impetus for the establishment of new orchestras. One example was the amateur *Slovácká filharmonie* [Philharmonic of Moravian Slovakia]. It consisted of some 80 musicians and put together by Zdeněk Chalabala in Uherské Hradiště.²⁸⁵ Naturally, it studied *Má vlast*, which it performed in its hometown but

²⁸³ “[na Slovensku] kde jsou hudební poměry zcela mimořádné a kde místní korporace neunesly by samy náklady na tyto slavnosti.” Letter from the Board to the Ministry for Education and National Enlightenment dated 15 July 1923 and its appendix. Folder “22 III Smetana,” Box 2946, MŠANO.

²⁸⁴ See Fukač, Settari, and Vysloužil, “Brno,” 78–83.

²⁸⁵ Gracián Černušák, “Slovácká filharmonie [Philharmonic of Moravian Slovakia],” in *Československý hudební slovník osob a institucí*, ed. Gracián Černušák, Bohumír Štědroň, and Zdenko Nováček, vol. 2 (Praha: Státní hudební vydavatelství, 1965), 523–24.

also toured nearby towns of Hodonín, Luhačovice, Valašské Meziříčí, Přerov, and Zlín.²⁸⁶ The largest concert tour in the region was, however, taken by another amateur orchestra, one led by Vladimír Helfert. He considered the cycle *Má vlast* to be, together with the operatic repertory, the “pinnacle of Smetana’s artistic vision” that Moravians needed to get to love.²⁸⁷ In the absence of a professional symphonic orchestra in the region, the Brno National Theater’s one was partially filling the gap but more symphonic performances would clearly come at the expense of the operatic programs. Helfert, who was then the head of the amateur association *Orchestrální sdružení v Brně* [The Orchestral Association in Brno], devised a plan to study the cycle and perform it over the region.²⁸⁸

The *Orchestrální sdružení*, revived in 1918, had an ambition to make, as Helfert put it, the works of “Smetana, Dvořák and Fibich the spiritual *property of the people*.” At the same time, it aimed to help contemporary compositions reach their audience.²⁸⁹ While the *Má vlast* tour fit well with their ambition, it was a daring project for an amateur body to aspire to a level of performance that would be deemed worthy of Smetana’s music. Helfert, himself an amateur,²⁹⁰ therefore brought in Ludvík Čelanský,²⁹¹ then ousted from the position of the

²⁸⁶ *Oslava stých narozenin Bedřicha Smetany na Moravě a ve Slezsku*, 44.

²⁸⁷ Vladimír Helfert, *Orchestrální sdružení v Brně 1906–1926* [Orchestral Association in Brno 1906–1926], (Brno: Orchestrální sdružení v Brně, 1926), 15.

²⁸⁸ Helfert, 12. Relying here on Helfert’s own account may appear imprudent, but who came up with the idea that *Orchestrální sdružení* would tour Moravia with *Má vlast* is not central to my argument. Moreover, Helfert’s role at the helm of the association made him responsible for the decision vis-à-vis the musical critics and the public. As a fervent Smetanite he was also in a better position to convince the orchestra members to take up this difficult task than others.

²⁸⁹ “O. S. vidělo od počátku svůj úkol v tom, aby hlavní symfonická díla Smetanova, Dvořákova a Fibichova stala se duševním *majetkem lidu* a aby stejně v nejširší vrstvy pronikla díla současné české tvorby symfonické.” Helfert, 26. Emphasis original.

²⁹⁰ Vladimír Helfert (1886–1945) never went to the conservatory, but instead, after graduating from the grammar school, studied at the Charles–Ferdinand University in Prague historiography with Jaroslav Goll and aesthetics with Otakar Hostinský. See Ivan Poledňák, “Helfert, Vladimír,” in *Český hudební slovník osob a institucí*, 7 April 2008, https://slovník.ceskyhudebnislovník.cz/component/mdictionary/?task=record.record_detail&id=3343.

²⁹¹ Helfert, *Orchestrální sdružení v Brně 1906–1926*, 10–14.

musical director of the Czech Philharmonic.²⁹² In early 1922, the orchestra started to study the symphonic poems one by one. A year later, they were ready to perform it in its entirety.

Helfert talked of the centenary project as transformational for the orchestra:

And thanks to both conductors, the association's own [Helfert] and the guest [Čelanský], the jubilee commemoration of Bedřich Smetana in 1924 became a blessing for the *Orchestrální sdružení*: the devoted and humble study of his works, especially *Má vlast*, united the forces of our corps in a unified will for further actions in the field of domestic musical culture.²⁹³

Not for the first time was Smetana's music said to have this kind of force, but while Helfert passed a strong belief in the right cause on the musicians, he also undoubtedly demanded that the performance border on professional level as Smetana's statute required. While other smaller orchestras, predominantly military bands, were performing *Má vlast* in the jubilee year in smaller towns, with forces as small as forty musicians, Helfert and Čelanský must have set the bar much higher for their Brno ensemble. Not only did they intend to impress their Moravian audience, but they were also putting their reputation at stake.

²⁹² Čelanský had a long history with the Czech Philharmonic, forming a *družstvo* [cooperative] in 1901 and was called back in April 1918 after the orchestra, during a tour, renounced obedience to its musical director Zemánek and returned home. What was, by definition, a coup was widely praised in the Czech circles as Zemánek was perceived as a German. After Čelanský had helped to consolidate the orchestra, he was himself forced to resign in February 1919 after a personal campaign by some representatives of the orchestra. The matter got as far as to a hearing at the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment which, though, as they acknowledged, with no jurisdiction over the private orchestra, sided with the rebels. Still when the ground war hot, Helfert wrote and self-published a brochure in which he stood up for Čelanský, whom he valued immensely, and called those aiming to remove him "terrorists." Now when Čelanský was available to work with *Orchestrální sdružení*, Helfert immediately reached for him.

See Helfert, *L.V. Čelanský a Česká filharmonie*. For a modern day account of the affair see Václav Holzkněcht's rather literary treatment. Václav Holzkněcht, *Česká Filharmonie: Příběh Orchestru* [Czech Philharmonic: The Story of the Orchestra], (Praha: Státní hudební vydavatelství, 1963), 61–76, <https://ndk.cz/uuid/uuid:d4e9e5c0-d3a2-11e6-8f91-005056827e51>.

²⁹³ Helfert, *Orchestrální sdružení v Brně 1906–1926*, 12. Italics added by this author. "A zásluhou obou dirigentů, spolkového i hosta, stala se jubilejní památka Bedřicha Smetany roku 1924 Orchestrálnímu Sdružení pozhnáním: oddané a pokorné studium jeho děl, především *Mé vlasti*, stmelilo síly našeho sboru v jednotnou vůli k dalším činům na poli domácí hudební kultury."

It was a long constant in the discourse on Smetana's music that musicians should avoid programming pieces that were beyond their abilities, a feat that would be seen detrimental to Smetana's legacy instead of honoring it. For instance, Otakar Šourek in an article addressed to *venkov* [the country] in the eponymous daily talked of the principle "long since universally emphasized" that any performance of Smetana's music, particularly of symphonic and operatic repertory, must be "in the spirit of serious, pure art, free from dilettantish mediocrity and haste."²⁹⁴

Both Helfert and Čelanský must have been confident that the result achieved a good standard before they took the *Orchestrální sdružení* to Prague's Smetana Hall on 20 May 1923 to perform the cycle under Čelanský.²⁹⁵ The critical response on the Prague concert was limited but forthcoming. The composer and critic Boleslav Vomáčka in *Lidové noviny* had reservations towards Čelanský's conceptions of the cycle but praised the quality of the playing and the orchestra's rapport with the conductor.²⁹⁶ A reviewer in *Venkov* talked of the enthusiasm of the players that under the leadership of Čelanský made one forget that it was an amateur orchestra performing.²⁹⁷

On the following day, the orchestra performed Dvořák's *Slavonic dances* at the same venue. This choice of programming was symbolical because by embracing both composers, they aimed to bridge the Smetana–Dvořák divide from the earlier "battles for Dvořák." While Helfert, originally siding with Nejedlý on downplaying the significance of Dvořák, had by then abandoned his earlier stance, Nejedlý persisted throughout the rest of his life.²⁹⁸ The programming of *Orchestrální sdružení* during the peak of the centenary celebrations was limited to Smetana, but immediately before and after that performances of Smetana's music

²⁹⁴ "Náš venkov čeká tu tedy úkol stejně čestný a důležitý jako obtížný, neboť i při této venkovské propagaci a oslavě Smetanově nutno vycházeti od zásady, ostatně dávno již všeobecně zdůrazňované, že musí se díti ve znamení vážného, ryziho umění, prostého dilettantské prostřednosti a nehotovosti [...]" Otakar Šourek, "Na prahu roku Smetanova [On the brink of Smetana's year]," *Venkov*, 1 January 1924.

²⁹⁵ On the following day, still in Prague, Čelanský led a performance of Dvořák's *Slavonic dances*. See Helfert, *Orchestrální sdružení v Brně 1906–1926*, 42. See Helfert, 42. See Helfert, 42.

²⁹⁶ Boleslav Vomáčka, "Brněnské orchestrální sdružení v Praze [Brno Orchestral Association in Prague]," *Lidové noviny*, 23 May 1923.

²⁹⁷ V. K., "Orchestrální sdružení [Orchestral Association]," *Venkov*, 30 May 1923.

²⁹⁸ See Pečman, *Vladimír Helfert*, 88–92; Křesťan, *Zdeněk Nejedlý*, 83–90.

were intertwined with those of Dvořák's.²⁹⁹ This aspect was another diversion of the concept that Helfert and his Moravian forces promoted that contrasted with the Prague Board's program: its adoration of Smetana did not have them push music of Dvořák and other composers into obscurity.

Returning back to *Má vlast*, the *Orchestrální sdružení* performed the complete cycle for the first time on its home turf, in Brno's Besední dům hall on 29 January 1923 (under Čelanský). To a reviewer in *Moravsko-slezská Revue* [Moravian-Silesian Review] it represented a milestone, because "from now on, Brno will always have the opportunity to listen to *Vlast*."³⁰⁰ This mention of repeatability and perpetuity of the performance pointed to the need to ritualize the adherence to the nation-state and make it a standing part of the cultural life of the region. Helfert himself underlined that it was the first performance of the cycle by local forces.³⁰¹ Clearly, the fact that Moravians were themselves performing the piece represented a symbolical change compared to when the Prague's Czech Philharmonic visited Brno to perform it. This way it was a demonstration of their identification with Smetana's *Vlast*, and with the nation-state.

The positive reception of the first performance led to a second concert given a month later (26 February). It also, according to Helfert, "stimulated *osvětové pracovníky* (outreach workers) in the Moravian country" to apply for concerts.³⁰² Thus, the positive reception of the concerts supposedly motivated local organizers to reach out to the Council and plan performances in their towns. In his 1926 account, Helfert portrayed this as the realization of a plan long-in-the-making of "regular tours" of the Moravian towns.³⁰³ This suggests that both forces from the top and from the bottom were at work when this unprecedented wave of performances of Czech national music in the region was birthed.

And the impact of *Orchestrální sdružení's* *Má vlast* tour on the region was considerable. During the centenary, the cycle was performed seventeen times, with Čelanský and Helfert

²⁹⁹ Helfert, *Orchestrální sdružení v Brně 1906–1926*, 42–46.

³⁰⁰ *Moravskoslezská Revue* 16, No. 3. Quoted in Helfert, 14.

³⁰¹ Helfert, 14.

³⁰² "Úspěch koncertu vyžádal si opakování v Brně dne 26. února a podnítil osvětové činitele po moravském venkově, že se hlásili o koncerty." Helfert, 16.

³⁰³ Helfert, 16.

taking turns conducting: four times in various parts of Brno, twice in Boskovice, and once in each of Ivančice, Blansko, Vyškov, Tišnov, Moravská Třebová, and Třebíč. In addition, special concerts for pupils and high school students were given in Brno (four times) and Ivančice (once).

Helfert asserted that what the *Orchestrální sdružení* was aiming to achieve was that their “*Vlast* would be carried by a truly Smetanian spirit” and the orchestra was to bring that spirit to Brno through its performance of the cycle.³⁰⁴ He may have been talking about the performance practice, but in line with the standing narrative that Smetana’s music encapsulated the Czech soul (see my discussion in chapter 1) it stood to represent the Czech nation. In this sense, its meaning in Moravia and Silesia was different from Prague, where its performance had a lengthy history and, in the centenary, it stood to demonstrate that Czech nation ruled over its own things. In Moravia, the cycle was a novelty and symbolized the cultural affiliation of Moravians to the Czech nation more than anything else. In both cases, though, affiliation with the state was equally important as the collocation of its performance with the political leadership or with state holidays evidences. For instance, the cycle was performed at Brno Královo Pole on 28 October 1923, with Tábor and Blaník given the day earlier as part of a celebration of the fifth anniversary of the republic³⁰⁵—the day was then a state holiday representing the birth of Czechoslovakia.³⁰⁶

In the next section, one particular performance of *Má vlast* in the centenary year will be discussed, which points to the ambition of the Council to introduce all classes of society to national music. Prior to the radio taking up this role, this necessitated live performances.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ “Šlo mu [Orchestrální sdružení] především o to, aby tato »Vlast« nesena byla skutečně smetanovským duchem.” Helfert, 15–16. Helfert, 15–16. Helfert, 15–16.

³⁰⁵ Helfert, *Orchestrální sdružení v Brně 1906–1926*, 42–43.

³⁰⁶ Dagmar Hájková and Miroslav Michela, “Oslavy 28. října.”

³⁰⁷ The Radio started broadcasting in Czechoslovakia already in 1923 but the technical limitations did not allow its used to broadcast operatic or symphonic works during the 1924 centenary. Though music was a significant part of the programming from the very start, technical limitations initially allowed for only solo or chamber performances to be transmitted. The first opera performance was broadcast in February 1925—Smetana’s *Two Widows* from the National Theater. Three months later, the first philharmonic concert followed. Naturally, *Má vlast* was programmed for the concert. Eva Ješutová, ed., *Od mikrofonu k posluchačům: z osmi desetiletí českého rozhlasu* [From microphone to listeners: from eight decades of Czech radio] (Praha: Český rozhlas, 2003), 19–26, 46–49, 592.

A performance of *Má vlast* monumental in terms of audience numbers

The Council organized a significant open-air performance of *Má vlast* at the Sokol physical education club's stadium in Brno, occurring on the notably warm morning of 29 May 1924. This monumental event, featuring the combined orchestras of Brno's National Theatre and the Orchestral Association under František Neumann's direction,³⁰⁸ garnered attention for its painstaking execution and fervent reception, as reported by contemporary newspapers.³⁰⁹ A detailed account in the Brno daily, *Svoboda*, however, offered insights into how this event differed from official celebrations in Prague, suggesting a different significance.

The concert's free admission made it accessible to an audience typically excluded from symphonic concerts. The *Svoboda* correspondent described the scene as “uplifting,” and the event as “meritorious.” The true merit of the event lay not merely in providing access to high-brow music for all social strata, but more significantly, in the sharing of a national treasure. The concert enabled ordinary citizens to experience and express their national belonging in a community that was not only imagined, but experienced.

This social aspect was emphasized by the audience's enthusiastic participation, arriving well in advance, and filling the venue rapidly. The audience was said to dwell in “sacred expectation of the sublime art of the immortal master” and as the performance commenced,

³⁰⁸ František Neumann (1874–1929), a son of a sausage factory owner, he apprenticed in father's business and trade, and only studied music on the side, first with the local organ player in Prostějov and the regenschori in Chrudim, then with the composer Karel Šebor. Against his father's wishes, he took up a career as répétiteur, conductor and composer, he gained experience with various opera houses and in 1904 he got the post of the second Kappelmeister at the Frankfurt am Main opera. Leoš Janáček recommended Neumann for the role of the musical director at the National Theater in Brno, which he held from 1919 to his death. See Radek Poláček, “Neumann, František,” in *Český hudební slovník osob a institucí*, accessed 14 March 2023, https://www.ceskyhudebnislovník.cz/slovník/index.php?option=com_mdictionary&task=record.record_detail&id=1024.

³⁰⁹ See for instance, K.S., “Divadlo a hudba [Theater and Music],” *Moravská orlice*, 31 May 1924.

“everyone was listening devoutly and hungrily catching the sounds.”³¹⁰ Despite their presumed limited exposure to such music, the audience engaged deeply, suggesting a profound spiritual connection to the music and, by extension, to their national identity.

The rhetoric used by *Svoboda*'s correspondent echoes that of reports from *Má vlast*'s premiere in 1882. Then, Václav Vladimír Zelený's description for *Dalibor* resonated with similar sentiments, including that the audience “felt its [the event's] significance to the depths of their souls.”³¹¹ Similarly, the reporter's narrative assumed the role of a collective voice, as if he could discern and articulate the thoughts and sentiments of the entire audience. The parallelism in language between these two events is noteworthy and contrasts with the reporting of the official centenary performances in Prague. While the festivities in the capital celebrated national achievements with Smetana's music as a symbol, in Brno and other locales, his music communicated a sense of cultural belonging and national unity. Both, however, were intrinsically political acts, linked to the existence of Czechoslovakia.

Despite similarities with the 1882 premiere at Prague's Žofín Palace, the 1924 Brno concert had its unique elements. Beyond its inclusivity, the outdoor setting posed challenges, as described by the *Svoboda* journalist:

The immense space of the stadium allowed at times to capture only single phrases, or even only fragments of phrases, of the magnificent work: but the audience was grateful for this too, and thunderously rewarded both this first and subsequent numbers of the cycle with applause. The sun was beating down overhead, and the feet in the galleries were sore from standing: and here many climbed up to the neighboring walls, and from thence listened to the whole concert. A few of the listeners fainted in the crowding and heat, but they were quickly helped, and the others remained in their seats, thirstily drinking in the further magic sounds of the symphonic poems.³¹²

³¹⁰ “[...] tonulo celé to velké a pestré shromáždění v posvátném očekávání vznešeného umění nesmrtelného mistra [... po zaznění prvních tónů] vše zbožně naslouchalo a lačně zachycovalo zvuky.” “Bezplatný lidový koncert.”

³¹¹ “Posluchačstvo, které se sešlo k veliké té produkci, cítilo tento význam její do hloubi duše” Václav Vladimír Zelený, “Smetanova Vlast [Smetana's *Vlast*],” *Dalibor* 4, no. 32 (10 November 1882): [249]-250.

³¹² “Ohromné prostranství stadionu dovolovalo chvílemi zachycovati pouze jednotlivé věty, ba i jen zlomky vět velkolepého díla: ale posluchači byli vděční také za to a bouřlivě odměňovali potleskem jak toto první, tak

Participation in the concert was thus framed as a sacrifice, a testament to the audience's dedication to experiencing national music and affirming their national identity. The significance of the Brno event therefore lay more in the identity associated with the music than in the music itself. This is further underlined by the fact that in the pre-amplification era, the audience heard only snippets of the cycle, interrupted, as the reporting further reveals, by construction noise and wind gusts.

As with Zelený's 1882 account, one must question how much of these descriptions in the newspaper stemmed from the reporters' imagination. The stakes were high: demonstrating that Moravians, representing all societal strata, embraced Smetana's music as a symbol of national identity. Even if some aspects were exaggerated, the impulse for such embellishment stemmed from the same motive driving the event's organization: to unify the young republic through cultural symbols.

A subtle parallel to Prague's grand ceremony on 2 March 1924 can be drawn after all: the physical toll on the people involved. In Prague, choristers fainted during Nejedlý's speech (see Chapter 2), while in Brno, attendees endured harsh conditions to experience *Má vlast*. This surface similarity belied a deeper divergence: in Prague, it was performers, commissioned by the Board, collapsing while waiting to honor Smetana in front of the state elite. In Brno, it was the diverse audience, voluntarily enduring discomfort to partake in this national event.

What is more, accessibility to the populace was also a feature of the publications put out by the Council during the centenary. The published were two booklets, including the one by Helfert mentioned earlier, in a total number of copies of 23,000. By the time the summary account of the Council was published in 1927, they were reported to be sold out. Both authors waived their royalties, and the two publications earned the Council income of nearly 12,000 Kč, which it allocated to the Foundation.³¹³ The price of the Helfert booklet of 2 Kč contrasted sharply with the output of Board. The least expensive publication from the pen of Nejedlý, *Bedřich Smetana* published by Orbis was sold for 6 Kč, but this was written with

další čísla cyklu. Slunce pražilo nad hlavami, nohy v ochozu od stání pobolávaly: a tu mnozí vyšplhali se na sousední zídky a odtud naslouchali celému koncertu. Několik posluchačů v tlačenici a horkem omdlelo, ale těm byla poskytnuta rychlá pomoc a ostatní setrvali na místech a žíznivě hltali dále čarovné zvuky symfonických básní." "Bezplatný lidový koncert."

³¹³ *Oslava stých narozenin Bedřicha Smetany na Moravě a ve Slezsku*, 25–26.

the audience abroad in mind. Therefore, the most accessible publication for the local market was *Smetanova čítanka* (Smetana Reader) at 15 Kč. The rest of the output, to which most of the funds went, was premium priced and intended for the wealthier part of the populace.

The Smetana Foundation: A Celebration of the Composer or a Social Matter

The second major project of the Brno Council was the establishment of a foundation to bear Smetana's name and support contemporary composers. Over a few years, the Smetana Foundation managed to accumulate a respectable fortune nearing 800,000 Kč and commenced its activity in 1927. The support of Czechoslovak composers was to be in the form of a major prize paid out once every three years, and smaller prizes in the intervening years. Its prizes were in the following years awarded to a wide range of composers, across generational and regional divides.³¹⁴ Its activity was first suspended by the Nazis and later cut short by the Communists.

The focus here will, however, be on its genesis and particularly on the discussion that developed on whether it represented a direct celebration of Smetana or not. This will be positioned as part of the broader investigation of how the Smetana myth was utilized in creating and justifying a particular cultural policy. It will also shed more light on the role of the state and its administration in the process.

Helfert, the Foundation's initiator,³¹⁵ took a stance contrary to what Nejedlý did in Prague: he accented creation of contemporary music against monumentalization of works of a past composer. The Foundation's Charter limited the use of its funds solely for "creative compositional work" and explicitly excluded funding of any performance or musicological

³¹⁴ The major price was given to J. B. Foerster, Josef Suk, Boleslav Vomáčka, Osvald Chlubna, and Ladislav Vycpálek. The recipients of the smaller price included Pavel Haas, Vítězslava Kaprálová and Bohuslav Martinů. Ondřej Pivoda, "Jubilejní nadace Bedřicha Smetany [Bedřich Smetana Jubilee Foundation]," in *Český hudební slovník osob a institucí*, 27 November 2017, https://slovník.ceskyhudebnislovník.cz/component/mdictionary/?task=record.record_detail&id=2379.

³¹⁵ Antonín Kolář, the executive of the Council, points to Helfert as to the initiator of the Foundation. Kolář, "Organisace oslav," 20–34, at 20.

work.³¹⁶ When justifying the need for the Foundation, Helfert utilized the Smetana myth in a way different from Nejedlý's. He pointed to the composer's idealism and a full dedication of his forces for the benefit of Czech musical life, which the Council in its activities was replicating.³¹⁷ Following the path shown by Smetana. This interpretation was translating the myth into actions that were to bring fruit to contemporary musical life same as Smetana strove to do in his time.

Soon, the question of whether the Foundation represented a celebration of Smetana or a social project arose. The Foundation's Charter presented the money as primarily artistic with the social function only as secondary. Social support was to be given only in cases of the musician's illness or retirement and was to be a marginal matter, with the main focus being on supporting active composers.³¹⁸ Most likely it was the Board who first attached a label of a social project to the Foundation. And the matter was not purely philosophical, for at its center money for Smetana projects was at stake.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Board originally allocated no separate budget to Moravia and Silesia, even though the Council's projects were developed and communicated almost concurrently with those of the Board. To mitigate this, the Prague society reallocated some limited funds to it as the centenary was approaching.

The Council succeeded in securing significant funding from the local administration in Moravia and Silesia, as well as from private donors. The Moravian Land Administration gave 50,000 Kč, and also major local banks and businesses contributed generously.³¹⁹ For instance, Tomáš Bat'a, the owner of the *Bata* shoe company, gave 50,000 Kč to the Foundation and financed the celebrations in his hometown, Zlín.³²⁰ The fundraising required

³¹⁶ Roman Rössel, "Jubilejní nadace Bedřicha Smetany [Bedřich Smetana Jubilee Foundation]," in *Oslava stých narozenin Bedřicha Smetany na Moravě a ve Slezsku* (Brno: Sbor pro oslavu stých narozenin Bedřicha Smetany na Moravě a ve Slezsku, 1927), 14–19, at 14.

³¹⁷ "A druhým inspirátorem této myšlenky byl život Smetanův a jeho veškeré umělecké snahy. Nám stále tanul na myslí onen vznešený a nezištný idealismus, jenž byl vzpruhou celého jeho života; měli jsme stále na očích jeho altruism lidský a umělecký, který mu velel, nemysleti stále jen na sebe, nýbrž především na českou hudbu a na ostatní skladatele, na 'kolegy', jak říkával. I chtěli jsme v tak památné jubileum vytvořit něco v tomto Smetanově duchu." Helfert, "Myšlenka uctění Smetanova," 5–6.

³¹⁸ Rössel, "Jubilejní nadace Bedřicha Smetany," 14–19, at 14.

³¹⁹ *Oslava stých narozenin Bedřicha Smetany na Moravě a ve Slezsku*, 37–40.

³²⁰ *Oslava stých narozenin Bedřicha Smetany na Moravě a ve Slezsku*, 38, 40 and 50.

a lot of effort and convincing, which Council's executive Kolář described on full four pages of his report.³²¹ In contrast to that, the central authorities of the state earmarked as little as 10,000 Kč for the Foundation.³²² The Council repeatedly approached the Ministry, highlighting the imbalance and requesting a top up. In an October 1923 letter signed by the leadership of the Brno Council (Kolbinger, Helfert, Neumann, and Kolář) they argued that the state subsidy corresponded to an “expression of trust” of the government in the project.³²³ In other words, it was important in that it could help persuade others to open up their wallets. The President of Moravian Land Administration, Jan Černý, supported the Council's pleas in July 1923 and suggested that the Land's contribution be at least matched.³²⁴ The Ministry sent the received requests to the Board for comment. Hence what was a communication between an applicant for subsidy (the Council) and the Ministry in one case, and a communication between two parts of the political administrations on the other, was, in effect, forwarded to another applicant for subsidy (the Board) for resolution.³²⁵ In a letter dated 28 November 1923, the Board reminded the Ministry of what it communicated to it four days earlier, that 25,000 Kč out of the 400,000 Kč subsidy be allocated to the Brno Council. This was perhaps meant to dispel doubts that funding was not being allocated across the country. More importantly, the Board communicated its stance on the Foundation. Asserting that they express support for the Foundation to be subsidized by the state, they

³²¹ Kolář, “Organisace oslav,” 28–31.

³²² Ministry Official Branberger note dated 5.1. [1924] in Č. [Case No.] 146.294/1923, Předmět [Subject]: Sbor pro Smetanovy oslavy na Moravě a ve Slezsku. Subvence. [Council for Smetana celebrations in Moravia and Silesia. Subsidy.], Box 2946. MŠANO.

³²³ Letter from the Council dated 18.10.1923 to the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment. Č. [Case No.] 144.462/1923, Předmět [Subject]: Smetanovy oslavy v r. 1924 Žádost o vyplacení subvence na Moravě. [Smetana celebrations in Y. 1924. Application for subsidy in Moravia.], Box 2946. MŠANO.

³²⁴ Letter from the *Předsednictví moravské zemské správy politické* [Presidency of the Moravian Land Political Administration] dated 2.7.1923 to the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment. Č. [Case No.] 81.459/1923, Předmět [Subject]: Sbor pro oslavu Smetanovu na Moravě a ve Slezsku / Nadace / Subvence [Council for the Celebration of Smetana in Moravia and Silesia / Foundation / Subsidy.], Box 2946. MŠANO.

³²⁵ Letter from *Předsednictví moravské zemské správy politické* dated 2.7.1923 to the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment. Č. j. 81.459/1923. Box 2946. MŠANO. The folder includes a note by the clerk “navrhuji dát k vyjádření Sboru pro postav. pomínku Smetanovi [I suggest giving to the Board for erecting Smetana monument for comment].”

called the matter a social one and proposed that it be forwarded to the Ministry of Social Affairs for resolution.³²⁶

In a response, the ministerial clerk noted down that he was “in accord with the opinion of the Board.” He recommended that the subsidy of 10,000 Kč for the Foundation be maintained, and the matter be forwarded to the Ministry of Social Affairs with a recommendation that they give at least 30,000 Kč to it. He also noted that the matter was to be put on hold until the Ministry of Social Affairs expressed its view.³²⁷ This is not to say that the Board shunned the Council from additional funds as they became available. When in early 1924, the President gave two times 100,000 Kč, the Board assigned part of this amount (18,000 Kč) to Brno, which allocated it to the Foundation. But their request with the Ministry was still pending.

When the matter was reopened in 1925, it became definitively clear that the Brno Council would not receive any more money from Prague. In a new round of letters, the Board reaffirmed its earlier stance that it “considers the issue to be more of a social one than a direct commemoration of Smetana” and therefore did not allocate any money to it when “establishing a program for the permanent commemoration of Smetana’s memory” so as not to “fragment forces.”³²⁸ That in 1925 they feel the need to point back to the moment of planning the centenary celebration and justify their decision speaks of their need to maintain the appearance that all possible ways of celebration were duly considered and only the most deserving—or “direct” as they say—were chosen. At this point, however, the play was not

³²⁶ Letter from the Board dated 28.11.1923 to the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment. Č. [Case No.] 144.462/1923, Předmět [Subject]: Smetanovy oslavy v r. 1924 Žádost o vyplacení subvence na Moravě. [Smetana celebrations in Year 1924. Application for subsidy in Moravia.], Box 2946, MŠANO.

³²⁷ Ministry Official Branberger note dated 5.1. [1924] in Č. [Case No.] 146.294/1923, Předmět [Subject]: Sbor pro Smetanovy oslavy na Moravě a ve Slezsku. Subvence.” See earlier note.

³²⁸ „považuje otázku spíše za sociální než za přímé uctění památky Smetany,” a proto na ni při „stanovení programu trvalého uctění Smetanovy památky“ nepřidělilo žádné peníze, aby „netříštilo síly“ Letter from the Board dated 29.10.1925 to the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment. Č. [Case No.] 133.035/1925, Předmět [Subject]: Sbor pro oslavu 100. narozenin Bedřicha Smetany v Brně. Jubilejní oslavy [Council for the celebration of the 100th birthday of Bedřich Smetana in Brno. Jubilee celebrations.], fond „Ministerstvo školství 1918–1949“; kar 2827, složka „21 Brno—Sbor pro oslavu 100. narozenin B. Smetany,” NAČR.

about the original subsidy of 400,000 Kč, which had been spent by then, but of a more general access to the funds from the Ministry.

Whatever the Board's motivation, the Ministry official copied their justification and sent it to the Brno Council. In the end, other than the original 10,000 Kč and the share of the President's gift, the Brno Foundation received no more money from the central authorities.³²⁹ The position of the Ministry will be further discussed in the conclusion.

The perspective taken by the Board can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, as a reflection of a different philosophy of what represented the commemoration of a national composer. Attaching the adjective "direct" to their own projects, they acknowledged that what the Foundation was aiming to do did, indeed, represent a commemoration of Smetana. But they gave preference to what they considered more immediate remembrance, which included a memorial but not support for contemporary music. Secondly, as a tactical step in the contest for limited resources. Their mention of "fragmenting forces" clearly pointed to their desire to maintain the funds of the Ministry supporting their own projects. At that time, they received an annual allowance and also applied for support for individual projects. They may have feared, rightfully, that in a zero sum game any money flowing to the Foundation would go off their projects. This thinking was prevalent at the Board as the chairman Táborský's letter to the Ministry from July 1922 (discussed in Chapter 2) evidences. Most likely, both these elements were intertwined.

There is one more aspect of the Foundation that deserves mention here, its ultimate organizational separation from the Council. This is not a mere technicality but has fundamental implications for the whole enterprise. While the Board strove to keep strict control over its projects (see Chapter 3), the Council was devised from the very beginning as a temporary body to organize the celebrations. After sufficient funds were amassed in the Foundation, the Council transferred the Foundation's assets to the Land of Moravia and its management to a Board of Trustees. Composed of nine members, it comprised various stakeholders, among them delegates of various levels of government, the Brno Masaryk

³²⁹ "Ministerstvo školství a národní osvěty: na zřízení nadace 10,000; na pořádání oslav 25,000; Pan president republiky 18,000 (podíl z celkového daru Pražskému Sboru 100,000)" in kon"Zpráva pokladní podle stavu ze dne 31. října 1926 [Treasurer's Report as at 31 October 1926]," in *Oslava stých narozenin Bedřicha Smetany na Moravě a ve Slezsku* (Brno: Sbor pro oslavu stých narozenin Bedřicha Smetany na Moravě a ve Slezsku, 1927), 38.

University, the Conservatory, the Brno National Theater, and Beseda Brněnská. This way it was ensured that no single stakeholder or philosophy could monopolize the Foundation. In fact, any personal and partisan perspectives were explicitly ruled out in the Foundation's Charter.³³⁰ To be sure, any such body had to be inherently political in its decision-making but, in contrast to the Board's projects, there was a broad representation of the local (Czech-speaking) cultural elite.

To summarize, the Brno Council received little funds from the central government when compared to what the Board got, however, it was able to compensate for that by attracting large contributions locally. These were coming from the local administration as well as businesses and banks. What differed in substance from the Prague undertaking was that the funds were used primarily for performances and support of living music. Also, accessibility of the celebrations to all classes was not only declared but also amply ensured. In the absence of a local professional symphonic orchestra, amateur bands were engaged or created. This way Smetana's music was not only made accessible to more people but also helped improve the orchestral institutions basis.

As can be seen, while proceeding from the same underlying myth, the Board and Council ventured on paths that were radically different. This is important for it shows that there was nothing inherent about the cultural policy that followed from the myth. The lore served solely to justify the steps of each of the societies, which were, however, based on a broader spectrum of values and beliefs, inputs and observations that together informed their goals. This contests their claim that their actions were directly derived from the narrative on Smetana.

While the Board and the Council had different philosophies, the central government demonstrably sided with the Board. While this was already discussed in Chapter 3, additional evidence presented in this chapter shows how pervasive this was. Moreover, here the discussion was not of a reputable organization on one side and an enthusiastic organizer in a small town on the other, but of two bodies with reputable musicologists and Smetanites at the helm.

³³⁰ Rössel, "Jubilejní nadace Bedřicha Smetany," 14.

Chapter 5 A missed opportunity: Smetana as a bridging factor between Czechs and Germans

The *Reichenberger Zeitung*, the most important daily in the German-speaking Sudetenland region, with daily number of copies around 60,000,³³¹ also brought a profile of Smetana on the day of the centenary. It talked at length about his life and work and portrayed the composer as “the man whose great merit remains that he created world-class national music for the Czechs.”³³² Yet, the account was far from close to those in the Czech dailies. For one, it came only on page 7 and was hidden among other articles within the cultural section. Clearly, the centenary was worth remembering, but not that much. In fact, though Smetana’s oeuvre was presented as requiring great respect, the journal asserted that a large part of it may not stand firm against strictest criticism. Then, the text was also clear on wherefrom the composer draw on his mastery:

What he owed to German music and German culture he gratefully recognized throughout his life, and his letters to Liszt are testimony to an impeccable character who was far removed from national preoccupation.³³³

Another article in the same paper, just a week later, elaborated on the argument yet further. The text highlighted Smetana’s lack of command of the Czech language. But more importantly, it pointed to the hypocrisy of what it labelled as the “Czech circles” that now (in 1924) “raise him to heaven” but were mostly attacking him during his tenure at the National Theater. As proof it cited a 1874 letter that Smetana sent to the theater’s

³³¹ Torsten Fuchs and Undine Wagner, “Musikpublizistik I. [Music Journalism],” in *Lexikon zur deutschen Musikkultur: Böhmen, Mähren, Sudetenschlesien*, ed. Sudetendeutsches Musikinstitut, 2 vols (München: Langen Müller, 2000), 978–93.

³³² “der Mann, dessen großes Verdienst es bleibt, den Tschechen eine nationale Musik von Weltgeltung geschafft zu haben.” Ewald Mayer, “Friedrich Smetana: Zur hundertjährigen Wiederkehr seines Geburtstages (2. März 1924) [Friedrich Smetana: On the centenary of his birth (March 2, 1924)],” *Reichenberger Zeitung*, 2 March 1924.

³³³ “Was er [Smetana] deutscher Musik und deutscher Kultur verdankte, hat er zeitlebens dankbar anerkannt und seine Briefe an Liszt sind Zeugnisse eines untadeligen Charakters, dem nationale Beschäftigung ferne lag.” Mayer.

administration, in which he pictured the uncertainty he was facing given the continuous attacks and demanded a permanent contract or else he would seek a position abroad.³³⁴ What was an attempt on Smetana's side to give weight to his demands, became a sign of contempt for him by the elites, or worse a sign of his disloyalty to the nation.

To *Reichenberger Zeitung*, Smetana was primarily a product of German culture. How could Smetana in these circumstances serve to reconcile the Czechs and the Germans? This is what the present chapter aims to demonstrate. At its center-point is a case study of a series of concerts for the German workers organized in 1924 by the Social Democrats in Aussig (Ústí nad Labem). In them the music of Smetana and Beethoven was juxtaposed. A generous brochure accompanied the concerts, in which the narrative around the composer and the *Má vlast* cycle was tweaked yet another way. Smetana's stature was elevated as he was presented as the Czech Beethoven. His Germanness was acknowledged and turned into a virtue. His Czechness was presented as the necessary ingredient that made the music worthwhile.

Behind the undertaking, there were both German and Czech social-democratic figures, from Aussig and from elsewhere. Though the reception in the local German press echoed the rhetoric of the *Reichenberger Zeitung*, it was nonetheless a serious attempt at building bridges between the two nations through music. It was also an entirely different use of the centenary than the one financed by the central government.

***Má vlast* as the national and nationalistic token in the Sudetenland**

Before the case study on the Aussig concert is presented, a short excursion into the reception of the performances organized in the Sudetenland by the Czech minority is due. This demonstrates how dramatically different the reception of the same piece was on the Czech and the Germans side. The removal of the national(istic) layer of significance turned the composition into a good piece of music, which was, however, open to some criticism.

As discussed in Chapter 2, part of the state subsidy intended for the concerts of the Czech Philharmonic in *venkov* (the country), representing places in Czechoslovakia, outside

³³⁴ "Smetana und das Deutschtum. Zu seinem 100. Geburtstag," *Reichenberger Zeitung*, 9.3.1924, p. 22.

of Prague. In a month-long tour at the turn of April and May of 1924, the orchestra performed the complete *Má vlast* in twenty-four locales. Among them only four places were either in Sudetenland or in inland towns with predominantly German population, namely Jihlava (Iglau), Most (Brücke), Olomouc (Olmütz), and Teplice–Šanov (Teplitz–Schönau).³³⁵

The concert in Teplice–Šanov was organized by *Okresní sbor osvětový* (District Awareness Corps) in the local theater on 14 May 1924. Unlike in some of the performances in Prague, Talich did not reinforce the orchestra for the tour. As a poster reveals, some sixty-eight musicians were performing. Though not as monumental as in the capital, the performance was, nevertheless, a significant event for the local Czech community. The poster urged patriots to “[h]onour the memory of our genius, whose masterpiece will be performed by the famous orchestral ensemble of Prague”³³⁶ and the local paper *Severočeský dělník* [The North-bohemian Worker] proudly reported a week before the concert that the tickets were nearly sold out. The journalist used the opportunity to sarcastically inform the correspondent of *Prager Tagblatt* that “no one, not even the state, contributed a subsidy to the concert. What is beautiful need not even be recommended!”³³⁷ Apparently, it was important not only that the concert hall would fill up but also that it would be a spontaneous demonstration of the local population, unaided by the Czechoslovak authorities.

A review of the concert in a local German paper *Teplitzer Zeitung* is of particular interest for the insight it provides on how local German population perceived the performance of the cycle. The correspondent noted that while the individual symphonic poems were known and performed in Teplice–Šanov, the complete cycle was presented there for the first time. As himself a newcomer to the cycle as a whole, the journalist weighed the quality of

³³⁵ Twenty-nine performances were under Talich, ten under Stupka and two under Čelanský; fifteen performances took place in Prague, the rest in twenty-six other Czechoslovak towns — all in Bohemia, except for Olomouc in Moravia and Ružomberok in Slovakia. Based on an analysis by this author using data from Czech Philharmonic database Portato.

³³⁶ “Uctěte hojnou návštěvou památku našeho genia, jehož stěžejní dílo bude provedeno slavným orchestrálním tělesem pražským.” Program leaflet to concert dated 14.5.1924 in Teplice, j. př. [Acquisition No] 19/2002, Fund “Tisková dokumentace [Print Material],” The National Museum, Museum of Czech Music — Bedřich Smetana Museum.

³³⁷ “Německého dopisovatele ‘Pr. Tagblattu’ upozorňujeme předem, že lístky byly rozprodány a že nikdo, ani stát, subvencí na koncert nepřispěl. Co je krásné, nemusí se ani doporučovati!” “Pražská Česká Filharmonie [Prague Czech Philharmonic],” *Severočeský dělník*, 7 May 1924.

individual poems, citing what he considered to be its highlights (including the contrapuntal moonshine episode in “Vltava”) and its nadirs (for instance, an imperfect symphonic structure in “Šárka”). The text asserted that symphonically the work was lacking some “gradus ad parnassum,” but that this was outweighed by Smetana’s use of folklore, with its “beautiful, clear creative force.” Overall, the composition was said to be a valuable contribution to the cultural history of not only Czech people, but other nations as well. In mentioning the significance that the cycle had for the Czechs, he added “although there is something in excess.”³³⁸ To him, what Czechs did around *Má vlast* was excessive.

As for the performance, the *Teplitzener Zeitung*’s reviewer was enthusiastic about the orchestra playing and Talich’s control over it. Interestingly, the reviewer said that Talich “was tastefully wary of outlandish nationalism,” while at the same time praising him for “the precise rhythms and national accents.”³³⁹ In the concert in Teplice, nationalism could apparently be expressed in music in measurable degrees.

The German critic, while he highlighted certain passages with national flavor, left the impression of listening to the cycle with fresh, disinterested ears. To them, it was a new piece that they critically analyzed and evaluated. Though they were aware of the nationalistic connotations of the cycle, this level significance of the music did not register with them. Therefore, naturally, when juxtaposed to the reception by Czech media, there was an abysmal difference. Within the Czech cultural realm, the reviews of *Má vlast* performances was never discussed the work itself, which already held the status of a national treasure, but focused instead on its significance and the quality of its rendition. Needless to say, the text in *Teplitzener Zeitung* may have come across as denigratory to the Czech elite. More so that it criticized some parts of the compositions. With the extra layer of significance that made the piece a proxy for the Czech nation itself, the review may be read as an insult.

In practice, this was kept out of the Czech discourse. For instance, when *Národní politika* reported on the Czech Philharmonic tour, mentioning five towns including Teplice-Šanov, it had all the “papers in the country write in accord the Czech Philharmonic completed and

³³⁸ “schöner, klarer Gestaltungskraft,” “wenngleich da etwas im Übermaß” B—m, “Konzert der Tschechischen Philharmonie [Concert of the Czech Philharmonic],” *Teplitzener Zeitung*, 16 May 1924.

³³⁹ “hütete sich geschmackvoll vor outriertem Nationalismus,” “den präzisen Rhythmen und nationalen Akzenten” B—m.

crowned the celebrations dedicated to the great creator of our national opera.”³⁴⁰ Clearly, only Czech papers were considered.

Aussig: An attempt to build bridges through the music of two nations’ great composers

The following section discusses the performance of *Má vlast* in Aussig (Ústí nad Labem). It aims to introduce yet another approach to the celebrations.

The piece was programmed as part of a series of concerts aiming to bring the gap between the Czechs and the Germans through the medium they both loved: music. This undertaking stood, as will become clear, outside of the efforts coordinated by the Board. Instead, it was part of a recurring series of *Arbeiter–Sinfonie–Konzerte* organized by the Social Democrats in Aussig. In it, German and Czech music was juxtaposed, and Beethoven symphonies were in different years placed side by side with works of Dvořák, Smetana, Foerster, Novák, and Suk.³⁴¹ In the project, both Czechs and Germans were participating.

In spring 1924, a series of three concerts took place to commemorate Beethoven and Smetana. On 10 March, an enlarged orchestra of the Aussig Stadttheater, consisting predominantly of German musicians, led by Vladislav V. Šak performed the overture to the *Bartered Bride* followed by “Meine Heimat,” or *Má vlast*. The two following concerts were dedicated to Beethoven’s music—the first to orchestral, conducted by Franz von Hoesslin (the *Prometheus Overture* plus the Seventh and Eighth symphonies), the second to chamber pieces. The narrative in the accompanying program notes aimed to help find mutual understanding between the two ethnic groups by juxtaposing their canonic composers.

³⁴⁰ “Všechny venkovské listy píší souhlasně, že Českou Filharmonii byly dovršeny a korunovány oslavy, věnované velikému tvůrci naší národní opery [...]” “Smetanovské tournée České Filharmonie po ČSR [Smetana tour of the Czech Philharmonic over CSR],” *Národní politika*, 23 May 1924.

³⁴¹ Martin Knechtel gave the total number of symphonic concerts organized by the Kreisbildungsausschuß der Sozialdemokratischen Partei in Aussig between 1923 and 1927 at twenty-nine. He also talked of them being well-attended. See Martin Knechtel, “Außig (Ústí nad Labem): 2. Spezialstudie zu [Special study to] 1918-1938,” in *Lexikon zur deutschen Musikkultur: Böhmen, Mähren, Sudetenschlesien*, ed. Sudetendeutsches Musikinstitut (München: Langen Müller, 2000), 127.

An extensive program brochure for the concert series in Aussig was published (in German) by the probable initiator of the whole project, Josef Bělina (see Figure 5 for two pages from the program).³⁴² Bělina, an apprenticed locksmith who had previously spent ten years in Switzerland, where he became editor of a social-democratic newspaper, was at that time a councilor in Aussig.³⁴³ The emphasis in his opening text was on Czech culture having sprouted from the German one. This ensured that it was of a high standard. He introduced Smetana as the Czech's equivalent of Beethoven and offered an interpretation that might have resonated with local audiences. The Czech national revival having followed the German idiom, also Smetana learned from the German masters. But his music was so original that even those who were privy to the best music in the world, i.e., the Germans, would find it worth listening to. This must have been a convincing argument for the Germans. It positioned Czech music as an offshoot of the German one, but at the same time gave it enough autonomy to develop its own idiom.

³⁴² The program brochure to the Aussig series of Arbeiter-Synfoniekonzerte from 1924 can be located as j. př. [Acquisition No.] 19/2002, Fund "Tisková dokumentace [Print Material]" in The National Museum — Museum of Czech Music / Bedřich Smetana Museum.

³⁴³ Josef Bělina (1893–1948) born in Velký Osek, apprenticed as a mechanical locksmith in Mladá Boleslav. In 1911 he left for Switzerland, where he worked in his profession but also became an active Social Democrat and started writing for the party's media. After his return to Czechoslovakia in 1919 he was active in the local social-democratic party. He was also a secretary at the Union of Metalworkers ("Svaz kovodělníků") and an editor of their magazine. Between 1923 and 1927 he was a member of the Aussig (Ústí) city council. Starting in the late 1920s he was giving anti-Nazi speeches in both Czechoslovakia and Germany. In 1939, he fled Hitler to the United Kingdom and died there in 1948. See Sylva Šimsová, "Dokumenty o exilovém sociálně demokratickém politikovi Josefu Bělinovi v britských archivech [Documents on the exile social democratic politician Josef Belin in the British archives]," in *Sborník Archivu bezpečnostních složek 8/2010*, ed. Ladislava Kremličková (Praha: Archiv bezpečnostních složek, 2011), 265–84, <https://www.abscr.cz/data/pdf/sbornik/sbornik8-2010/sbornik08.pdf>; Josef Tomeš, *Průkopníci a pokračovatelé: osobnosti v dějinách české sociální demokracie 1878-2013: biografický slovník* [Pioneers and followers: personalities in the history of Czech social democracy 1878-2013: biographical dictionary], 3rd ed, (Praha: Cíl, 2013).

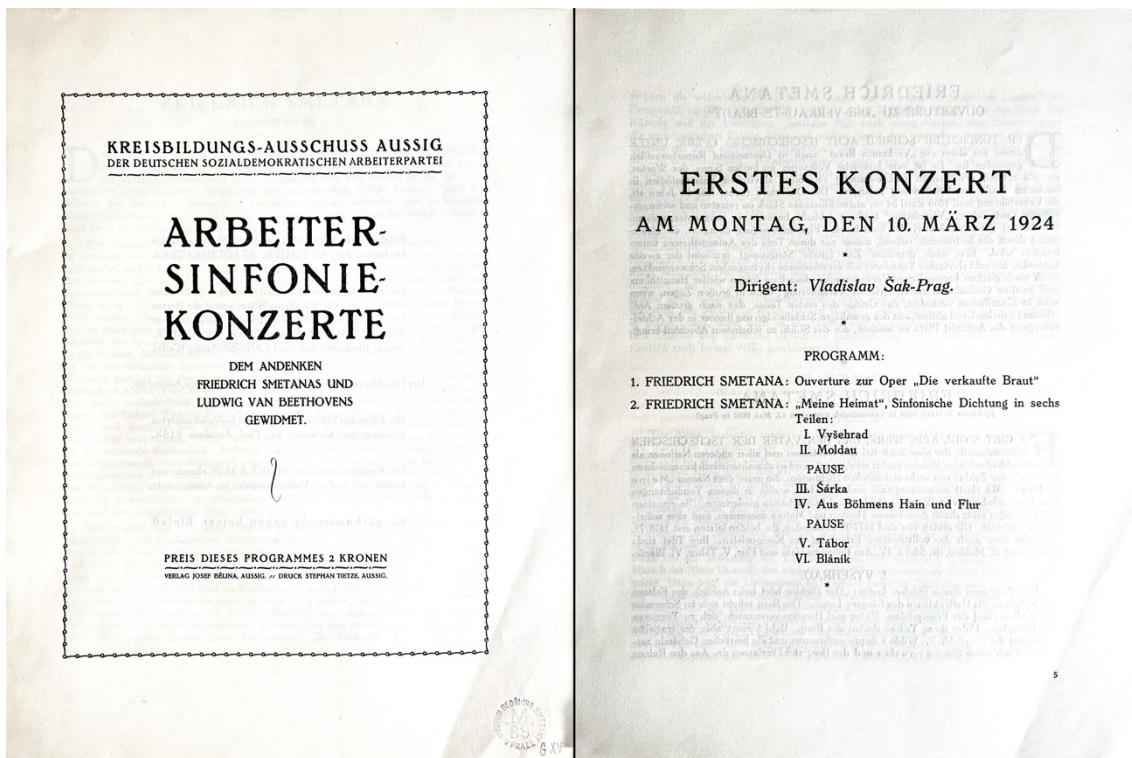


Figure 5 Two pages from the program booklet to the series of concerts in Aussig

Reproduced by permission of The National Museum — Museum of Czech Music / Bedřich Smetana Museum (j. př. [Acq. No.] 19/2002, Fund “Tisková dokumentace [Print Material]”)

Bělina made enough references on the way, including to Hegel’s “Geist” of a nation that Smetana captured in his music, to present a reading easily accessible to person educated in German culture and philosophy.

He also addressed some recurring tropes in the German nationalistic writing on the Czech veneration of Smetana. Particularly, he sought to explain the opposition to Smetana within Czech circles during his life, which accused Smetana of being overly influenced by Wagner. He referred to the passage of time, asserting that Smetana’s originality couldn’t have been apparent to everyone during his lifetime. However, in hindsight, it is clearly recognizable, and this is why Smetana is now highly valued by Czechs. Thus, he dismissed the German criticism of Czechs now adoring the one whom they initially rejected.

Bělina was not afraid to position Smetana above the German masters in certain aspects. Smetana’s music was according to him more accessible to the “masses” when positioned next to Beethoven’s. This was a result of Beethoven’s music being perceived as intellectual

and for the elite, while Smetana's output was portrayed as a property of the general folk. Then he compared the composer's operatic output to Wagner's, which he said was universal rather than purely German music. This was the standing claim of the German musical discourse, later spread around the world by the German emigres.³⁴⁴ Bělina followed it by contrasting Smetana's music as "Czech and only Czech" to argue that this was the greatest value of his music—that it can convey the "character of the Czech people" to the world.³⁴⁵ While the great German music was universal, the music of the Czech master could mediate the way to the "Geist" of the nation. An argument skillfully built on the bricks of German discourse. This implied, though, that without Smetana having "canned" the spirit of the nation in his music, the true nature of the Czechs would be inaccessible. The performance in Aussig thus turned from a mere listening to the music of a composer to the presentation of the Geist of the Czech nation.

To be sure, the last argument and its implications were part of the Czech Smetana myth. What Bělina was, in fact, doing here was taking the standing narrative and translating it into the words that the German people would better understand. He also painted Smetana as a martyr, when he blamed Smetana's opponents for causing him a nervous disease and a loss of hearing, and a hero, who despite all the hatred of the people, rose to new heights. With this passage he built up momentum to juxtapose Smetana with Beethoven, whose standing portrayal had similar tropes in it. Again, making the Czech composer more relatable.

To conclude his piece, Bělina extensively cited the Austrian musicologist Paul Amadeus Pisk, a Viennese Social Democrat. Pisk, a protégé of Guido Adler and a former student of both Schönberg and Schreker, served as a music critic for the *Wiener Arbeiter-Zeitung* from 1921 to 1924³⁴⁶ Interestingly, Pisk contributed to the same program notes for the concert series, yet Bělina chose to use his words to articulate the Smetana narrative. In the cited

³⁴⁴ Richard Taruskin, "Nationalism," in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001), <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.50846>.

³⁴⁵ "tschechisch und nur tschechisch," "tschechischer Volkscharakter" See Note 342.

³⁴⁶ Marion Brück, "Pisk, Paul Amadeus," in *Neue deutsche Biographie*, vol. 20 (Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt, 2001), 483–84, <https://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/0001/bsb00016338/images/index.html?id=00016338&groesser=&fip=xsxseayayztseayaeaya fsdrxseayaenxdsyd&no=1&seite=497>.

passage, Pisk lauded Smetana as “not merely a Czech national composer and performer but also as an educator and mentor to the nation.”³⁴⁷

In the main section of the program notes, Pisk presented his novel reading of *Má vlast*. He described the Hussite march that forms the basis of the last two poems as “friendly” and in “Blaník” he did not have the soldiers leave the mountain when the country was to be threatened, but when its glory would be restored.

The response of local German paper to the concerts demonstrates the depth of the trenches that Bělina and Pisk were aiming to fill in. The German-language *Aussiger Tagblatt*, which devoted a section to “Theater und Kunst” and always informed of the upcoming performances at the Aussig theater and reviewed its new productions, was lax on informing about the Arbeiter–Symphoniekonzerte, or, to put it more precisely, selective. The 10 March Smetana program was never announced, but only shortly reviewed in the following day’s issue (174 words). The Beethovenian orchestral concert of 19 March was announced at length (314 words) and reviewed on the next day (190 words). But much more than the number of words points to the indisputable bias of the music critic of the newspaper. The journalist devoted half of the text on Smetana to proving that his music was German. This is how the article opened:

A workers' symphony concert dedicated to the memory of Friedrich Smetana took place yesterday in the Volkshaussaale. Smetana's musical career was completely under German influence, which he never denied, and German musicians, Proksch, Liszt and Wagner, recognised and promoted his talent; Liszt's and Wagner's influence is naturally noticeable in his works, which was reason enough for his Czech contemporaries to openly and covertly oppose him. Today, however, all this has been forgotten and he is celebrated as a genius of Czech national music.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁷ “nicht nur tschechischer Nationalkomponist und ausübender Musiker, sondern Lehrer und Erzieher seines Volkes.“ See Note 342.

³⁴⁸ „Ein Arbeiter-Symphoniekonzert, das dem Gedenken Friedrich Smetanas gewidmet war, fand gestern in Volkshaussaale statt. Smetanas musikalischer Werdegang stand völlig unter deutschem Einfluß, was er auch nie verleugnete, und deutsche Musiker, Proksch, Liszt und Wagner, erkannten und förderten sein Talent; der Einfluß Liszt's und Wagner's macht sich naturgemäß in seinen Werken bemerkbar, was für seine tschechischen Zeitgenossen Grund genug war, um ihn versteckt und offen zu beföhden. Heute aber ist das

The German journalist presents the Czech nationalists' arguments but inside-out. The influence of German music on Smetana, which was not rejected but also not highlighted within the Czech narrative—Listzt's rather than Wagner's, was labeled as the central point of his style by the *Aussiger Tagblatt* reviewer. This was supposedly proved by what was later dubbed “the battles for Smetana,” in which the composer was accused by some that his music was too German. In doing this, the German journalist ignored that in these “battles” what was to be the Czech “national music” was only negotiated. In the battles, after the ultimate victory of the Smetana side, anyone who had reservations about the composer's music was relabeled as a traitor to the nation. The *Aussiger Tagblatt* reviewer turned this argument around, and out of the discourse of the time handpicked the side opposing Smetana as proof of the nature of the composer's music. The text was then contrasting this now supposedly proven fact with the status of Smetana as a Czech national genius in 1924. Twisting the same set of claims to prove the antithesis of the Czech mainstream view so as to ridicule it. As if none of the words that Bělina or Pisk wrote in the program brochure had any bearing.

What is more, the *Aussiger Tagblatt* mentioned nowhere that the two symphonic concerts were part of a three-night festival honoring Smetana *and* Beethoven, putting the musical icons of the two nations side-by-side. Only those attending would have known that. This way the main message was lost to, or deliberately withheld from, a broader audience, and, stayed within the ranks of the Social Democrats.

All that said, the reviewer was sympathetic to the works and praised the performance. The issue at stake was not whether it was good music but to whom it belonged. This raises a more substantial question of whether a piece, like *Má vlast*, that was made a symbol of the Czechoslovak nation within the Czech narrative could at all have been recognized as free from nationalistic bias by the German populace. Or to put it another way, was not the design of the Smetana celebrations as an undertaking limited to the Czechoslovak nation a way to divide the multiethnic country rather than bring it together?

Next, it is important to demonstrate that the activities of the Aussig Social Democrats were indeed independent of the efforts of the Board or financed from the state subsidy.

alles vergessen und er wird als Genius der tschechischen Nationalmusik gefeiert.“ W—a, “Ein Arbeiter-Sinfoniekonzert [A Worker's Symphony Concert],” *Aussiger Tagblatt*, 11 March 1924.

After all, the program brochure can be found in the Smetana Museum's collection,³⁴⁹ which includes many posters and program leaflets mailed in from across the country by many concert organizers cooperating then with the Board.

Though the relationship between the local organizers of the Aussig concerts and the Board may appear to be a minor issue, it is an important part of the argument in this study. It points to the division that existed between the Czech and the German activities during the centenary, which jeopardized the Social Democrats' efforts to build bridges by depriving their event of publicity.

That the concert in Aussig stood outside the celebration coordinated by the Board and not financed from state subsidy can be documented in several ways. Firstly, as can be seen from the detail in Chapter 2, no funds were allocated to concerts in the country outside of those of the Czech Philharmonic or the tour of the young musicians. Secondly, the copy in the Smetana Museum was likely not mailed in by the organizers, as was the requirements for events coordinated by the Board, as its title page was marked as *Rezensionsexemplar* (Review copy). It was thus most likely a journalist's copy that ended up making its path to the museum's collection at some point in time. Thirdly, Nejedlý despised Šak and his journal *Smetana* never informed about the concert. This last point deserves more detailed discussion.

First, on the personal animosities that may have impacted the reception. Vladislav V. Šak was the founder of a short-lived orchestra, Šak's Philharmonic. This ensemble, active between 1919 and 1921, was viewed by some, including Nejedlý, with a resentment as an unnecessary competition to the Czech Philharmonic.³⁵⁰ Nejedlý and others accused Šak of "fawning to the Germans," as Vlasta Reittererová put it, adding in her text that the attacks were ungrounded given that the core of the orchestra's repertory was Czech music.³⁵¹ Clearly,

³⁴⁹ See Note 342.

³⁵⁰ See for instance Zdeněk Nejedlý, "Dvě Filharmonie [Two Philharmonics]," *Smetana* 11, no. 2–3 (25 May 1921): 22–30.

³⁵¹ Vladislav V. Šak (1894–1977), Šak's Philharmonic was initially called *Orchestr uměleckého klubu* "Orchestra of the Artistic Club." Tellingly, the first concert of the Šak's Philharmonic programmed *Má vlast* (on 21 November 1919) under Čelanský and the same piece was also programmed for one of its final concerts, which took place on the Czechoslovak Independence Day (28 October) of 1921. See Vlasta Reittererová, "Šakova filharmonie [Šak's Philharmonic]," in *Český hudební slovník osob a institucí*, 31 October 2019,

with his history, Šak was not afraid that he would further spoil his name within the Czech circles when he was asked to participate in this project.

Secondly on the ignorance of the concert in Aussig in the Czech national press.³⁵² A text in Šak's journal *Hudba* reprimanded the media for deliberate ignoring the concert, accusing them of chauvinism. It highlighted that while the media were frequently printing reports of German hostility to Czech art, this instance of the Germans performing Czech music in an exemplary manner was left without mention.³⁵³ This report needs to be taken for what it was—a bitter reaction of the opposing camp and likely the conductor himself—but there is some truth in it. Though the issue was more complicated than what Šak was suggesting. This omission may not have resulted simply from chauvinism across the Czech media, but rather from where information about the centenary celebrations was disseminated. It was coming from the Board, as the communication between it and the media organization shows. The society here was therefore not only in control of the use of state money, but also of the distribution of information. Be it as it may, the readers of mainstream papers never learned about the performance of *Má vlast* that the German orchestra gave in Aussig.

Adding to it the ignorance of the German reception of the tour of the Czech Philharmonic mentioned earlier, the Czech media were presenting the centenary as a project of the Czechoslovak nation and its readers would hear little about the German positive reception of the work.

To illustrate that this was not an isolated instance, attributable to a personal animosity towards Šak, a small diversion is hopefully justified. There was another performance of *Má vlast* that was never covered in the main periodical of Nejedlý's circle, the *Smetana* journal. It was that of the Wiener Philharmoniker in Ostrava in January 1924, a concert given under the auspices of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs Beneš. To further exemplify the mindset of the contributors to

https://www.ceskyhudebnislovník.cz/slovník/index.php?option=com_mdictionary&task=record.record_detail&id=4995, accessed 20 Oct 2022.

³⁵² This author's survey of the Czech media recovered no mention of the concert, save for an announcement that it was to place that appeared in the *Prager Presse*. This absence of publicity is also confirmed in the text published in Šak's journal *Hudba*. As much this text was biased and included multiple inaccuracies, it would be unlikely that it would dare to suppress existing reports. See "Němci a Smetanovy oslavy [Germans and Smetana Celebrations]," *Hudba* 2, no. 1–2 (February 1925): 39–40.

³⁵³ "Němci a Smetanovy oslavy."

Smetana on performers of German nationality, a citation from a 1923 review by Josef Bartoš, a member of the Board leadership (see Appendix 3), is warranted. The reviewed performance was that of the Wiener Tonkünstler-Orchester under Franz Schalk and the concert was given in the presence of President Masaryk and other prominent politicians. Bartoš described the conductor's sparing gestures, but then moved by the music, he concluded that as the concert closed the audience found out "with certainty that Franz Schalk has a human heart beating under his imperial coat."³⁵⁴ Guilty of adherence to the Empire until proven human by music!

It would be of interest to read what Czech media reported about the Aussig concert. The minimal response to the Aussig concert necessitates a look at other reactions in the Czech discourse to Austrian or German writings on Smetana. This exploration helps illustrate how the activities of German-speaking individuals were perceived in the Czech press. A notable example is represented by the response published to the *Neues Wiener Journal*. In this journal, music critic and historian Elsa Bienenfeld³⁵⁵ published an article on Smetana on 24 February 1924.³⁵⁶ Focusing on Smetana's musical criticism, the article also offered a brief portrait of him. This was reported on by an anonymous writer in the centenary edition of *Československý denník* (Czechoslovak Daily) published in Moravia.³⁵⁷

The response to Bienenfeld's article is symptomatic of the Czech chauvinism at the time, which could twist any text to seem anti-Czech. Initially, its author acknowledged Bienenfeld's sympathetic portrayal of Smetana. However, they took issue with her statement that "[h]is ideal was to create a great national Czech music modelled on and with the help of German

³⁵⁴ "s bezpečností, že Franzi Schalkovi pod císařským kabátem bije lidské srdce" The Wiener Tonkünstler-Orchester directed by Franz Schalk performed on 26 February of 1923 at the Lucerna Hall in the presence of President Masaryk and other prominent politicians. Schubert and Brucker were on the program. The concert review in *Smetana*, written by Josef Bartoš revealed his value system when he labeled Franz Schalk as "zosobněná Vídeň císařská [personified Imperial Vienna]." Josef Bartoš, "[Wiener Tonkünstler-Orchester]," *Smetana* 13, no. 1 (10 March 1923): 8.

³⁵⁵ Elsa Bienenfeld (1877–1942), a student of Guido Adler and Arnold Schönberg, of Jewish origin. She was a music critic with the *Neues Wiener Journal*. Published texts a.o. on Mahler as conductor. Died in concentration camp Maly Trostenets. See Renate Heuer, ed., "Bienenfeld, Elsa Dr. phil," in *Lexikon deutsch-jüdischer Autoren: Band 2 Bend–Bins* (Munich: Saur, 1993).

³⁵⁶ Elsa Bienenfeld, "Smetana als Kritiker [Smetana as a Critic]," *Neues Wiener Journal*, 24 February 1924. Elsa Bienenfeld, "Smetana also Kritiker," *Neues Wiener Journal*, 24.2.1924, p. 11–12.

³⁵⁷ Vr., "Němci o Smetanovi [Germans on Smetana]," *Československý denník*, 2 March 1924.

music,” interpreting it as an insult that suggested Czechs should be grateful to Germans for the modern national music Smetana created.³⁵⁸ The text countered by arguing that Wagner and others simply provided the means for Smetana to achieve “the Czech purity of his music.”³⁵⁹ Echoing other journalists, the writer emphasized the Czechness of Smetana’s music rooted in Czech folk, elevating it above Wagner’s influence. They also claimed that “only in the original Czech musical atmosphere could a luminary of Smetana’s stature have emerged.”³⁶⁰ Thus, what could have been an acknowledgement of Smetana’s international recognition turned into a bitter critique and attack.

In summary, the project devised by the Social Democrats in Aussig, juxtaposing Smetana and Beethoven, aimed to bridge societal divisions. In a comprehensive program brochure, Czech and Austrian authors endeavored to present an accessible and relatable portrait of the Czech composer to the German public. The myth presented here was in line with the existing narrative in Czech discourse and, if preconceptions were set aside, the event could have showcased Smetana’s music as a unifying element between Czechs and Germans in Czechoslovakia. However, the Czech public was unaware of it. This lack of awareness was due to several factors, including the existing division in cultural life, personal animosities, and, most crucially in the context of the centenary, the dominant role of the Board in disseminating information about the celebrations.

³⁵⁸ “Sein Ideal war: Nach dem Muster und mit Hilfe der deutschen Musik eine nationale große tschechische Musik ins Leben zu rufen” Bienenfeld, “Smetana als Kritiker.”

³⁵⁹ “Dle toto máme my, Čechové, co poděkovati jen Němcům, že máme moderní národní hudbu Smetanovu vytvořenou. Němečtí vzdělanci nevidějí [sic], že Wagner, jako Verdi, byli pro Smetanu jen prostředky k dosažení vlastního cíle: české ryzosti jeho hudby.” Vr., “Němci o Smetanovi.”

³⁶⁰ “Neboť jen v tom originálně českém ovzduší muzikantském mohl vyrůstí takový veleduch rázu Smetanova.” Vr.

Conclusion

In March 2022, the General Director of the Czech Philharmonic, David Mareček, in a widespread newspaper insert addressed the Czech readers announcing the upcoming European tour of the orchestra. This was to cover prestigious venues: Vienna's Musikverein, Berlin's Philharmonie, Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, Philharmonie Essen, and London's Barbican center. He noted that the tour's program:

[...] is a truly representative showcase of Czech music. In addition to Smetana's *Má vlast*, Dvořák's *Eighth Symphony* and Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass*, it also includes Bohuslav Martinů's *Concerto for Two Pianos*, Kabeláč's *Mystery of Time* and Viktor Ullmann's melodrama *The Lay of Love and Death of Cornet Christoph Rilke*. The popularity of Dvořák's symphonies and Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* is hardly surprising. On the other hand, Smetana's *Má vlast*, which belongs to the core concert repertoire at home, is still little known to foreign organizers and we often must fight very hard to get it included in the program. The fact that *Má vlast* was accepted this year at the Musikverein in Vienna, the Berlin Philharmonic, Hamburg, Essen and the Barbican in London is a good sign for Czech music and a well-deserved recognition of Smetana's importance.³⁶¹

No need to mistrust Mr. Mareček that the Philharmonic had “often to fight very hard” to get Smetana's cycle in the program of their tour, while Dvořák's and Janáček's pieces were accepted without any question. But that would rather speak against Smetana's importance, at least when measured by popular demand. And what about Kabeláč's *Mystery of Time* and the melodrama by Ullmann? Was there no convincing needed or does Mr. Mareček think

³⁶¹ „Program, který se pro právě začínající turné podařilo sestavit je skutečně reprezentativní přehlídkou české hudby. Vedle Smetanovy *Mé vlasti*, Dvořákovy *Osmé symfonie* a Janáčkovy *Glagolské mše* v něm naležeme i Koncert pro dva klavíry Bohuslava Martinů, Kabeláčovo *Mystérium času* nebo melodram Viktora Ullmanna *Píseň o lásce a smrti korneta Kryštofa Rilka*. To, že jsou ve světě populární Dvořákovy symfonie i Janáčkova *Glagolská mše*, zřejmě nikoho nepřekvapí. Naproti tomu Smetanova *Má vlast*, která doma patří k základnímu koncertnímu repertoáru, je pro zahraniční pořadatele stále ještě málo známá a o její zařazení do programu musíme často velmi usilovně bojovat. Že *Mou vlast* přijali letos ve vídeňském Musikvereinu, v Berlínské Filharmonii, v Hamburku, v Essenu i v londýnském Barbicanu, je pro českou hudbu dobrým znamením a zasluženým uznáním Smetanova významu.“ David Mareček, “[Slovo generálního ředitele; A word from the Director General],” *Česká filharmonie*, August 2022.

that it is not worth mentioning? Admittedly, these two compositions were not the sole numbers programmed for the night, as was *Má vlast*. Could this explain the reluctance of the foreign production teams? Were they afraid that the rarely performed cycle would not attract an audience to their halls?

A quick peek into the recent programs of the venues that the Czech Philharmonic toured in 2022 provides quite a different picture. In Vienna, the cycle was performed by the Wiener Philharmoniker under Jakub Hrůša in June of 2021 on four nights in a row. The same orchestra performed it four years earlier, in the 2016/2017 season, under Daniel Barenboim in Vienna, Linz, Munich, Cologne, and Paris (as well as in Prague). Just a few years earlier another series of performances was given by the orchestra under Nikolaus Harnoncourt.³⁶² The Berliner Philharmoniker played it in their concert hall of residence in October 2020 under Daniel Barenboim (three concerts) and the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin was scheduled to perform it there some three weeks after the Czechs.³⁶³ NDR Sinfonieorchester performed the complete cycle in Hamburg in 2015,³⁶⁴ and the individual poems were given there in multiple concerts since. The London Symphony

³⁶² Wiener Philharmoniker performed Smetana's *Má vlast* under Jakub Hrůša in Vienna on 11–14 June 2021. The same orchestra played the cycle under Daniel Barenboim in Vienna on 17 and 18 December 2016 and again on 17 May 2017, in Paris on 20 December 2016, in Cologne on 21 December 2016, in Munich on 11 May 2017, in Prague on 12 and 13 May 2017, and in Linz on 16 May 2017. The performances of the cycle by the Viennese forces under Nikolaus Harnoncourt took place on 30 September 2010 in New York, on 5 October 2010 in Linz, and 6 and 7 October 2010 in Vienna. See "Konzertarchiv–Wiener Philharmoniker," accessed 15 March 2023, <https://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/en/konzert-archiv>.

³⁶³ Ingo Metzmacher led Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin in the cycle on 2 April 2023. See "Ingo Metzmacher – Symphonic Concert 02.04.2023 – DSO," accessed 31 December 2023, <https://www.dso-berlin.de/en/concert/metzmacher-2022-04-02/>.

³⁶⁴ Thomas Hengelbrock conducted the NDR Sinfonieorchester in *Má vlast* on 7 and 10 May 2015 in Hamburg, 8 May 2015 in Wilhelmshaven, 9 May 2015 in Wismar, and on 12 and 13 May 2015 in Prague. See "Thomas Hengelbrock und NDR Sinfonieorchester eröffnen das Festival 'Prager Frühling' mit Bedřich Smetanas *Mein Vaterland*, [Thomas Hengelbrock and the NDR Symphony Orchestra open the 'Prague Spring' festival with Bedřich Smetana's *Má vlast*]," 2015, https://www.ndr.de/der_ndr/presse/mitteilungen/Thomas-Hengelbrock-und-NDR-Sinfonieorchester-eroeffnen-Festival-Prager-Fruehling-mit-Bedich-Smetanas-Mein-Vaterland-,pressemeldungndr15780.html.

Orchestra played *Má vlast* under Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider in the Barbican Center in 2018³⁶⁵ and Jakub Hrůša conducted his Bamberger Symphoniker in a Proms concert in 2019,³⁶⁶ which got five stars in a review in *The Times*.³⁶⁷ One wonders what was there to fight for. The evidence suggests that any hesitance on the part of the organizers may have been attributable to too much rather than too little of *Má vlast*.

What is more important though is why it is that the Czech top-most orchestra feels the need to “fight” for Smetana. The short answer is that the myth has not died and the unique position of Smetana’s cycle in the Czech culture persists. It was cemented over its long performance history in events like the Smetana 1924 centenary. Institutions and artists then were tasked, or more precisely, it was said to be their duty, to pay back to Smetana what the myth had him give to the nation—music that embodied the Czech soul but was at the same time on par with that of the world’s eminent composers. Given how much important the phenomenon is for Czech music, it has been addressed so little by Czech scholars.

This study attempted to fill in some gaps of this emerging scholarship on the composer. Its focus was on the early decades of the twentieth century. Following approach applied by Kelly St. Pierre in looking at the influence of non-governmental organizations, the activities of the Prague Board and the Brno Council were mapped. These two organizations were among the main players in the “Smetana market” around the centenary of his birth. This economic metaphor is, in my view, justified by the centrality of fundraising to support various initiatives and the covert, and sometimes overt, competition for limited funds. These institutions greatly impacted the cultural life in and around 1924 and the cultural policy of the various levels of the political administration in Czechoslovakia.

The study worked with printed materials issued by both societies, articles in newspapers and magazines, but also utilized the archives of the Board and various state institutions. This

³⁶⁵ Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider conducted London Symphony Orchestra in a performance of *Má vlast* on 14 October 2018 in London. See “LSO – Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider Conducts Smetana’s *Má vlast*,” accessed 31 December 2023, <https://www.classicalsource.com/concert/lso-nikolaj-szeps-znaider-conducts-smetanas-ma-vlast/>.

³⁶⁶ Bamberger Symphoniker performed the Smetana’s cycle on 20 July 2019 at the Royal Albert Hall. See “Proms 2019 Prom 2: Bohemian Rhapsody – BBC Proms – BBC,” accessed 15 March 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/events/epqwxj>.

³⁶⁷ See Richard Morrison, “Proms 1 and 2 Review — a Brilliant Start to the Season,” 22 July 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/proms-1-and-2-review-a-brilliant-start-to-the-season-0d305g9ms>.

offered a peek into the background of the festivities and uncovered the negotiations that took place between the bodies and the state.

The comparison of the agenda of the two organizations uncovered a radical difference in their approach to the centenary. It also uncovered the differing degrees of success of both bodies—the majority of the Board's projects were never completed.

The divergencies may be partially explained by the different locale of these organizations. The Prague Board's, whose ambition was to build a Smetana monument and museum in the capital as well as to produce monumental musicological works, saw itself as a continuation of the nineteenth century Czech national rebirth projects. It presented its projects as belonging to the entire nation, however, it failed to recognize the changed circumstances of the new and larger state. The Brno Council recognized these new circumstances and the historical cultural connection of Brno and Moravia to Vienna and considered it its task to bring Moravians to Smetana by performing his compositions aplenty.

But there were differences between these two bodies that went beyond the place of their seat. These were differences of ideology that translated into policy. The Prague Board with its replication of the historical nationalistic agenda sought to construct national monument in marble and books. The Brno Council instead focused on stirring up cultural life, not only in Moravia and Silesia but in the country as a whole. Their project of the Smetana Foundation was, in this regard, transformational.

The ideology, in the general sense of the word, that dictated the bodies' agenda was set by musicologists. Nejedlý's and Helfert's imprint on the activity of their respective societies was enormous. As the evidence revealed they were the ones to "expertly" justify the societies' acts and policies.

There was also a significant difference in governance. The Prague Board was striving to keep control of matters around Smetana and most of the active members of the Committee were musicologists educated by Nejedlý. The Brno Council set itself up as a temporary body for the time of the celebrations and invited the representatives of a wide range of musical institutions to its leadership.

What is more important is that the archival materials and the public pronouncements of both bodies demonstrate the weakness of the link between the standing myth and the

resulting cultural policies. Same as the myth itself, this link was constructed and reconstructed as needed. That also meant that the existing myth could be utilized to support multiple, mutually contradictory cultural policies.

Aside from these two organizations, the state administration played a significant role in the centenary, mainly by providing finance. The state was, however, also active in utilizing the centenary to pursue its own agenda.

The dynamic between the Ministry for Education and National Enlightenment and the Board as documented in the correspondence kept in the archives is remarkable for the state institution in effect outsourced the planning and organization of the celebrations to the Board. This was, in my view, the result of two factors. Firstly, the Board, having announced very early on that they would spearhead the celebrations, obtained the buy-in from the top politicians in the state. Secondly, the Board furnished the Ministry with a convincing justification of its own steps and with persuasive justification for the refusal of the projects of some of their rivals. This would have been the result of both the differences in ideology and priorities, but also of their ambition to ensure sufficient funding for their own projects.

All that said, the Board's policies based on the nineteenth century nationalistic philosophies must have been considered aligned with the state's own agenda, or else the Board would not have been given such autonomy. In this respect, this study complements the view of the cultural policies of the Czechoslovak state in the first years after its establishment.

One policy choice that was present in both bodies, the Prague Board and the Brno Council, was the focus on at the "Czechoslovak nation." Despite that, the identification of the sizable German population with the state was outside their interest, or, if not, Smetana was not to play a key role in it. Despite that, attempts were made by various organizers in Sudetenland to use Smetana's music to bring the Czechs and Germans closer to each other. The Social Democrats in Aussig who conceived of a series of Arbeiter-Sinfoniekonzerte of Smetana's and Beethoven's music serve as a fitting example.

The performance of Smetana's *Má vlast* in Aussig in March 1924 was to build bridges between the Czech and German speaking population. In the sizable program booklet, Smetana was portrayed as a Czech Beethoven and his music, and hence the Czech nation, was presented as worthy of acknowledging. To present an understandable and acceptable

image of the Czech hero to the Germans, the program notes referenced German philosophy and also reinterpreted the narrative around *Má vlast*. Though the concert was a success, the narrative failed to fall on fertile soil in the local German press.

The standing narrative around Smetana as propagated by the press in Sudetenland was a negation of that of the Czech nationalists. The facts were skillfully chosen to turn Smetana primarily into the result of the German cultural milieu. This reading ignored that he spent majority of his life delivering on the Czech nationalistic projects and reduced him to the result of his teachers and models. By erasing all his Czech particulars, he was no more a representative of the Czech nation but simply a German Bohemian composer.

This portrayal constructed by the German minority in Czechoslovakia, though less worked out than the Czech one, is an ideal starting point for a critical assessment of the portrait built by the Czech nationalists. It also demonstrates the degree to which facts can be tweaked to support a pre-defined agenda.

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MŠANO: Fund 371 “Ministerstvo školství, Praha [Ministry of Education, Prague]”

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Appendix 1 Comparison of different versions of Hostinský's 1909 speech

Minuted speech (1909) ³⁶⁸	Reprinted speech (1909) ³⁶⁹	Board's citation (1922) ³⁷⁰
Pomník jeho musí býti výtvarnou hodnotou dílo dokonalé, důstojné umělce, ježž má zobrazit. To je požadavek samozřejmý.	Že pomník ten musí býti dílo svou uměleckou hodnotou plastickou i architektonickou, velikého mistra tónů důstojné — toť zajisté požadavek samozřejmý.	Pomník tak velkého genia musí býti výtvarnou hodnotou dílo dokonalé, důstojné umělce, jehož má zobraziti.
To co bych dále žádal — a ovšem je to jen mé osobní, skromné přání, byla by jasná, slunná, zářivá apotheosa mistra a jeho díla. Tato zářnost je znakem jeho díla. Pomník ten musí být zobrazen jako fanfáry "Libuše". Pomník vítězího a vítězného Smetany.	Mám dále na mysli <i>jasnou, slunnou, zářící apotheosu mistra vítězného</i> . Neboť <i>jas a životnost</i> jest hlavní celkovou signaturou jeho díla; proto pomník musí k zraku našemu mluvit tak radostně, jako k sluchu našemu ony <i>skvělé, jásavé fanfáry, které zahajují „Libuší“</i> .	Musí to býti jasná a zářivá apotheosa mistra i jeho díla. Pomník vítězího a a vítězného Smetany.
<u>Nebude-li moci pomník být obklopen svěží vegetací, budiž umístěn aspoň tak, aby od něho bylo možno zalétnout dále do přírody. Zeleň smavému dílu Smetanovu svědčí zrovna tak jako slunce, vzduch, volnost.</u>	Nebude-li pak pomník moci býti bezprostředně obklopen svěží vegetací, nechť od něho alespoň náš volný pohled zalétá kamkoliv dál k <i>přírodní zeleni</i> , neboť i ta, jako jasné slunce a volný vzduch, shoduje se s povahou mistra a jeho díla.	Nebude-li pomník obklopen svěží vegetací, budiž umístěn aspoň tak, aby od něho bylo možno zalétnout dále do přírody. Zeleň svědčí dílu Smetanovu právě tak jako slunce, vzduch a volnost.
Vůdčí hvězdou bylo Smetanovi Národní divadlo. Proto bych vítal, kdyby pomník přišel ve styk s Národním divadlem, nejen ideálně, nýbrž i místně. Ta synthesisa těchto dvou momentů, <u>Smetana a Národní divadlo, byla by nejšťastnější myšlénkou</u> umělcovou.	Konečně nemohu zapudit jednu myšlenku. Vůdčí hvězdou Smetanovou bylo <i>Národní divadlo</i> . [...] — Proto vítal bych šťastnou myšlenku uměleckou, která by dovedla Smetanův pomník sblížit s Národním divadlem netoliko ideově, ale i místně, alespoň tak, aby divák, jenž v duchu sklání se před geniem Smetanovým, zároveň zahlédnouti mohl i onen stánek Mus, pro který Smetana tolik krásného vytvořil, a jenž se během let sám stal pomníkem jeho bojů a jeho vítězství.	Smetanovi bylo vůdčí hvězdou Národní divadlo. Proto měl by pomník přijíti ve styk s Národním divadlem, nejen ideově, nýbrž i místně. <u>Smetana a Národní divadlo byla by nejšťastnější myšlenka</u> tvůrce pomníku Smetanova.

Note: The underlined text points to similarity of some passages between versions. The bolded text highlights differences in meaning.

³⁶⁸ "Pro pomník Smetanův" [For the memorial to Smetana], in "Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924," Box 2, SBS.

³⁶⁹ Hostinský, "Pro pomník Bedřichu Smetanovi [For a monument to Bedřich Smetana]." Otakar Hostinský, "Pro pomník Bedřichu Smetanovi," *Hudební revue* 2, No. 6, 305–308. Emphasis in italics original.

³⁷⁰ *Program slavností B. Smetany v roce stých narozenin 1924*, 8–9.

Appendix 2 Centenary portraits of Smetana analyzed

Author	Newspaper, page number	Word count
Hubert Doležil	Československá republika, 2–4	2,415
Josef Bartoš	České slovo, 1–2	1,555
Hubert Doležil	České slovo, 2–3	1,530
Zdeněk Nejedlý	Rudé právo, 1–2	1,792
Otakar Šourek	Venkov, 1	1,355
K. B. J[irák]	Československá samostatnost, 1	451
r. ³⁷¹	Tribuna, 1	1,136
Q[uido] M[aria] V[vyskočil] ³⁷²	Československý denník, 1–2	885
Karel Kramář	Národní listy, 1	1,048
Emanuel Ambros	Československý denník, 1	889
Vladimír Helfert	Národní politika, 1	1,077
Arne Novák	Lidové noviny, 1	1,842
Otakar Zich	Tribuna, 2	1,036

Note: All newspaper editions dated 2 March 1924.

³⁷¹ The author could not be identified. A possibility is that it was J. B. Foerster who was known to sign his texts with “-r” and also published in *Tribuna*. See Ludmila Lantová, “Josef Bohuslav Foerster,” in *Lexikon české literatury: osobnosti, díla, instituce*, ed. Vladimír Forst (Praha: Academia, 1993), 1278–1280, <https://kramerius.lib.cas.cz/uuid/uuid:be9058c6-806d-4141-abf9-d0af37159736>.

³⁷² See Luboš Merhaut, “Quido Maria Vyskočil,” in *Lexikon české literatury: osobnosti, díla, instituce 4*, ed. Jiří Opelík, Vladimír Forst, and Luboš Merhaut (Praha: Academia, 1993), 1553–1557, <https://kramerius.lib.cas.cz/uuid/uuid:5f2bbd03-8299-44ce-abc8-977eb1108882>.

Appendix 3 Leadership Composition of the Smetana Board (1922)

Position/Role	Name	Profession/Additional Info
Chair	František Táborský	Writer
First Vice-Chair	Zdeněk Nejedlý	University Professor [of Musicology]
Second Vice-Chairman	Josef Jiránek	Professor at the Conservatory [and Performing Artist; a Pupil of Smetana]
Executive (Jednatel)	Karel Guth	Administrator, Historical Department of the National Museum
Deputy Executive	Josef Bartoš	Professor [at Secondary School]
Treasurer	Bohumil Benoni	Retired Member of the National Theater
Substitute Treasurer	Josef Urbánek	Manager (přednosta) at Banka Slavie
Delegated Member (City of Prague)	Eustach Mölzer	Ministerial Counselor
Delegated Member (Smetana Family)	Zdeněk Schwarz	Ministerial Counselor
Delegated Member (UB)	J. B. Svojsík	Professor
Elected Member	Jindřich Čapek	Academic Sculptor
Elected Member	Hubert Doležil	[Music Historian and Critic], Professor [at Secondary School]
Elected Member	Vladimír Helfert	University Professor [of Musicology]
Elected Member	Jaroslav Kříčka	Professor at the Conservatory
Elected Member	František Kysela	[Visual Artist and] Professor [at a Vocational School]
Elected Member	Marie Majerová	Writer
Elected Member	Otakar Ostrčil	Head of Opera at the National Theater
Elected Member	[Marie] Röslerová-Fleischingerová	[Founding Member of the Czech Chamber Music Society]
Elected Member	Otakar Španiel	[Sculptor and] Professor [at the Academy of Fine Arts]
Elected Member	Václav Štěpán	Composer
Elected Member	Josef Theurer	[Physicist and Mathematician], Professor [at a college]
Elected Member	Václav Tille	[Writer and] University Professor [of Comparative

Position/Role	Name	Profession/Additional Info
		History]
Elected Member	Josef Valenta	Head of Department
Elected Member	Emil Weiss	Factory Owner
Elected Member	Otakar Zich	University Professor
Elected Substitute Member	Arnošt Arnošt	Attorney
Elected Substitute Member	Pavel Janák	Architect and Professor [at Vocational School]
Elected Substitute Member	Eliška Svěcená-Matysová	[Opera Singer?]
Elected Substitute Member	Ota Zítek	Professor at the Conservatory
Head of the Conciliation Commission	Jaroslav Stolz	Attorney
Librarian	Josef Hutter	[Archivist at the Prague Conservatory]
Auditor of Accounts	Artuš Rektorys	Director [at the Prague Credit Bank]
Auditor of Accounts	Vojtěch Sedlák	Wholesaler

Source: "Funkcionáři Sboru v roce 1922 [The officials of the Board in year 1922]," in "Zápisník [Notebook] 8.V.1920–25.6.1924," Box 2, SBS. Information in square brackets added by this author based on entries in "Český hudební slovník a osob a institucí," accessed 1 January 2024, <https://www.ceskyhudebnislovník.cz>.