

MEMORIAL TO LIDICE

COMPOSED IN 1943

BOHUSLAV MARTINU

BORN IN POLICKA, BOHEMIA, DECEMBER 8, 1890

DIED IN LIESTAL, SWITZERLAND, AUGUST 28, 1959

On an unforgettable night in June 1942, the peaceful village of Lidice, Czechoslovakia, ceased to exist. It was neither earthquake nor flood that wiped this town from the verdant hills west of Prague; it was the dark evil of man's nature. Nazi troops swept through the village as it slept, killing the men, deporting the women and children. The buildings were burnt to the ground and everything leveled; nothing remained, not even the cemetery. The massacre was the Nazis' way of avenging the plot to assassinate the vicious S.S. leader Reinhard Heydrich ("Heydrich the Hangman"), whose term as regional governor had been a reign of terror. Shortly after Heydrich died of injuries from a bomb explosion, the retaliation began.

The horrors of Lidice became an emblem, a symbol of how a sleepy, innocent village could be swept up into the fascist terror. The intent was to obliterate the village—but it remained a potent memory. Other towns adopted the name and some parents gave it to girls born at the time. Lidice emerged as a symbol not just for Czechs, but also for the world. In 1957 the government of Great Britain planted a huge rose garden in the town, which was eventually rebuilt. Various works of art, including several moving pieces of music, memorialized the moment. The Czech composer Bohuslav Martinu was one of the first to recognize, in music, that terrible night in June. His somber, eight-minute *Memorial* remains the most effective statement on Lidice.

FROM A CZECH VILLAGE TO NEW YORK

Driven from his adopted city of Paris by the Nazis, Martinu settled in the U.S. and watched from a distance as the horrifying events of the Second World War unfolded in Europe. He had already been uprooted before in his life. Born and raised in Policka, a village in a picturesque region of eastern Bohemia, he began his career as a top-rank violinist, studying at the Prague Conservatory in the early years of this century and joining the violin section of the Czech Philharmonic in 1918. But his ambition to compose became all-consuming, and by the early 1920s his own compositions—which by then already numbered nearly 200—were still little known in his own country. He moved to Paris in 1923, where he lived modestly for nearly two decades. His mentors were Roussel and Stravinsky, but he also studied jazz and mingled in a wide variety of musical and artistic circles.

By the late 1930s he had gained renown in Europe as a composer whose music merged the rhythmic vitality of the Franco-Russian sphere with the neoclassical trends of the '20s—and with idioms from Czech folklore as well. Just when it seemed that success might come his way, the Nazis blacklisted Martinu and he fled. Serge Koussevitzky, conductor of the Boston Symphony, included one of his works on a 1942 concert of "Czechoslovak Immortals of Symphonic Music"—in the distinguished company of Smetana, Dvorák, and Janáček. That year Koussevitzky also commissioned him to write a symphony—the First, which was performed in Boston in April 1943.

Koussevitzky also arranged for Martinu's employment, at the Berkshire Music Center (now Tanglewood). The composer spent the next years writing music and teaching in New York, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. But his mind was clearly elsewhere; the *Memorial to Lidice* was one of several works he composed that reflected his preoccupation with events "back home." He wrote it in just a matter of days in August 1943 in Darien, Connecticut. The American League of Composers commissioned Martinu, together with other composers, to write works relating to the war. Martinu's response had its premiere at Carnegie Hall on October 28, with Artur Rodzinski and the New York Philharmonic; Eugene Ormandy led the Philadelphians in the work five weeks later. *Memorial* was not performed in Czechoslovakia until March 14, 1946, the eve of the seventh anniversary of the German occupation, with Rafael Kubelik and the Czech Philharmonic.

A CLOSER LOOK

From its gripping opening measures, the *Memorial* creates a striking emotional "inner world," with a jolting bitonality—the superimposition of two jarringly conflicting keys, C minor and C-sharp minor. Throughout the work's development Martinu quotes a hymn to St. Wenceslaus, the patron of Bohemia. After a central section of heightened intensity, the initial *adagio* returns, bringing a hopeful quotation: the "victory call" from the opening of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The piece then closes in C major.

—Paul J. Horsley/Christopher H. Gibbs

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