

A man in 18th-century attire, including a blue coat and a white cravat, holds a sheet of music. He is looking back over his shoulder towards a woman on the right. The woman is wearing a large, ornate wig and a dark, patterned dress. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting an indoor setting.

# THE BOHEMIAN

# THE BOHEMIAN

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY PETR VÁCLAV

Czech Republic's Official Entry – Best International Feature Film at the 95th Academy Awards®

OFFICIAL WEBSITE

OFFICIAL STILLS

142 minutes / Biography, Drama, History, Music / In Czech and Italian / Czech Republic, Italy, Slovakia / 2022

## CONTACT

PUBLICITY & MARKETING REQUESTS

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# LOGLINE

In the 18th century, aspiring composer Josef Mysliveček, a mentor to Mozart, travels to the sophisticated Venice opera world to achieve his dream in a lush biopic following the most prolific decades of an underappreciated musical great.

# SYNOPSIS

In 18th century Italy, aspiring opera composer Josef Mysliveček dreams of becoming a musician. His ambitions lead him to embark on a journey, exploring the world of opera to fulfill his destiny. Against all odds, he makes his mark in sophisticated Venice society as “Il Boemo,” his talent and charm winning over socialites, impresarios, and performers – in addition to the many women captivated by his appeal. Embracing a hedonistic lifestyle within the “pleasure capital” of Europe, Mysliveček enjoys a multitude of sexual relationships while pouring his heart into his music.

The Bohemian follows Mysliveček’s most prolific decades, composing numerous works in the genre of Italian opera seria as well as influencing and befriending Mozart – though their relationship is tested when a life-changing commission comes between them. Winner of six Czech Lion Awards, including Best Czech Film and Best Director, and selected as the Czech submission for Best International Feature Film at the 95th Academy Awards, this lush biopic from Petr Václav commemorates an underappreciated, adventurous musical great.

# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I was interested in the topic of a man who could have lived a peaceful life of a respected citizen in Prague. However, he abandons these certainties and leaves to follow his desire to become an opera composer in Italy, which was the superpower in the realm of the opera at that time. He goes into the unknown and has neither money nor influential friends. On Josef's example, I wanted to tell the story of how someone becomes whom he wants to be, and how he achieves self-fulfillment through the career of an artist. And how he can lose this career.

# ABOUT THE BOHEMIAN

The film tells the story of a Prague miller who went to Italy, and became the most sought-after composer of his time. For fifteen years, Josef Mysliveček (1737–1781), known as Il Boemo (The Bohemian), wrote for all the Italian courts and for many city theatres, from Naples to Florence, Turin, and Venice. In Italy, he also met the young Mozart, whom he befriended and influenced. He died of syphilis in Rome, alone, forgotten. His life is the story of this extraordinarily talented artist and follows his journey to the top and his fall.

The music was recorded by Vaclav Luks with his ensemble Collegium 1704 and leading soloists such as Philippe Jaroussky, Raffaella Milanese, Emöke Baráth, Simona Šaturová, Krystian Adam, and Juan Sancho.



# CAST & CREW

WRITER AND DIRECTOR	PETR VÁCLAV
STARRING	VOJTECH DYK, BARBARA RONCHI, ELENA RADONICICH, LANA VLADY
PRODUCER	JAN MACOLA, MIMESIS FILM (CZ)
CO-PRODUCERS	KATEŘINA ONDŘEJKOVÁ PRODUCTION GROUP – CZECH TELEVISION (CZ), DUGONG FILMS (IT) , SENTIMEN TAFILM (SK), LIBOR WINKLER (CZ), MAGICLAB (CZ), DANIEL BERGMANN (CZ), JAN MENCLÍK (CZ)
CAMERA	DIEGO ROMERO SUAREZ LLANOS
CONDUCTOR AND ORCHESTRA	VÁCLAV LUKS, COLLEGIUM 1704
SOLOISTS	PHILIPPE JAROUSKY, EMÖKE BARÁTH, RAFFAELLA MILANESI, SIMONA ŠATUROVÁ, JUAN SANCHO, KRYSTIAN ADAM, SOPHIE HARMSSEN
EDITORS	PAOLO COTTIGNOLA, FLORENT VASSAULT, FLORENT MANGEOT
ARCHITECTS	IRENA HRADECKÁ, LUCA SERVINO
COSTUMES	ANDREA CAVALLETTO
SOUND	DANIEL NĚMEC, FRANCESCO LIOTARD
ARTISTIC MAKE-UP	ANDREA MCDONALD
EXECUTVE PRODUCTION	KLÁRA BOTLÍKOVÁ, VENDY FENCLOVÁ
VFX SUPERVISOR	MICHAL KŘEČEK
EXPERT CONSULTANT	DANIEL E. FREEMAN

# GLOBAL OPERA STARS PERFORMING IN THE FILM

Philippe Jaroussky	the most admired French countertenor of his generation
Emöke Baráth	Hungarian soprano, much sought-after as a performer of Baroque music
Simona Šaturová	soprano of Slovak origin who has achieved international renown as an interpreter of Mozart; for many years, she has been promoting and performing Mysliveček's music
Raffaella Milanesi	Italian soprano, one of the most sought-after soloists in the field of Baroque music
Juan Sancho	Spanish tenor who feels at home singing the Baroque repertoire and concentrates mainly on Bach, Handel, and Monteverdi
Krystian Adam	Polish tenor with a broad repertoire – Monteverdi, Purcell, Handel, Mozart, Haydn, Gluck, and Schubert
Sophie Harmsen	an internationally successful and respected mezzo-soprano of German origin



# ABOUT THE CAST & CREW





## PETR VÁCLAV (DIRECTOR AND SCREENWRITER)

Petr Vaclav is a graduate of the Film and TV School at the Academy of Performing Arts (FAMU) in Prague. For his film *Paní Le Murie* (*Madame Le Murie*), he was nominated for a student Oscar. His debut feature, *Marian*, won a number of international awards in 1996, including a Silver Leopard at the International Film Festival in Locarno and prizes for direction in Angers, Belfort, Tehran, and Bratislava, and it was also nominated for a Czech Lion award.

His next film, *Paralelní světy* (*Parallel Worlds*), was a finalist in the NHK Award – Sundance scriptwriting competition and was screened as part of the competition section at the festival in San Sebastian. His film *Cesta ven* (*The Way Out*) was shown in the ACID section at the Cannes Film Festival in 2014, becoming the first Czech film to premiere at the this most prestigious film festival in 23 years. It was awarded seven Czech Lions, including Best Film, Best Screenplay, and Best Director.

The drama *Nikdy nejsme sami* (*We Are Never Alone*) (2017) won the audience Tagesspiegel Award at the Berlinale Festival and the prize for artistic contribution at the Cairo International Film Festival. The documentary *Zpověď zapomenutého* (*Confession of the Vanished*) then won the Fipa d'or Award at the Biarritz Festival. Vaclav's most recent work, the road movie *Skokan* (*The Jumper*), arrived in Czech cinemas in June 2017.

## JAN MACOLA (PRODUCER)

Jan Macola joined Barrandov Studio in 2006 after studying international relations at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University. At Barrandov, he worked as Marketing Manager until 2011, and during his final two years as Head of Development and Coproduction. This gave him detailed knowledge of the practice of Czech and international film funding. Jan Macola founded his own production company, Mimesis Film, in 2012.

His first production, *Cesta ven (The Way Out)*, was made in cooperation with director Petr Vaclav. It was screened in the ACID section at the Cannes Film Festival and went on to win a number of awards, including seven Czech Lions, among them Best Film, presented to the producer of the film. Their next film together was the drama *Nikdy nejsme sami (We Are Never Alone)* which was selected for the Forum section at the Berlinale Festival where it won the audience award.

In addition to feature films, Jan Macola also makes documentaries, winning a Czech Lion for *Normální autistický film (Normal Autistic Film)* together with director Miroslav Janek in 2017. His other documentary productions are *Na Sever (Into the North)*, *Zpověď zapomenutého (Confession of the Vanished)*, *V Mosulu (Inside Mosul)*, and *Nebe (Heaven)*. In 2016, Jan Macola and his wife Alžběta reconstructed and reopened the Kino Pilotů cinema in Prague-Vršovice and founded the Pilot Film distribution company. Jan Macola is a member of the Czech Film and Television Academy and the international ACE Producers association.

## DIEGO ROMERO SUAREZ LLANOS (CAMERAMAN)

Spanish cinematographer Diego Romero has made feature and documentary films in many countries. He has worked with director Roberto Minervini for a number of years. Their film *The Other Side (2015)* wowed the audience of the Un Certain Regard competition section at the festival in Cannes, while the film *What You Gonna Do When the World Is on Fire (2018)* won four awards at the festival in Venice.

## ANDREA CAVALLETTO (COSTUME DESIGNER)

Andrea Cavalletto graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice in 2004 and the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome in 2007, where he was a student of costume designer Piero Tosi and scenographer Andrea Crisanti. He began his career in film and theatre productions as an assistant to costume designers Maurizio Millenotti and Alessandro Lai. In 2009, he made his debut as a costume designer in his own right for the film *Diecia Inverni*, directed by Valerio Mieli. The film won a Silver Ribbon, an Italian film award, and a David di Donatello Award, the Italian equivalent of the American Academy Awards (Oscars).

Various cinematographic collaborations followed, including films such as *I Primi della Lista*, *Piuma*, *Itaker*, *Il Sud è Niente* (entered in the competition at Berlinale 2014), *Il Padre d'Italia*, and the drama *7 minutes*.

Andrea Cavalletto won a David di Donatello Award for best costumes for the film *Torneranno i prati* by director Ermanno Olmi in 2014.

He has also taught classes in film and theatre costume design at the Academy of Fine Arts in Perugia and the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice.



## VÁCLAV LUKS (CONDUCTOR)

Václav Luks is the founder and artistic director of the Prague Baroque orchestra Collegium 1704 . He studied at Schole Cantorum Basiliensis in Basel, Switzerland. Under his leadership, Collegium 1704 quickly established itself as one of the elite world orchestras dedicated to the interpretation of 17th and 18th century music.

The ensemble regularly appears at prestigious European festivals such as Salzburger Festspiele, Bachfest Leipzig, Chopin Festival Warsaw, Lucerne Festival, Oude Muziek Utrecht, and Handel-Festspiele Halle, and performs at prominent concert and opera houses – Opéra Royal deVersailles, Wiener Konzerthaus, Berliner Philharmonie, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, BOZAR in Brussels, and elsewhere.

Between 2009 and 2022, Václav Luks and Collegium 1704 were involved in four international opera projects – a production of Handel's opera Rinaldo, the modern premiere of Mysliveček's opera L'Olimpiade, which was nominated for the International Opera Awards in 2014, the modern premiere of Vivaldi's opera Arsilda, Regina di Ponto, and a production of Handel's opera Alcina.


Under his direction, Collegium 1704 performed Mysliveček's oratorio Lapassione di Gesù Cristo at the Prague Spring International Music Festival in 2013, Abramo ed Isacco at the prestigious Salzburger Festspiele in 2022, and recorded an album of Mysliveček's violin concerts together with Leila Schayegh.

## VOJTĚCH DYK (JOSEF MYSLIVEČEK)

Vojtěch Dyk is a Czech actor and musician who studied at the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts (DAMU) in Prague, specializing in drama. He used to be a member of the Czech National Theatre and also cooperated with independent theatres.

He became better known to the public after appearing in several television series and in the films *Ženy v pokušení* (Women in Temptation) by Jiří Vejdělek and *Tři bratři* (Three Brothers) by Jan Svěrák. Both films are among the most successful Czech films of recent years. In 2022, he appeared in the critically acclaimed film *Zpráva o záchraně mrtvého* (Saving One Who Was Dead), directed by Václav Kadrnka who main award at the International Film Festival Karlovy Vary in 2017.

Music fans know Vojtěch Dyk as the frontman of Nightwork. In recent years, he performs with his own project, D. Y.K., and with B-Side Band from Brno.

A man in a blue puffer jacket and a light blue face mask stands in the center of a room, holding a white envelope. He is looking down at the envelope. To his left and right, two women are seated in ornate, patterned chairs. They are wearing dark red, long-sleeved dresses with white lace collars. The room has blue patterned curtains in the background and a window on the left. The lighting is soft and indoor.

Q&A WITH  
PETR VÁCLAV

*You tell the story of a historical figure: the composer Josef Mysliveček. Who was he?*

Josef Mysliveček was born in 1737 to a Prague miller. He studied milling and became a member of the millers' guild in Prague. It wasn't until the age of twenty-five that he dared to defy the wish of his long-dead father that he should look after the mill. He also disappointed the expectation of his mother and his twin brother that he would remain in Prague with them. He disappeared abruptly to Venice, and after four years of residing in Italy he got his first incredible commission to write an opera for Teatro San Carlo in Naples. This was the largest opera house at this time, and the most renowned singers sang there. There are no historical sources which record how this rapid progress in his career occurred. My film begins in Venice where the young Josef is trying to find his way around in foreign surroundings. It captures the events which led to his first major commission, and it goes on to describe the life of an artist who builds a dazzling career, but then loses it. It is an Icarian story of a rise and a fall. Mysliveček's suffering and death are tragic. Even so, my film is the story of great fortune because Josef became a major composer. He achieved the artistic destiny he desired. His life was short. But it was a full one. He achieved self-fulfillment, and he left behind his music which still speaks to us even after 240 years of oblivion.

*What aspects of his life and works, unknown to the public, did you particularly want to capture in the film?*

I wanted to tell the story of a man who followed a vital urge to live his life, to become somebody, to achieve self-fulfillment. I also endeavored to incorporate some of his best arias in the film, representing different aspects of his skills as a composer. The entire film is about how his career grows, and how he loses it.

*How would you describe the era in which your film is set?*

Josef grew up in the occupied and bombarded Prague of the Seven Years' War. We are all familiar with this conflict from the film *Barry Lyndon*. Three years after Mysliveček's first great success at Teatro San Carlo in Naples, Marie Antoinette marries Louis XVI, her sister having married King Ferdinand of Naples two years prior. Mysliveček wrote his greatest operas for the royal theatre in Naples. The queen of France and the queen of Naples were both sisters of Austrian Emperor Joseph II. The general public knows him from the film *Amadeus*. Mysliveček dies eight years before the French Revolution. At that time, Beethoven is nineteen years old.



### *What was special about Josef Mysliveček's relationship with Wolfgang A. Mozart?*

Josef Mysliveček was thirty-three and was writing his eighth Italian opera when he met the thirteen-year-old Mozart and his fifty-one-year-old father, Leopold. It happened in Bologna during the Mozarts' Grand Tour. The father and son were traveling around Italy, looking for contracts. Leopold also secretly hoped that with his son's success, the whole family would move to Italy and never return to Austria, where they felt unappreciated. Leopold showed great interest in Mysliveček, both as an impresario and a father: he wanted to understand how this German-speaking foreigner from the other side of the Alps, a citizen of the Austrian Empire, essentially their compatriot, had managed to make such a great career in Italy. He undoubtedly wanted advice. Wolfgang was more interested in Mysliveček's music. The overture to his first opera, *Mitridate*, is influenced by Mysliveček's overture to his Bologna opera, *La Nitteti*. We can even say that it directly borrows some musical ideas. Josef and Wolfgang respected each other greatly. The only psychological description of Mysliveček we have is contained in one of the letters Mozart wrote to his father. In it, he describes Mysliveček as a man full of fire and passion. After meeting in Bologna and Milan, the two composers did not see each other again for six years. After Mozart had escaped from Salzburg at the age of twenty-one and had failed to find employment in Germany, Mysliveček attempted to get him a position in Naples. He did not succeed, however, because there had been a change in the management of Teatro San Carlo at that time, and "il Boemo", who was also gravely ill, lost his influence over the new directors. I think we can say without exaggeration that Mysliveček had achieved the career and lifestyle which Mozart himself was seeking seeking and never got. As an adult, Mozart did not receive a single commission in Italy, and he never returned there.

### *How did you come to know Mysliveček's music?*

When I started this project, there were only about three recordings of his operas, and they were really dreadful, played by average orchestras with very average singers. Yet Mysliveček wrote for the greatest castrati, tenors and sopranos of his time. This alone means his music must be performed by the best voices of our time. And even for them, the castrato and coloratura parts remain extremely difficult. At this point, however, I was unable to recognize where the blame lay, and I was terrified that Mysliveček was simply an inferior composer. Václav Luks, one of the greatest contemporary conductors of Baroque music, who had been an advisor to me in writing the screenplay from the outset, reassured me. He told me about Mysliveček's music. Shortly afterwards, he traveled to Paris. We made copies of two of Mysliveček's operas from the the National archives, and he played them on the piano for me and sang the vocal parts that afternoon. Also, he explained to me Mysliveček's dramaturgical skills. His sense for the psychology of the characters, his ability to express their emotions. I began to grasp the grandness of Mysliveček's music. When I was a fellow at Villa Medici a little later, Václav Luks flew over for a few days, and played L'Olimpiade for me on the piano. It was an incredible experience. When he got the opportunity to perform it in a co-production between the Czech National Theatre, Dijon Opera and Caen Opera, I decided to film a documentary about it. Thus, I was present for over three months of rehearsals and was able to follow Václav Luks, the singers, and all the work that went into making the opera. That was a crucial experience for me.

### *What were the main sources that you used to find out information about Mysliveček's life?*

The amount of materials available which relate directly to Mysliveček is not great. Czech musicologist Stanislav Bohadlo collected existing sources in his book, *Josef Mysliveček v dopisech* (Josef Mysliveček in Correspondence). American scholar Daniel E. Freeman followed up on his work in the monograph *Josef Mysliveček, the Man and His Music*. Daniel became a great ally and dedicated advisor to me, and we exchanged hundreds of pages worth of emails. I read various texts from Paris libraries which had been printed during Mysliveček's time. I needed to have publications from that time. To feel that period close-up, in my own hands. I consulted numerous interesting texts about venereal diseases, travel journals... I studied many books: Charles Burney, the memoirs of Goldoni, Gozzi, Casanova's monumental *Histoire de ma vie*. I read memoirs of anyone I could get hold of, correspondence, the literature of the time. Of course, one of the greatest sources for understanding the music world of that time, and also the world in general, is the correspondence of Mozart. I also read many of the latest expert treatises and met a number of the authors of these works.

### *How is it possible that Mysliveček has been forgotten?*

First of all, he died of syphilis. Many people caught it at the time, but it was still considered a disease of immoral people. Mysliveček was undoubtedly condemned by many. This is evidenced in Leopold Mozart's letter to his son, in which he states that he is sorry for their friend, but that his misfortune was of his own making because he had led a wicked and shameful life and so it was no surprise that he had to bear the shame which all the world could see. Another reason why Mysliveček has been forgotten is the fact that he was a foreigner. He worked continuously and traveled across Italy from south to north, and from north to south, for over fifteen years. But he never had the time to settle anywhere. He wasn't married, his relationships were intermittent. Although he was famous, there was no one who wanted to nurture his legacy. A third reason is that opera seria as a genre fell out of favor with the collapse of monarchies and disappeared. Mysliveček is not the only opera composer to who has been forgotten. Almost nobody knows of the wonderful Traetta. Cimarosa and Jommelli are well-known, but only in Italy and even so almost nobody plays their operas. Johann Christian Bach is really only known because he was Johann Sebastian's son. This phenomenon of oblivion is only really seen in the eighteenth century. Even Bach was not played for a long time, and he was basically rediscovered. And in Mysliveček's own time, Vivaldi was almost never performed. The history of music is to some extent the history of forgetting and rediscovering, a story of fashionable admiration and unjust damnation. Success is never won forever but neither it is lost for eternity.

### *Is the issue of admiration and obscurity something which also affects the famous singers whom Mysliveček worked with?*

Definitely. Caterina Gabrielli, for example, who is one of the major characters in my film, was incredibly famous, all Italian theatres were fighting over her. Catherine the Great invited her to Russia. Gabrielli asked for a huge salary. Shocked, the Empress replied: "This money equals the pay of my generals." The singer calmly advised: "So call your generals to sing for you." The Empress was forced to surrender. Caterina Gabrielli died fourteen years after her last opera performance. Nobody published any obituaries or articles about her.

*The film also focuses a lot on the status of women in society in that era. Is that intentional?*

It is merely the direct consequence of the story. Women played a fundamental role in Josef's life. And they naturally bring with them the issue of their status in the social order at the time. On the one hand, we can see a free-spirited Venetian noblewoman, one that Casanova or Cardinal de Bernis could have described. On the other hand, we also see a woman who is ensnared by her despotic husband, and a young woman destroyed by her authoritarian father. We also provide a portrait of the most famous soprano of her time. In her case, we can get a sense of the special status enjoyed by an opera star who was wealthy, had no husband or guardian, and could do what she wanted. This was a woman who was lauded and feared, seen as a great artist but also as a woman of dubious morals and ill repute. At that time, the status of actors and dancers was a poor one, but not even a great opera star could escape the deeply ambivalent response of society, oscillating between admiration and suspicion.

*How did you make use of Mysliveček's music?*

From the outset, I worked with Václav Luks, as one of the greatest experts on Baroque music, on the screenplay. He then recorded the music for the film with his orchestra, Collegium 1704. We filmed all the opera scenes live, although playback would have been common practice. Playback is cheaper and ensures technical cleanliness. But no singer can perform in playback what they experience when singing live. The art of singing depends on expression, on acting, but it's also a physical performance. That's what makes the profession so difficult and so thrilling. That's why there has always been so much admiration for singers. I wanted the live performance to convey the uniqueness which characterizes each note, each moment of the singers' performance. But we also recorded some music in the studio so that I had additional material to edit in. We also used it for an upcoming CD with Mysliveček's music, which includes a number of arias nobody had studied since the composer's death. The only playback we had to resort to was for actress Barbara Ronchi, who plays Caterina Gabrielli. She had to learn to breathe, to sing, to perform. She worked very hard so that she could be completely credible.

*The film's cinematographer is Diego Romero from Spain. Why did you choose him?*

I was looking for a cinematographer with a great aesthetic feeling, a sense for natural light, and experience with handheld camera work. I wanted a living, non-academic, contemporary picture. I also wanted a cinematographer who wasn't going to complain if he didn't get a steadicam, cranes, tracks, and soon. Someone who is able to light theatres. I needed somebody who had filmed documentaries, and who was more interested in the magnetizing observation of actors rather than in form. Someone who would be able to produce a beautiful picture with a lot of production values, but no empty embellishments.

*How did you choose your actors?*

It took me a long time to find someone to play Josef, a foreigner from Prague, surrounded by Italian women and men. After considering well-known Anglo-Saxon actors, and after looking at various Austrian and Slavic actors, I came to the realization that no actor of a different nationality could embody a Czech. You can feel it in the manners, you can see it in the facial expressions, in the smile, and especially in the accent. In the end, I decided to work with a Czech actor. Vojta Dyk is also a musician, with a feel for music, and he is able to lead. So he was an obvious choice. The excellent Roman casting director, Stefania De Santis, helped me to find Italian actors. She introduced me to the Italian acting world, which I was unfamiliar with. In the scenes set in Venice, I only wanted actors from the north, with a Venetian-Lombard accent. That was very important to me, as I am unable to hear certain nuances myself, and I needed to ensure their speech was authentic. I didn't want to rely on someone "putting on" the accent. I did make one exception, however, although the actress worked with a dialect coach to get rid of her Roman accent. For the Neapolitan characters, I asked my actors to rewrite my Italian dialogues into the Neapolitan dialect. They had a lot of fun with that, and the lines also became very natural for them, since they partly wrote the text themselves. Vojta Dyk had to learn everything from scratch, and the role was very demanding for him due to the difficulty of the language.

*Doing a historical film in Italian must have been a great leap into the unknown for you.*

I want my films to change my life, so they've always got to be a journey into the unknown. Initially, I joked that it was going to be such an expensive film that I might never make it. That all this work will make me a very knowledgeable scholar but deaden me as a filmmaker. Finally, we made this film. It has led me to adopt Italy as my third home. France is my second home. The idea of doing films that are easy to make does not excite me too much.

*You've been living in Paris for twenty years. You are a French citizen. Isn't this departure to foreign climes in some way a parallel to Myslivoček's life?*

Well, for sure: the story of an artist who decides to resettle and make it in show business somewhere new, to work in a language which isn't his mother tongue; these are naturally topics which are somewhat familiar to me.

*What do you expect from your film?*

My first goal is to ensure that the film has an impact on the audience. Right after that, my second goal is definitely to ensure Josef Myslivoček comes out of obscurity. This process has already started, slowly, and I am convinced that our film will be of great assistance in this regard. I think that this can surely be achieved in Myslivoček's home country, in the Czech Republic. But I'd also like to return him to Italy, the country where he was born as an artist. The return of Myslivoček's works to the global opera scene would be my ultimate dream.

A man with long, light-colored hair tied back, wearing a white high-collared shirt and a dark vest, sits at a table in a dimly lit room. He is looking down at a piece of paper he is holding. On the table in front of him are several items: a violin in its case, a glass of red wine, a glass of water, a glass decanter, and a white mask. To the right, a candelabra with three lit yellow candles provides light. The background features a wall with a large, ornate, colorful mural or tapestry. A window with a decorative glass pattern is visible on the far right.

ABOUT JOSEF  
MYSLIVEČEK

# THE LIFE OF JOSEF MYSLIVEČEK

A native of Prague, Josef Mysliveček (1737–1781) became one of the leading musical personalities in the whole of Europe, in spite of all expectations. In his time, he was the most sought-after opera composer in Italy and can be described without exaggeration as having been the most celebrated artist of Czech origin in the 18th century. He collaborated with the vocalists of his time and influenced Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart himself. His music continues to fascinate listeners to this day with its energy, ingenuity, and emotional depth.

Josef Mysliveček was most likely born in Sova Mills in Kampa on March 9, 1737. His father Matěj Mysliveček was a wealthy and influential miller, and his mother Anna Terezie also came from a family of millers. In addition to a twin brother, Jáchym, Mysliveček also had a sister, Maria Anna, who entered a convent. Jáchym made a living as a miller in Prague until his death.

We know for a fact that the family was wealthy and materially secure. Josef probably attended the Dominican school at the Church of St. Giles, where he also likely received music lessons. After this, he appears to have switched to the Jesuit college in Klementinum, where great emphasis was placed on the musical prowess of students. We know that he enrolled at Charles-Ferdinand University but left after the first year because he “made no progress in logic.” He subsequently learned the trade, studying hydraulics and mathematical subjects, among others, as required of the millers of that time. He completed his studies, was admitted to the Prague Guild as a master miller, and began working in the family mills.



# CAREER IN ITALY

Until he was twenty-five, Mysliveček did not focus on music to any great extent. At that stage, he decided to change his path in life and become a composer and violin virtuoso. He first completed his musical education in Prague with František Václav Habermann and Josef Seger and began writing his own compositions surprisingly quickly—his oldest surviving work is the successful *Symphony in C Major*. Italian education, however, was indispensable for opera composers of that time.

Mysliveček left for Italy in the autumn of 1763. He made for Venice, probably because the Italian operas which were performed in Prague and the vocalists who sang in them were often of Venetian provenance. During his time in Italy, Mysliveček traveled from city to city, composing for various theatres. He was primarily associated with Teatro San Carlo in Naples, the most prestigious European stage of its time, and it was in this esteemed theatre that more of Mysliveček's operas were performed than anywhere else.

Mysliveček's first opera for Naples, *Il Bellerofonte*, met with enthusiastic reception. The main roles were performed by tenor Anton Raaff and soprano Caterina Gabrielli, two of the most famous opera stars of the age. The positive response to the opera led to commissions for many other Italian theatres, including Florence, Rome, Venice, Turin, and Bologna.

Mysliveček also achieved great success in Munich. In 1777, he presented his opera *Ezio* at the local court and also his oratorio *Isacco, figura del redentore*, that “the whole of Munich” was still talking about six months later, as Wolfgang Mozart noted in a letter.

# MYSLIVEČEK AND MOZART

The surviving correspondence tells us of a number of meetings between the two composers.

Mysliveček first met Mozart and his father Leopold in Bologna in 1770, when the fourteen-year-old Wolfgang was working on the opera *Mitridate, re di Ponto*, which was to be performed in Milan. Theirs was a very friendly relationship, the young Mozart admired Mysliveček and was grateful for the experience that the older artist was passing on to him about composition. Mysliveček even tried to use his contacts to secure commissions for Mozart in Italy.

Mysliveček and Wolfgang Mozart met for the last time in Munich, by which time Mysliveček was already seriously ill. Mozart visited him in hospital and wrote about the meeting in a letter to his father in great detail and with strong emotion. The friendship between Mysliveček and the Mozarts cooled off later on when Mysliveček was unable to fulfill his promise of getting Wolfgang a commission for an opera at Teatro San Carlo.

Mozart returned to the genre of opera seria at the end of his life, when he composed the opera *La clemenza di Tito*, which premiered at the Estates Theatre in Prague in 1791 on the occasion of the coronation of Leopold II as Bohemian king. Mysliveček had set the same libretto some seventeen years earlier.

A comparison in terms of recognition is inescapable. The Czech, a generation older, achieved stellar success in Italian theatres in his own lifetime. Although Mozart later attempted to do the same, he never managed to achieve a breakthrough in Italy. Again, their posthumous fates were almost entirely the opposite, only this time the other way round. While Mozart became one of the world's most renowned composers after his death, Mysliveček was almost completely forgotten for more than two centuries.

# FINAL YEARS

In the final years of his life, Mysliveček suffered from major health problems and pain caused by progressive syphilis. In spite of this, however, he continued to compose operas and instrumental music. Three years before his death, he presented one of his best operas of all, *L'Olimpiade*, which was played in honour of the name day of the King of Spain.

Apart from his illness, Mysliveček also faced financial difficulties and had to resort to taking out several loans from a paupers' bank. It is not known exactly when he died, but there is a record of his funeral in Rome, in the Church of San Lorenzo in Lucina, on February 4, 1781, a date which soon came to be accepted as the date of his death. He left behind virtually no possessions, and the priest who recorded his funeral took Mysliveček to be a 65-year-old man, when in reality the composer did not even live to the age of forty-four.



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