

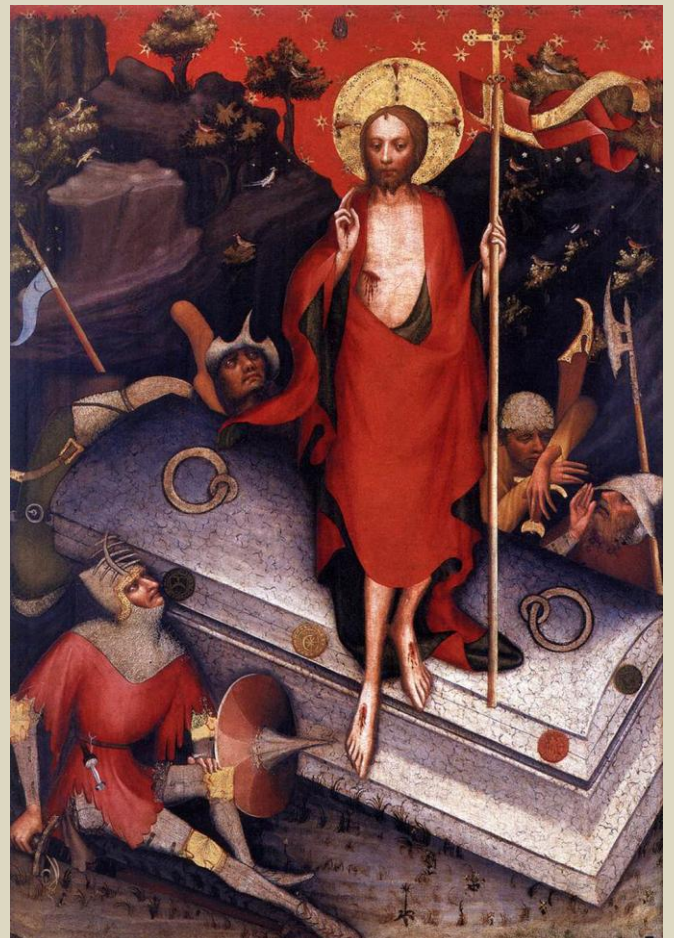


Třeboň

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*The 14th-century
Madonna of
Třeboň*



*The Resurrection
by the 14th-
century Master
of the Třeboň
Altarpiece*

Třeboň - Cinderella or the Sleeping Beauty?

by Jan Mladovský

You enter the historic town of patrician houses joined by arcades around the main square through one of the three city gates. It is dominated by the large Renaissance château, the adjacent monastery, the Gothic church and the cloisters with medieval frescoes. There is a large English park with a promenade leading to a chapel containing the embalmed remains of 26 members of the local ruling dynasty, the Schwarzenbergs. The promenade runs along the lake *Svět* (World). Other lakes bear equally poetic names such as Love, Faith, Hope, Good Will, Pleasure, Deed, etc., but the real magic lies in the relationship between the town and the surrounding countryside, which gradually evolved over the centuries. Initially, the whole region was marshland, so settling it involved draining the land, making hundreds of artificial lakes by building an extensive system of dykes and canals, and creating a new, man-made landscape. Over time nature has blended the man-made features into countryside of unique, protected flora and fauna with the old town at its core. It is called the Třeboň Region.

Several times Třeboň experienced a cultural flowering that reflected contacts with many parts of Europe. The best known period, the 14th century, is represented by the famous Retable of the Master of Třeboň and the Madonna of Třeboň, *see page 10*, regarded as the high point of the International Gothic or Beautiful Style. In the 16th century the last of the Rožmberks, the powerful rulers of South Bohemia, built a world class art collection, library and archive, and funded the hydro-engineering projects that made extensive fish farming possible. Vilém of Rožmberk, the chief diplomat of Emperor Rudolf II in Prague, was a candidate for the Polish throne.

Třeboň opened its gates to the world. Among others, the English Renaissance occultist Edward Kelly and the alchemist John Dee took up residence there. The art collection was later dispersed but the archive containing illuminated manuscripts, maps and documents survived. In the 18th century the Augustinian monastery installed a magnificent organ in the church of St. Giles with a large collection of mainly hand-written music. It kept an orchestra and supported music-making, attracting interest from far and wide.



The Renaissance Château of Třeboň

Beside its historic heritage Třeboň is well known as a spa town and as an outdoor activity destination, especially for swimming and cycling. These assets lend Třeboň its unique character. The town seems prosperous, money has been invested, façades repaired, but recent developments have also had some negative effects. The historic quarter is no longer the natural heart of the town. The shops and local residents have moved to the suburbs and have been replaced by services for holidaymakers. Out of season it feels deserted and melancholic, like Cinderella or the Sleeping Beauty who hasn't yet fully woken up. The surrounding countryside has also suffered. According to the scientists of the Prague Charles University the intensive fish farming in Třeboň relies too much on growing ever-larger volumes of relatively low-market-price fish such as carp. To avoid an ecological disaster in the Třeboň Region they call for sustainable fish farming. Maintaining the magical connection between the countryside and the old town with its assets requires awareness of ecology as an inseparable part of wider cultural horizons.

The non-profit organisation WERHERE z.s. (www.whyrwehere.info) has been trying to reverse the trend by the soft power of art. WERHERE z.s. has been promoting contemporary art in Třeboň by organising a programme of exhibitions and accompanying events pointing out historical links to Třeboň's art and culture, e.g. a large international exhibition, the *Rekurze 1.618*, which included the Turner Prize winner Laure Prouvost. In 2017 WERHERE z.s. signed an agreement with the NPÚ (the Czech National Heritage Institute) to locate an arts centre in the Château of Třeboň, which currently houses its contemporary art collection. In 2018 WERHERE z.s. teamed up with Australian benefactors Frank and Winnie May, the Australian musicologist Dr. Janice B. Stockigt

of Melbourne University and the Prague music impresario Robert Hugo with his Capella Regia. They staged a benefit concert to promote the restoration of the important Baroque organ. Preparatory research confirmed that the history of the instrument is linked to the extensive music collection, now stored in the church tower. In the 1970s a UNESCO project saw the cataloguing of this music library. There were 1,231 items of music listed in the typewritten catalogue completed on 13th September 1974. The benefit concert performed pieces from this library to the enthusiastic audience. This is not the only case of Třeboň's relationship with UNESCO. More recently Třeboň has been considering whether or not to support the pending UNESCO registration of the Třeboň Region, including the town, as a world heritage site.

In 1723 Třeboň suffered a great fire. As part of reconstruction a new organ was ordered for the Church of St. Giles and built in 1737 by the outstanding organ builder, Václav Pantoček of Dačice (1684-1746), possibly using some components from the previous Renaissance instrument. In order to play music churches also needed music collections. The remarkable Třeboň example of such a collection consists of those parts of the archive that survived the fire and of later additions to the archive. Local musicians would have been fine performers. In the 18th century Bohemia had a high reputation for producing great musicians. In 1772 the English musicologist Charles Burney travelled the country and wrote: *"I crossed the whole kingdom of Bohemia, from south to north; and being very assiduous in my enquiries how the common people learned music, I found out at length, that, not only in every large town, but in all villages where there is a reading and writing school, children are taught music."* (Dr. J. Stockigt). Composers whose music was heard in Třeboň came from all over Europe. The earliest compositions were from the Renaissance: a motet by Palestrina and a version of the *Miserere* by Gregorio Allegri. Music of the late Baroque era is represented by German composers such as Johann Caspar Ferdinand Fischer and by members of the Bach family such as Johann Sebastian Bach's son, Johann Christian. Austrian composers include Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf, Italians such as Giovanni-Battista Pergolesi, Giuseppe de Majò and Gennaro Manna and a host of Czech composers such as Florian Leopold Gassmann, František Xaver Brixi, Jan Křtitel Vaňhal, Jakub Jan Ryba and Paul Vranitzky. The Classical period is represented by Michael and Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus

Mozart, Leopold Hoffmann, Leopold Koželuch, and Georg Christoph Wagenseil. The Romantic period includes music composed by Luigi Cherubini, Karl Maria von Weber, Franz Schubert, Franz Liszt, and later also Zdeněk Fibich and Antonín Dvořák. These are just a few examples mentioned by Dr. J. Stockigt.

What makes this archive unique is that the Church of St. Giles in Třeboň still holds its collection, whereas most other music libraries were broken up and displaced during and after World War II, losing the valuable context for ever. The library also includes anonymous composers because it was common practice to copy music without crediting the author in order to avoid paying royalties. Could the Třeboň collection hide some yet-undiscovered masterpieces? It could be a potential goldmine for musicologists.

Because in 17th and 18th centuries the Czech lands were part of the transit route by which the southern, mainly Italian cultural influences were reaching the European North, the Pantoček's organ, like many other Czech organs, had a distinct character. Since these instruments were not very well suited to playing the music written in the great German tradition, which gradually became the requirement of the time, most were later modified and lost their original sound. Frank May's research unearthed the original contract for the Třeboň organ dated 1736, which contained technical specifications including all the stops and pipes. This information shows that the restoration of the instrument to its original state is possible and desirable. A renovation project of the Church of St Giles and the cloister is currently underway. Resources from the EU and Czech Government have been allocated to support the project, including the restoration of the organ and the housing of the music collection. If sufficient funding and professionalism were to be applied, the organ could become a superb concert instrument with a unique sound. Its historic value would be greatly enhanced by the music collection joined to it for centuries and its fame could spread around the world. Public funds are needed to see the Czech character of the organ properly restored and maintained. All proceeds from the benefit concert in 2018 were donated to support this cause.

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The Friends of Czech Heritage are considering plans for working holidays in Třeboň and for supporting the restoration of the organ mentioned in the article