INTERNATIONALISM AND NATIONALISM IN SMETANA’S

BRANDENBURGERS AND LIBUŠE

by

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Internationalism and Nationalism in Smetana’s 
*Brandenburgers* and *Libuše*

Abstract

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From his first opera, *Braniboři v Čechách* (*Brandenburgers in Bohemia*, 1866), composer Bedřich Smetana (1824-1884) dedicated himself to the development of a Czech operatic repertoire. Czech society in turn from the mid 1870s gradually adopted the composer as the “creator of Czech nationalistic music.”\(^1\) Despite Smetana’s intent to establish an autonomous Czech musical identity, examination of both *Brandenburgers* and his fourth opera, *Libuše* (1881), reveals that he ultimately came to rely on international musical styles to create a Czech national aesthetic in his works. This paper will examine this larger artistic problem in which a Czech musical identity is contingent upon non-Czech sources by providing close readings of *Brandenburgers* and *Libuše*. Considering the ways in which Smetana borrowed and subverted international musical idioms as well as his audience’s reception of his techniques illuminates an exceptionally complicated relationship between Czech political nationalism and musical identity during the mid-nineteenth century.

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Smetana, Nationalism, and the Rebirth

Over the course of his career, composer Bedřich Smetana (1824-1884) revealed in several letters that he considered his fourth opera, *Libuše* (1881), to be his greatest contribution to the Czech arts. In one instance he described the composition as, “the most perfect work on the highest dramatic plane,” and in another as “[of] unique importance in our history and literature.”² He once even argued that *Libuše* was “the highest peak in the expression of Czech music.”³ For these reasons, Smetana allowed the work to be performed only for “festivals which affect the whole Czech nation” after his completion of the score in 1872.⁴ He consequently withheld the score for nine years until the opening of the National Theater (Národního divadla) in 1881 provided him with an appropriate occasion for the work’s premiere.

Like Smetana’s opera, the theater had become a nationally charged symbol. Its construction was funded strictly by Czech donations for the purpose of presenting Czech theatrical works. The theater had become the most tangible symbol of the Czech National Rebirth (Národní obrození), a movement of renewed interest in Czech language, arts, and culture that culminated in the second half of the nineteenth century. A leader in the theater’s construction, Karel Sladkovský (1823-1880), addressed the building’s status as a cultural symbol:

² Smetana to Ludevít Procházka, Prague, 36 September 1877, and Smetana to Josef Srb-Debmov, Prague, 20 December, 1880. Quoted passages are modified from translations found in Brian Large, *Smetana* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 215. Footnotes for all translated quotes included in this paper will first list information for the original source and then, following a comma and the abbreviation “trans.,” list the secondary source. It should be noted that the quotes have been modified in some instances to reflect phrasing more idiomatic to English.
³ Smetana to Dr. František Ladislav Rieger, 26 May 1882, trans. Ibid.
⁴ Smetana to Adolf Čech, 17 August 1883, trans. Ibid., 212. Smetana originally intended to premiere the opera at the coronation of Franz Joseph as king of Bohemia. Czechs hoped that this event would allow for more political sway within the Hapsburg Empire, but the coronation never took place. See John Clapham, *Smetana*, The Master Musicians Series (London: J. M. Dent and Sons LTD, 1972), 37-38.
We are building not just another theatre, but a National Theater, which must not only function as a theater, but must also represent the nation. This theater must be a monument of our rebirth. The National Theater must announce to all future ages the strength of our nation. The National Theater must be a great edifice.\textsuperscript{5}

In celebration of the theater’s cultural project, one of the greatest national demonstrations in Czech history took place from May 15 to 17 during the laying of its foundation stones in 1868. Its opening was expected to incite a similarly strong national response.\textsuperscript{6}

Smetana was awarded the opportunity to premiere Libuše at the opening of the National Theater after submitting the score to an opera contest. His active participation in Czech national life made his inclusion in the theater’s opening festivities appropriate to the occasion. From his first opera, Braniboři v Čechách (Brandenburgers in Bohemia, 1866), Smetana dedicated himself to the development of a Czech operatic repertoire. Czech society in turn from the mid 1870s gradually adopted the composer as the “creator of Czech nationalistic music.”\textsuperscript{7} Smetana was even included as an honored guest at the laying of the foundation stones for the National Theater, making his famous pronouncement, “Music—the life of the Czechs!” while striking the stone.\textsuperscript{8}

In a letter written in 1882, Smetana acknowledged his growing celebrity and its influence on his artistic perspective.

\begin{quote}
I must seek to keep that honorable and glorious position which my compositions have gained for me in my nation and in my country. – According to my merits and according to my efforts I am a Czech composer and the creator of the Czech style in the branches of dramatic and symphonic music – exclusively Czech.\textsuperscript{9}
\end{quote}

Smetana’s writing reveals his commitment to achieving an exclusively Czech musical identity, a goal that led him on an artistic mission to create a national aesthetic in his

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 81, 130.
\textsuperscript{8} Trans. Clapham, 35.
works. Smetana’s *Brandenburgers* and *Libuše*, however, reveal that the composer ultimately came to rely on international musical styles to create a Czech national identity. Though he originally composed *Brandenburgers* for an opera competition requiring submissions to “have a real national identity” and regarded *Libuše* as his most successful national opera, Smetana modeled the former work on French and Italian operatic genres and relied on a more Wagnerian style for *Libuše*.\(^{10}\) Smetana’s use of internationalism to construct nationalism in both of these instances points to a larger artistic problem in which a Czech musical identity is dependent upon non-Czech musical idioms.

Scholar Michael Beckerman begins to address this problem of Czech musical identity in his article, “In Search of Czechness in Music.” Here, he points out that, though Smetana’s nationalism has historically been attributed to his use of first beat accents, lyricism, dance rhythms, and harmonic stability, “there is in fact no single musical detail that can be shown to occur in Czech music and nowhere else.”\(^{11}\) The composer’s intended “exclusively Czech” style was not actually unique to the culture. Beckerman also provides, however, source material explaining that Smetana’s historical audiences readily perceived “Czechness” (českost), or a unique Czech sound, in Smetana’s music. The author concludes by arguing that the affect was “as real as the river Vltava” for Czech audiences.\(^{12}\) Though Beckerman’s observations here are significant for cultural research in Czech music, he does not more broadly address Smetana’s blending of “Czechness” and international musical styles. In his book *Czech Opera*, scholar John Tyrrell similarly offers valuable analyses of cultural figures, topics, and politics in the

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\(^{10}\) Trans. Large, 141. The contest was organized and sponsored by national activist Count Jan Harrach (1828-1899).

\(^{11}\) Beckerman, 64.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 73.
Rebirth and their influence on Czech music. Although he addresses Smetana’s use of and exposure to international styles in several instances, Tyrell, like Beckerman, devotes less attention specifically to the composer’s strategy of using internationalism to create a national aesthetic in his works.

The complicated interrelationships between internationalism and nationalism in Smetana’s *Brandenburgers* and *Libuše* constitute a cultural contradiction that warrants discussion. The composer’s reliance on non-Czech sources for the creation of nationalism reveals a complex concept of Czech national identity in music. Close readings of both operas help to illustrate this complexity, elucidating the curious internationalism at the foundation of Smetana’s intended nationalism. By examining the composer’s political and artistic relationship to his audience as well as the relationship between the greater Czech society and the international community, it is possible to begin to illuminate the connection between cultural context and compositional strategy in Smetana’s work. Although such analysis in many cases raises as many questions as it answers, it provides insight into the compositional conflict at the foundation of Smetana’s musical identity.

**Underpinnings: The National Rebirth**

Smetana’s active participation in the Rebirth caused the movement’s ideals to strongly inform his compositional process. On the most fundamental level, the composer’s decision to compose operas in Czech reflected the movement’s focus on reviving the language. The Hapsburgs had banned the Czech language in higher social settings in 1780. By 1784, they had named German as the national language, despite
German-Bohemians’ minority status in the region.\textsuperscript{13} The resulting elevation of German culture brought about social stereotypes linking Germans with higher social classes and Czechs with the lower classes. German customs and language became necessary knowledge for advancement within the society, while the Czech language became that of “fools and illiterates.”\textsuperscript{14}

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, several events took place indicating renewed interest in and esteem for Czech language and culture. The first book of Czech grammar was published by Josef Dobrovský in 1809. The discovery of the Dvůr Králové (Rukopis královédvorský) manuscripts took place in 1817, followed by the discovery of the Zelená hora (Rukopis zelenhorský) manuscripts in 1818. These were said to contain thirteenth- and tenth-century Czech poetry respectively and, though determined fraudulent by the end of the century, were considered an indication of a historical literary tradition.\textsuperscript{15} In addition, Josef Jungmann published the first Czech-German dictionary in 1834, and in 1836, František Palacký published his first volume of The History of the Czech Nation in Bohemia and Moravia. Palacký’s account provided the first detailed, though romanticized, account of Czech medieval history.

The general renewal of interest in the language inspired Smetana to begin practicing Czech in his forties. Because his first language was German, however, he

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 271.
\textsuperscript{15} Hanka Václav “discovered” the first of these two collections under a church tower in the city for which it was named. The second was submitted anonymously to Prague’s leading political official. Though the latter collection was generally recognized as fraudulent by the middle of the century, Václav was held as a national hero until he was officially revealed as the collection’s author in the 1880s. In 1852, however, Václav published the contents of the Dvůr Králové manuscripts in 13 different translations in a collection titled Polyglotta. Derek Sayer, The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 144.
initially used Czech only with difficulty and never mastered its grammar—as his diaries attest. The composer consequently struggled to set Czech texts in a natural manner in his early operas and had to recruit assistance for the translation of the German librettos provided for him for both Brandenburgers and Libuše.17

The Rebirth and the Arts: The Rise of Opera

Beyond inspiring him to refine his knowledge of the Czech language, the Rebirth encouraged Smetana to favor opera as a means for national expression. Because of its popularity and ability to reach a wide audience including the illiterate, opera became a significant platform for the portrayal of the Rebirth’s ideals during the second half of the nineteenth century. Demand for new operas in Czech rose significantly as a consequence, providing new career opportunities for composers and performers alike.19 The increased availability of venues for the performance of Czech opera during the nineteenth century reflected the genre’s rise in cultural status.20

Opera production in Prague was largely dominated by one theater for the first half of the nineteenth century. Originally the Nostitz Theater (Gräflich Nostitzsches Nationaltheater, established 1783), the theater was renamed the Royal Theater of the Estates (Königliches Ständetheater, Králové stavovské divadlo) in 1789 following a

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16 Smetana did practice some Czech during his youth, but communicated primarily in German.
17 John Tyrrell, Czech Opera (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 258-264. Karel Sabina and Josef Wenzig provided the librettos for Brandenburgers in Bohemia and Libuše respectively.
18 Ibid., 5.
19 The availability of operas translated into Czech also generally increased during the first half of the century, particularly with the contributions of scholar Jan Nepomuk Štěpánek (1783-1844). Štěpánek translated fifteen operas to Czech including Weber’s Der Freischütz and Don Giovanni. The repertoire during the era additionally grew to include works such as Mozart’s Così fan Tutte and Die Zauberflöte; Rossini’s (1792-1868) Il barbiere di Siviglia, Tancredi, and Otello; and Meyerbeer’s (1791-1864) Les Huguenots. Ibid., 21.
20 The following discussion of Prague’s historic theaters is indebted to Ibid, 13-27.
shift to new management. Dedicated primarily to the production of German operas, the Estates Theater staged the premiere of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* in 1787 and was partially under the direction of composer Carl Maria Von Weber from 1813-1816. The popularity of operas translated into Czech, however, occasionally motivated their staging at the theater, though with varying degrees of censorship over the first half of the century. During the 1820s, for example, performances of Czech operas were permitted only on Sundays between four and six in the afternoon. The theater management relaxed its restrictions in the 1830s, however, and even constructed the New Theater in Rose Street (Nové divadlo v Růžové ulici) specifically to house Czech and some German productions, though the project ultimately failed.\(^{21}\) Czech productions again became more restricted following the 1848 Revolution and brought about nearly a decade of relative stasis in the production of Czech operas.\(^{22}\)

The opening of the Royal Provisional Theater in Prague (Královské zemské prozatímní divadlo v Praze) in 1862, however, helped to restore interest in Czech opera. First conceived following the 1848 Revolution, the state-funded Provisional Theater was the first dedicated solely to Czech theatrical works and staged weekly performances of Czech opera productions. Despite the new venue and Smetana’s role as its conductor from 1866 to 1874, the theater was still indirectly managed by the administration for the Estates Theater and was consequently restricted to staging only operas that were also produced at that theater. In combination with its extremely small size (which earned it the nickname the “matchbox”), restrictions on the Provisional Theater significantly inhibited

\(^{21}\) The more than 2,000 seats available at the New Theater caused it to be of an unprecedented size for the region. Though the demand for Czech opera was high, the Czech community could not regularly fill the theater’s seats. Ibid, 20.

the production of Czech operas. Smetana, for example, deliberately scaled back forces for the premiere productions of both his *Brandenburgers* (1866) and *The Bartered Bride* (1866) because of the theater’s lack of resources.

In response, the Czech community began to organize fundraising efforts to build the new National Theater as early as 1862. Independent from state funding and consequently free from its influence, the theater was constructed specifically to house Czech theatrical works including plays, ballets, and operas. Reflecting its status as a national symbol within the Rebirth, the theater’s planning committee originally scheduled its opening to take place on the Feast of St. Václav (St. Wenceslas, the patron saint of Bohemia) on September 28, 1881. The date was ultimately moved forward to June 11, however, to celebrate the marriage of Crown Prince Rudolf, a popular military leader, to Stephanie of Belgium. Because work on the building’s interior was not completed by this opening date, the theater closed again on Aug 12 to allow for completion of its construction. Further complicating matters, the building was forced to remain closed after a fire broke out, leaving only the theater’s primary walls, main staircase, and foyer intact. Despite the setback, prompt financial response from the Czech community allowed the theater to reopen by November 18, 1883, an event again celebrated with a performance of *Libuše*. A prominently displayed dedicatory motto still displayed inside the building,

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23 Tyrrell, 28.
24 From the beginning of its construction, it was planned that the Provisional Theater would ultimately be absorbed into the structure of the National Theater. Today, it is still possible to see the Provisional Theater’s façade at the south end of the National Theater. Ibid., 29.
25 Though Rudolf ultimately attended the theater’s opening without the company of his new wife, he was warmly received by the audience. Still, Rudolf stayed only for *Libuše*’s first act, though he did offer Smetana his congratulations before parting. Kimball, 130-131.
“The Nation to Itself” (“Národ sobě”), reflects the theater’s cultural project and intended audience.26

Beyond serving as an icon for the Rebirth, the construction of the National Theater significantly influenced the production of Czech music. The sudden availability of a performance venue helped to confirm opera’s status as an ideal genre for nationalist expression. Tyrrell explains the particular appeal of opera in writing, “Gratifying though it was to hear Czech spoken from the stage of a lavishly decorated theater, it was even more flattering to national pride to hear Czech sung, ennobled by music into the grandest style the theater had at its command.”27 The rise in opera’s popularity as well as the availability of a suitable performance space strongly influenced Smetana’s compositional output, the composer ultimately producing nine operas before his death.28

The Rebirth, Art, and Politics

The centrality of opera to the project of the Rebirth meant that it was also, inevitably, a political tool. The Czech nation’s two political parties, the conservative Old Czechs (staročeši) and liberal Young Czechs (mladočeši), adopted platforms concerning the portrayal of nationalist sentiment in opera.29 In general, the Old Czechs were opposed to the use of Wagner’s operatic style but supported the direct quotation of Czech folksong in national opera, while the Young Czechs preferred the opposite in both instances. Both parties’ views were explained in greater detail by their representative music critics,

26 Tyrrell, 5.
27 Ibid., 6.
28 The last of Smetana’s operas, Viola, was left incomplete at the composer’s death.
29 Previous to these parties’ establishment in 1874, Czechs were represented only by one political party, the Czech National Party. Opposing viewpoints concerning strategies for gaining autonomy from Hapsburg rule, however, resulted in the former party’s division. The Old Czechs preferred to act more passively and to work within the current system of government to achieve their goals, while the Young Czechs called for more radical action. Kimball, 119.
František Pivoda (1824-1893) and Otakar Hostinský (1847-1910), who wrote for papers managed by the Old and Young Czechs respectively. Frequently, Smetana’s status as a leading composer of opera made him a target of discussion in both critics’ writing.

Writing for the Old Czech paper, Pokrok (Progress), Pivoda initially supported Smetana’s works. He praised Brandenburgers, and even hailed the Bartered Bride as an ideal model for nationalistic opera. Following the premiere of Smetana’s third opera, Dalibor (1868), however, Pivoda publicly withdrew his support for the composer. He argued that Smetana’s reliance on Wagnerian models for the opera undermined its Czech narrative and famously suggested that the opera’s title character be renamed “Dalibor Wagner.” More broadly, however, Pivoda argued that nationalistic Czech opera should remain independent from international models and should rely on the nation’s traditional folksong instead. He warned that incorporating international styles into its composition would cause, “our opera...[to] not surpass the stage of being hostess to a foreign entity, which might suddenly take over as landlord...if it has not already happened.”

Contrasting Pivoda’s emphasis on Czech opera’s stylistic independence, Hostinský favored modeling Czech operas on Wagner’s works and also more fundamentally questioned the possibility of creating nationalism in music. Writing initially for the Young Czech journal, Hudební Listy (Music Pages), Hostinský argued that standards of beauty reflect local cultural preferences so that several equally valid concepts of national beauty could simultaneously exist within one society. Because

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31 František Pivoda, Pokrok (Prague), 22 February 1870, trans. Ibid.
32 When Hudební Listy eventually came under management of the Old Czechs, Hostinský left his position, which Pivoda promptly filled. Hostinský in turn began to publish his own journal, Dalibor, the title for which was aimed directly at Pivoda. Ibid., 27.
national standards of beauty were inconsistent, the inclusion of a nation’s folksongs would neither create nor inhibit the portrayal of nationalism in music. Hostinský further made a point to distinguish between nationalistic and patriotic art. The former, he argued, was aimed at portraying the internal lives of a society’s individuals, while the latter broadcasts a society’s interests to a wider audience.33

Within these politically charged artistic debates, Smetana soundly aligned himself with the Young Czechs. In a journal entry from 1869, the composer both described the competition between the two parties and affirmed his political position:

The feudal and clerical Old Czech Party…is stronger as far as wealth and property are concerned, while the liberal Young Czech Party—although it contains few rich people—consists of men of letters, artists and journalists. Naturally, I belong to the Young Czechs. The struggle between the two groups becomes more bitter from month to month…the Old Czechs, wherever they go in politics, in social life, or in the arts, endeavor to suppress everything that is carried out in the name of the Young Czech Party and throw them out.34

In addition to his explicit alliance with the Young Czech party, Smetana worked as a music critic for the liberal newspaper Národní listy (National News) from 1864 to 1865. From this post, Smetana responded to Pivoda’s accusations of Wagnerism by arguing that Pivoda, who primarily taught Italian operas in his own vocal studio, “merely babble[d] something about Wagnerianism without knowing what it is.”35 Concerning the quotation of folksong specifically, Smetana wrote, “Imitating the melodic curves and rhythms of our folksongs will not create a national style let alone any dramatic truth—at the most only a pale imitation of the songs themselves.”36 Because of this artistic perspective,

33 Ibid., 24-25. For more information on the favored aesthetics of Pivoda and Hostinský, see Locke, 23-27.
34 Trans. Large, 218.
36 This quote is from an unpublished draft by Smetana of an article for Národní Listy. Relayed by Otakar Hostinský, Bedřich Smetana a jeho boj o moderní českou hudbu [Smetana and his struggle for modern Czech music] (Prague: Nákladem J. Laichtera, 1901), 112, trans. Tyrrell, 217.
Smetana avoided folksong in his writing and generally relied instead on dance forms to create a vernacular aesthetic in his music.\textsuperscript{37}

**The Rebirth, Brandenburgers, and Libuše**

The rise of Czech cultural awareness during the Rebirth resulted in the development of a new sensibility within Czech society. Tyrrell describes this growing perspective:

> Previously inert material now became invested with a warm glow of nationalist sentiment that could be appealed to for patriotic purposes. Images of historical rulers and the past glory of the nation, of a civilization with a sophisticated literature stretching back into the distant past, or of a contented Czech countryside with its own distinct way of life, customs and music, were carefully fostered and imprinted on the minds of a susceptible Czech community.\textsuperscript{38}

Working within this charged cultural context strongly informed Smetana’s compositional process. Both *Brandenburgers* and *Libuše*, specifically, engage directly in the polemics surrounding the emergence of Czech nationalism in music. While the composer’s desire to create a national musical voice aligns these operas with the ideals of the Czech cultural Revival, his reliance on foreign models complicates their status as reflections of an unproblematically Czech identity. The respective discussions of *Brandenburgers* and *Libuše* in the following chapters will examine this nationalistic and aesthetic conflict, looking at the relationship between internationalism and nationalism in Smetana’s writing in both works. Considering the ways in which Smetana borrowed and subverted international musical idioms as well as his audience’s reception of his techniques reveals

\textsuperscript{37} Smetana made an exception of his avoidance of folksongs for *Libuše*. He set the title character’s climactic statement, “Czech people shall never perish. They all hell’s horrors will ever resist” with the Hussite hymn, “Ye who are God’s Warriors.” For more information, refer to Chapter 3, International Stereotype and *Libuše*, 45-46.

\textsuperscript{38} Tyrrell, 3.
an exceptionally complicated relationship between Czech political nationalism and musical identity during the nineteenth century.
On February 10, 1861, patriot and diplomat Count Jan Harrach (1834-1891) published an article in the Bohemian paper, *Národní Listy*, announcing his sponsorship of a Czech opera competition. He began, “There is no nation who loves song and music in greater measure, and at the same time could prove itself with a treasure of genuine songs and delightful melodies, than the Slav in general, and the Czech in particular,” before going on to explain,

> I want to encourage the composition of Czech National Opera, and therefore announce two prizes, each of six hundred gulden, for the two best two-act scores, and two prizes, each of two hundred gulden, for the best Czech texts to these…The selected plot must be simple but sufficiently dramatic, at the same time rich in lyric and pathetic moments so that there can be an adequate basis for song and music. The characters should be lightly drawn and well contrasted; the verses must be fluent and singable; rhythm and form molded to the mood and situation; the diction should be poetic, natural, easy and correct and the whole content imaginative, emotional and above all musical.39

In addition to these guidelines, Harrach made his preference for folksong quotation clear by adding, “I stipulate that the opera shall be based on a diligent study of the national songs of the Czech and Slovak peoples.”40 Smetana eagerly chose to participate in the competition upon reviewing Harrach’s announcement, but objected to his position on folksong, arguing, “In this way a medley of different songs would arise, a sort of quodlibet, but not a unified artistic work.”41 Because Smetana decided to participate in the competition, however, he had to reconcile his own artistic beliefs with Harrach’s request. The compositional techniques he ultimately used in his submission to the contest,

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39 Harrach’s conclusion to the announcement makes his national intent even more explicit. He writes, “And so I invite my dear compatriots, wherever they may be, to participate enthusiastically in the Czech enterprise—to produce a real national work that will glorify the Czechs!” Harrach’s article appears in translation in Large, 141-142.
40 Ibid., 141. Harrach was a member of the Old Czech Party. Clapham, 31.
41 Smetana delivered this argument during a conversation with František Rieger. Rieger was arguing in favor of folksong quotation. This situation is described in Tyrrell, 217. The anecdote is relayed by Josef Srb-Debrnov, trans. *Smetana in Reminiscences and Letters*, ed. František Bartoš, trans. Dephne Rusbridge (Prague, Artia, 1939), 57.
the Brandenburgers in Bohemia (1866), illustrate both his creative problem solving and his early concepts of a Czech musical identity. In this case, the composer blends Czech dance idioms with his own adaptations of Western European operatic styles to create a nationalism rooted, paradoxically, in composite internationalism.

**The Libretto**

Harrach’s announcement first reached Smetana in Göteborg, Sweden, where the composer had been living for five years but from which he was considering returning. The day after Smetana moved back to Prague in May of 1861, he approached poet Josef Jiří Kolár (1812-1896) seeking a libretto for the competition. Though Kolár agreed initially, his slow progress caused Smetana turn instead to Karel Sabina (1813-1877). Sabina’s political background made his involvement in the work a charged decision. The author had helped lead the Czech radical movement during the 1848 revolution and was consequently imprisoned for eight years from 1849 to 1857. Though Sabina’s actions within the revolution aligned with the nationalistic policies of the Rebirth, it was later discovered in 1872 that Sabina had succumbed to the pressures of the Hapsburg administration upon his release and agreed to become an informant for the secret police as early as 1859, making him a particularly controversial figure in Czech history. Despite his conflicting political activities, however, Sabina delivered a libretto to Smetana in February of 1862 that featured overt anti-Hapsburg sentiment.

Sabina drew his setting for the libretto from a period of Bohemian history during the thirteenth century in which Margrave Otto V of Brandenburg occupied the region.

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42 Though Smetana had enjoyed financial success in Sweden, he regularly wrote of his desire to return to Prague. He ultimately returned to the city after a disappointing tour as a concert pianist to Leipzig, Cologne, Berlin, and Amsterdam among other cities. See Large, 116-120.
The Czech ruler Přemysl Otakar II had just been murdered in 1278 by Hapsburg emperor Rudolf I, who then took over Moravia. Bohemia consequently came under power of Otto for the following five years. During the occupation, Otto captured Otakar’s son, Václav, and imprisoned him in Bezděz Castle outside of Prague, while his armies pillaged the region, freely stealing from and murdering its inhabitants. The troops, in their conquests, generally targeted native Bohemians instead of German-Bohemians, thereby intensifying the inhabitants’ long standing cultural rivalry.43

Reinterpreted during the Rebirth, this period in Czech history was understood as a symbol of Czech oppression by the Hapsburgs. The Brandenburgers were considered synonymous with the German-speaking Austrians and, by extension, the Hapsburg administration.44 Capitalizing on the period’s symbolic meaning, Sabina created a plot that portrayed the triumph of the Czech people over their oppressors. The entire story revolves around the abduction of three girls, all of whom were daughters of Prague’s leading official. The opera’s antagonist, Tausendmark, initially organizes the girls’ abduction after the eldest sister, Ludiše, rejects his romantic advances. In retaliation, Tausendmark (although a Bohemian resident) collaborates with the Brandenburgers, arranging for their troops to loot Ludiše’s home. Tausendmark had requested that the Brandenburgers leave Ludiše and her sisters for him, but the troops take the girls for ransom instead. Tausendmark then frames Jíra, “king of the peasants,” for his own crimes. The following day, an order is issued requiring the Brandenburgers to retreat from Bohemia within three days. Tausendmark, in response, enlists the aid of an older Czech citizen to retrieve the girls before the Brandenburgers depart, but his accomplice

43 For more on the cultural rivalry during the medieval era, refer to Sayer, 32.
sets two of the sisters free instead. Tausendmark escapes with Ludiše, however, and goes into hiding. In an effort to save her, Ludiše’s genuine love interest, Junoš, rallies a search party including both Jíra and the captain of the Brandenburger troops to find her and her captor. Jíra finds Tausendmark and threatens death, but instead sends him to be imprisoned. As a reward, Ludiše’s father offers Jíra a home on his estate, but he does not accept. The opera ends with a chorus singing of Bohemia’s strength and ability to overcome oppression.

Through his portrayal of peasants as heroes and Bohemians as resilient sufferers as well as his casting of a disloyal Bohemian as the plot’s primary antagonist, Sabina’s libretto aligned itself with the nationalistic ideals of the Rebirth. Once the libretto was delivered to Smetana in February of 1862, the composer was responsible for developing the work’s national meaning on a musical level, as Harrach had requested in his contest’s guidelines. Despite his interest in the competition, however, Smetana had little experience with vocal music at this point in his career and even less with the Czech language.45 Moreover, previous operas by Czech composers were created on a small enough scale that they did not necessarily provide a helpful model for the composer.46 For this deliberately “Czech” opera, Smetana consequently took inspiration from international operatic styles.

45 Sabina’s libretto had to be translated from its original German.
46 Clapham, 90; Large, 140. Smetana was primarily known for his piano works such as *Six morceaux caractéristiques pour piano*, op. 1 (1874-1878) and his two *Souvenirs de Bohême en forme de polkas*, op. 12, 13 (1859–1860). He had also written tone poems including *Richard II* (1857-1858), *Wallenstein’s Camp* (1858-1859), and *Hrkon Jarl* (1860-1861) while living in Sweden. Tyrrell, *Czech Opera*, 69.
Smetana, International Styles, and the Czech Audience

Because the major national styles of opera during the mid-nineteenth-century (French, German, and Italian) shared certain compositional techniques, it is difficult to determine specific sources of inspiration for Smetana while he was composing *Brandenburgers*. Smetana moreover did not generally discuss the opera’s composition in great detail in his letters or diaries so his exact influences are unclear. Still, the wide availability of international operas at the Provisional Theater would have meant that both Smetana and his audience (including Harrach) were well aware of current operatic trends. Smetana’s regular involvement with the Provisional Theater as an audience member, music critic, and later conductor further meant that he actively helped shape the Czech audience’s reception of international styles.\(^{47}\) The composer’s reliance on international models in composing his first national opera would consequently likely have coincided with his audience’s expectations for the creation of a Czech opera and, by extension, a Czech musical identity.

Smetana’s articles for *Národný Listy* during the Provisional Theater’s operation help to illustrate his operatic preferences as well as those of his audience while he was composing *Brandenburgers*.\(^{48}\) Under the direction of Jan Nepomuk Maýr (1818-1888) from 1862-1866, the theater’s repertoire most prominently featured Italian operas and Verdi’s works in particular. Maýr produced twenty-eight performances of Verdi’s *Rigoletto* as well as thirty-five of the composer’s *Ernani* during his time as director.\(^{49}\) He further introduced *Il trovatore* to the Provisional Theater’s repertoire, a work which

\(^{47}\) Marta Ottlová, et al, “Smetana, Bedřich.”

\(^{48}\) Ibid. The Provisional Theater operated from its opening in 1862 to the opening of National Theater in 1883.

\(^{49}\) Tyrell, *Czech Opera*, 37.
received 106 performances before 1883. Smetana was strongly opposed to both Maýr’s emphasis on Italian opera, however, as well as his techniques for its performance. The composer regularly described Maýr as “old fashioned” in his articles and further accused him of taking too many liberties with the repertoire such as making unreasonable cuts or additions. Still, Smetana did admire Rossini’s Il barbiere di Siviglia and, once he became director in 1866, introduced Verdi’s La Traviata and Nabucco to the theater’s repertoire. Though he resisted Italian opera’s popularity, Smetana allowed its characteristic sounds and forms to influence Brandenburgers to some degree—a choice that insured the work’s appeal (and therefore exposure) to a broad audience.

Rather than Italian opera, Smetana’s writings as well as his programming choices once he became the Provisional Theater’s director reveal his preference for German operas. Smetana was vocal in his admiration for Gluck and held Weber’s works in great esteem. As a tribute to the latter composer, Smetana opted to lead Der Freischütz for his first performance as conductor at the Provisional Theater. Czech audiences, however, were less fond of German operas. The building of the Provisional Theater specifically for the purpose of opposing the German-oriented Estate Theater reflected this preference, while the restricted repertoire of German operas at the Provisional Theater confirmed it. Though Weber’s Der Freischütz ultimately received forty-nine performances at the Provisional Theater, most other German operas were limited to lighter works such as Albert Lortzing’s Zar und Zimmermann and Friedrich von Flotow’s Martha. “German”

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50 Ibid., 40.
51 Ibid., 34. In a letter to Fröjda Bencke, 12 October, 1863, Smetana even labeled the conductor as his “personal and irreconcilable enemy.” Trans. Ibid.
52 Ibid., 37.
53 Smetana dressed as Gluck for a ball in 1848. Ibid.
54 Clapham, 34.
55 Tyrrell, Czech Opera, 36.
composers Mozart and Gluck, however, were exceptions to this general bias.\footnote{Gluck and Mozart are regularly listed as “German” composers in Czech repertory lists. Ibid.} Mozart’s \textit{Don Giovanni}, originally premiered at the Estate Theater, was one of the first works to be translated into Czech, while demand for Gluck’s \textit{Orpheo ed Euridice} ultimately caused the work to be staged twenty-four times.\footnote{Ibid.}

Both Smetana and his audience, however, received French operas with exceptional enthusiasm. Smetana introduced ten Offenbach operas to the repertory at the Provisional Theater during his time as director and further oversaw a portion of the fifty-six and seventy-seven respective performances of Meyerbeer’s \textit{Robert la diable} and \textit{Les Hugenots}, two of the theater’s most frequently performed works.\footnote{Ibid., 40.} The Czech audience’s warm reception of French opera was further reflected by the 722 performances of forty different French operas at the Provisional Theater from 1861 to 1883.\footnote{The year 1883 marks the opening of the National Theater. There were only 26 Italian operas in the repertoire at the Provisional Theater from 1861-1883, but they received 611 performances. Also, there were 21 German operas in the repertoire, but they received only 397 performances. Forty-one Czech operas were included in the repertoire during this time, but they received only 588 performances, the smallest ratio of works to performances. This information is indebted to Tyrrell, \textit{Czech Opera}, 39.} Scholar Jan Smaczny argues that Czech partiality to grand opera reflected the audience’s relative socioeconomic diversity, grand opera’s spectacle and divertissement appealing to the lower classes in particular.\footnote{Smaczny, 371, 373-364.} Smetana, through his dramatic structure and incorporation of ballet in \textit{Brandenburgers}, reveals his own interest in the genre as well as his awareness of its popularity.

On the whole, the wide availability of international operas at the Provisional Theater made operatic trends readily accessible to Smetana and his audience. Though Smetana’s individual musical influences while composing \textit{Brandenburgers} are difficult
to gauge, the composer’s writing as well as the theater’s repertoire help to illustrate the reception of national styles by both the composer and Czech society. Together, these resources reveal the composer’s diverging artistic tastes from his audience. Though both shared an enthusiasm for French opera, Smetana’s preference for German styles did not align with his audience’s taste for Italian works. In order to create an opera celebrating the Czech culture that would simultaneously satisfy his audience, the composer would have to incorporate and adapt a variety of international styles in *Brandenburgers* for the establishment of a Czech musical identity.

**International Styles in *Brandenburgers***

Smetana’s diverse musical styles throughout *Brandenburgers* reveals a reliance on multiple international models. The work’s musical organization, for example, often reflects the influence of Italian operatic forms. Most fundamentally, its division into three acts, rather than the preferred five of grand opera, aligns it with Italian practice.\(^{61}\) Clear transitions between recitative and aria sections also reflect Italian influence, while their patterns of alternation in some instances further adhere to the formal conventions of a Rossinian aria.\(^{62}\) For Ludiše’s introduction in the third scene of the first act, for example, Smetana uses a cantabile-cabaletta aria to develop her character and establish her primary conflict (Fig. 1).

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61 Smaczny argues that scene changes within the opera’s three acts indirectly align its organization with grand opera. Ibid., 375. In a letter to Josef Frič in 1879 concerning a five-act libretto for *Ahasver*, Smetana wrote, “I am… worried by [the libretto’s] excessive division into five acts. That is employed by the French and only for material gain since three per cent of takings are paid per act, thus the composer gets fifteen per cent for the entire opera. From the aesthetic standpoint of opera, only three-act opera can be justified and countenanced.” Trans. Large, 377.

The aria opens with an orchestral introduction that presents a lyrical and chromatic unifying theme. A scena follows during which Ludiše, in recitative, expresses her sadness that Junoš has recently been less attentive to her.\(^{63}\) In keeping with the dramatic organization of a Rossinian aria, Ludiše’s ensuing cantabile, marked as an “adagio” section in the score, depicts the character in a contemplative mood. Within a rounded musical form of ABA’, Ludiše sings here of love’s nobleness and further wishes love and peace for her country. Also in keeping with a Rossinian aria, Tausendmark’s entrance at the cantabile’s conclusion sparks a tempo di mezzo section during which he unsuccessfully attempts to court Ludiše. The section closes in an “allegro agitato” (mm. 555-609) where Tausendmark argues in frustration for Ludiše’s affection, and Ludiše accuses him of consorting with the Brandenburgers. The intensity of both characters’ emotions finally leads to an ensuing cabaletta performed as a duet. Marked as “doppio movimento” in the score, Ludiše and Tausendmark both sing of their futile efforts to communicate with one another throughout the section. Repetitions of musical phrases align with the characters’ rapid delivery of repeated textual phrases (though never exactly). If this prominent use of repetition further aligns the aria with Rossini’s conventions, a brief cadenza for Tausendmark at its conclusion is in keeping with the Italian style more broadly. On the whole, Smetana’s musical organization throughout

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63 See p. 26 for a discussion of harmony in the introduction and scena.
both scenes suggests Italian influence. Smetana relies in this case on the formal and
dramatic conventions of a Rossinian aria in order to introduce both Ludiše and
Tausendmark as well as develop their characters and conflict.

Though Smetana organizes Brandenburgers by drawing on Italian conventions,
scholars Marta Ottlová and Milan Pospíšil argue that he also includes sections of “quasi-
Wagnerian arioso” in his writing. The unstable harmonies and imitative textures
Smetana uses during the introduction and scena of Ludiše’s aria serve as an example of
this feature. Though Smetana indicates the key of C major/A minor at the scene’s outset,
his heavy use of chromatic inflection and nonfunctional harmonies creates tonal
ambiguity throughout both sections. The introduction (mm. 409-424), for example,
consists of three repetitions of a melodically and harmonically chromatic musical phrase.
The first iteration of the phrase spans mm. 409-415. (Fig. 2)

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64 Tyrrell, Czech Opera, 104, paraphrasing Marta Ottlová and Milan Pospíšil, “K problematice české
historické opery 19 stolí [The problems of Czech historical operas of the Nineteenth century]”, Hudební
Though a pedal D in the first measure (boxed above) could indicate that the section is grounded in either D major or minor, the ensuing nonfunctional harmonic progression from $e^7-6/5-D^7-Eb^7-E^7-A^4/2-F#(unison)$ does not clearly establish a key. Smetana moreover uses the final unison $F#$ as a pivot tone from which he begins his second iteration of the phrase. Because both this second phrase as well as the introduction’s final phrase are constructed the same as the first, however, no clear cadence is delivered throughout the whole section and no key consequently is established. Smetana’s reliance on chromatic harmonies in this case as well as his elisions between statements of the phrase resonates with Wagner’s interests in chromaticism and continuous melody.

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65 It is possible to interpret the resolution of the $A^4/2$ to an $F#$ as an authentic cadence in D. The lack of the root of the tonic chord in this case, however, still contributes to a sense of tonal ambiguity.
Though the following scena section is marked as a recitative in the score and correspondingly not in keeping with Wagner’s declamatory practices, Smetana uses chromatic harmonies similar to those of the introduction throughout. Combined with these harmonies, a brief shift in declamation in Ludiše’s part from mm. 432-435 underscores Smetana’s Wagnerian leanings. (Fig. 3)

**Fig. 3.** Bedřich Smetana, *Brandenburgers*, Act I, scene 3, mm. 432-435. Ludiše: I am so depressed, Junoš mine had not even a look for me.

Here, Smetana sets the phrase, “I am so depressed, Junoš mine had not even a look for me,” within a syllabic, exceptionally legato line. The phrase’s harmonic accompaniment features a nonfunctional chord progression from F♯7-G7-G♯º7 that is ultimately left unresolved, nearly a measure of rest following its conclusion. This combination of arioso declamation and chromatic harmonies could serve as an example of the “quasai-Wagnerian arioso” that Ottlová and Pospíšil identify, though it is an isolated instance in the score. Still, an orchestral transition to the ensuing cantabile at the scena’s conclusion
features the same “endless melody” as the introduction, so that the scena is framed by music resonant of Wagner.66

Though Smetana’s writing for Brandenburgers reflects Italian and German influence in certain facets of its formal and harmonic organization, the work’s dramatic characteristics resonate most strongly with French grand opera. Most fundamentally, the opera’s medieval setting aligns with commonly used plots in the French tradition, while its portrayal of opposing political groups is in further keeping with the genre. Brandenburgers does lack, however, the traditional use of two choruses to represent both opposing groups. Instead, the choruses featured in Brandenburgers represent different factions of Bohemian inhabitants at different points in the opera, while the German Brandenburgers are left unrepresented. Smaczny points out that this adaptation may have been motivated by active censorship of “national squabbles” on stage.67 Despite this subtle difference, the active engagement of both choruses during the unfolding action in Brandenburgers still suggests the influence of grand opera. At the end of the opera in this seventh scene of Act III, for example, Junoš has organized a group of both Bohemians (including Jíra) and Brandenburgers to search for Ludiše and her captor. This group, represented as a chorus, actively participates in the action, exclaiming, “Let’s light up torches, let’s make a big noise!...We shall look through all the bushes we shan’t leave a stone unturned! There’s no time for discussion! Let’s go into action!” Earlier, in scene six of the third act, the chorus similarly drives the plot foreword by foreshadowing the action to come, saying, “The wrongdoers know not that vengeance is near, merciless vengeance!” Like the choruses used in French grand opera, then, the choruses in

66 For a discussion of the possible influence of Weber’s Euryanthe on Brandenburgers, refer to Large, 149.
67 Smaczny, 375.
Brandenburgers take on an active role in the unfolding plot rather than simply reflecting on the action. Smetana’s musical characterization of a chorus of peasants earlier in the opera contributes another level of political conflict to the opera’s narrative. When this chorus is first introduced in scene seven of Act I, they are rallying themselves to loot the homes of Prague’s upper class citizens, saying, “You have refused to give in daytime what we have eagerly begged for and so we had to come at night to help ourselves.” The members of the chorus here confirm their low socioeconomic position and go on to introduce an additional conflict brought about by the Brandenburgers’ invasion, exclaiming, “There are no more beggars in Prague, we are equals—man and lord!” Here, the chorus describes a collapse in social hierarchy resulting from the region’s occupation, introducing a secondary conflict into the opera’s narrative. Though portrayed as a mob of rebels initially, the chorus is identified during the tenth scene of Act I as “the people” of Bohemia. The group consequently takes on a nationally charged identity within the opera, becoming what Smaczny describes as the “very embodiment of the aspirations of the common folk of Prague” and “a distinct manifestation of the proletariat” for the opera’s historical viewers.68

While the peasant chorus serves as a national symbol within the narrative, Smetana develops its political meaning in his score by using vernacular folk stylizations for its musical characterization. During the seventh scene of the first act, for example, when Jíra, “king of peasants,” delivers a recitative to the chorus at mm. 960-967, Smetana accompanies Jíra’s line, “What I’ve taken you shall have it, I have had enough of drink,” with a lyrical melody accompanied by syncopated accents. (Fig. 4)  

68 Ibid., 374.
Smetana prominently features these dance-like rhythms again throughout an ensuing section of ballet. Here, adapting the tradition of grand opera *divertissment*, Smetana writes a *skočná*, or folk polka, for the peasant chorus. Organized into an ABA form with a coda, the section features lyrical melodies, conservative harmonies, and the syncopated accents of a polka reflective of Jíra’s earlier accompaniment. (Fig. 5)

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Fig. 5. Bedřich Smetana, Brandenburgers, Act I, scene 7, mm. 1068-1082. Note the change of texture at m. 1080.
Here, Smetana confirms the links between nationalism, folk rhythms, and the peasant chorus that he had hinted at earlier. By relying on a vernacular musical genre and using
folk stylizations to characterize the chorus of peasants, Smetana confirms their belonging to countryside and folk culture. The composer’s decision to draw on ‘native’ musical practice to characterize “the people” of Bohemia likely would have encouraged his audience during the Rebirth to interpret the chorus as a reflection of itself, in turn helping the composer to relay his intended national message.

The text Sabina provides for the chorus as well as Smetana’s musical depiction of it in his score is in keeping with the active and politically charged role of the chorus in grand opera. Both authors take advantage of this role most explicitly at the opera’s close. In a grand finale, the large chorus assembled to search for Ludiše exclaims, “Long live the truth! Long live our rights! Long live the country’s protectors! Good times will again return to us and glory to our Czech homeland.” Within the Rebirth, the chorus’ celebration of the region’s resilience over oppression could have been interpreted as a call for Bohemians to unite against the culturally oppressive Austro-Hungarian government. Even more than a reflection of “the people of Bohemia,” then, the chorus in this case would have resonated with current politics as much as with Sabina’s thirteenth-century narrative.

In a comparison of the traditions of French grand opera and Brandenburgers, Smaczny writes, “Given the potential for constructing the Czech people as political victims against the background of Austrian domination, grand opera might well have seemed an inevitability [for national Czech opera].” The role of the chorus in the opera provides evidence to support such a claim. Still, in addition to the opera’s lack of a politically opposing chorus, Smaczny also argues that the finales included in

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70 Smaczny, 374.
Brandenburgers are less extensive than those of grand opera.\textsuperscript{71} Inconsistencies such as these in Smetana’s use of foreign models makes it difficult to single out French opera as his only influence. Instead, the composer’s application of Rossinian aria conventions, Wagnerian harmony, and the dramatic practices of grand opera reveal his use of a variety of international operatic trends in the work. Smetana’s score in this case illustrates his strategy of drawing on international traditions of form, harmony, and drama to meet the needs of a nationally charged, “Czech” opera. For the portrayal of Czech nationalism in Brandenburgers, then, Smetana relies on a blend of international techniques.

Completion and Reception

Smetana’s blending of international styles for the opera ultimately complicated the work’s reception. In the months following his submission of the score to Harrach in April of 1863, Smetana received no indication of the contest’s results.\textsuperscript{72} Harrach and his panel of six judges were so dissatisfied with Smetana’s contribution as well as those of four other participants that they initially chose not to determine a winner.\textsuperscript{73} They argued that Smetana set the Czech language poorly and that his use of counterpoint was flawed.\textsuperscript{74} They moreover claimed that Sabina’s libretto was not nationalistic enough.\textsuperscript{75} Others not directly involved with the competition such as František Rieger, head of the

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 375.
\textsuperscript{72} Because Count Harrach received no entries by his original deadline of September 30, 1862, he extended the contest for a full year, moving the final deadline to September of 1863.
\textsuperscript{73} Other entrants included Maňr, Jaromír, Duke of Bohemia, on a libretto by his wife, Emilie Ujková; Adolf Pozděňa, The Treasure, based on a play by Václav Klicpera; and František Šír, Drahomiřa (libretto). For further discussion of each, see Tyrrell, Czech Opera, 126-130. Harrach’s panel of judges, announced in December of 1863, included Jan Kittl, head of Prague’s conservatory; Josef Krejčí, head of organ school; and poet Karel Erben. August Ambros, a music critic, later withdrew from the panel. See Large, 143, and Tyrrell, Czech Opera, 69.
\textsuperscript{74} Large, 145.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid. Tyrrell conversely argues that Sabina’s libretto was accepted as unambiguously nationalistic. Tyrrell, Czech Opera, 129.
old Czech Party, disagreed with Smetana’s avoidance of folk melodies and use of dissonant harmonies, while Maýr opposed both Smetana’s use of harmony and the opera’s intricate plot line.76

Despite the panel’s lack of enthusiasm for the work, František Liegert, director of the Provisional Theater and supporter of Smetana, began making plans to stage Brandenburgers as early as 1863. Maýr resisted initially, however, so Liegert placed Smetana in charge of the production once he was able to overrule the conductor in 1865.77 Smetana described the stress of the ensuing rehearsals in his diary, writing, “The work was tiring to prepare, especially with the singers. I had to hammer the parts into their heads note by note. There were rehearsals with the soloists and chorus for six days from 10am to 4pm and I returned home each evening quite exhausted.”78 Despite difficult rehearsals, the opera’s premiere on January 5, 1866 was enthusiastically received by audiences. “The opera was liked and was excellent,” Smetana explained in a letter, “I was called on stage nine times. I conducted myself…Even though I did not expect it the house was sold out and critics, both Czech and German, are full of praise.”79 A review of the opera published in Národní Listy further claimed,

> We know Mr. Smetana to be a man of great gifts. He alone has the vocation to make the name of Czech music glorious. The public received his opera with enthusiasm and the work should indicate to the directors the way in which national opera must proceed.80

In keeping with its warm reception, the opera was staged eleven times within the first two months of its opening.81

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76 Clapham, 32.
77 For more information, see Large, 143-144.
78 Smetana, diary, January, 1866, trans. Large, 145.
79 Smetana to Fröjda Benecke, January, 1866, trans. Ibid.
80 Smetana, Národní listy (Prague), 16 January 1886, trans. Ibid.
81 Ibid. The opera was only performed 26 times during Smetana’s lifetime. Ibid, 159, footnote 2.
In the wake of his success, Smetana was named as the winner of Harrach’s opera competition. On March 27, 1865 Smetana received a letter from the Count explaining, “Your score has complied with the rules of the competition and the judges have been unanimous in their decision to award you the prize of six hundred gulden. My heartiest congratulations!”\(^\text{82}\) In addition to his victory, *Brandenburgers*’ success ultimately contributed to Smetana’s appointment as conductor for Provisional Theater following Maýr.\(^\text{83}\)

**Looking Forward**

Though Smetana relied on a blend of diverse international styles to create a nationally charged opera in the case of *Brandenburgers*, he revealed his particular interest in Wagnerian-style opera in an article for *Národný Listy* published on July 15, 1864. In addition to calling for more “truthful” performances, Smetana argued in the article that, “operatic performances must be elevated to the level of drama…this is the only way to reach the honor due to us, before the whole of Europe, as a nation of born musicians.”\(^\text{84}\) Smetana’s emphasis on opera as, first and foremost, a dramatic work in this case aligns with Wagner’s theatrical concepts. Earlier in the article, Smetana moreover argued for the performance of more German works, particularly those of Wagner. He explained, “Since Goethe’s *Faust* has been performed on our stage, this same stage need not be afraid of great music dramas by German composers. Wagner, too, could be

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\(^\text{82}\) Ibid., 146
\(^\text{83}\) Clapham, 34.
performed, if only there were an appropriate theatre!"\textsuperscript{85} Smetana concluded this thought with a predictive, “But there is time enough for that.”\textsuperscript{86} In accordance with his projection, Smetana began to experiment more overtly with Wagnerian style in his next operas, particularly in his third opera, \textit{Dalibor}. Though his use of the new style brought about charged exchanges among critics, the composer chose to continue to rely on Wagnerian-influenced writing for his fourth and most deliberately national opera, \textit{Libuše}. Just as he relied on a blending of international styles in \textit{Brandenburgers}, then, Smetana continued to draw on the operatic traditions of other cultures in his composition of \textit{Libuše}. Unlike his inclusiveness in \textit{Brandenburgers}, however, Smetana actively “others” some international trends in the latter opera. On the whole—as I will argue in the next chapter—Smetana’s creation of Czech musical identity for \textit{Libuše} acknowledges Bohemia’s ties to Western Europe while underscoring the region’s increasing political and aesthetic independence.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 149.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
International Stereotype and Libuše

Although Smetana relied on Italian and French models for Brandenburgers, his complicated relationship with Wagner (and “German” music more broadly) was the clearest influence during his composition of Libuše (1869-1872). Following the premiere of his third opera, Dalibor (1868), critic František Pivoda published a series of articles in the Old Czech paper Pokrok negatively responding to the work.87 Here, Pivoda accused Smetana of both monopolizing the production of Czech music in Prague and of writing in the style of Wagner in Dalibor. He even later suggested that Dalibor’s title character should be renamed “Dalibor Wagner.”88 In response to Pivoda’s accusations, Smetana argued in the Young Czech paper, Národní listy, that the critic was not knowledgeable enough to discuss Wagner and that there was more national character in Dalibor than in any other opera.89 The composer further wrote in 1882,

I am not counterfeiting [the work of] an esteemed composer; I just marvel at his greatness and make use of all that I recognize as good and beautiful and above all truthful in art. You already knew that about me long ago, but others do not know it and think I introduce Wagnerism!!! I am sufficiently occupied with Smetanism, since that is the only honest style.90

Continuing to defend his artistic individuality in this case, Smetana deliberately distances himself from the possibility of Wagner’s influence.

Despite Smetana’s protests, he had taken a clear interest in Wagner in the past. In 1859, he had traveled to Weimar for a performance of the prelude to Tristan und Isolde, and also traveled to Munich in 1870 for a performance of Das Rheingold as well as three

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87 Pivoda, Pokrok (Prague), February 22, 1870 and March 3, 1870, paraphrased in Clapham, 37.
88 Trans. Locke, 23. Authors Clapham and Large both point out that Pivoda’s attitude may have been a brought about Smetana’s decision to recruit foreign performers for his opera productions at the Provisional Theater. See Clapham, 38 and Large, 233-234. Characteristics of Dalibor that may have inspired the accusation of “Wagnerism” include its through-composed form and general lack of choruses and large ensemble sections.
89 Smetana, Národní listy (Prague), March 8, 1870, trans. Clapham, 39.
90 Smetana to Adolf Čech, December 4,1882, trans. Ibid., 100. Clapham takes the quote from P. Pražák, Smetanovy zpěvohry, vol. ii (Prague, 1948), 133.
performances of *Die Walküre*. Smetana revealed his excitement for the latter work in particular in a letter to his wife:

> I like the opera exceptionally, and the scene is grandiose and stupefying…The music is exceptionally beautiful, and in time must succeed everywhere. Here, in general, one hears just Wagner’s music—that would be something for Mr. Pivoda. Our Czechs living here are all passionate Wagnerians.\(^91\)

Beyond his enthusiasm, Smetana demonstrates here an awareness of his Czech audience’s tastes. Young Czech critic Otakar Hostinský later relayed an anecdote in which Smetana discussed the perception of Wagnerism in *Dalibor* as well as Wagner’s reception in Prague. Hostinský explains that when he first met with the composer,

> I soon saw an opportunity to put to him a direct question about *Dalibor*. As he was answering my question, the master was grave: ‘Hitherto it has been performed but little. The public does not know what to do with it; they are against it because certain critics have persuaded them that it is too much in the Wagner style.’ I pointed out that sooner or later it would probably be inevitable for Czech opera to follow that direction. ‘Of course,’ was Smetana’s answer, ‘but not now. It is quite impossible at present. Such progress must be prepared gradually and at the same time we must follow our own path, suited to our own conditions. *Dalibor* hardly follows the same lines as the *Flying Dutchman*, yet do you know what I was told? That I had wanted to outdo *Tristan*, that I was only just beginning where Wagner had left off. From this it is clear that those gentlemen understand nothing and the public still less.’\(^92\)

Smetana reveals here that he considered Wagner to be a leader in music composition, but that he felt his Czech audience in Prague was not knowledgeable enough to appreciate (or even recognize) Wagner’s style. Through his acknowledgement of both Wagner’s innovations and the need for Czechs to “follow their own path,” the composer further broadly addresses issues dealing with influence, artistic integrity, and nationalism. This latter dynamic came to significantly influence Smetana’s evolving concepts of national opera during his composition of *Libuše* and underlie the opera’s construction.\(^93\) While Smetana adapted international styles to create a Czech national aesthetic for

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\(^93\) Smetana had begun work on *Libuše* in June of 1869 and completed the score on Nov 12, 1872.
Brandenburgers, he more actively placed a Czech musical identity in opposition to international styles in Libuše, particularly those more associated with Wagner and the “German” culture. Though he did make use of a Wagnerian-style non-numbered form as well as recurring themes in his organization of Libuše, the composer’s vilification of musical characteristics likely perceived as “German” by his audiences throughout serves to “other” the latter culture. By playing to both the complex reception of Wagner in Prague and international musical stereotypes in this case, Smetana calls on internationalism in Libuše to distinguish a Czech musical identity from greater European operatic trends.

“Czech” and “German” Musical Stereotypes during the Rebirth

Though the cultural rivalry between Czechs and German-Bohemians extended back to the middle ages, its persistence through the nineteenth century resulted in the establishment of widely recognized musical stereotypes for the two cultures. In his article, “Ethnicity and Musical Identity in the Czech lands: A Group of Vignettes,” Bruno Nettl explains that these stereotypes most broadly linked Czechs with folksong and Germans with “art” music. The link between Czechs and a folk music tradition was developed particularly during the 1860s with the publication of two exceptionally extensive collections of folksongs. Both collections, František Sušil’s Moravian Folksongs with Tunes Included with the Text (Moravské národní písné s nápěvy do textu vřaděnými) and Karel Jaromír Erben’s Czech Folksongs and Nursery Rhymes

94 For more on Smetana’s use of themes or leitmotives in the work, refer to Clapham 100-103 or Large 224-232.
95 For more information on the cultures’ rivalry in the Middle Ages, refer to Sayer 29-52.
96 Nettl, 274.
(Prostonárodní české písně a říkadla), contained the texts to nearly 2,500 songs. The increased interest in Czech folksong caused the repertoire and its perceived characteristic sound to become one of the most widely recognized symbols of Czech culture during the Rebirth. Nettle explains, “When Prague Germans thought of folk music, they thought of the Czech; the fine thing about Czech music was its rich folk music, and if Czech art music was good, this was due to its use of folk material.” Tyrrell further points out that Czech and German Bohemians generally agreed that Czech folksongs were “gentler” than that of the “harsh” German tradition.

This emphasis on a repertoire of distinctly Czech folksong was further complemented by a prominent stereotype concerning the Czechs’ natural musicality that originated in the eighteenth century. Charles Burney, for example, described Bohemia as the “Conservatory of Europe” and Bohemians as “the most musical people of Germany, or, perhaps all of Europe.” In a document titled Observations on Prague by a Foreign Traveler, another author similarly writes, “Whether the general talent of the Bohemians for music springs from the temperament of the nation, or is a heritage from the land's former greatness, is a question that cannot be answered, at least by me. But that it exists is clear.” While Bohemians were gaining a reputation as a particularly musical society, however, the Bach revival in contrast helped to establish a strong link between German style and counterpoint. The movement ultimately helped to establish counterpoint as a

97 Ibid., 270-271.
98 Ibid., 276.
99 Vladimír Karbusický, Mezi lidovou písní a šlágrem [Between Folksong and Hit Song] (Prague: Supraphon, 1968), 38, paraphrased in Tyrrell, Czech Opera, 212.
stereotypically “German” technique by the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{102} During the second half of the century, Wagner’s reception in Prague further caused “German” music to be associated with thick textures and chromaticism, as evidenced by Pivoda’s writing.

The polemics surrounding national opera during the Rebirth reflected these “Czech” and “German” musical stereotypes. Pivoda’s arguments in favor of Italian and French operatic styles, both of which prominently featured homophonic textures, functional harmonies, and lyricism, was in keeping with stereotypically “Czech” musical characteristics as well as the critic’s own argument for the use of folksong quotation in national Czech works. Pivoda’s arguments that Wagnerian-style thick textures and chromaticism were not appropriate to a musical Czech identity, however, cast them as belonging to a cultural “other” or, more specifically, “German” culture. Regardless of the validity of this contrast of musical styles, the desire of the Czech community during the Rebirth to culturally distinguish itself from the German influence resulted in the promotion of such musical stereotypes.

Because a uniquely “Czech” musical identity existed primarily in historical reception rather than as a set of guidelines for the production of “Czech” music during the nineteenth century, it is difficult for modern listeners to speculate on the aesthetic’s precise characteristics. As a nationally and politically motivated construction informed by the Rebirth, a “Czech” sound served most fundamentally to distinguish Czech musical culture from both “German” counterpoint and “Wagnerian” textures and chromaticism,

\textsuperscript{102} While Bach’s reception in Prague warrants further research, Nicholas Temperley and Peter Wollny point out in their article, “Bach Revival” for \textit{Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online} (http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/01708), that other cities in the Austrian and German lands such as Leipzig, Berlin, and particularly Vienna were exceptionally active in the Bach revival. In addition to these locations’ close proximity to Prague, Smetana’s various trips to each meant that he could have encountered the movement either in Bohemia or during his travels.
so that it was primarily defined by what it was not rather than what is was. Instead of an autonomous aesthetic, “Czechness” existed primarily only in contrast to other cultures—in particular, as a sound that was “not German.” At the same time, the writings of Pivoda, Hostinský, Smetana, and others suggest that certain concrete musical attributes did adhere to what they considered a “Czech” sound—homophonic textures, lyricism, and harmonic stability—and that this set of characteristics was perceived as “Czech” by historical listeners. Pivoda’s writings in particular point to this idea, while Hostinský’s discussions of a national voice, though often challenging this concept on a fundamental level, represented a response to a more widely accepted identification of a “Czech” sound with the characteristics of folksong.103 The identification of homophonic textures, lyricism, and harmonic stability as uniquely “Czech,” however, is problematic, as these characteristics were shared by a number of Western European traditions. The linking of “Czechness” with folksong is further problematic because, as Beckerman argues, no folk stylization traditionally associated with “Czech” music is genuinely unique to the culture.104 Citing the research of Vladimír Karbusický, Bedřich Václavec, and Robert Smetana, Tyrell also points out that few supposedly “authentic” Czech folk melodies, under the influence of Western Classical styles practiced in the region during the eighteenth century, existed in their original form by the nineteenth century.105 Historical authors’ identification of homophony, lyricism, and harmonic stability as “Czech” was consequently based primarily on false constructs. Still, because I am interested here in the

103 For more information, see discussions of the two critics’ general viewpoints in Chapter 1, “Smetana, Nationalism, and the Rebirth,” 13-14.
104 Beckerman, 64.
105 For further discussion of Czech folksong’s “authenticity” as well as information concerning the research of Karbusický, Václavek, and Smetana, see Tyrrell, Czech Opera, 210, 212. Hussite hymns such as “Ye Who Are God’s Warriors” are preserved in their original form, however, in period texts such as the Jistebníký Kancionál (mid-fifteenth century).
ways in which nineteenth-century audiences would have heard “Czechness” (in the reception rather than construction of a national idiom), I will refer to these characteristics in the following discussion and analysis as “stereotypically Czech.” In keeping with nineteenth-century listening practices, I will also refer to counterpoint, polyphony, and harmonic instability as “stereotypically German.” This strategy is still exceptionally problematic, but is intended to acknowledge historical reception and assist in discussing “Czech” musical identity using the terms established by its nineteenth-century formulators.

**Stereotype and Libuše**

Smetana’s consistent pairing of homophonic textures, functional harmonies, and lyricism with Libuše’s protagonists and his corresponding reservation of imitative textures, nonfunctional harmonies, and chromaticism to develop the opera’s antagonist plays to the dialogue of musical stereotypes during the era. By linking his protagonists with “Czech” music and its antagonist with “other” music, Smetana musically distances the opera’s villain from Czech values. That the antagonist in this case was a German-empathizing Czech moreover alludes to a deliberate contrast between “Czech” and “German” music on the part of the composer. Though Smetana does not overtly discuss this cultural strategy in his writing, the possibility of such a reading warrants discussion. First, however, it is necessary to address the work’s libretto to reveal relationships between Smetana’s score and the opera’s narrative. Then, a close analysis of Smetana’s placement of musical styles within the frame of the narrative will help illustrate his consistent strategy of aligning contrasting ‘national’ styles with the opera’s protagonists.
and antagonist. Smetana’s consistent use of ‘German-coded’ styles to characterize his antagonist in a variety of dramatic situations ultimately reveals the strategy’s dramatic function of musically “othering” the antagonist within the work.

The Libretto

Librettist and playwright Josef Wenzig (1807-1876) originally delivered a draft of Libuše to the composer as early as April of 1866, only three months after the premiere of Brandenburgers.¹⁰⁶ Though Smetana was occupied both with revisions to The Bartered Bride and the composition of Dalibor (1868) at the time, he enthusiastically received the libretto.¹⁰⁷ In keeping with the Rebirth’s cultural and literary emphasis, Wenzig based his scenario on the legend of the mythological Czech ruler and prophetess for which the opera was named, drawing information for the plot from three documents that rose to popularity during the national movement. Wenzig’s primary source was medieval church delegate Cosmas’ (ca.1045-1125) Chronica Boemorum, which contained the earliest documentation of the Czechs’ founding legends. The Zelená hora manuscripts, though

¹⁰⁶ Smetana originally met Wenzig through the cultural society Umělecká beseda (Artistic Union), for which Wenzig was chair. Umělecká beseda was founded in 1863 for the purpose of providing a politically unbiased environment to facilitate artists’ discussions of aesthetic issues. Smetana was named the president of the music division on March 13, 1863. See Locke, 21 and Large, 127 for more information on the society’s organization. In addition to his duties within Umělecká beseda, Wenzig taught German and geography and founded the first Czech Realschule, or technical grammar school, and further authored plays that had been performed in both the Estate and Provisional theaters. Tyrrell, Czech Opera, 104.
¹⁰⁷ The Bartered Bride failed to impress after its initial premiere in 1866. In his memoirs, Josef Srb-Debrnov reports one viewer’s response to the opera as, “That’s not a comic opera—it’s a failure and won’t be able to hold its own. The opening chorus is good, but I didn’t like the rest.” Trans. Bartoš, 102. Smetana, himself, acknowledged the work’s poor reception, writing, “Poor Thomé [the Provisional Theater’s director] has been forced to pay me two hundred gulden out of his own pocket and receipts have failed to cover the costs. He has since asked me to terminate my contract for all further performances.” Smetana, diary, June, 1866, trans. Large, 165. Ultimately, after several revisions, the work grew in popularity and was performed 114 times between its premiere and the opening of the National Theater in 1883. See Tyrrell, Czech Opera, 40. It was also Smetana’s first opera to travel abroad. Its first international performance was in St. Petersburg on Jan 11, 1871, though audiences here did not receive the opera particularly well either. See Large, 168-169.
later determined fraudulent, also informed Wenzig’s writing, while the first volume of Palacký’s *History of the Czech Nation in Bohemia and Moravia* was a third important source, and one that inspired Wenzig to conclude the opera with a series of *tableaux vivants*.\(^\text{108}\) In Wenzig’s draft, these tableaux depicted scenes revealed to Libuše during a prophetic vision, each portraying a highly influential political leader or warrior in Bohemian history. The first, for example, featured Prince Břetislav who joined Bohemia and Moravia in the 10\(^{\text{th}}\) century. The next five depicted Jaroslav Šternbeck, Přemysl Ottokar II, Elizabeth of the Přemyslids, Prokop the Great, and Poděbrady, each of whom either defended the region from foreign invasion, expanded the territory, or, in the case Elizabeth, established the first Bohemian university between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries.\(^\text{109}\) Wenzig deliberately stopped the chronological progression of these scenes, however, immediately before the region yielded to Austrian rule.

In order to emphasize Wenzig’s anti-Hapsburg message, Smetana chose to present these scenes within the context of an extended dialogue for Libuše that climaxes with her statement, “My dear Czech people shall never perish, they will resist all of hell’s horrors!” Further, he prominently featured the Hussite hymn *Ye who are God’s warriors* (*Kdož jste Boží bojovníci*) in his settings for the fifth and sixth tableaux.\(^\text{110}\) The quotation was an exception to the composer’s usual avoidance of folksong, but appealed to a greater tradition of Czech political resistance. It was originally used in military battles during the Hussite Revolution in the early fifteenth century and had, for centuries after, served as a national rallying cry for the Czechs.

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\(^\text{109}\) See Large, 217-218.  
\(^\text{110}\) For more on Smetana’s avoidance of folksongs, refer to Chapter 1, Smetana, Nationalism, and the Rebirth, p. 14-15.
Beyond both collaborators’ anti-Hapsburg contributions to the tableaux, Wenzig’s scenario for the opera at large helped to establish the work’s intended national message. The opera begins with two characters who introduce the narrative’s two separate, but interrelated conflicts. The first, Radmila, anxiously summons Libuše to resolve a dispute between two brothers. Though not fully explained until a trial during scene four of Act I, the brothers’ dispute concerns the redistribution of land following their father’s death. The opera’s antagonist, Chrudoš, argues during the trial that, “like our neighbors, the Germans,” the oldest son should inherit the entirety of the family’s estate rather than dividing it equally as Czech tradition prescribes. Chrudoš’ character is placed in further opposition to Czech values at the conclusion of Libuše’s judgment when she rules in favor of his younger brother, Šťálav. Following her pronouncement, Chrudoš insults Libuše by encouraging her to take on a husband so that a man could rule. Chrudoš then storms out of the scene, leaving a shocked audience of onlookers concerned that he will wage war against the region. The second character featured at the opera’s opening, Krasava, addresses the scenario’s secondary conflict by frantically reacting to the news of the brothers’ fight. Her charged emotional state reflects her own involvement in the brothers’ conflict. Hurt by Chrudoš’ apparent lack of romantic interest, Krasava had been flirting with Šťálav in a successful attempt to make Chrudoš jealous. Krasava’s manipulative behavior had provoked Chrudoš to turn against his younger sibling, further fueling the brothers’ land dispute.

Wenzig’s portrayal of a disloyal Bohemian as the opera’s primary antagonist resonates with both the political struggles that fueled the Rebirth as well as Sabina’s scenario for Brandenburgers. While both operas overtly portray anti-Hapsburg sentiment,
Brandenburgers through its use of chorus and Libuše through its tableaux vivants, both works also suggest that the disloyal Bohemian was an even greater cultural nemesis.

Smetana provides further development for this theme within his score for Libuše by using German-coded musical tropes—the tropes of a musical “other”—to characterize Chrudoš and his actions, placing the character in even further opposition to Czech values. Closer analysis of Smetana’s establishment of a musical “other” in his score, however, reveals the complexity of this strategy. In order to begin to examine this cultural relationship, it is necessary to begin by more broadly addressing Smetana’s general juxtaposition of stereotypically “Czech” and “German” styles within the narrative. Ultimately, the composer’s consistent use of imitative textures and nonfunctional harmonies to develop Chrudoš’ character at both high and low points of the drama helps to reveal his use of “other” music for characterization. Though the limited scope of this paper does not allow for a comprehensive analysis of Smetana’s settings for all characters and conflicts in the opera, a discussion of representative examples serves to illustrate this broader compositional strategy.

“Czech” and “German” styles in Libuše: Establishing a Pattern

Smetana begins to juxtapose opposing textures and harmonic and melodic treatments from the opera’s outset, aligning their use with alternations of subject matter in the opera’s text. During discussions of Czech subjects or characters, Smetana generally relies on stereotypically “Czech” characteristics including homophonic textures, functional harmonies, and lyrical melodic lines in his accompaniment. When the subject changes to address either Chrudoš, his conflict, or the Hapsburg oppressors, however, the
composer switches to “German” characteristics such as imitative textures, nonfunctional harmonies, and chromaticism. Radmila’s opening dialogue, for example, is directed to Libuše at first, describing her as an “illustrious” and “mighty princess,” but then continues on to address Chrudoš’ rebellion. Reflecting these alternations of subject, Smetana accompanies Radmila’s initial text with a sustained C major chord, but, transitioning with a descending chromatic line in the lower strings, switches to a series of nonfunctional seventh and augmented chords once she begins to address the two brothers’ conflict. (Fig. 6)

**Fig. 6.** Bedřich Smetana, *Libuše*, Act I, scene 1, mm. 1-7. Radmila: You, Krok’s illustrious daughter, mighty princess, thank you, thank you, that at my prayer you’ve summoned the elders to subdue [the evil strife which arose about my father’s estate]. The chromatic descending line, boxed below, marks the beginning of a series of nonfunctional seventh chords.
Solidifying these musico-dramatic connections, Smetana goes on to accompany the ensuing dialogue (in which Krasava reacts to the unfolding conflict that Chrudoš has caused) using a fast, chromatic motive in an imitative texture. Though he does incorporate a pedal Bb, Smetana prevents it from providing a sense of stability by layering another succession of nonfunctional seventh chords above the bass tone. (Fig. 7)

**Fig. 7.** Bedřich Smetana, *Libuše*, Act I, scene 1, mm. 15-17. Krasava: *O woe! I know whose guilt it is*
When the narrative again returns to Radmila, however, who once more sings of Libuše’s power and the region’s respect for her as a ruler, Smetana resolves the instability of his previous setting for Krasava to a sustained, root position D major chord. Over the course of these three exchanges, Smetana begins to establish a pattern of musically characterizing Czech topics with stereotypically “Czech” music and the opera’s conflict (as well as its villain) with “German” techniques.

Smetana’s settings for the opera’s first two arias help to confirm and expand his strategy of stylistic juxtaposition.111 First, Smetana’s accompaniment for Libuše’s entrance aria is in keeping with the style he previously used to develop her character during Radmila’s dialogue. Here, Libuše delivers an extended prayer to the gods in which she asks for their blessing and protection. Smetana features functional harmonies in his accompaniment and harmonically unifies the section by moving between the related tonal areas of Eb major, G major, and C major before returning to Eb major. The vocal line’s generally stepwise motion contributes to the section’s lyricism. (Fig. 8)

111 Because Libuše is not a numbered opera and Smetana provides no clear indication between alternations of recitative and aria, the use of the word “aria” here is subjective. In this case, however, it is meant to refer to extended sets of dialogue that are distinguished musically in the score by unified textures, motives, or tonal centers.
In addition to these stereotypically “Czech” techniques, some scholars point to the aria’s unifying motive, dubbed “horn call harmonies,” as evidence of Smetana’s national musical style.\textsuperscript{112} Consisting here of dotted eighth and sixteenth note groupings, the harmonic movement of the motive, progressing through the harmonic series, mimics the sound of a chorus of hunting horns (see Fig. 8). While this gesture is not unique to Smetana’s compositions, scholars cite its prominence throughout Libuše as well as the composer’s following work as evidence of his “original” style and, by extension, a nationalistic style.\textsuperscript{113} Additionally, Smetana’s use of “horn call harmonies” to describe Czech topics resonates with a link between horns and the Czech landscape, which emerged as a result of developments in the Czech language during the nineteenth century.

\textsuperscript{112} David Bruce Mead, “The Symphonic Structure of Smetana’s Má vlast,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1994), 43, 70.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 70.
Linguists labeled orchestral horns as *lesní rohy*, or “forest horns,” during the era, linking them with the Bohemian countryside and with traditional hunting practices. Whether this link was at the forefront of Smetana’s mind while he was composing and regardless of any inherent nationalism associated with “horn call harmonies,” the motive’s prominence in settings for Czech characters throughout *Libuše*, including the title character’s opening aria, suggests that Smetana associated horns with a particularly Czech sound.

In contrast to his introduction of new “Czech” musical techniques in *Libuše*’s aria, Smetana’s setting for Krasava’s following aria further develops the function of “German” musical styles in the opera. In this aria, Krasava metaphorically foreshadows the unfolding political conflict brought about by Chrudoš by describing the fiery destruction of the Czech landscape. Though the music in this case is grounded by a pedal G, Smetana uses highly chromatic harmonic motion under a fragmented texture to set Krasava’s declamation. Specifically, he uses a chromatically ascending bass line above the pedal tone to alternate between German augmented chords and seventh chords. Smetana also chromatically inflects each chord tone in the upper voices, with the exception of the tritone appearing in the oboe parts, so that the harmony is further distorted. (Fig. 9)
Together, Smetana’s use of highly chromatic harmonies and a fragmented texture to set Krasava’s reaction to Chrudoš’ actions is in keeping with the musical pattern of aligning stereotypically “Czech” writing with Czech subjects and “German” with the opera’s political conflict. In addition to providing characterization for the work, Smetana’s deliberate contrast of “national” styles in this case also serves to emphasize a distinction between Czech and German cultural practices and values. It is possible to interpret Smetana’s use of “German” style writing as programmatic in some instances, as many composers underscore moments of peril and natural disaster using dissonant harmonies and fragmented textures. This descriptive function, however, primarily serves to provide
one additional dramatic layer to the tropes’ symbol of villainy or “otherness” within the work. Smetana continues to develop and confirm this cultural dynamic through his generally consistent pairing of “German” music and Chrudoš regardless of the drama’s respective level of tension throughout the work.

*Comparison of Smetana’s Settings for Chrudoš at High and Low Points of Drama*

While Smetana may have begun to establish a relationship between “Czech” and “German” musical styles during the opera’s introduction, the composer’s consistent settings for Chrudoš and his actions, regardless of the degree of drama in each instance, helps to confirm the style’s function as characterization rather than strictly plot development. To foreshadow Chrudoš’ trial at the outset of the first act’s third scene, for example, Smetana draws on stereotypically “non-Czech” music featuring conflicting rhythms and tonal centers in his accompaniment. He begins by introducing an ostinato pattern in 9/8 meter that is grounded in D by a pedal tone. Following the first two statements of the ostinato, however, the composer writes a new melody below that he notates in a meter of 3/4, while the melody’s natural accents further create a hemiola in 2/4. The result is a rhythmically destabilizing juxtaposition of a compound meter in the accompaniment and duple subdivisions in the melody. Smetana develops this contrast harmonically by scoring the melody in the mixolydian mode of the ostinato’s relative major. ¹¹⁴ *(Fig. 10)*

¹¹⁴ Smetana calls on this combination again in scene 4 of the opera’s third act when Libuše’s new husband, Přemysl, calls Chrudoš to appear in front of him, though here he writes the juxtaposed melody in relative major of the ostinato rather than the mixolydian mode (mm. 305-310).
Smetana’s use of rhythmically and harmonically contradictory music in this case is consistent with his strategy of aligning “other” music with the opera’s national conflict. Though his rhythmic treatment is not characteristically “German” in this case, his use of nonfunctional harmonies might well have been received as such by Czech audiences, who—under the influence of critics—had begun to associate complex chromaticism with a vaguely “Wagnerian” style.

For Chrudoš’ delivery of his insult to Libuše, perhaps one of the highest dramatic points in the opera, Smetana returns to nonfunctional harmonies in his accompaniment. Specifically, Smetana accompanies the text, “I would rather the world fall apart first,” with a succession of French augmented sixth chords and then sets Chrudoš’ following, “Woe to birds when an evil snake creeps up, woe to them whom a woman rules, inconstant,” with a series of augmented triads changing on each beat. (Fig. 11)
Smetana’s use of nonfunctional harmonies in this case is in keeping both with his techniques of characterization over the course of the opera as well as the elevated drama of this section. Later, however, Smetana sets Chrudoš’ secondary romantic conflict using the same dramatic musical techniques. When Chrudoš says to Krasava, “You are faithless and falsehood I can’t suffer,” for example, Smetana writes both characters’ love themes in a brief canon where the voices enter at a tritone apart.¹¹⁵ (Fig. 12)

¹¹⁵ For more on Smetana’s use of themes or leitmotives in the work, refer to Clapham 100-103 or Large 224-232.
When Chrudoš similarly declares, “Ah, how forcefully in my heart are her ardent words implanted! They, like flaming arrows, penetrate all my being,” Smetana again accompanies the text with an imitative texture and, in this case, uses syncopated rhythms in the upper voices. Though he grounds the section using a pedal tone on B, he also scores a nonfunctional progression of seventh chords above. (Fig. 13)

Fig. 13. Bedřich Smetana, Libuše, Act II, scene 2, mm. 573-575 (vocal and strings parts only). Chrudoš: Ah, how forcefully in my heart are her ardent words implanted!

In both of these instances, the “German” style music Smetana has used to characterize Chrudoš over the course of the opera appears during periods of relative dramatic calm, confirming that the style serves to musically characterize the antagonist as an “other” rather than strictly developing the narrative’s tension. By using this strategy of characterization over the course of the opera, Smetana confirms that “German-perceived” tropes, more than enhancing the drama’s tension, serve to musically develop Chrudoš’ character as displaced from Czech values.
Smetana’s Characterization for Přemysl: Establishing a Foil

Smetana’s strategies for musically characterizing Přemysl, Libuše’s chosen husband, more soundly confirming Smetana’s pattern of musical characterization by creating a foil to his musical treatment of Chrudoš. As a Czech mythological hero and the character within Libuše that ultimately punishes Chrudoš, Přemysl is dramatically placed in strong opposition to the antagonist. Smetana’s settings for two of Přemysl’s arias correspondingly musically provide a “Czech” contrast to Smetana’s “German” characterization of the protagonist, confirming the function of the “national” styles as cultural symbols within the score. Přemysl’s first aria, in keeping with his own status as a Czech cultural symbol, concerns the sacredness of the lime tree within Czech society. Smetana’s accompanying music, particularly during the aria’s refrain of “O ye lime trees,” features a homophonic texture and functional harmonies as well as stepwise and triadic motion in the vocal line, all techniques consistent with stereotypically “Czech” folk idioms. (Fig. 14)

27 In Czech mythology, Přemysl became the first leader of the Přemyslid dynasty, which ruled Bohemia from the ninth century to 1306.

117 The lime (linden) tree was established as a Czech national symbol following the wide dissemination of Kollár’s poem Sláva’s Daughter (Slávy dcera) during the era. Tyrrell, Czech Opera, 3-4.
Still, one instance of chromaticism at the phrase, “O, be ye ever its [the Czech people’s] image, a symbol of its virtue, strength,” warrants acknowledgment. Here, the composer chromatically alters a G minor chord (beginning in m. 1101) over several measures to transition to a Bb major chord. At m. 1104, this process results in the simultaneous scoring of an E natural and Eb against a Gb in the bass. (Fig. 15)
Fig. 15. Bedřich Smetana, Libuše, Act II, scene 4, mm. 1101-1106. Přemysl: *O be ye ever its [the Czech people’s] image, a symbol of its virtue, strength!*
Although it is difficult to speculate on Smetana’s dramatic intent in scoring this chromatic passage, it is possible that the composer’s interest in the ‘progress’ of Czech music and his belief that Czech music would ultimately follow Wagner’s direction motivated the decision. Despite this subtle deviation, Smetana’s harmonic setting for the Přemysl’s second aria more soundly returns to his use of stereotypically “Czech” music to develop Czech characters. In this case, Přemysl, in the process of leaving his home to be with Libuše, offers his blessings to both his farmhands and land before also discussing the cultural and symbolic meaning of his plough. In his musical settings for these moments of national reflection, Smetana prominently features the same harmonically
stable and perhaps nationally charged “horn call harmonies” as he originally introduced in Libuše’s entrance aria. The texture the composer uses throughout the section, featuring the same rising and falling arpeggios in thirds, for example, derive from his “horn call harmonies,” while he further answers each of Přemysl’s blessings with the motive in its original form. (Fig. 16)

**Fig. 16.** Bedřich Smetana, *Libuše*, Act II, scene 5, mm. 1291-1298. Přemysl: *Peace be with you, my dears [farmhands], bless you with my trembling hands!* The “horn call harmonies” motive is boxed below.
In addition to this second aria’s homophonic texture, Smetana’s use of static harmonies throughout is consistent with his greater pattern of characterization over the course of the opera and contributes an added layer of development to the technique. By portraying Přemysl, the character who ultimately reprimands Chrudoš and delivers Libuše from insult, as “Czech” within his score, Smetana provides a musical foil to his settings for the antagonist, a deliberate contrast that musically and dramatically confirms the antagonist’s symbol as an “other” within the work.

**Conclusion**

Though a complete analysis of Smetana’s settings for characters and conflicts over the course of the opera is impossible here, these representative examples begin to illustrate Smetana’s dramatic alignment of stereotypically “Czech” and “German” musical styles with loyal Czech characters and the opera’s antagonist respectively. On the
most fundamental level (political motive aside), this relationship serves the dramatic purpose of developing tension at points of conflict within the opera’s narrative. Within \textit{Libuše}, however, the relationship also operates more subtly by contributing to the establishment of a Czech musical identity for the piece, the composer’s alignment of “German” and “Czech” serving as a deliberate analogue to Czech and German aesthetic values. The polemics surrounding the production of nationalistic Czech music at the time Smetana was composing \textit{Libuše} were centered on musically distinguishing a “Czech” sound and therefore separating it from other musical idioms. Smetana’s treatment of contrasting styles in the opera would seem to speak to these goals as well as lay bare their political resonances.

Critics such as Pivoda made it clear that Wagnerian-style writing was a particularly controversial technique to be included in nationalistic Czech works and instead elevated Italian and French styles as ideal models for national expression. Though Smetana’s various writings make it clear he disagreed with Pivoda’s total rejection of Wagner, the composer was equally aware of both his audience’s cultural biases and a more widely acknowledged need to establish a Czech identity (and sound) as autonomous. Perhaps for these reasons, Smetana deviated in \textit{Libuše} from the strategies for creating nationalism that he originally used in \textit{Brandenburgers}. Rather than relying on international styles to create a national voice as he had in the former opera, Smetana instead framed other operatic styles as antagonistic in \textit{Libuše}, situating German culture in particular as a primary political and artistic enemy of the Czechs. While using a composite internationalism to create nationalism in \textit{Brandenburgers}, then, here Smetana
more actively distances the Czech culture from foreign influence by “othering” international, non-Czech aesthetic values.
Conclusion

Smetana’s desire to create a Czech musical voice in his operas reflected the burgeoning nationalist movement in Bohemia during the nineteenth century. The composer’s strategy of using musical internationalism to convey nationalism in both Brandenburgers and Libuše, however, reveals a larger aesthetic conflict in which this Czech voice is contingent on international styles. Smetana’s reliance on international operatic practices in Brandenburgers makes this work’s national aesthetic particularly problematic. By framing folk stylizations as a marker of a Czech cultural identity within international operatic forms, the composer effectively “others” the Czechs and emphasizes their marginality within Western Europe. This dynamic shifts somewhat in Libuše, however, in which the composer’s vilification of stereotypically “German” musical styles serves to marginalize Western European trends, specifically those associated with the Czechs’ oppressors. In this case, Smetana uses internationalism as a foil for the creation of nationalism rather than borrowing established international structures to convey his message as he did in Brandenburgers.

Smetana’s “othering” of German musical tropes (or Czech stereotypes of those tropes) in Libuše is particularly in keeping with a greater trend of vilifying the German culture in Czech national works during the Rebirth. The composer’s depiction of “German as enemy” is consistent, for example, with Palacký’s celebration of the Czechs’ resilience under Austrian oppression in his History as well as the general reinterpretation of the Hussites as a symbol of resistance to the Hapsburg Empire.118 Observing the Czechs’ emphasis on distinguishing their culture from Germany and Austria, Locke explains that, “Czech nationalism [during the Rebirth]…was defined precisely in relation

118 Smaczny, 374; Tyrell, “Russian, Czech, Polish, and Hungarian Opera to 1900,” 166.
to the German presence all around them.” He further explains that nationalism in Czech art was primarily a response to the “repressive force of German art and culture.”

Smetana’s marginalization of the German culture in Libuše confirms and provides evidence for Locke’s observations.

Though Smetana’s contrast of Czech and German cultures points to greater trends in Czech nationalism, Tyrrell points out that the aesthetic can exist only through an audience’s interpretation, and its examination by modern scholars, therefore, tends towards speculation:

‘National character’ is often in the ear (and mind) of the listener. Indeed, nationalist messages are sometimes read into works whose authors and composers had no such intentions. The question of ‘national’ elements in music is often not so much a matter of what composers put into it as what audiences get out of it.120

The analysis presented here of Smetana’s use of internationalism to convey nationalism in Brandenburgers and Libuše is consequently only one possible interpretation of the composer’s aesthetic. Still, as Beckerman points out through his description of “Czechness” as “as real as the river Vltava” for Czech audiences, Smetana’s historical listeners did not generally find it difficult to identify the composer’s intended national aesthetic.121 Smetana’s enthusiastic reception as the “creator of Czech nationalistic music” by the end of his career reflects his audience’s collective interpretation of his works.122

Further research into the historic reception of the two operas extending beyond the writings of Pivoda and Hostinský, however, would help to more specifically clarify the elements of Smetana’s style to which his listeners were responding. Additionally,

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119 Locke, 4.
120 Tyrrell, Czech Opera, 212-213.
121 Beckerman, 73.
122 Ottlová, “Profiles; Bedřich Smetana,” 4.
more thorough research into the national musical scene that constituted the context for
Smetana’s *Brandenburgers* would help to more fully contextualize his compositional and
political strategies in this earlier work. Though past scholars have claimed that there were
no models for Czech opera on which the composer could base his construction of
Brandenburgers, there were 588 performances of operas by Czech composers at the
Provisional Theater between 1862 and 1881, Smetana’s works representing only a
relatively small percentage of this total.123 Researching and identifying these other Czech
composers and their works would contribute to a more complete understanding of
concepts of Czech musical identity during the era and moreover help to de-romanticize
the myth of Smetana as the lone creator of Czech opera.124 While Smetana’s
compositional and dramatic strategies for *Brandenburgers* and *Libuše* point to a complex
relationship between internationalism and nationalism, such research would help to
reveal more specifically the ways in which Czech historical listeners perceived both
nationalism and musical identity more broadly during the era. This project only takes the
first steps towards a more nuanced political and artistic positioning of Smetana and the
Czech culture within an international framework.

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123 Clapham, 90 and Large, 140 both discuss a lack of models for Czech opera as Smetana began work on
*Brandenburgers*. For more on the number of opera performances at the Provisional Theater, see Tyrrell,
*Czech Opera*, 39.
124 For more on Smetana’s myth, see Tyrrell’s “Posthumous Reputation” in Ottlová, et al, “Smetana,
Bedřich.”
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