

Konrad Wallerstein

Memoirs Translation : Nachlass Wallerstein 3

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Nachlassmaterial Freier  Zugang



MEMOIRS TRANSLATION

At this time I would like to recount the following little stories which mostly I myself experienced or which were told to me by credible sources which, I certainly assume, you too my dear ones will be interested in and also friends could enjoy one or another of these anecdotes.

Actually one can never tell of a joke whether all the people will like it. The raconteur or the listener have to be in a good and receptive mood when the best joke can fall flat and only out of politeness bring up a smile or a so-called "ha". Sometimes the most idiotic joke, in spite of its stupidity, receives the most laughs.

As a student at the Conservatory, I had contact with Antonin Dvorak because he lectured on Composition two rooms away from the organ practice rooms and when we played too loudly he burst in furiously - we didn't know anything about his schedule - but if we gave him the correct exculpatory reply he was pacified and we received from him, instead of nasty verbal assaults, a marshmallow lozenge put directly into the mouth. Once he was with us he asked various questions, looked at what we are practicing and even listened a little and then he went back to his pupils. Once he even talked about amateurism, which he particularly abhorred. At that time he coined his eternal phrase "*Confounded Amateurism*". "*For example, a really stupid gal paints a streetcar and immediately thinks of herself as an artist*" he finished by repeating "*confounded amateurism*".

After the lesson, which took place at Konvikt Street we, Robert Robitschek and I, quite often accompanied him to his Korn Street apartment. In the front yard of the organ school he put his cigar stub (he called "Slavik") between his lips. My friend struck a match trying to be helpful to the Maestro but was growled at: "*hey you, are you crazy? Lit now it wouldn't last me until I got home. Only when we reach Mustek are you allowed to light it*".

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Actually one can never tell of a joke whether all the people will like it. The raconteur or the listener have to be in a good and receptive mood when the best joke can fall in and only out of politeness bring up a smile or a so-called "ha". Sometimes the most idiotic joke, in spite of its stupidity, receives the most laughs.

As a student at the Conservatory, I had contact with Antonin Dvorka because he lectured on Composition in two rooms away from the organ practice room and when we played too loudly he burst in furiously - we didn't know anything about his schedule - but if we gave him the correct explanatory reply he was pacified and we received from him, instead of nasty verbal assaults, a mathematical formulae put directly in the mouth. Once he was with us he asked various questions, looked at what we are practicing and even listened a little and then he went back to his pupils. Once he even talked about amateurism, which he particularly abhorred. At that time he coined his eternal phrase "Confound amateurism." For example, a really stupid girl paints a sunset and immediately thinks of herself as an artist, he finished by repeating "confound amateurism."

After the lesson, which took place at Konvikt Street we, Robert Robjachek and I, quite often accompanied him to his Korn Street apartment. In the front yard of the organ school he put his organ stool (he called "Slavik") between his lips. My friend struck a match trying to be helpful to the Maestro but was provided with: "hey you, are you crazy? Lie low it wouldn't last me until I got home. Only when we reach Husak are you allowed to light it."

It was no rarity that he put down the cigar stub in his Classroom or that, without anybody noticing, it fell to the floor. At that point, the upright piano and everything, which was in that room, was moved around and cleared until the valuable "Slavik" was found again. Dvorak could be found every afternoon for one hour, in the Coffee House Imperial, now known as the National on the Narodni street. One day he was chatting with the bass of the National Theater, Emil Pollert and us. The waiter knew what Dvorak always ordered so he didn't need to give him the order. One cup of coffee with milk and a croissant. On that day, the croissant was exceptionally good and he really wanted to have a second one. He called the headwaiter and negotiated with him: *"Waiter, I feel like having another croissant. This, however, would come to 19 pennies. and you don't think that I would, give you only a one penny tip. I'll tell you something, I will take the second croissant and tomorrow I will bring you your three pennies, yes?"* The waiter was helpful and smiling, and with an elegant gesture, agreed. *"But of course, Doctor, please feel free to help yourself."*

By the way, I want to mention that the Composer's wife gave him a small allowance because he was inclined to give to a poor person, whom he accidentally met, everything he had on him. He got daily for his expenses at the Coffee House twenty pennies, which paid his bill. The coffee cost fifteen pennies, the croissant two pennies and the remaining three pennies went for the tip.

My friend, Emil Pollert, told me the following story from the same Coffee House. Dvorak, when he came alone to the Coffee House, had the habit to visit his many acquaintances at the various tables. He complained about the bad service: *"I've been here so long and no one brought me my coffee."* *"But doctor, your coffee has been on your table the whole time you have been here"* - *"Am I sitting there or am I sitting here?"* was Dvorak's strict reply. Patiently, the waiter brought him his coffee to the designated table however, in the meantime, our dear Dvorak changed his place again and after the waiter finally reached the Maestro, the coffee was cold and was mercilessly sent back and so continued the hunt.

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In spite of that, all the waiters were exceptionally nice to him because they, too, saw in this great Antonin, the genius and the National Hero.

Dvorak was commissioned to prepare a composition for the 70th Birthday Party of Dr. Tragy, a member of the Board of Trustees of the Conservatory. He complained about his problem that he dislikes composing for special occasions and nothing comes to mind for a festive song but time presses on. The following day he told us, beaming happily: "*as I came home last night, our Otilka [his daughter who later became the wife of Composer Joseph Suk) was singing something – and something came to my mind and at night I wrote it.*" A few weeks later was the Dress Rehearsal and Dvorak was asked to baptize his work himself. Almost nothing came of it because Dvorak thought that a coincidental laugh coming from the pausing trombonist was directed towards him and he furiously exited the podium. While he was taking his glasses off his nose he said in a whiny tone, "*I don't deal with boys*" and took off. In the Center of the Rudolfinum Hall the harpist and the pian professor, Hans Trnecek, caught up with the fleeing Dvorak, pulled him back literally by his jacket tails, and it needed Trnecek's full power of persuasion to make Dvorak continue the rehearsal. Trnecek brought the Maestro back to the Podium and addressed a few words to the orchestra which ended with the sentence: "*gentlemen you must not excite the Doctor and do pay attention.*" Dvorak returned very meekly in front of the orchestra and said like a child almost whimpering, "*well they'll only laugh at me again.*" Nobody laughed because there was no reason for it – not before and not now. The rehearsal was brought smoothly to an end and at the Performance, the work of the Maestro was the nicest present and the biggest honor for the jubilant.

Dvorak said to us after hearing a Brahms Symphony: "*Only Beethoven and no one else knows how to write a symphony*". We told him that he was forgetting his own symphonies. His answer was "*I dissuaded Smetana from writing symphonies and I myself don't know how to write them*". Although he did not have quite such a bad opinion of himself as

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he truly believed, inwardly he was very pleased with our evaluation of his works.

At the turn of the century, at which time Strauss was not yet a composer of opera, Dvorak and I discussed Strauss' compositions of symphonic works. Dvorak's criticism was devastating. He exclaimed verbatim: *"Strauss has no talent, Strauss only has technique. I do not need his divisions into eight parts, let him write for two violins."* If Dvorak were alive today, he surely would have changed his hasty judgment. Today he certainly would not consider him so untalented as not to be capable of composing a work for two violins, i.e. to create a two part violin work.

After I had returned from Nurnberg to Prague, Prof. Knittl invited me to attend the orchestra rehearsal for the final concert of the Compositions Class. Naturally Dvorak was present and suddenly asked me *"can you tell me who is missing at the second chair of the violas?"* (The violas were of special interest to him because he was previously a violist in the Orchestra of the National Theater). I regretted that I could not give him an answer since I, myself, had graduated two years earlier. Then he also grabbed a hold of composition student H. because he, as was ascertained, had not written any numerals in the orchestral parts, and pushed him into the orchestra pit directly among the cellists and yelled: *"here you have him, tear him in half because he is holding up the rehearsal"*.

After this little episode I remember the following tragic event. At a rehearsal Prof. Knittl conducted a symphonic poem, because regrettably, the student had suddenly died fourteen days before the final concert. Usually every graduate is

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permitted to conduct his own composition. All professors and colleagues were sincerely touched at this poor man's tragic fate. The composition was written in C sharp minor and the finale consisted of four beats, played in C sharp chords by the basses, bassoons, etc. When Dvorak heard this he ran from me to the podium and with his cane he pulled Knittl's right leg backwards. Startled he turned around and said: *"what do you wish doctor?"* *"Please have them play the end again but the basses have to play H sharp, C sharp, etc."* The answer was *"alright - doctor."* Dvorak came back to me and said: *"damned boy, he still wrote it the way he wanted to, hard-headed fellow."* Dvorak again ran forward and repeated the previous maneuver with the cane. Only Knittl got used to the attack and didn't get startled. Now the Maestro requested that they repeat the final beats the way the composer had intended them and once as the teacher envisioned them. Then he discussed it with me and I told him very calmly that the H-C Sharp definitely sounded more original. One more time he had the two versions played and said to me: *"shall I fight with him? He's dead, he'll go to Heaven and create havoc and I will be in trouble."* *"Look friend, H-C sharp, let him have it his way."*

Alexander Von Zemlinsky, the long-time opera chief of the New German Theater in Prague, was an artist through and through. He was very near-sighted, of small stature, witty and highly educated in many fields.

Externally, one could call him not only not beautiful but expressly ugly. He, himself, once told me: *"with my face, on stage I can only be a Conductor; imagine me as a young, dramatic singer, as such I certainly would not find an engagement."*

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In spite of that however, one forgot what he looked like when having a conversation with him.

When Zemlinsky was introduced to the famous comedian, Alexander Girardi, at the time in Vienna, he said to him in disbelieving amazement "ah... ah, you don't really look like that."

As a smoker, and also in other respects, he was full of passion, he practically devoured the cigars, there is no other way to describe it. As a guest at a Bank Director's house - he was dreaded because he usually dirtied the tablecloths, carpets, etc. with the ashes from his large cigar - he put the ashes especially carefully into the ashtray and as the party later was asked to move into the next room, he picked up the presumed ashtray and carried it into the next room cautiously so that nothing would fall on the carpet. What a disappointment for him when the lovely lady of the house laughingly showed him what he had perpetrated. On the tablecloth remained a huge mountain of ashes. It was a deep napkin ring which Zemlinsky had mistaken for an ashtray.

Invited to dinner by a family, he burned a cigarette hole in the tablecloth. The lady of the house - an exceptional hostess - saved the situation by asking Zemlinsky to put his signature under the hole. He smilingly did so, but not without embarrassment. When he came to the house as a guest the next time, the same place was offered him and the same tablecloth was used. The hole and the signature were beautifully embroidered by the older daughter of the house.

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A friend of Zemlinskys, the charming, red-haired, beautiful St. who was very vain and conceited, and who never walked past a mirror without admiring herself, coined the following phrase: *"he is so ugly that he has become beautiful."*

Zemlinsky had to go to Berlin one day and was forced to spend two nights in a row on the train. When he returned I asked him whether he was able to sleep on the train. He answered me: *"splendidly, that's been my luck. The day before yesterday, it was as follows. As soon as I sat in my seat, right away somebody disturbed me. I asked "what's the matter?" The conductor says that the Customs are coming up because Bodenbach is the next stop. Zemlinsky told me that he was desperately trying to stay awake but after the Customs procedure, before even the Official left his Compartment, he slept again. "In a little while, at least this is as it seemed to me, I was again startled and asked: "what's the matter now?" The answer surprised me: "Berlin, Anhalter Railroad Station".*

The violist, Ruzicka, a member of the Hofoper, resp. the State Opera Orchestra, was telling me once about a rehearsal for "Maskenball", that Conductor Albin made more demands than the members of the orchestra liked. Ruzicka thereupon said to his colleagues: *"now I've had enough. If he says one more word, we'll play the way he conducts."*

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As is well known, vanity plays a big part in an artist's life. Also that the biggest of them can be so petty is a well-known fact. Strauss, e.g., talked to me once about his works and I expressed to him that I consider his "Elektra" to be his most monumental work and he said: "and "Salome" is not?" I was afraid that I put my foot in my mouth and immediately I said: "already the beginning of Salome is so fascinating that it's effect cannot be more beautiful" However, I stayed with my first opinion regarding Elektra. I added furthermore that I value and love his Rosenkavalier and that he shouldn't be jealous of one or the other of his works. Strauss was then completely satisfied and we talked about other things.

Felix Adler, the critic, was in his young days employed by the Dresden Latest News. His boss ordered him to attend a Lieder recital in the evening, compositions by a newcomer. The review as usual, hit Adler's criticisms like a nail on the head. It was a well-deserved really lousy one. As the boss checked it, he called our friend Felix Adler to his office and said to him: "You Adler, what's with you, we can't have that, the composer is the son of our chairman of the Board of Directors. You have to praise the songs." The next day Adler praised the singer and her singing in great detail and with great satisfaction. The last sentence of the Concert review read, "I have to praise the songs of N.H."

As appointed guest conductor at the New German Theater Dr. G. conducted "L'Africaine" - more bad than good. After the performance Adler went to both big Coffee Houses where he was well known, and declared loudly and clearly that " in tomorrow's Bohemia-Review a typographical error will appear.

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Enough has already been written about State examinations. For example the answer to the question: "how many Symphonies did Beethoven write" has been told many times. Nevertheless I'll repeat it "Three". The III, the V. and the IX." This is thoughtlessness for which the candidates, being under pressure, cannot be blamed too much.

The Baron Rudolf Von Proshazka has been, for many years, Chairman of the Examination Commission, under the State Board of Music Referees and at the termination of the Conservatory and the founding of the German Academy for Music and Performing Arts, whose first President he was, he retired. The founding of the new state form in the year 1918, brought with it that also the Commission were divided into one German and one Czech. Here again, Baron Proshazka and sixteen members of the Commission were nominated, including me. In the twenty, Proshazka maybe in forty years of service, we lived through so many situations. He recounted as true stories the following: The Candidate was asked about Bethoven's works because we assumed that the candidates from small towns and villages certainly had heard of this hero and possibly read something about him. This candidate numerated piano and violin sonatas, symphonies, quartets, etc. To that question whether Bethoven wrote anything for the theater, he thought for a moment and then said "Bethoven also wrote Operas". "yeah, which ones?" "Excuse me Baron but I can's remember now. Will you just tell me one, then I will know the others."

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Once I asked a Candidate about Bethoven's piano sonatas and about wind Chamber Music and also orchestra music and she answered "three Leonora Overtures" I asked her why he wrote those Overtures. The answer was "to Fidelio". I asked "do you know the Opera?" "No, it is not performed any longer."

The final examinations at the Academy were always under commission. The Director was the Chairman and Professors of the same subject were witnesses. Our Rector and Director of the Institution was Fidelio Finke - I have recommended him some time ago to the Board of Trustees after Romeo Finke, the uncle of Fidelio left, as Director of the Academy - he was a good colleague however, thinking of distance, a pig-headed nagger, who liked to spew a little maliciousness. I had a Tenor sing small bars which were meant for different voices and could be used as a stereotype and the Director wrote stupid little text for instance, instead of "the scent of roses" he wrote "the hares bib". The colleague and the Drama Teacher, as well as the Director, laughed hilariously. I wasn't embarrassed and gave the pupil immediately as a change, to sing a new sentence which, strangely, nobody held against me even though the sentence was the joy of being *spite* malicious.

And one more Finke. Drama final exams: A girl recited two poems. I had to give my judgment for the drama. Our Rector thought "I like the first poem better" but he added ironically, "probably I don't understand it". I told him, as he was expecting a contradiction with exaggerated seriousness, "but Rector you can't understand everything."

Once I asked a candidate about Beethoven's piano sonatas and about wind chamber music and also orchestral music and she answered "I know those Overtures" I asked her why he wrote those Overtures. The answer was "to Fidelio". I asked "do you know the Opera?" "No, it is not performed any longer."

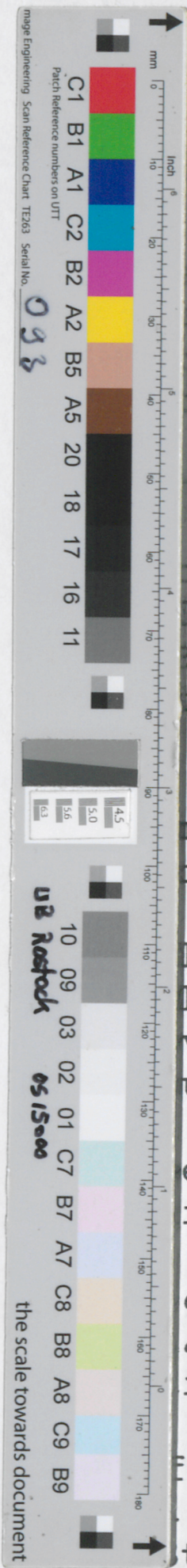
The final examinations at the Academy were always under commission. The Director was the Chairman and Professors of the same subject were witnesses. Our Rector and Director of the Institution was Fidelio Finke - I have recommended him some time ago to the Board of Trustees after Romeo Finke, the uncle of Fidelio left, as Director of the Academy - he was a good colleague however, thinking of distance, a pig-headed nagger, who liked to spew a little maliciousness. I had a tenor and small parts which were meant for different voices and could be used as a stereotype and the Director wrote stupid little text for instance, instead of "the scent of roses" he wrote "the roses bid". The colleague and the Drama Teacher, as well as the Director, laughed hilariously. I wasn't embarrassed and gave the pupil immediately as a change, to sing a new sentence which, strangely, nobody held against me even though the sentence was the joy of being malicious.

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(11)

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TRANSLATION

this time I would like to recount the following little stories which mostly I myself experienced or which were told by credible sources which, I certainly assume, you too and your ones will be interested in and also friends could tell one or another of these anecdotes.

Actually one can never tell of a joke whether all the people will like it. The raconteur or the listener have to be in a good and receptive mood when the best joke can fall flat. Usually out of politeness bring up a smile or a so-called "humor". Sometimes the most idiotic joke, in spite of its stupidity, receives the most laughs.

As a student at the Conservatory, I had contact with Anton Dvorak because he lectured on Composition two rooms away from the organ practice rooms and when we played too loudly he burst in furiously - we didn't know anything about the schedule - but if we gave him the correct exculpatory explanation he was pacified and we received from him, instead of verbal assaults, a marshmallow lozenge put directly into our mouths. Once he was with us he asked various questions, such as at what we are practicing and even listened a little when he went back to his pupils. Once he even talked about nationalism, which he particularly abhorred. At that time he used his eternal phrase "*Confounded Amateurism*". "*For example, a really stupid gal paints a streetcar and immediately thinks of herself as an artist*" he finished by saying "*confounded amateurism*".

After the lesson, which took place at Konvikt Street we, together with Robitschek and I, quite often accompanied him to his street apartment. In the front yard of the organ school he put his cigar stub (he called "Slavik") between his lips. My friend struck a match trying to be helpful to the Maestro but was growled at: "*hey you, are you crazy? Lit now it wouldn't last me until I got home. Only when we reach Mustek are you allowed to light it*".