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Full transcript of an interview with

VERA TANCIBUDEK

on 5 March 2000

By Sasha Kovaricek

Recording available on CD

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A series of dots, indicates an untranscribable word or phrase.

Sentences that were left unfinished in the normal manner of conversation are shown ending in three dashes, - - -.

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Interview with Mrs Vera Tancibudek recorded by Sasha Kovaricek on the 5th March 2000 for the Life Stories of Migrants from the Czech and Slovak Republics Oral History Project.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

My name is Vera Tancibudek and I live in Adelaide. I have been actually living here with my husband and my two daughters since 1969. And all these years I've been engaged a lot in music, in education, the first years in performance as well, but as I became more and more involved in teaching, so my practical music-making had to take second place.

At first I was engaged to teach at Norwood High School, where I was seven years in charge of all the music program. I have established a very good choir. We managed to get four-part singing – soprano, alto, tenor and bass. The boys who already had lower voices, it was quite a battle to get them into the choir, because somehow it was considered unmanly or unboyish to sing with girls in a choir, but in the end we won several first prizes in Eisteddfod, and then it became *extremely* popular and we had any amount of boys and girls, so our choir was a great pride of the school.

Well, then I also tried to establish an orchestra, so there were number of children – because Norwood High School was a very big school – and we managed to get a lot of children who had private tuition in all sorts of instruments. So our orchestra must have been quite an extraordinary one, because apart from violins and cellos and trumpets and saxophones and pianos, we had just about everything we could put together, and of course such music never existed. Although I went through many libraries to find some sort of orchestral music, in the end I had to re-write from all sorts of other scores and give everybody some part. Some were quite advanced, there were others were very, very (laughs) sort of on elementary level, so the part has to fit them. So that was my first job.

And after seven years I was promoted to lectureship at Flinders Street School of Music. That was a very nice job, because there I was in charge mostly of students who wanted to take Music as a matriculation subject. There was a new

subject established in about '79, and I was involved with them right from the beginning. I was on the committees who were working on the curriculum and so on, so at first it was just taught as adult education classes under those auspices, and finally it became – when School of Music was established in Flinders Street – so this matriculation Music was the centre for all Adelaide. And we had students from all schools who wanted to take it as a subject, because the schools could not engage individual teachers for two or three students from one school or another one. So that was until my retirement, really, my main job. And apart from that I had to teach history of music and theory, and also piano students, so I was pretty busy there.

Now, can you tell us actually where you come from, where were you born, who –

Yes.

– your parents were?

Well, I was born in Czech Republic, north of Prague in a place called Železny Brod, and I spent most of my youth in Jablonec, which is in the foothills of the Giant Mountains. And I studied there, I matriculated in secondary school – *gymnasium* it's called – and then all the universities were closed. We couldn't study at tertiary education because we were occupied by Germans and so we had to look for some other openings. And because I was always interested in music and *loved* practising and *loved* music, so I managed to pass an audition into the Conservatorium, which was very selective, because enormous amount of students tried to get in, and that was the only school that was open apart from other – some art school. But all universities were closed. So I managed to get there, and the next five years I studied piano and pedagogy at the Conservatorium in Prague. There I met my husband, who also was a musician.

Well, actually, you grew up in what was then known as Czechoslovakia.

Yes. I was born in an extraordinary family. My father was a real patriot. In the First World War he fought in the Czech army. He started as a – of course, we were under Austrian Empire, Czech Republic and Moravia and Slovakia – so he was officer in Austrian army, and as soon as he had the first possibility in Carpathian Mountains he ran over to the other side where Czech legions were formed and he

became eventually a major of storm battalion who fought right through Russia, at first against Germans and then later on against the Soviets and Communists when the Revolution started in Russia. So that was my father's background, and of course we were always brought up very strongly in that nationalistic Czech spirit.

My mother was, on the other hand, born in Omsk in Siberia. Her parents were – one parent was – mother was Polish, father was a Lithuanian, and for political agitation he was sent to Siberia as a prisoner. And there she grew up, and when the Revolution – then she returned back to European Russia, lived in Lithuania for a number of years, or Poland, and when the War broke up, again, with her mother, she shifted back to Omsk, where she still remembered that part of her life from her youth. And she met my father then, during the fight somewhere in Yekaterinburg and finally they were married in Charbin –

What year was that, do you know?

– that was in 1919, and in 1920 – that was two years after the end of the world war – they returned from Vladivostok, where they fought through all to get the Czech contingents, the soldiers, back to Czechoslovakia, because the Soviets wouldn't allow them to go through Russia, back the shorter way, so they arrived in Vladivostok and then finally through Canada to Hamburg, and from that way to Czech Republic. So that was a big, really, journey. And Mother settled very well and adopted Czech culture and Czechoslovakia very well, and taught us always to speak Russian as well.

So what was her language?

Her language was equal Polish and Russian. Polish people couldn't say that she's not Polish, and Russian couldn't say that she wasn't Russian. She went to Russian schools when she was in Omsk, and then she spoke at home Polish, so it was absolutely without accent. And later on she had to learn German, because we lived in Jablonec, it was a very strong German population there, and of course Czech because she was married with Czech. She had strong accent in Czech, I must say. And finally, when the whole family emigrated – because of the Communism again – to Canada, so she had to adopt English. (laughs) And I never forget when we were waiting for the emigration in Germany how she learnt about Mr Priestley, what he did from a textbook, and she got very cross when we interrupted and said, 'Mother,

you said you'd already' (laughter) So she managed to master English reasonably acceptably, let's put it that way.

How old was she?

She was sixty when finally she emigrated with Father, because of the Communism, in 1950 to Canada. They both were sixty.

So at sixty she started to learn English.

English, oh yes, and she managed to travel to Australia on her own and talk to her neighbours and everything. She was quite independent lady like that.

And your father, he was also quite an eminent man.

My father was, because not only did he make quite a career during this First World War in the Czech army, when he came back to Czechoslovakia he was offered promotion. He was major then. He would stay in Czech army, and Mother would have wished it very much, because she loved my father in uniform, (laughs) I must say that. But Father – his father already, my grandfather, started extremely prosperous business. It was export firm, which dealt with bangles at first, and had big export contacts with India, with Egypt, with Persia, and they were sending these brass bangles mostly to these countries. I remember going often then, still, to the expedition and having a look with great interest at this enormous amount of big wooden cases with these strange addresses written on them, all these countries. Well, Grandfather was getting old and Father came back from war, and he decided that the firm will go to my father and he has to carry on. Well, it was already so well established that Father felt he needs help, and he asked his brother, who was then in England, to come back and join him, and the firm was called Hásek Brothers. And the premises were too small – (sound of rustling paper) first in Železny Brod it started – so they moved to Jablonec, and there from 1921 until '39 they established and really gave a livelihood to hundreds and hundreds of people in the whole neighbourhood. They all worked for Hásek Brothers, because it was the only Czech firm in Jablonec – the rest were German and Jewish firms established – and Hásek Brothers employed Czech people. They were very poor in this area in the hills, in the mountains there, and they built, as it was called. They were then starting business in beads during Queen Victoria time. It was a great export to England as

well. The dresses were all embroidered with tiny little *schmelz*, it was called in Czech, tiny little beads, and that was what they were making in Jablonec. So enormous amount of material was sent away.

Then in '38, when Sudeten became part of – after the Munich Agreement, unfortunately, they were annexed to the Reich, so the Czech people had to opt whether they wanted to become under – German citizens and remain where they were, or whether they wanted to emigrate or, rather, move into the so-called Protectorate, which was then formed as a part of previous Czechoslovakia, sort of without a Sudeten. So of course my father, as I mentioned before, being great nationalist, and he decided definitely we are moving, and we're going back to Železny Brod, which was close where he started – Grandfather started a business there. It was very difficult to get any accommodation, but my aunt had a big house and she organised it in such a ways that we get one floor at least, and so we managed to live there. And the firm was shifted to a factory which was at that stage empty, so they rented it, with all the employees which they had, the whole firm started to function there. And during the whole War they were working for further – they sort of started to think that in case the War finishes there will be such shortage of stuff for all these countries where we had such a busy export, and so they were still building it and keeping it for future deliveries. And they had some minor business with Rumania and Bulgaria and some of these European countries. They were sending, by that time, buttons they were making and some glassware and things like that. Still they function always as an export firm.

During, of course, this Occupation, Father was always known as a person who fought against Soviet Russia and was in Russia, but Germans were frightened that he might start some sort of anti-German activity during these years and, sure enough, he was pulled into such action. And some person who was member of that must have mentioned his name, because Gestapo came to the house and they imprisoned him, took him, and he was imprisoned for quite a length of time in Jičín in Kartouzy Prison. And they could not in any way get him – he said, 'I have not been involved with anything,' because he knew this person, and he actually came to the house to collect money for this action and Father didn't give him anything because he came while our maid was in the kitchen and in front of

her – strange person – he would be asking for money for some underground activity, and Father was, of course, clever enough to refuse that. But he was involved with such action, and finally the Germans, or the Nazis, let him go after a lot of interrogations and things like that, so he was – but watched all the time. But in spite of that both my parents were involved in very dangerous activity, because in the areas around Železny Brod in the mountains were quite a number of partisans. And these partisans were usually Russian deserters who managed to get away, and my mother was organising the food supply for at least two or three years, and Father was the leader of the whole uprising of the whole area. Well, eventually he saved the Železny Brod from dreadful bloodshed because the particular partisans wanted to start and attack the German contingent, which was quite big in Železny Brod. Quite a number. There was even a general. And they couldn't – when they heard that the War is coming to an end, they wanted to come down and murder all these Germans, they were so full of hatred. But Father risked his life for the second time, and he had long talks with the German general and tried to persuade him to give up all the guns and all the ammunition and not to start any fighting, because the War is anyway lost already for them, and that he will absolutely guarantee him with his word that he will make sure that the German soldiers and a whole lot of people who were there – the Germans – would have free passage to Germany. Well then, finally the German general was very much annoyed that somebody would *dare* to have this type of talk to him, even took his revolver out against Father, but finally Father managed somehow, with his calm and very professional soldier attitude, he managed to calm him down, and finally the general and he signed a contract that this is what will happen, that there will be no fighting and they will put down all the guns, all the tanks and everything that was in Brod, and for that Father will guarantee that the Germans have free passage out. So it almost happened, but of course these partisans – and they're very hotblooded, some Czechs, who couldn't possibly wait – when all that happened and the guns were put down, so some of them stormed the city and they still killed some Germans and Father felt it like a dreadful betrayal of his word. He never forgave that horrible letdown of the local people whom he represented with his life for so many years. It was a terrible disappointment.

Then freedom came and we enjoyed wonderful three years under the President Beneš, and then '48 fortunately was the *putsch*, Communistic *putsch*, and then the Harsegs' firm, which was extremely prosperous after the War, particularly, because they had so much goods to immediately ship to America and everywhere else, so in '49 the firm was nationalised and everything was confiscated. Absolutely the whole lot of stock, everything that there was, and of course 'capitalist Hásek' and so on. And fortunately, because he was very much liked by the whole big surrounding, because he was always nationalist, people knew it, they loved him, they respected him, he gave them livelihood for years and years, so they didn't have quite that strength to really perhaps punish him more. They gave him job and he sort of lived there and they let us stay in our villa. They didn't at least take the house away.

Towards the end of 1950, uncles – before the nationalisation still – Uncle, his brother, his partner, went for the firm to United States, he was in New York at that time, and he'd let Father know that he will never return under the circumstances, and the only way is to start all over again in another country, that he will not be happy, that he can't possibly see how the country went into ruins for everything he fought for and already during First World War and all his endeavours and things are all ruined and lost, and he lost everything in any way, so why doesn't he just try to get out? It still is worth – he's almost sixty, but he should consider that and he will try to find some way how to get the family out. And sure enough he did. He left his wife behind and two little children, because he went on his own on the business trip, and the children were two year-old and ten year-old. And he sent a message through some buyers – Americans, who still were able to come to Czech Republic as if nothing happened – that he will send half of letter, just describing nothing particular, and if a person will come with the second half, which will be torn to two parts, and if the two parts will fit together, he should trust the person and he will help him to get out. Well, that's exactly what happened in January 1950. Such person arrived dressed in overalls, as a plumber, and he came to Jablonec. Father immediately decided to go out. My elder sister was imprisoned under Communism as well because they caught a letter which she wrote to a friend of hers criticising the situation in Czechoslovakia, and they tried to prove to her because she was from a

‘unsocialistic family’, as it were, so they tried to prove that all these words which she put in were – actually had a different meaning, that it was all some or something like that which meant something different, that they just let her go home for Christmas and we disappeared in January, because she had to go back to prison. So that she was another one immediately who decided she will leave. My younger sister was very successful actress. She was in the theatre in Liberec and enjoyed her career. She was also graduate from the Prague drama school of the Conservatorium. And I was the only one married to a very successful musician who had wonderful possibilities in Czechoslovakia, and he was the only one who was extremely reluctant to leave his country.

My husband, I met him as a student at the Conservatorium. The first day I saw him, he was something very special, because he always was the first one to have every answer, and he was so full of life and full of excitement, such a through-and-through musician – much more than many of us who just went there as a second choice, like for me it was, in a way, second choice, the Conservatorium, because I couldn’t do anything else. For him it was just nothing else existed but music, and it came through in everything he did. Well, when I got to know him better I found out that of course he’s from an extremely cultured and musical family. His grandfather already was a teacher in a small little village, teacher who was in charge of all classes, and of course as such he was the sole personality who brought in music to the village and culture and poetry and everything, and he organised all the cultural life in that area. Well, out of that family came Jiří’s mother, who was also a teacher, and then his father, he was graduate – or he was studying, actually, graduate teacher and studied at the university Musicology. And he did about two or three years. At the same time he did Composition – he even composed some trios which were played by Smetana Quartet later on, and he became then finally teacher and headmaster of a school in Mnichovo Hradiště, which is north of Prague. And there he really started enormous tradition in music. Not only was he a member of a strong quartet which was very functional and performed regularly at different functions, he started orchestra and he conducted it. Then he had a wonderful choir which is established, and all the musicians from the whole big area kept on coming to these orchestras, and there where his son, Jiří, also started to get his first musical

education, at first listening to the quartets for hours on end as they rehearsed in the classrooms, especially during holidays, when the children were at home, so they had the run of the whole school, of course. And then he – my husband – became a violinist to fill in the gap in the quartet, but when he had the oboe he just fell so in love with it and he felt, ‘I don’t want to do anything but play the oboe,’ which he did and got to the Conservatorium already as an oboe student, student on oboe. And there he was extremely successful.

And in ’46 I applied – I wanted to go somewhere into the world, I was so longing to go somewhere to see how it, music, is done in different parts. And I tried for France and for England. And as it turned out, a couple of musicians came to perform in Prague. They told me that they have connections Royal Academy of Music and that there is a very good teacher, Professor Kreksen, and I should get in touch with him. So I immediately started to making contact, and the Director of the Prague Conservatorium, who was Václav Holzknicht and also my teacher in the last year, he wrote, as the head of the Conservatorium, a letter to the Royal Academy of Music introducing me and so on, and that that I would love to come to England to study, and the answer was yes. So I was delighted, and in February I left for London and stayed there until after the Revolution, ’48. And during this period of time, Jiří came, he got scholarship – because he wanted probably to see me, as well – so he got scholarship from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and from the Czech Philharmonic – he was then already member, principal oboe, of Czech Philharmonic Orchestra – so he got permission and a stipendium, or scholarship, to go to England and study with the best-known, perhaps, world oboist, Leon Goossens. He heard him in Prague, straight after the Revolution. He came and gave a few concerts, and Jiří made contact with him. He also came to the oboe class at the Conservatorium, and because Jiří was probably the only one, and they asked me to interpret English because he couldn’t speak Czech to the students, so we got to know him a little bit. And Goossens invited then Jiří, yes, he should come to England, he’ll be delighted to teach him. And so Jiří came and spent the whole – about two, two and a half months, in England. And during this period of time that was still under Czechoslovakia, before the Communists took or changed our country, so the Czech Embassy organised a concert for us in London, where just about every

oboist who was in London came to the concert, and we shared the program. I played some solos and my husband played some oboe pieces, and in fact we have all these programs still here, and all the cuttings. And then I had another big concert, I was invited by some members of the Covent Garden Opera – singers, mainly – to participate as a pianist in a concert in Swansea in Wales, and that was a great thing for me because I made connection with some very important musicians. Well, then I went back to Czechoslovakia in '48, and in April we were married, and we stayed there until '50. The following year, in '49, we gave a big concert in Jablonec, where I lived, they organised it for us, and in the middle of the night the Czech SNB¹ came, and they – that is like Gestapo Germans, and so on – and they searched us –

SNB was the Czech Communist police.

– police, and they searched the whole house, and finally took my sister away. She was imprisoned because of the letter I mentioned earlier. So it gave us such a frightfully bitter and horrible feeling after that elation of the concert coming home, celebrating, suddenly middle of the night comes this SNB into the house, takes her, interrogations, horrible. Well, we went to Prague, and from that on it was – the utmost fear in the whole family was getting from bad to worse, and we all were terribly unhappy. Even Jiří who, of course, was not really touched by all that so directly as our family, he felt it through the marriage, of course. And then, in 1950 we left, then.

And what was his position at that time?

Jiří was principal oboist of Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. He was a member of the Czech Wind Quintet, which gave a lot of concerts and broadcasts. Together we already played in Czech radio, we had some sessions, and he was a member of the Chamber Orchestra which had a very high prestige, and it was conducted by Václav Talich, our great conductor – the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra was conducted by Rafael Kubelík at that stage.

Very successful for young people.

¹ [SNB in full?]

You know, he was only in his early twenties.

You both. He also met some interesting musicians there coming to Prague at that time.

Oh, very many of interesting musicians as a member of the orchestra. Sir Adrian Bok was one. He will tell you a nice story about that. Then Bernstein was there. Then, of course, I mentioned Gussens. Mora Limpani, French conductor Charles Münch and – oh yes, Erich Kleiber on top of that, great musician as well. And Charles Mackerras was a student then. So student Mackerras came just when we were married in Prague, and in fact he was our very first visitor in our flat in Prague. He studied conducting with Talich in his chamber orchestra, went to many rehearsals and, being an oboist himself, because he was an oboist in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, so naturally his first interest was to meet some oboists in Czech Republic, and he was introduced to Jiri who could speak English because he just came from England, and basically sort of he could manage already to speak reasonably well. So they became quite friends. And Charles Mackerras with his wife, new wife, stayed in Prague then for quite a while from, I think, a whole year. And we were in touch ever since, ever since, and he was great help in our new life when we started to establish ourselves then in the world. And in fact the whole year that we spent in England was for us extremely important when we finally emigrated, because we had all these contacts, musical contacts, which helped us to start a new life.

So everything went very well for you artistically in Prague. But, unfortunately, politically –

Yes.

– the situation was very different.

We were very close family, and because they decided – I knew there was absolutely no hope for us, they would definitely take it on the rest of the family who stayed, and that was just the two of us – – –.

But then early 1950 it was not easy to escape. So how did you do it?

Well, that was shocking, actually. This man came dressed in the overalls, and he said, ‘I have been sent by’ – and mentioned Uncle’s name – ‘to take you all out. He didn’t say how many people will go, but I have got a route and I can take you out.

But it means very big physical exhaustion, because we have to go some ten, fifteen kilometres on foot across the frontier. There's no other way to get out.' And Father although sixty and Mother sixty, they agreed to that. So one afternoon, about two days later, he came to our flat where everyone came together, so that was my two sisters, my both parents, my aunt, her two little children that was the family of the uncle who was in the United States, and me and my husband. And the guide still brought another two people who were somehow connected with him. And this whole huge group of people assembled outside the Communistic Secretariat –

Headquarters.

– it was on Arbesovo náměstí, where we had our flat.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A: TAPE 1 SIDE B

And we with our luggage – well, luggage: each had one bag with a few extra things to change into. Jiří didn't take anything except his oboe, not even a shirt, he just was so upset. But I took a suitcase (laughs) which I dropped somewhere on the frontier, couldn't carry it any further. And so everyone got something little, which they took with them, and off we started. The day was 20th January 1950, middle of the winter, frosty day, and so we were dressed properly. At least we had couple of dresses on and we had couple of coats over us so we could take at least some clothing with us and we could carry, because it was so very cold. And so we got off the taxis. The taxi started to suspect some dangerous journey, and one of them was very worried, and the guide was extremely firm. He frightened him with a gun. He said, 'Well, you'd better take us or else. You'll be paid properly for that.' So the poor taxi man had no way but to carry on up to the nearest point they could to the frontier, because the last about ten, fifteen kilometres were No Man's Land, that was already whole frontier was absolutely depopulated, and they patrolled this area regularly on motorcycles to just check that people don't really run away. That was the only section.

The West German border.

It was on the Western German border between Mariánské Lázně and Tachov, little place called Tachov. So they let us out and we all had to jump quickly and there was a big, big field which was frozen and snow on it, and we had to run over it and fall

over, and so often we saw a rocket with light which lit the whole area, because they were looking, they knew that this is probably the area where people might try to escape. And from that moment we only walked through forest without any paths, it was quite a shocking journey. We had to carry those two little children between us. The little one was drugged and she was tied to a toboggan, and in turn we have to help to carry her because there was not enough snow to pull the toboggan; it was just enough to walk over it here and there. Well, we were slow, slow moving group of nine people, with old people, with young people, and we did not manage to make it in the one night, as it was planned. We actually left Prague at about six o'clock in the evening, and we started our march over the frontier at about seven o'clock at night, or eight o'clock at night. And so, by the time it started to be dawn, we still were on the Czech side and the guide was getting very impatient and terribly worried, so finally he said, 'This is really very dangerous, this area. We have to wait for the next night, we can't go any further.' And so he found such a thicket, small trees, which were recently planted, and there we had to sit and wait for the next night. There was a lot of snow there, and we had nothing to eat. That was the last thing we were thinking about. We either took another pair of stockings or another skirt with us, but to take some food, no-one thought of that. Fortunately there was no problem with water, because we could eat snow and melt it in our mouth, so we had drink. But we had to sit there on this snow, icy, half-frozen land, and wait for the next night. And we were so exhausted, all of us, that we started to have hallucination. Every so often somebody of us got panicky that they can see a group of soldiers coming towards us. And the trees started to move and they looked like soldiers. It was unbelievable how, when you get exhausted, you have this imagination, you start to really hallucinate. It was horrible. And there were patrols of these soldiers with dogs running along the roads, but we were very lucky that the wind must have gone from the dogs towards us. They didn't smell us. And we managed to survive until the next night, when the guide came and finally took us through the next section, which was fortunately shorter, and which was terribly exhausting.

And when we got on the other side, of course we got lost. Half of – the guide with part of the party went somewhere else, the other party somewhere else, we lost the concentration to follow like sheep, one after the other, and then we were

still almost lost there and waiting for us and what to do next. So then Father, although he was the oldest of us, we had the two little children, Aunt was quite hysterical then, she wanted – she started to shout, she wanted to get police and get the children some milk and she didn't care whether it was prison or whatever as long as she got out of this misery. And Father's calmed us all down and then he started to look at the stars and he said, 'Well, the only way, the frontier goes this way and that way, so it is not straight line, so we have to manage to go down the hill,' and according to the stars he decided we have to go that direction, west. And as we did, so finally we started to see little lights in the – because we were high up in the mountains. We could see little lights down in the valley. And so of course we knew there are no lights on the Czech side, it's absolutely No Man's Land, so it must be Germany. And as we walked down again to the first house, which was a simple little farmhouse, and we all simply went in and collapsed there. And I lost my husband, because he was with the guide somewhere else, and I had no idea whether he made it or not so I was quite hysterical then. And this farm lady, she said, 'Look, we have nothing here which we can offer you. We have a bit of milk for the children,' which she did, and we got hot water, which was very pleasant drink, I must say. And then we – and they told us that it's not far any more to walk down the hill and we come to the police there, German police, which guard also the frontier, and she said, 'There are ever so often some people who managed to escape, and so you will be looked after when you get down there.' So we walked, and on the way we met the guide with already two or three soldiers, German soldiers, who came to look for us on the frontier, and they brought us down, and so we all, happily, made it.

What happened then, in Germany?

Well, first of all you had to establish your identity, who you are, whether you are not some robbers or some criminals or whether you are genuine emigrants, so we were all sent to such camp, which was called Valka camp, close to Nurenburg lager. And there it was absolutely horrible for us, because there were really all sorts of people. Some people were not quite of the best character, and it was called Valka and surely there were (laughs) often fights and things. But fortunately we didn't stay very long, because Jiri was very soon spotted, and he was sent to Munich to play for the

American soldiers and personnel in (laughs) such nightclub with couple of other Czech *emigrés*. Šroubek was one, who was violinist, also from Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, he was also already there; Běhounek was a jazz musician; so the three of them organised such musical activity in Munich and I went along, so at least we didn't have to stay in this shocking camp. And Father, as soon as we were screened, or when we were through the screening process, Uncle managed to send some money and the whole family went to a place near Ludwigsburg in Kurheimheuneck – that was such a nice *Pension*, and because it was middle of the winter so it was closed, of course. So my father managed to work with them some very, very low fee on which they would be able to house us, the ten of people, and make it worthwhile for them to have it open and keep us and feed us and keep us there until we can emigrate. So Uncle, who had a bit of money in the States, he managed to support us and we lived very comfortably then in this lovely Kurheimheuneck by Ludwigsburg. And there we organised the immigration.

My elder sister got very soon job with international refugee organisation as an office person because she was employed by the firm in Czech Republic and she understood office work – typing and shorthand and things like that – so she was very much in demand, but I was good for nothing as a musician, and neither [was] my sister who was an actress. But my sister, with her wonderful position as a secretary of the head of the whole refugee camp, organised that we can have free accommodation in the camp, get food there for nothing and we can even attend some of their classes for retraining. So they had classes for electricians, for plumbers, for dressmakers, for cooks, and there were lawyers and there were doctors, and everyone tried to learn some trade so when they emigrate they will be able to start a new life, because they knew jolly well that they won't be able to keep their previous position. So out of all these possibilities we chose dressmaking. At that stage I could not even hold a needle! (laughter) But it was a wonderful help. We stayed there for about three months. I made a couple of dresses for myself and for my sister, who then went and got married and so on. So in fact it was three months well spent. But Jiří again was very fortunate: he was taken into a family of musicians in Stuttgart, which was the next city of Ludwigsburg, he lived with this family and was very much engaged in playing in all sorts of ensembles, in churches, in concerts, also in radio, and he was the only

one from us who was earning quite a reasonable amount of money, so he could support us a little bit and we managed with his music then.

Well, that's how it was. And then we finally got our emigration papers because we didn't want to stay in Germany – it was too close to all these problems – and somehow everyone was so nervous that another war can start, all sorts of problems were still in the world, and the Germans were coming back from the Russian camps and they were full of stories and it was quite horrible. But if Jiri would have stayed in Germany he would have made quite a career, because there were hardly any really worthwhile musicians. They all were fighting on the front, and only young students – you know, it was just nothing there, they had to start building everything up in Germany, so he could have done well. But we wanted to get away. So we immediately started correspondence with all our contacts, starting with the oboist, Leon Goossens, Lady Barbirolli, oboist, her husband, Sir John Barbirolli, Kubelík, of course, who was by then already in Chicago as a resident conductor, so all these people were extremely helpful. Sir John Barbirolli wrote enormous amount of letters on behalf of Jiří to South Africa, to America, to Sydney, to Goossens, and he got offers from all these places to become a member of the orchestra. Then in Sydney, unfortunately, there was a very strong Musicians' Union, and he couldn't get into orchestra, which he would have liked, but he offered him professorial position at a conservatorium in Sydney, so it sounded very glamorous, but he only had about eight students and salary was accordingly! (laughs) But I was also offered a job because I had connections also with Australia by living in London and sharing a room with an Australian girl, so to a very nice boarding school in New South Wales, Frencham, and the headmistress wrote us a very nice letter telling us that she'll be delighted to have me on the staff and Jiří can be as a guest of the school, and if he wants to he can even teach some oboe to the students if some would like to – that was a school with about four hundred boarders. And so, with the two offers, like mine teaching and accommodation and food, and Jiří Sydney, we decided we'll go to Sydney.

We would have preferred America because the whole family went to Canada, and Kubelík definitely wrote to Jiří that he will help him, but for the time being he has to wait until he will become member of the American Musicians' Union,

and he can do it in such a way that he will get him into the preparatory orchestra for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, they were such orchestra, and from that they took then the musicians to the thing, and he can survive the whole year there, and of course then the door will be open. But there was a big problem. At that stage there was such extraordinary law that – in America – that only a quota, certain quota, of different nationalities can emigrate to America, and Czech quota was filled for three years. So I would have to wait for three years before I could follow my husband. He could go immediately, because he was offered position and he could work there, but I not, even as a wife. So we tried to get around it, but there was no way. We really – maybe it would have been if I would have gone to Canada and – I don't know how it would have worked, but simply we decided against it, and we thought, 'We'll go to Australia. It sounds good, and after three years, when the quota will be lifted, we'll go to Chicago and we will settle in America.' That was the plan.

But the plan did not realise ever, because from first day in Australia everything was so positive to us. The school was wonderful, the Conservatorium was wonderful, they have been offering us enormous amount of engagements, everything was new, no-one ever played an oboe solo recitals before him, and so he was sent as a soloist, Jiří, to all cities in Australia to play concertos, and so it was so positive, so wonderful everything, and we even enjoyed the countryside. And later on we discovered that we were very fortunate, because Frencham is in Mittagong, which is about eighty kilometres south of Sydney, and the country is absolutely beautiful there. It's one of the nicest areas in New South Wales. And so we thought all Australia is so wonderful and everything so green and beautiful gum trees, and sort of – we just loved it there. And so when the three years came, on top of that was big complication because I was expecting our first daughter. And then we thought, 'Well, we can't start all over again and start in America from scratch.' So we decided we'll postpone it (laugh) and that postponement came for several times. We had another such possibility. Jiří was asked that he could join the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra under George Szell, who then lost his oboist, and by that time he could have managed to get around the Union somehow. But already the offer was here from Adelaide, from Professor Bishop, to become a lecturer at the University of Adelaide, and at the

same time member of Wind Quintet. He had a big ambition to establish a world-class wind quintet and wanted Jiří very much to be in it. He was one of the foundation members.

Between Sydney and Adelaide was still about eleven years *interregnum*, as it were, where he was principal oboe of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, and we lived for eleven years in Melbourne. During this time Jiří did several overseas tours, and during this time also Martinu wrote that wonderful concerto for him, which opened many doors for him as well.

So you've made certainly well-recognized mark on musical life in Australia. Apart from concerts and performances, which of course are gone, you also left behind – both of you – many pupils, great influence for the future. How many pupils altogether do you think that you taught?

Oh, for me it must have been hundreds, absolutely hundreds, because I had sometimes classes – specially when I taught that matriculation Music – up to between thirty and forty, and outsiders and piano students, enormous amount. It would be hardly possible (laughs) to count them. And I hope I left something behind that was away from that horrible pop rock music, because I never ever introduce anything like that. I always tried to stir their interest and teach them how beautiful is music, even if it has got – that it has also a beat, but not such a vulgar beat as this other type of music. Because they say, 'Oh, it has no speed and no rhythm,' so I tried to pick up some very fast movements of some symphonies or some chamber music to show them how fast it can be and how, at the same time, there is much more to it than just that one regular (laughs) endless beat. I often am still met by ex-students who come to me, rush to me, and tell me how they enjoyed being taught this other part of music.

Another important result of your life, your two daughters.

Yes, we have two girls. Eva, elder daughter, and younger daughter, Sandra. They are both born in Melbourne, and of course somehow or other they didn't want to do anything else (laughs) but music again. So it seems to be run in the family. I often say it's like the people from circus. Their children are great again in circus acts, so in our family somehow it became all the time music, music, music. Sandra particularly. Eva did – she graduate at university, music was one of her main units, but she also did other subjects; but Sandra did straight-out music and performance,

and she did master's degree and she was very good performer, she finally got scholarships, number of them, to go to United States, Harkness, to study in Bloomington and in Juilliard School of Music, which she enjoyed enormously. Then she went, she got other scholarships to study, Australia Council plus German government scholarship and George Murray from University Scholarship to study in Germany, so she was for some time also in Berlin studying with the leader of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Professor Brandis, who is now retired and has a very nice string quartet. And she married then eventually a non-musician, the first one in the family who is non-musician, and she still pursues her musical career. She's member of Haydn Ensemble in Berlin, which consists of about fifteen string players who occasionally engage some wind players, and they all are members of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, so she is in a very distinguished company there, and she thoroughly enjoys playing with them. And apart from that, she often freelances. She's already very well established in Berlin as – she plays in the Radio Symphony Orchestra – I think it's now called Berlin Philharmonic – so she often plays with them as a freelance player, and she also was asked to help, to play, in the Deutsch Oper in opera, but she hasn't done it so far. She also played with the Berlin Philharmonic as a part-timer to help out. Before she got married and settled in Berlin, she was for five years member of the Westdeutsche Rundfunk – that's the WDR Orchestra – in Köln. And Eve married a very distinguished musician, she was married for twenty years, and his name is Wolfram Christ, who also has got a strong connection, through us, with Australia. He has done many tours to Australia.

How about grandchildren?

Well, there are three of them. The nineteen year-old Sarah is again a musician. She's a harpist and excellent pianist, but she wants to concentrate on the harp. She's studying now at the Hochschule in Detmold. Second boy is Rafael. He's outstandingly gifted. He's a violinist, he had concerts recently in Prague, played in the Rudolfinum. He's only seventeen. Very gifted boy.

It's obvious that the Tancibudek musical dynasty continues. Looking back and observing your journey from the heart of Europe down to Australia, how do you see the journey now?

I think it was very positive. Somehow or other, as life goes on, you seem to forget the dramas, or else the dramas are not any more so frightfully important, and always the better things come through, specially if you are more optimistic type of person, as I am. So for me always these positive things seem to be still to be shining out much more than negative things. Of course, the horrible things one remembers, particularly when I start talking about it, but they don't seem to be dominating our life at all.

Well, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW.