

# Beatlemania!

VERONIKA SEIDLOVÁ

The year 2010 in the Czech Museum of Music was marked by intensive preparations for and mounting of the exhibition *Beatlemania!* It opened on 4 June 2010, and because of great public interest its duration was extended to 6 April 2011. During these ten months the exhibition was viewed by 39,315 people, making it the museum's most popular exhibition in recent years.

It cannot be denied that the expectation of heavy attendance and media attention drawn to the museum as a whole was one reason for the choice of this topic. But it was not just a matter of 'numbers' – we especially wanted to change some deep-rooted notions about our institution, which the general public often associates only with 'classical' music despite the fact that popular music is also within our range. We conceived the topic – probably the all-time most famous band in the world from the realm of Euro-American popular music – from a broad perspective, analyzing the impact of the Beatles on the lifestyle of Czechoslovak youth during the 1960s. And the year 2010 seemed especially suitable for such an exhibition, including as it did many landmark anniversaries connected with the band.<sup>1</sup>

However, the task was not as simple as it might seem. From the collections of the museum we selected officially-licensed copies of Beatles phonograph discs which had been released in socialist Czechoslovakia, and even a special collector's rarity – a Resonet Grazioso guitar, made in Czechoslovakia, identical to the one George Harrison played in the first years of his career. But we knew this was not enough. We decided to apply socio-anthropological approaches and illustrate history 'from below', from the viewpoint of a young Beatles fan living in socialist Czechoslovakia during the 1960s.

We focused on collecting materials that would physically illustrate the paths by which Beatlemania made its way through the 'Iron Curtain' (both officially and unofficially), and the modes in which it was then manifested in our country. In this pursuit we received major help from many other Czech institutions, most notably the Prague Popmuseum, and especially from individuals – private researchers, collectors, and witnesses to the events of the time. Although contacts were not established easily during the starting phases, in the end an entire network of private collectors and witnesses formed around the exhibition, and they very willingly loaned us many exhibit items. Apart from newspaper clippings, posters, and private period photographs of young men with hair across their ears, these items included touching hand-made products from a time when fans were unable to buy souvenirs or picture books produced commercially, but had to

**1)** In 1960 the newly-named Beatles left for Hamburg on their first tour. In 1970 Paul McCartney announced he was leaving the band. In 1940 three of the members of the band were born – Ringo Starr, John Lennon, and Stuart Sutcliffe (a member of the original group who died in 1962). Finally, in December 2010 the world commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of the tragic assassination of John Lennon.



Ukázka výstavního panelu / Part of the exhibition panel

rely on their own devices. For example we acquired diaries with regular entries including articles copied by hand from the Czechoslovak press, paper and wooden models, and even paintings. Through their inclusion in the exhibition these modest items took on new meaning for their owners and allowed visitors to identify with the story being told. Less numerous but extraordinarily interesting were home-made electric guitars and bass guitars, fashioned in an effort to imitate admired western models in music. One of the first big beat musicians in Czechoslovakia, Pavel Sedláček, lent us his first guitar.

Passing through the whole exhibition were two complementary time lines. The first of them told the thrilling story of the most famous rock band of all time, from its beginnings in Liverpool through the culmination of the Beatlemania wave until the dissolution of the group and the subsequent artistic and personal fates of its individual members. This story included cultural phenomena of the 1960s influenced either directly or indirectly by the Beatles through their music and their attitudes; we did not even avoid negative or controversial subjects such as drugs. The second time line of the exhibition traced the life of young people in Czechoslovakia during that period, dealing with culture and fashions of the day – both official (approved by the regime) and unofficial. We paid particular attention to the beginnings of big beat in the Czech lands and the reaction of the establishment to the lifestyle of long-haired youths. The closing portion of the exhibition was devoted to John Lennon as an icon of freedom, peace, and revolt against the majority society, and to the importance of his cult for resistance to the totalitarian regime in the 1980s.

We were also able to enhance the exhibition with many authentic objects touched by the Beatles, loaned from Florida and Liverpool, including John Lennon's suede jacket in which we see him photographed on the cover of the *Rubber Soul* album, and George Harrison's banjo uke. Although such items were secondary from the standpoint of our conception of the exhibition, they played an important role in attracting media attention, as did also wax figures of the Beatles made in 1964 for Madame Tussaud's Museum in London.

Audio-visual and interactive elements helped visitors experience the atmosphere of the time. For example they could view *A Hard Day's Night* in a period cinema, insert an audio tape into the cult Czechoslovak Sonet Duo tape player, or record a song from radio on it. They could play a phonographic disc on a period East-German jukebox, mix sounds on a mixing board in a recording studio, or write a message on a replica of the 'Lennon Wall'. The exhibition was accompanied by an impressive series of concerts, including an absolutely unique performance by Pete Best, the Beatles' first drummer. In May the Yellow Submarine stationed in the museum's atrium set out for the Moravian Museum, together with most of the other exhibit items, to be viewed by visitors in Brno from 25 May 2011 to 20 January 2012.

A wealth of information about and photographs from *Beatlemania!* can be found on the website [www.beatlemania.cz](http://www.beatlemania.cz). Photographs from the Prague exhibition and all texts from the exhibition panels were published in the exhibition's catalogue of the same title (ISBN 978-80-7036-291-4).



**Beatlemánie!: Houslista Jaroslav Svěcený u repliky Lennonovy zdi v muzejní dvoraně**  
**Beatlemania!: The violinist Jaroslav Svěcený at the 'Lennon Wall' replica in the museum's atrium**  
 Fotografie / Photograph, Martin Musil



**Beatlemánie!: Bendžolele Georga Harrisona ve výstavním sálu**  
**Beatlemania!: George Harrison's 'banjolele' in the exhibition hall**  
 Fotografie / Photograph, Martin Musil



**Adolf Russ: Václav František Červený**  
Olej na plátně / Oil painting on canvas, 1878  
NM-ČMH F 2207

**Václav František Červený:**  
*Hudební Názvosloví čili pojmenování žestových (plechových) hudebních nástrojů a některých děl jejich... / Musical Terminology, or The Naming of Brass Instruments and Some of Their Parts [...]*  
Tisk / Print, Hradec Králové s. a.,  
titulní list / title page  
NM-ČMH 98 E 6



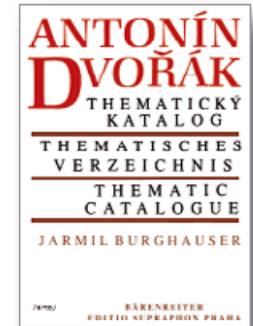
# Thematic Catalogues

## Czech Composers

Burghauser Jarmil  
**Antonín Dvořák – Thematic Catalogue**

H 7755, ISBN 80-7058-410-6, 844 pages, (Cz/Ger/Eng)

The second newly revised and substantially expanded edition provides an exhaustive catalogue of all Dvořák's compositions and a detailed time-line of the composer's life. Moreover, it is newly-equipped with an extensive bibliography and a series of easy-to-use indexes.



Nouza Zdeněk – Nový Miroslav  
**Josef Suk – Thematic Catalogue of the Works**

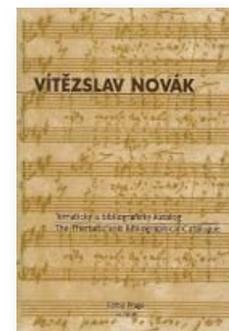
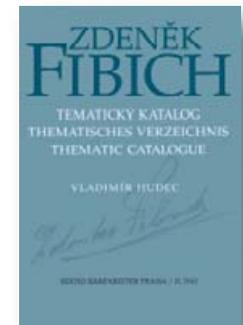
H 7955, ISBN 80-86385-30-2, 490 pages, (Cz/Eng)

This publication covers not only the finished works but also minor juvenilia, projected compositions, works of doubtful authenticity, arrangements of works by other composers, and revisions of music by Dvořák. Catalogue includes a precise description of all available sources, from sketches and autographs to copyist's manuscripts and published editions of the definitive versions.

Hudec Vladimír  
**Zdeněk Fibich – Thematic Catalogue**

H 7843, ISBN 80-86385-10-8, 854 pages, (Cz/Ger/Eng)

The most extensive list of Zdeněk Fibich's works including unfinished and uncertain compositions, the composer's piano reductions of his own works and arrangements of folk songs and other composers' compositions. Catalogue contains a biographical study, a series of clearly laid out indexes and an extensive bibliography.



Schnierer Miloš – Peřinová Ludmila  
**Vítězslav Novák – The Thematic and Bibliographical Catalogue**

H 7814, ISBN 80-7058-473-4, 522 pages, (Cz/Eng)

This survey constitutes probably the complete list of Novák's works – 162 titles. The catalogue presents a detailed bibliography, a series of useful indexes and a chronological table to Novák's life and works.