

## **Josef Skarka**

Josef Skarka (1981) was born in Brno (Czech Republic). After graduation at the Brno Conservatory, he was accepted to the Academy of Music in Prague where he obtained the Bachelor degree studying with Rene Tucek and the Master degree under tutelage of Miloslav Podskalsky.

Josef Skarka has established himself as one of the foremost young singers of the bass-baritone voice. His repertoire ranges from Gregorian chant (collaborating with David Eben and his Schola Gregoriana Pragensis), or baroque music (projects with Collegium 1704, Collegium Marianum, Ars Brunensis), to opera Bello in La Fanciulla del West in the National Theatre in Prague and in Figaro in La nozze di Figaro or Leporello in Don Giovanni, J. K. Tyl Theatre in Pilsen, Colline in Puccini's La Bohème. Eremit in Weber's Freischütz or Ferrando in Verdi's Il Trovatore in Usti nad Labem, Steffano in Donizetti's Viva la mamma in Liberec, and Figaro in the National Theatre of Brno.

He is favourite performer of many ensembles and orchestras of classical music. Notably he collaborated with Prague orchestra Berg with conductor Peter Vrabel, focusing on modern and contemporary authors (Poulenc, Ravel, Jezek). With Roxy Ensemble and its artistic leader Tomas Hanak he performed selected arias from Mendelssohn's oratorio Elias. His successful co-operation with Zlin Philharmonic Orchestra followed with special Christmas concert series. With the well-known Ars Brunensis Chorus he was invited to perform Vesperi and fragments from the Mass by L. Boccherini at the International Music Festival L'autunno musicale di Como in Italy.

He performs regularly well-received recitals, often accompanied by the pianist Richard Pohl. One of their first success includes presentation during International Music Festival Moravian Autumn 2004 (Songs by Dvorak and Janacek) or concert performance at the Festival of Czech Music under the auspices of Sir Charles Mackerras. They were also invited to perform abroad, notably to Mexico, Sweden, Italy or Montenegro.

His is holder of many awards at the International Singer Competition of Antonin Dvorak in Karlovy Vary (from 2002, 2006 and 2009 – including 2nd prizes in both Opera and Lieder Contests, award for the best Czech participant and award for the youngest finalist). He was a guest soloist on stage in Japan, Germany and France, including an invitation by the famous tenor José Cura.

Josef Skarka is now focusing on improving his prominent position among the youngest generation of bass (bass-baritone) singers. He specializes on the Lieder repertoire, but also devote himself strongly to the performance of contemporary works, as well as the early music. He is praised by the audience and reviewers (Harmonie magazine) for his artistic nobility, charity of style and powerful sense of the expression.

## **Richard Pohl**

Richard Pohl (1983) was born in Ostrava (Czech Republic).

His exceptional talent resulted in many awards at national competitions for young musicians including Honorary Diploma and First Prize at the Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf Chamber Music Competition, 3rd prize at the National Contest of Jazz Ensembles, Honorary mention at the International Broadcast Competition Concertino Praga and many awards for the outstanding piano accompaniment during his studies at State Conservatory in Brno and later at the Janacek Academy of Music and Performing Arts.

At the academy he studied with Zdenek Hnat, one of the greatest Czech pianists of our time, a pupil of Heinrich Neuhaus. After his retirement in 2006 Pohl entered class of celebrated professors Alena Vlasakova and Jan Jirasky; the Master degree under guidance of professor Jan Jirasky only. He also attended masterclasses with Antonin Kubalek (Canada), Jan Gottlieb Jiracek (Austria), Stefan Vladar, Sontraud Speidel, Thomas Steinhardt, Iva Navratova (Germany), George Kanev (Bulgaria), Petr Sejl and Ivo Kahanek (Czech Republic). He is now a doctoral student at the music faculty, accompanist at its vocal department and professor at Pavel Krizkovsky High School Specialising in Arts in Brno.

Since 2003, he's been regular participant of the International Kubalek Piano Courses where in 2004 he received a special prize for the best performance of a piece by a Czech composer and in 2006 for the best performance of a Mozart piece.

Pohl's main interest is the chamber music, especially his collaborations with singers. In 2002 he established a partnership with one of the most talented singers of his country, the bass-baritone Josef Skarka. They created a duo focusing on performing art songs, and together took part in several festivals in their own country and abroad (Montenegro, Sweden, Italy, Mexico).

Richard is also collaborating with various ensembles, (Sinfonia Chamber Orchestra, Matl Academic Choir) and institutions (Conservatory Brno, Janacek Academy of Music, Frantisek Jilek School of Music). As an experienced accompanist has also earned many prizes and awards in that field. He collaborates with many respected artists (J. Dvorsky, M. Zhang, J. Pustina, E. Weissova, R. Fujii, J. Dolezilkova...) and since 2008 serves as the official accompanist of the International Vocal Contest in Zdar nad Sazavou.

He records both solo and as an accompanist on CD's and for broadcast. Pohl is proud to present his live recordings at the Piano Society, appreciating the idea of the site as a source of sharing the classical piano recordings by pianistic community from the entire world.

Mr. Pohl has also established his own Melodia Art Management, encouraging mainly collaborations with young artists and organizing benefit concerts. His artistic projects are supported by Ing. Cyril Svozil (Fenix Trading).

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