

Cellist Michaela Fukacová was keen to talk to us and, although the interview was given via email, her answers reflect the cellist's remarkable spontaneity, optimism and affability. (We wanted to preserve the mood of the text, so we left in her smileys!)

You've performed an impressive number of works. What place does Elgar's concerto assume in your repertoire?

I heard this concerto while I was studying, in a recording by the famous Jacqueline du Pré. It was just spell-binding and naturally it inspired me to start practising the piece myself. I was so enchanted that I planned to go over and study with Jacqueline herself. I even got the scholarship required, but Jacqueline died in 1987... I then used the grant to study with her teacher, professor William Pleeth. It was wonderful for me to be able to go for lessons and study Elgar's concerto in the place where Jacqueline had studied as well. It gave me some kind of connection with her.

Musically, Elgar's concerto is close to my heart, with its rich, expressive character. I also selected it for my first (in fact, also my last :-)) recording for Supraphon. I teamed up with Libor Pešek and the Brno Philharmonic to make a recording which I'm really fond of to this day.

You have studied under legendary cellists, could you tell us about some of them and what aspects of their legacy do you continue to adopt in your life as a performer?

If I were to speak about each one of them as I should, it would take forever - Paul Tortelier, André Navarra, Bl?ndal-Bengtsson, Uzi Wiesel, Erkki Rautio and others. But it's my fundamental threesome which comes to mind: Havlík - Vectomov - Rostropovich. They were so important for me; each of them, in his own way, guided and inspired me, I adored all three of them and I miss all of them.

At this point, I'd like to bring in your father if I may, the fine musicologist, publicist and university teacher Jiri Fukac. Did you have many discussions together about musical interpretation?

Not really, only exceptionally, for instance when dad tried to instil in me greater purity of style when performing early music. He gave me several books on the subject, so that I could learn more about authentic interpretation - but I was a bit headstrong and wouldn't let myself be influenced by them too much, and I continued along my favourite intuitive path. My father was always tolerant and he respected my approach. We didn't talk about interpretation but we often played together. Whenever I was studying a new work, he would always be my first selfless and reliable pianist.

Do you remember the time you became convinced that you had "matured" as a musician?

Yes, during my studies with Rostropovich, who brought me back to myself in a way. Like every good teacher should, when the time is right. I remember feeling a great sense of relief that I no longer had to seek out the opinions of others on how a given work ought to sound, or follow advice on how to hold the bow... In this respect, Rostropovich came just at the right time; put simply, he rid me of all those perennial questions. Actually, he never gave normal answers to issues like these in any case; instead he intimated that you had to work towards your own idea with a will, to go to places from where every expression originates.

What do you most enjoy about your profession and what, on the other hand, do you find difficult about it?

I'll start by saying what's arduous about it: I have to travel to concerts, my audiences won't come to my village! I don't like packing and I don't like leaving my family. When the boys were little, they travelled with me, but now they have to go to school and it's not that simple anymore. What do I enjoy about my profession? Music is one of the ways to express indefinable beauty - the miracle of feeling a quiver in one's soul through the vibrations of the strings continues to fascinate me.

What's it like, actually being on the concert platform?

A friend of mine asked me about this the other day after one of my concerts: Míša, how do you do it? And I said - I have to completely immerse myself, otherwise I'd be in trouble! :-)) It's not easy being up there on the podium. In order to give a flawless performance, you need to find the symbiosis between complete

humility and complete self-confidence. I endeavour to give performances that are effective testimonies. Genuine testimonies which are able to lift the spirit and bring delight. This is what I try to achieve and, each time, to do this I need a certain measure of courage and faith. So that nothing unnecessary hinders the experience of pure joy in the beauty of music and what it conveys.

As a mother of two 11-year-old sons, are you thinking about their future as possible successors?

I don't think my boys are headed towards the musical profession. About a year ago Alexander bribed us with his pocket money to make us stop tormenting him with piano lessons. He said he might go on to another instrument eventually, but it would have to be one that didn't require rhythm - it's too stressful, he says. I've so far managed - if after a few minor battles - to take Filipek to music school on a regular basis. Even though he has obviously got talent, I can't see it turning into something serious. But I'm not worried about it, there are lots of other ways in which they can demonstrate their creativity.

You live in Denmark with your twins and Swiss husband. What's it like living there?

The only thing which I miss a little are the longer, more reliable summers. Otherwise, Denmark has a really nice atmosphere of tranquility and well-being. It's agreeably mature, people feel a natural responsibility for the state of things and they understand their own active role here. Of course, there are exceptions, but it's more a case of the exception proving the rule.

On your web pages [www.fukacova.com](http://www.fukacova.com), visitors to the site have the opportunity to take a look at some wonderful photographs you took yourself. Have you ever thought about changing profession completely?

Thank you for the compliment. I'm not a professional photographer, just a keen amateur. My idea of the difference between the two is that the professional has a clear vision of the way the finished product is going to look, and the amateur takes in the beauty and, here and there, something nice might come out... And that's my case. I simply see so much beauty around me that I can't help myself, I have to capture those fleeting moments and share their magic with those who take an interest.

Otherwise, I actually did think about a change of profession, chiefly at a time when, for health reasons, I had to stop playing and it wasn't clear whether I'd ever begin again. (I had what's known as a frozen shoulder which righted itself after a period of two years - in fact, a week before my planned operation!) I took this professional break as a gift, without bitterness and without worrying how everything would turn out. It was a time for lots of new discoveries, and various possible ways to earn a living presented themselves; I even started composing, which I could never have pictured myself doing until that point! :-)) I don't know whether I would have acquired all the necessary technical know-how and experience to do the things which appealed to me and which seemed feasible, I'm not sure if the outcome would have been convincing. But I certainly wouldn't be afraid to put all my energies into a new field.

In addition to photography you are also a talented painter, and apparently writing also fascinates you - so you write as well?

Yes, I like writing. I write quite a lot, mostly in English. Mainly reflections on life and poetry - it's all here in my computer but I've no ambitions to publish my work. These are things which seemed to come with no effort, I was doing it for myself - I enjoy creativity, it's a delight to see how creative strength manifests itself in us and projects content into form, in this case, into words.

What else do you invest your energies in (physical activities as well)?

I invest most of my time in my children. I'm aware that, in a few years' time, they'll eventually be leaving home, so I'm making the most of them while I can. My physical energy goes mainly into the cello - playing is quite tough! I love relaxing in nature most of all, I'm lucky that I live right in the middle of it. As soon as I get the chance, I hurry out of the house (preferably just me and my camera) and go on walks to the sea or into the woods. In the past I was also a keen gardener, but I have to be careful with my shoulder, so now we have a professional doing the garden called Hans. He just fascinates me, all his hard work, it never shows on him, he simply goes about doing what he has to do, he's totally serene and, after about two or three hours, he's done a perfect job which would have taken me weeks, and I would have been puffed out in

the process. Otherwise I try to keep in shape by doing yoga and swimming, but my conscience keeps telling me I ought to be stepping up the pace.

Given all your artistic and personal experience, what does music mean for you today?

Music? For me, it's a miracle... like life itself... like every new note produced from nothing, from silence... For me it means an encounter with beauty which is born in the heart and which, in turn, touches the heart as well. I perceive music also as a reflection of the mystery of life itself, it occurs and is heard only in the present moment. We only ever hear a fragment of it, the actual sound, but the beauty and significance of this sound lies in its coexistence with all the other fragments which are silent at that given moment. As listeners we can enjoy this "occurring" without probing too deeply into the familiarity of the structure. As active co-creators we have our own idea about what character, what tone colour each individual note needs in order for it to sound right. This we discern only with knowledge of the entire work and its architecture; the significance we ascribe to every note is determined by its relationship to the whole. As in life, we take one little step after another; but only with a more profound knowledge of the contexts, by recognising where we have come from and where we are heading, can we consciously take these small steps, knowing they are the right ones.

As time goes by (and also given that you live in Denmark), is it becoming more difficult to keep in touch with Czech music circles?

It's been a fairly natural process keeping in touch, for the time being. The orchestras here still remember me and, even though I don't perform in the Czech Republic all that often, I'll certainly be appearing here once or twice every season.