

The Czechoslovak National Band in the United States of America Chronicles from the years 1923 to 1931

The compiler of the chronicles of the band from the regions of Valašsko and Slovácko that performed in the United States in the years between 1923 and 1931 and became known under the name of the Czechoslovak National Band, was Václav Hořák. Václav, who was born in 1897 and lived until 1980, came from the town of Bylnice where his father, Josef (born in 1865), was one of the originators of the Bylnice brass band that was formed in this little village of southern Valašsko in 1885.

In 1905, when Václav was eight years old, his father, by then the bandmaster of the Bylnice band, left for Chicago in the United States. He stayed there from October 1905 until March 1910, during which time he performed in various bands, for example in the band called Moravan, part of the Moravský zábavný a podporující spolek club, of which he was a co-founder in August 1909. Josef brought back - among other things - two clarinets and he started to teach both his sons, Václav and Jan (1900 - 1966), to play them. Soon, they both began to perform in the Bylnice brass band (first in 1911, and the following year regularly).

For a short time, Václav was a trainee tailor but he quit his apprenticeship and worked in the Bylnice sawmill. In 1915, he started military service in the town of Brno and fought in the First World War on the Russian and later Italian fronts.

Václav wrote altogether seven chronicles in which he recorded his reminiscences and memories. The third one records the years between 1923 and 1931, the period when the band from the regions of Valašsko and Slovácko was established and then departed for America.

In July 1923 a band comprising about 40 musicians from the town of Kyjov and its surroundings left for the United States but within one year, however, the band broke up. Soon after that, Karel Šerý, the bandmaster of the local Sokol band, started to put together a similar band in the town of Valašské Klobouky. He asked the Hořák brothers (Jan had just finished his military service in the town of Frývaldov, where he had performed in the military band) to take part in the tour which was then being prepared.

The groundwork for the folk-costumed band from the regions of Valašsko and Slovácko to visit the United States was prepared by two fellow countrymen - P. František Boženek of the town of Valašské Klobouky, who performed in Chicago, and Otakar Bártík, a renowned manager who arranged for the band to play eight lucrative seasons in the New York Funfair and six winter seasons in the warmth of Sarasota, Florida. (Besides this, the musicians performed numerous concerts and dances in other American settlements of their fellow countrymen.



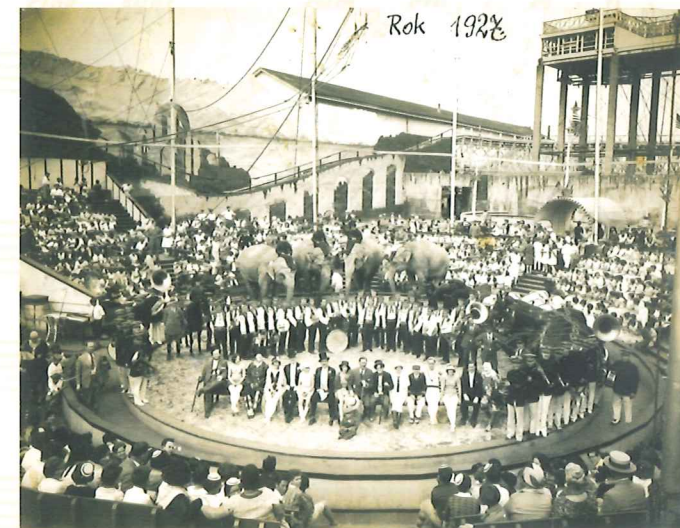
To perform in the New York Funfair was a dream of many - not only American - bands because it was at the top of the entertainment culture in America at that time and politicians, celebrities of the era, journalists and managers used to gather there. It was also there where the gramophone industry originated. Newly established American radio stations got their inspiration, too, from the Funfair programmes. Bártík arranged the Sarasota contract with John Ringling, who was in his time one of the most important producers in America. He owned, among other things, a world-wide known circus.

Thanks to their performances in the Funfair and the contacts with Ringling, the band from the regions of Valašsko and Slovácko became more and more popular. Their radio broadcasts made their music very popular, not only with their fellow countrymen. As a consequence, offers to make their first records started coming in from the American company, Victor, and later from the famous Columbia studios. Recording took place most probably in 1926 and these recordings are probably the oldest gramophone records of a country folk band from our region.

As the years went on, the quality of the band's performances increased steadily: the musicians became better and grew musically and the band expanded and improved its repertoire. Jan Hořák, the brother of the chronicler Václav, even became the bandmaster in 1931. The achievements of the band were admired by a great number of prominent people, for example the politician Jan Masaryk, the cornet-player and composer Bohumír Kryl, the piano-player and composer Rudolf Friml and the Russian opera singer Fyodor Ivanovich Shaliapin.

At the end of September of 1931, when the seasonal contract in the Funfair had finished, what was by then known as the Czechoslovak National Band finished its activities. Some musicians remained and settled in America while the others returned home to Czechoslovakia. However, even nowadays you can trace their musical influence in many villages and towns of our region. Their names are often forgotten, but this is typical of the country musicians of the folk culture in general. Its creators are nameless but their legacy forms the roots of the folk and country culture - the culture that constitutes the greatest asset of our region.

Československá národní kapela ve Spojených státech Kronika Václava Hořáka let 1923-1931



Pro potěchu i poučení čtenářstva knihu
o putování hudby Moravanů
sestavili, průvodním slovem vybavili
a fotografie vybrali

Petr Odehnal a Jiří Severin

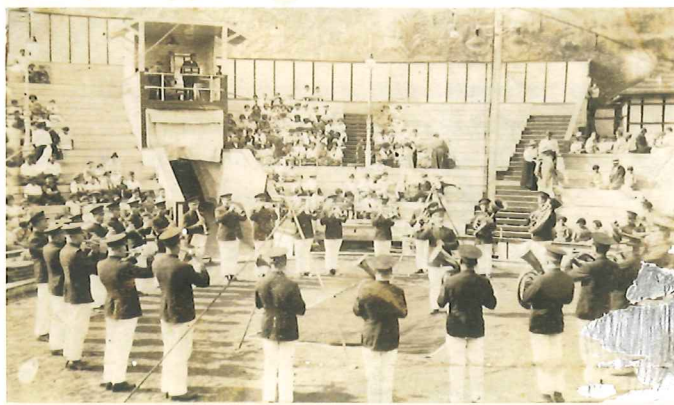
Autorem kroniky valaško-slovácké hudby, která působila v letech 1924-1931 ve Spojených státech amerických, je Václav Hořák z Bylnice. Základ téměř čtyřicetiletého souboru byl sestaven ve Valašských Kloboukách na podzim roku 1923, a to Karlem Šerým, kapelníkem tamní sokolské hudby. Výchozí pozici připravovali této krojované valaško-slovácké hudbě ve Spojených státech krajané, zvláště kloboucký rodák P. František Boženek, působící v Chicagu, a Otakar Bártík, manažer, který souboru postupně zajistil osm lukrativních sezon v newyorském Lunaparku a šest zimních sezon v Sarasotě na Floridě. Vedle toho muzikanti odehráli řadu koncertů a zábav pro krajské osady.



Prvního - letní r. 1923.

Naše valašská družina v Praze v Libni, kde jsme dlouho čekali na záruční listinu ze Spojených států, a to prostřednictvím pátera Boženka v Chicagu.

Vystupovat v Lunaparku bylo snem všech hudeb nejen v Americe, Lunapark patřil k vrcholům tehdejší zábavní kultury. Sarasotské angažmá dojednal Bártík s Johnem Ringlingem, který byl v té době jedním z nejvýznamnějších amerických producentů. Díky účinkování v Lunaparku a stykům s Ringlingem se hudba stávala stále populárnější: pravidelná vysílání v rádiu, natáčení gramofonových desek...

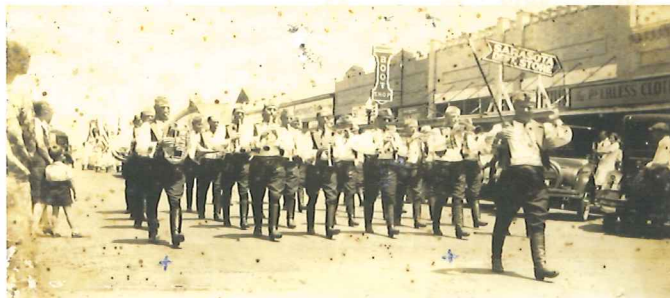


New York, 1925-1926.



Sarasota, Lido Beach, uprostřed kapelník Bohumír Raban, r. 1929.

Koncem září 1931 Československá národní kapela ukončuje činnost. Část muzikantů v Americe zůstala trvale, část jich odjíždí domů do Československa. Stopa jejich hudebního působení je v mnohých valašských a slováckých obcích stále – více či méně – patrná.



Naše hudba roku 1930.



Carneval v Tampě na Gasparile parádě. Naše hudba pochoduje Tampou na Floridě r. 1931.



Václav Hořák

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