

Czech Underground from a Musical Historical Point of View*

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Abstract: The first part of the article summarises and comments on the literature on the Czech music underground. It proves that professional research of the phenomenon was previously carried out by foreign authors, whose focus was mainly on the social and political contexts in Eastern Europe. Memoirs and published interviews predominated in the domestic reflection of the phenomenon. Theoretical studies, including monographic treatises, appear only on an ongoing basis. However, the underground is still more in the field of view of historians than musicologists. This article also traces the changes in understanding the “underground” category in the Czech environment. It leads to defining it compared to the “alternative scene” and “grey zone” categories, which gradually gained a specific significance in Czech public awareness in the 1970s and 1980s. The second part of the article places the Czech musical underground in the context of the general development of rock and popular music in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s.

Keywords: underground; alternative scene; grey zone; rock; Czech music; normalisation, music literature

Abstrakt: První část článku shrnuje a komentuje literaturu o českém hudebním undergroundu. Dokládá, že odborný výzkum fenoménu začali dříve realizovat zahraniční autoři, v jejichž centru pozornosti stály především společenské a politické souvislosti v kontextu východní Evropy. V domácí reflexi fenoménu zpočátku převažovaly memoáry a publikované rozhovory. Teprve průběžně se objevují teoretické studie, včetně monografických pojednání. Underground je však stále více v zorném poli historiků než muzikologů. Článek též sleduje proměny chápání kategorie „underground“ v českém prostředí a ústí do jejího vymezení vůči kategoriím „alternativní scéna“ a „šedá zóna“, které v českém společenském povědomí 70. a 80. let 20. století postupně nabývaly specifického významu. Druhá část článku zasazuje český hudební underground do kontextu obecného vývoje rockové a populární hudby v Československu 70. a 80. let.

Klíčová slova: underground; alternativní scéna; šedá zóna; rock; česká hudba; normalizace; literatura o hudbě

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The Czech music underground attracted attention, especially abroad, mainly because of its social and political context.¹ The interest in this context often led to an extreme ignorance of the creative side of the phenomenon. This fact is not incomprehensible when considering that the Czech music underground is based on rock music in style and sound. The Czech rock scene grew out of mastering and transforming Anglo-American patterns. Foreign journalists and researchers were not interested in other Czech (or Slovak, Polish, Hungarian, etc.) rock music unless connected with a significant social and political context. Subjecting the Czech music underground to professional music analysis and criticism is the task of domestic researchers.

Underground literature

Martin Machovec² stated 20 years ago that “almost completely there is a lack of musicological evaluation of at least the most significant underground and ‘proto-underground’ musical activities”. The following overview of publications on the topic will imply that the situation has not changed much. Apart from the unique period samizdat reflection before 1989³ and the later publication of essential unofficial texts defining the phenomenon from within,⁴ we find the first Czech publications seeking a retrospective of the unofficial music scene were memoirs.

Paradoxical as it is, foreign authors writing about Eastern European rock scenes touched upon the Czech music underground, much earlier. The Dutch historian Timothy Ryback covered Czechoslovak issues in several sections of his 1990 book *Rock Around the Bloc*⁵. He compares the advent of the Beatlemania in various Eastern European countries, noting the influence of Ginsberg and hippies, the success of Czech

¹ A personal memory can serve as an introduction: around the mid-1990s, I was approached by a Japanese journalist asking for a consultation on Plastic People of the Universe. I invited him to the office of the then Ústav pro hudební vědu AV ČR and answered questions about trials, censorship, and the lack of freedom in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s. Towards the end, I asked which recordings of the band he had heard. He smiled awkwardly: “None.” I was surprised by the answer, so I immediately offered to play him some. His next reaction took my breath away. The journalist apologized, saying he had to go and that it wasn’t really that important.

² JOSEF ALAN (ed.), *Alternativní kultura: Příběh české společnosti 1945–1989* [*Alternative Culture: The Story of Czech Society 1945-1989*], Praha: Lidové noviny 2001, p. 177; MARTIN MACHOVEC, *Pohledy zevnitř: Česká undergroundová kultura v dokumentech a interpretacích* [*Views from the Inside: Czech Underground Culture in Documents and Interpretations*], Praha: Pistorius & Olšanská 2008, p. 123.

³ Especially the 15 editions of the unofficial magazine *Vokno*, published between 1979 and 1989 by František “Čuňas” Stárek. Electronic versions of the magazine are available on www.vons.cz/vokno.

⁴ See IVAN JIROUS, *Magorův zápisník* [*Magor’s Notebook*], Praha: Torst 1997, *passim*; MACHOVEC, *Pohledy zevnitř*, *passim*; MARTIN MACHOVEC et al., „Hnědá kniha“ o procesech s českým undergroundem [“Brown Book” on the Processes with the Czech Underground,], Praha: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů 2012, *passim*; and others.

⁵ TIMOTHY RYBACK, *Rock Around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990, *passim*.

bands like the Olympic and the Matadors, the happenings of Milan Knížák, and the way Karel Kryl's reflected on the occupation of Czechoslovakia. Ryback also comes to reflect the Czech underground. In a brief but devout way, he discusses the sequence of significant events and the increase in police restrictions leading up to the 1976 trial of the Plastic People of the Universe.

Four years after Ryback, Sabrina Petra Ramet, an American political scientist of English-Spanish descent, edited a similarly focused monograph, *Rocking the State*,⁶ which extended to all socialist countries of the time except Albania and Romania. The chapter on Czechoslovakia, authored by the editor herself, gives a brief overview of the essential names of Czech (and very exceptionally Slovak) rock and again devotes more space to the political context, the happenings of the "Primitives" group, and in addition to the subchapter focused again on Plastic People of the Universe, she also names other underground bands: "DG 307, Umělá hmota, Bile svetlo, the Hever, Vaseline, Extempore, and Stehlik..."⁷ The conclusion of the chapter deals with the campaign against the new wave and punk, led by the Tribuna weekly magazine and the situation at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. Ramet also quotes selected snippets of lyrics by Umělá hmota, DG 307, Plastic People and Stromboli in English.

Tony Mitchell, an Australian researcher in performance studies, did not seek exhaustive coverage of a particular area but selectively compared the situation of popular music in several distant places of the world outside the Anglo-American scene. The book *Popular Music and Local Identity*⁸ contains, in addition to more general passages about non-Western popular cultures and specific views of the Australian, New Zealand, and Italian scenes, a chapter on the Czech Republic. Here, too, the social and political context is at the heart of the author's interest, as she compares, for example, the Olympic's media success with the underground work represented by Plastic People of the Universe. It maps the period up to the 1990s in quite some detail and focuses on the fates of the "eccentrics on the ground floor" – the bands and personalities of the Czech new wave of rock in the first half of the 1980s. The title of the chapter⁹ refers to the content of the Czech book on this subject.¹⁰

The aforementioned foreign authors have done an honest job of seeking broader comparisons, which are valuable since no Czech or Slovak researcher has made a similar Central European comparison. However, their approach to individual countries, including Czechoslovakia, can be superficial and lacking knowledge of important broader contexts. Even in the themes of the Czech underground, recurrent familiar

⁶ SABRINA PETRA RAMET (ed.), *Rocking the State: Rock Music and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia*, Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford: Westview Press 1994, p. 55–72.

⁷ The correct spelling of some of those band names are: Umělá hmota, Bílé světlo, The Hever & Vazelína Band, Stehlik.

⁸ TONY MITCHELL, *Popular Music and Local Identity: Rock, Pop and Rap in Europe and Oceania*, London and New York: Leicester University Press 1996, p. 95–136.

⁹ MITCHELL, *Popular Music and Local Identity*, p. 119–122.

¹⁰ ALEŠ OPEKAR and JOSEF VLČEK (eds.), *Excentrici v přizemí: Nová vlna v Čechách první poloviny 80. let [Eccentrics on the Ground Floor: A New Wave in Bohemia in the First Half of the 1980s]*, Praha: Panton 1989, *passim*.

stereotypes prevailed, focusing mainly on political contexts without regard to the very musical basis of the work.

Ryback revised some of his findings after about 30 years in the collective monograph *Popular music in Communist and Post-Communist Europe*.¹¹ He recapitulated what led him to write the book, from which sources he drew in the second half of the 1980s, and how he worked with them. He highlighted situation reports and a snippy service, processed by Radio Free Europe, as the most important source.

At the same time, remembrance titles dominate Czech literature about the underground – the first ones by Mejla Hlavsa and Jan Pelc¹² and Mikoláš Chadima.¹³ Other testimonial memoirs followed, and some of the authors did not shy away from fictional accounts: Ervín Hruška,¹⁴ Ivan Hajniš,¹⁵ Jiří Odvárka,¹⁶ Josef Vondruška,¹⁷ Josef Bobeš Rössler,¹⁸ Otakar Alfréd Michl,¹⁹ Ivo Pospíšil, Vladimír Jurásek,²⁰ Vladimír Hendrix Smetana,²¹ Jaroslav Jeroným Neduha,²² and in other sequels Chadima²³ and Hajniš.²⁴ The images of individual events and periods started to be composed of a mosaic of subjective memories, often based on an honest verification of factual data (Chadima). Jan Pelc's book interview with Mejla Hlavsa was expanded by a number of other underground horizons: Tomáš Weiss interviewed Jáchym Topol,²⁵ Renata Kalenská in-

¹¹ JAN BLÜML, YVETTA KAJANOVÁ and RÜDIGER RITTER (eds.), *Popular Music in Communist and Post-Communist Europe*, Berlin: Peter Lang 2019, p. 13–20.

¹² MEJLA HLAVSA and JAN PELC, *Bez ohně je underground [Without Fires It Is the Underground]*, Praha: BFS 1992, 172 p.

¹³ MIKOLÁŠ CHADIMA, *Alternativa: Svědectví o českém rock & rollu sedmdesátých let (od requalifikací k „nové vlně se starým obsahem“)* [The Alternative: Testimony to Czech Rock & Roll of the Seventies (from Retraining to “New Wave with Old Content”)], Brno: Host 1992, 416 p.

¹⁴ ERVÍN HRUŠKA, *Od odzemu k valašky k rocku a elektrické kytáře: Historie bigbitu a rocku na Valašskomeziříčsku [From Folk Odzemek Dance and Wallachian Ax to Rock and Electric Guitar: History of Big Beat and Rock in the Region of Valašské Meziříčí]*, Egg: Ervín Hruška 1999, 183 p.

¹⁵ IVAN HAJNIŠ, *Legenda The Primitives Group: True Story About First Underground Band in East Europe*, Praha: Pragoline 2019, 136 p.

¹⁶ JIŘÍ ODVÁRKA, *Auvajs, Mejlo: Zlatá léta šedesátá, jakož i čacké početí big beatu v Břevnově [Ow Mejla: The Golden Sixties as well as the Heroic Engendering of the Big Beat in Břevnov]*, Praha: Primus 2003, 185 p.

¹⁷ JOSEF VONDRUŠKA, *Chlasej a modli se [Get Drunk and Pray]*, Praha: Torst 2005, 546 p.

¹⁸ JOSEF BOBEŠ RÖSSLER, *Obraz doby aneb Chaotické vzpomínky na život v českém undergroundu 70. let [Picture of the Time or Chaotic Memories of Life in the Czech Underground of the 70s]*, Praha: Pulchra 2009, 331 p.

¹⁹ OTAKAR ALFRÉD MICHL, *Trable den co den [Troubles Every Day]*, Praha: Pulchra 2012, 616 p.

²⁰ IVO POSPÍŠIL and VLADIMÍR JURÁSEK, *Příliš pozdě zemřít mladý [Too Late to Die Young]*, Praha: BiggBoss 2015, 328 p.

²¹ VLADIMÍR HENDRIX SMETANA, *Od dospívání k dozpívání [From Adolescence to the Moment I Stopped Singing]*, Praha: Pulchra 2015, 192 p.

²² JAROSLAV JERONÝM NEDUHA, *Životaběh [Life Course]*, Praha: Galén 2016, 300 p.

²³ MIKOLÁŠ CHADIMA, *Alternativa II: Od „Nové“ vlny se starým obsahem k Velké listopadové sametové revoluci [The Alternative II: From the “New” Wave with Old Content to the Great November Velvet Revolution]*, Praha: Galén 2018, 669 p.

²⁴ IVAN HAJNIŠ, *Legenda The Primitives Group: True Story About First Underground Band in East Europe, passim*.

²⁵ JÁCHYM TOPOL and TOMÁŠ WEISS, *Nemůžu se zastavit [I can't Stop]*, Praha: Portál 2000, 168 p.

interviewed Vratislav Brabenec,²⁶ Štěpán Hájek and Michal Plzák interviewed Svatopluk Karásek,²⁷ Jaroslav Riedel interviewed Paul Wilson in the book of his essays,²⁸ and Ivana Denchevová, František “Čuñas” Stárek, and Michal Stehlík interviewed other important figures of the scene.²⁹ Other interviews include the book *Baráky* by František “Čuñas” Stárek and Jiří Kostůr³⁰ and some narrative photographic publications by Abbé J. Libánský,³¹ Jan SágI³² or Tomáš Cidlina.³³ Memoir literature and book interviews are still the most common type of printed literature on the Czech music underground.

Thus, for the first time, Jaroslav Riedel’s “Biografická poznámka” [Biographical Note] in the book of the Plastic People of the Universe’s lyrics³⁴ brings a sober historiographical treatise carried out in a distanced manner by someone who was not an interested or emotionally interested participant. After less than ten years, the same author completed his work on the topic with a monograph of the abovementioned core group.³⁵

With the new millennium, other essential works have been created, expanding the journalistic scope into a broader context. Sociologist Josef Alan has collected his almanack with many contributions, some of which explore the music scene (especially the chapters by Martin Machovec and Josef Vlček).³⁶ Others are focused on unofficial literature, theatre, film, and fine arts. The academic horizons aimed at the literary side of the phenomenon were expanded by Martin Pilař³⁷ and again by Martin Machovec³⁸, who commented on reprinted documents from the 1970s and 1980s and repudiated the aforementioned theoretical study of the Alan-edited almanack. Machovec’s book from 2019, written in English, includes a chapter “Exploring Modern Art: Czech Underground Rock Musicians”,³⁹ analysing selected phenomena of music and lyrics from Plastic People, Milan Knížák, DG 307 and other examples.

²⁶ RENATA KALENSKÁ, *Evangelium podle Brabence* [The Gospel according to Brabence], Praha: Torst 2010, 292 p.

²⁷ SVATOPLUK KARASEK, ŠTĚPÁN HÁJEK and MICHAL PLZÁK, *Víno tvé výborné: Rozhovory* [Your Excellent Wine: Interviews], Praha: Kalich 2010, 293 p.

²⁸ PAUL WILSON, *Bohemian Rhapsodies*, Praha: Torst 2011, 520 p.

²⁹ IVANA DENČEVOVÁ, FRANTIŠEK STÁREK and MICHAL STEHLÍK, *Tváře undergroundu* [Faces of the Underground], Praha: Radioservis 2012, 238 p.

³⁰ FRANTIŠEK „ČUŇAS“ STÁREK and JIŘÍ KOSTŮR, *Baráky - Souostroví svobody* [Baráky – Archipelago of Freedom], Praha: Pulchra 2010, 638 p.

³¹ ABBÉ J. LIBÁNSKÝ, *My underground*, Praha: Institut for culture-resistant 2004, 221 p.

³² JAN SÁGL, *Tanec na dvojitěm leď* [Dancing on Double Ice], Praha: Kant 2012, 537 p.

³³ TOMÁŠ CIDLINA, *Českolipská satisfakce – I Can’t Get No* [Satisfaction from Česká Lípa – I Can’t Get No], Česká Lípa: Rudolf Živec 2016, 398 p.

³⁴ JAROSLAV RIEDEL, *The Plastic People of the Universe: Texty* [The Plastic People of the Universe: Lyrics], Praha: Maťa 1997, p. 15–23.

³⁵ JAROSLAV RIEDEL, *Plastic People a český underground* [The Plastic People and Czech Underground], Praha: Galén 2016, *passim*.

³⁶ ALAN, *Alternativní kultura*, p. 154–263.

³⁷ MARTIN PILAŘ, *Underground aneb Kapitoly o českém literárním undergroundu* [Underground or Chapters on the Czech Literary Underground], Brno: Host 2002, *passim*.

³⁸ MACHOVEC, *Pohledy zevnitř*, p. 96–149.

³⁹ MARTIN MACHOVEC, *Writing Underground: Reflections on Samizdat Literature in Totalitarian Czechoslovakia*, Praha: Karolinum 2019, p. 104–130.

In the last two decades, the Czech underground has also become an occasional subject of interest for students writing bachelor's and master's theses.

Historians have also taken the initiative, focusing on the history of recent decades. For them, musical themes are a secondary but essential context for describing the selected topic. Many creators or supporters of the underground have inevitably come under the radar of the authors of the book *Vratte nám vlasy!*⁴⁰ about long hair as an expression of boys' taste and lifestyle in communist Czechoslovakia. In his book *Byl to jenom rock and roll?*⁴¹, Miroslav Vaněk looks at rock music from a historical perspective, and we can find subchapters directly dedicated to the underground and alternative music. Both books draw not only from available book and magazine sources but also dive into sources including state archives and security forces archives and benefit from interviews of the Oral History Center, which is part of their parent Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences and brings many new findings and connections. The most abundant crop of texts on the topic has continuously been generated by researchers of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, established in 2007. We have already mentioned the book *Baráky*,⁴² with interviews and reprinted police and samizdat documents and an afterword by Josef Alan. The institution's activities also led to several collective monographs edited by Ladislav Kudrna: *Reflexe undergroundu*,⁴³ *Podhoubí undergroundu*,⁴⁴ *Od mániček k undergroundu*.⁴⁵ As they are based on conference papers, the individual contributions differ in character and quality. On the other hand, many contributions are revealing as they demystify the legacy of key personalities, open up new debates, and broaden the view to include other genres (free jazz, hip hop and graffiti).

Extensive monographs were also written by Ladislav Kudrna and František Stárek Čuñas: *„Kapela“*⁴⁶ and *Kniha v barvě krve*.⁴⁷ In the former, the authors tried to capture how the police interventions against the free cultural activities of young people in the 1970s grew stricter, especially in connection with the national police action “Kapela”

⁴⁰ FILIP POSPÍŠIL and PETR BLAŽEK, *Vratte nám vlasy: První máničky, vlasatci a hippies v komunistickém Československu* [Give us Back Our Hair: The First Long-haired Men and Hippies in Communist Czechoslovakia], Praha: Academia 2010, *passim*.

⁴¹ MIROSLAV VANĚK, *Byl to jenom rock'n'roll?: Hudební alternativa v komunistickém Československu 1956–1989* [Was it Just Rock'n'roll?: Music Alternative in Communist Czechoslovakia 1956-1989], Praha: Academia 2010, *passim*.

⁴² STÁREK and KOSTUR, *Baráky – Souostrovi svobody* [Baráky – Archipelago of Freedom], *passim*.

⁴³ LADISLAV KUDRNA (ed.), *Reflexe undergroundu* [Reflections of the Underground], Praha: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů 2016, *passim*.

⁴⁴ LADISLAV KUDRNA (ed.), *Podhoubí undergroundu* [The Underground of the Underground], Praha: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů 2018, *passim*.

⁴⁵ LADISLAV KUDRNA (ed.), *Od mániček k undergroundu* [From Long-Haired Men to the Underground], Praha: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů 2019, *passim*.

⁴⁶ LADISLAV KUDRNA and FRANTIŠEK ČUŇAS STÁREK, „Kapela“: *Pozadí akce, která stvořila Chartu 77* [“The Band”: Background of the Event That Created Charter 77], Praha: Academia and Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů 2017, *passim*.

⁴⁷ LADISLAV KUDRNA and FRANTIŠEK ČUŇAS STÁREK, *Kniha v barvě krve: Násilí komunistického režimu vůči undergroundu* [Blood Colored Book: Communist Regime Violence Against the Underground]. Praha: Academia and Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů 2020, *passim*.

[Band], aimed against key figures of the underground. The latter book describes the same conflicts in the broader time range from 1960 to 1989. In both cases, the research was based on studying a wide range of official records and reports from municipal, regional and national archives and private archives, thus bringing many new findings and contexts. Similarly, in the book *Podzemní symfonie Plastic People*,⁴⁸ Stárek and Valenta move from more generally known facts to a historical description, structured according to the perspectives of the studied sources from the underground community and dissent, as well as the archives of police and political authorities. Again, the interpretation does not discuss music as such. The level of detail of the discussion of social and political contexts is aimed at a much broader scope than the group's monograph (see, for example, the passages on various approaches to the character of Charter 77 and its development).

The sum of the writings is complemented by partial studies published in journals or on the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes website. For instance, Kudrna and Stárek described in detail the police intervention in Rudolfov in 1974, which, despite the wishes of communist politicians, kick-started the self-awareness of the beginnings of the Czech underground⁴⁹. They also focused on events that indicated later underground attitudes as early as the 1960s.⁵⁰

The latest very concentrated additions are monographs of the main representatives of the Czech underground: Riedel's study on Plastic People⁵¹ and the comprehensive biography of Ivan Martin Jirous written by Marek Švehla.⁵² Riedel's monograph is based, as much as possible, on the study of period documents, including band chronicles, police protocols or judgements and interviews, and it quotes these widely in the appropriate context. Reprinted documents de facto replace the absence of photographic accompaniment. The monograph includes the broader context of the scene in the form of essays and overviews of statistics concerning the files Aktual, DG 307, Plastic or singer-songwriters Svatopluk Karásek and Charlie Soukup, as well as other names and more general passages. In addition to a complex discography, the appendices also contain lists of all concerts and changes in the ensemble and, for example, a clear commentary on the four chronicles of Plastic People of the Universe. The overall character of the book is descriptive and, therefore, less evaluative. The overlap with the post-communist era of the 1990s is only fleeting. Švehla's

⁴⁸ FRANTIŠEK ČUŇAS STÁREK and MARTIN VALENTA, *Podzemní symfonie Plastic People [Underground Symphony of The Plastic People]*, Praha: Argo and Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů 2018, *passim*.

⁴⁹ LADISLAV KUDRNA and FRANTIŠEK STÁREK ČUŇAS, „Zásah, který změnil underground: Rudolfov, 30. březen 1974“ [“An Intervention that Changed the Underground: Rudolfov, March 30, 1974”] [online], *Paměť a dějiny* (1, 2015), available online at <<https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/pamet-dejiny/pad1501/027-041.pdf>>, *passim*.

⁵⁰ LADISLAV KUDRNA and FRANTIŠEK STÁREK ČUŇAS, „(Proto)underground: Několik poznámek k vývoji podzemního hnutí“ [(Proto)underground: Some Remarks on the Development of the Underground Movement] [online], *Paměť a dějiny* (4, 2016), available online at <https://www.ustrcr.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/PD_4_16_s03-15.pdf>, *passim*.

⁵¹ JAROSLAV RIEDEL, *Kritik bez konzervatoře: Rozhovor s Jiřím Černým [A Critic Without a Conservatory: Interview with Jiří Černý]*, Praha: Galén 2006, *passim*.

⁵² MAREK ŠVEHLA, *Magor a jeho doba [Magor and His Time]*, Praha: Torst 2017, *passim*.

monograph provides an excellent and detailed map in a journalistic form, focusing primarily on Jirous's life story. However, it provides a less accurate and apt depiction of the broader context of the period and Jirous's poetic work. Švehla also devotes less space to Jirous's life after 1989.

As for audio and audiovisual recordings, we can refer to a great deal of editorial work that makes them available to date. The preserved recordings from the Czech underground are available mainly thanks to the publishing houses Šafrán, Globus International or Globus Music, Guerilla Records or Galén.⁵³

We can also add four extensive documentary series by the Czech Television to the range of audiovisual monuments⁵⁴. Each episode was usually around 50–56 minutes long:

Alternativní kultura [Alternative Culture] (dir. Petr Slavík 1997–2006) consists of two seasons of 13 episodes each. The Czech musical underground is mainly covered in episodes 4–6 of the first season and some parts of the second season, dedicated to poetry.

Of the forty-two episodes of the cycle on the history of Czechoslovak rock music *Bigbít* (dir. Václav Křístek 2000), episodes 26 (focusing on the period of 1970–75) and 27 (period 1973–81) concern the underground. Episodes 28 and 29 deal with the alternative scene of the periods of 1969–78 and 1977–81, respectively. Episode 35 is about the Moravian alternative scene of the 1980s, and finally, episode 41 focuses on the underground of the 1980s.

The three-part cycle *Šedá zóna* [Grey Zone] (dir. Vladimír Merta 2014) explores the boundaries and overlaps between the unofficial and official activities and works in the Czechoslovak society of the 1970s and 1980s and, therefore, it often touches on the underground.

And finally, the extensive documentary series *Fenomén underground* [Phenomenon Underground] (dir. Břetislav Rychlík, Jana Chytilová, Jiří Fiedor and Václav Křístek 2014) divided his very deep dive into the issue into 40 episodes. Of these, 3 episodes form the “Prolog” [Prologue], 6 episodes fall under the section “Série Kořeny” [Series Roots], 4 episodes are created as “Série k 25. výročí pádu totality” [Series for the 25th anniversary of the fall of totalitarianism], 7 more episodes form “Série na téma kapely, svoboda a hodnoty undergroundu” [Series on the theme of the band, freedom and values of the underground]. The following 8 episodes include the section “Série na téma komunity a exilu” [Series on the theme of community and exile], 8 parts also include “Série na téma regiony a Slovensko” [Series on the theme of regions and Slovakia] and 4 episodes “Série na téma fenomény 80. let až po součas-

⁵³ See, for example, lists in the publications MACHOVEC, “*Hnědá kniha*”, p. 501–502, or RIEDEL, *Plastic People a český underground*, p. 347–407. Sound recordings with the work of Pavel Zajíček were commented by ANTONÍN KOCÁBEK, „PZ v konzervách“ [“PZ Canned”], *Uni* 31 (4, 2021): p. 18–21. An annotated and comprehensive overview of recordings is most recently published by JOE YANOSIK, *A Consumer Guide to the Plastic People of the Universe*, New York: self-released 2021, *passim*.

⁵⁴ For a basic overview, see again MACHOVEC, “*Hnědá kniha*”, p. 502–503, and RIEDEL, *Plastic People a český underground*, p. 370–375.

nost” [Series on the phenomenon of the 1980s to the present]. The TV documentary on the underground, initiated by František “Čuñas” Stárek and Břetislav Rychlík, repeated and commented extensively on known facts and mapped some less visible, primarily regional activities that would otherwise have been out of focus. Some of the works are monographic portraits of personalities (Milan Knížák and the ensemble Aktual, Svatopluk Karásek, Pavel Zajíček, Dino Vopálka and Plastic, and others).

From the previous review, it is clear that musicology stands aside from insider views. Would classically trained musicologists be put off by the external simplicity and occasional coarseness and vulgarity of the lyrics and contexts? Amateur enthusiast analysts, in turn, lack professional erudition and methodology. A more detailed musical characterisation of the music of Plastic People and DG 37 was attempted by the music publicist Jiří Černý.⁵⁵ However, it was a self-serving apologia, created as an opinion piece to help the musicians in the 1976 trial: He compares Ravel’s Bolero to African music and the resounding repetition of the theme in the bass guitar and the escalation of tension by long repetitions. He attributes the use of the saxophone or viola to the influences of modern jazz and Frank Zappa. The half-spoken vocal performance is then connected with African-American talking blues and choral inputs in connection with the voice band of E. F. Burian or songs by Bertold Brecht. In the text, he did not avoid the term underground but introduced it in the spirit of Czech music journalism of the late 1960s in connection with anti-establishment attitudes in Anglo-Saxon countries. Černý himself later emphasised that he would have approached an independent treatise on the group quite differently.⁵⁶ However, this never happened because “he did not have in himself the standards for music that is both slick and at the same time actually simple [...] he didn’t find [...] the time or energy to get into it.”⁵⁷ The most comprehensive Czech insight into the musical creation of the Czech underground thus remains in the commentaries of programmes and recordings in Riedel’s monograph (2016).

Recently, foreign authors have again provided exciting additions to the music of the Czech underground. New York freelance writer Joe Yanosik publishes detailed commentaries on the discographies of his favourite rock bands in his “A Consumer Guide to...” series. His long-term interest in Plastic People of the Universe and related ensembles has resulted in the latest book in this series.⁵⁸ It focuses on reviews and comments on over 80 albums sorted chronologically by recording date. Without any knowledge of Czech, using Google Translator and with the help of Czech friends, he managed to create a guidebook, useful especially for English-speaking readers. The insight into the music itself, which he describes as a magical brew of progressive rock, free jazz, the roots of European music, and psychedelia, remains at the forefront, while other information completes the historical context.

⁵⁵ MACHOVEC, “Hnědá kniha”, p. 68–69.

⁵⁶ See RIEDEL, *Kritik bez konzervatoře*, p. 88.

⁵⁷ RIEDEL, *Kritik bez konzervatoře*, p. 89.

⁵⁸ YANOSIK, *A Consumer Guide to the Plastic People of the Universe*, *passim*.

Sociologist of music and culture and trumpeter Trevor Hagen, originally from Wisconsin, USA, worked for many years in European cities, including Prague and settled down at the University of Exeter in the UK. In *Living in the Merry Ghetto*⁵⁹ he summarised his previously published minor essays and studies into a fairly comprehensive treatise on the Czech musical underground. Unlike foreign authors from the 1990s, his work relies on a surprisingly thorough knowledge of Czech sources and realities, direct consultations with specific personalities of the scene, and the study of recordings. In addition to a basic summary of factual data, important for the international reader, he also brings his own views on the phenomenon, based in particular on the concept of “cultural ecology” by the music sociologist Tia DeNora and psychologist Eric Clarke, which can be briefly explained as the coherence of people, places, recordings, symbols, etc., which are collected or rejected for the “healthy ecology” of life.⁶⁰ That is why his book is also called “The Merry Ghetto” – Hagen rightly rejects the concept of the Czech underground as a conscious protest tied to a targeted connection with Czech dissent. Its conception also includes a correlation with the categories “alternative musicians” and “gray-zone”, which have acquired a specific meaning in the Czech context and embark on a deeper characteristic of music aesthetics. It speaks of a specific “musicking”, which can be understood as an abbreviated combination of the words “music-making” – similar to Czech music-making:⁶¹

... how musical practices (composing to lyrics, listening to records, playing with spirit, rehearsing without count-offs, adapting poems as lyrics, writing and thinking about music) were linked to aesthetic phenomena (out-of-tune, rough and ragged sounds, sing-song recitation, heavy bass lines, screamed vocals, raw, unmusical sounds) that provided models, through contrast and comparison structures, for learning dispositions (how to feel and know the establishment, living in dignity, historical commitment, rejection).

In the chapter *Underground Is Life*, Hagen describes the transition of the Czech underground into the post-1989 era and, with references to the U Skaláka festivals, talks about the renaissance of the underground. However, the post-revolutionary interest in the phenomenon is overestimated in the long run. It is more soberly commented on by authors in more recent smaller journalism, e.g. Vladimír Drápal in the monothematic issue of the April magazine *UNI 2021*:⁶² “At that time [since the mid-1990s – author’s note] commercial interest in the underground was already in decline [...]. The underground has returned to the periphery and the small clubs where he belongs and where a handful of loyal nomads are coming after him, who have refused to accept the market’s invisible hand.”

⁵⁹ TREVER HAGEN, *Living in the Merry Ghetto: The Music and Politics of the Czech Underground* [online], New York: Oxford University Press 2019, available online at <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780190263850.001.0001/oso-9780190263850>.

⁶⁰ HAGEN, *Living in the Merry Ghetto*, p. 152.

⁶¹ SEE HAGEN, *Living in Merry Ghetto*, p. 78 and chapter “Creativity, Establishment, and the Self”, p. 79-92.

⁶² VLADIMÍR LÁBUS DRÁPAL, “Pavel Zajiček: Ostrov uprostřed pevniny” [“Pavel Zajiček: An Island in the Middle of the Mainland”], *Uni* 31 (4, 2021): p. 6.

Gradual stabilisation of the terms underground, alternative scene and grey zone in Czech music culture

When dealing with the underground, we operate with several expressions that have acquired a particular meaning within the Czech musical culture: underground, alternative (scene, music, rock), and grey zone. What is the history of their Czech perception?

The term underground first entered the Czech consciousness in music journalism, especially in the magazine *Melodie*.⁶³ In 1967, the word appeared only as part of the name of the Velvet Underground group, but between 1968-70, the word became a more widely used term in articles about American counterculture rock of the late 1960s. The missionary for the American music underground in our country was the music publicist Jaromír Tůma. In the first of the articles of this type, entitled “Underground ještě žije” [The Underground Still Lives], he asks: “What is the music that was born in the ‘underground movement’ of hippies and for which the name ‘underground rock’ or ‘progressive rock’ has now become established?”⁶⁴ From the beginning, the expression merged with the attributes “progressive” or “psychedelic” and was perceived as other similar stylistically genre designations, only with the added value of specific textual content or accompanying artistic phenomena within stage events. In the editorial section “Přehled světových hit parades” [List of world hit parades]⁶⁵, it says, “... Arthur Brown [...] has been watching the friends of ‘underground music’ for a long time, albeit mainly because of the mask they put on and then light during the performance.”

The artistic connection is also confirmed by Josef Kotek, whose degree of listener dedication was replaced by a sociological perspective with a characteristic generational and thus aesthetic distance: *Underground music* [...] it is not enough for it just to be heard, but it is also necessary in the context of it – with all that accompanies it, and that explains much of it [...]. And it is provoked by revealing the “underground” of the human being as much as possible and as exhibitionistically as possible to the anger of those affluent. Even in music [...].⁶⁶

The perception of the term underground and its correlation with other new terms of that time (psychedelic, progressive) is commented on in more detail by Jan Blüml.⁶⁷

⁶³ Martin Valenta summarized the first survey of the entrance of the English terms underground, psychedelic, hippies or happening into Czech journalism in his article “The term underground in the media of the late 1960s”, in VALENTA, *Podhoubí undergroundu*, p. 82–120.

⁶⁴ JAROMÍR TŮMA, „Podzemí ještě žije“ [„The Underground Still Lives“], *Melodie* (6, 1968): p. 164.

⁶⁵ *Melodie* 6 (6, 1968): p. 294. The author is not listed, but it is clearly Jaromír Tůma again.

⁶⁶ JOSEF KOTEK, “Underground music a její sociální otazníky” [“Underground Music and its Social Question Marks“], *Melodie* 7 (2, 1969): p. 37–40. The author evaluates his experience as a member of the older generation who participated in the festival in Essen, Germany. He also expressed his contradictory perceptions in the magazine *Hudební rozhledy* (See JOSEF KOTEK, „Paradoxy z Es-senu“ [“Paradoxes from Essen“], *Hudební rozhledy* 21 (20, 1968) p. 630–631.

⁶⁷ JAN BLÜML, *Progresivní rock [Progressive Rock]*, Olomouc: Togga 2017, p. 150–151 and 160–161.

The term underground was profiled in *Melodie* as a designation of more demanding music, contrasted with the opposite, i.e. the consumer counterpart of popular music.

Tůma, this time under the abbreviation “jt”, writes, for example, in the charts section that “*Bubblegum music is a kind of natural response to the increasingly demanding underground music, with which it shares an external appearance, or rather the instrumental cast of the interpreting groups.*”⁶⁸

At the same time, however, the view of underground as a fashionable label⁶⁹ and a sign of strong protest and political connotations was also growing. In November 1968, *Melodie* presented the column “Co vlastně chce podsvětí“ [What the Underworld Actually Wants],⁷⁰ preceded by the phrase “*The Underground’ – is a term for some bands that have recently become very fashionable [...] It is a certain atmosphere of vague protest against contemporary society.*” The column was also valuable in that it quoted in translation from the British magazine *Melody Maker* the words of John Peel of the British station BBC Radio 1, whom Tůma a few pages earlier described as an “‘almost underground’ disc-jockey”:

“Of course, everything stems from today’s political situation. Everything is prepared, planned and drawn for us so that people just stay seated and do not have to think and decide for themselves [...] Everything is so shallow – I was terribly disappointed with how things turned out.”

In the December issue of *Melodie*, Jaromír Tůma indirectly explains Peel’s disappointment when he comments on the sales of the albums of the bands in the American top 30 with the words, “*The biggest market for a gramophone record in America today is the underground.*”⁷¹

In any case, the phrase “underground music” became a household name in 1968–70, not only on the pages of the long-term only specialised monthly *Melodie* but also in more up-to-date periodicals of that time, which were only being published for a short time, such as *Pop Music Expres* or *Aktuality Melodie*. The expression also got into the advertising section⁷², the “Jak já to slyším” [How I hear it] section and editorial discussions. In a discussion titled “Jam session kritiků” [Jam session of critics]⁷³, Jaromír Tůma still defends the progressiveness of the phenomenon: “*The new, revolutionary one is being fought for by someone other [than the Beatles – author’s note]. – e.g. underground music, engaged music on which we can have our opinions, whose goals may*

⁶⁸ See *Melodie* 21 (11, 1968): p. 326.

⁶⁹ For example Jaromír Tůma in *Melodie* 8 (11, 1970): p. 344 or Ondřej Konrád in *Aktuality Melodie* 1 (8. 12. 1969, 25): p. 2. Both mockingly commented on the Czech performance of the Polish band Breakout, which states on the posters that it is “prwy zespół polski grający w style underground” [first Polish band playing underground].

⁷⁰ *Melodie* 6 (11, 1968): p. 333. The column is signed with an “m”, so it is probably the collective authorship of the magazine’s editorial board.

⁷¹ *Melodie* 6 (1968, 12): p. 361, section “Overview of world hit parades”, signed “jt”.

⁷² For example, *Melodie* 6 (1968, 12): p. 384 and the like in many other editions it is written: “I will record two tracks: everything from the field of rock ‘n’ roll, R+B, Beat, Psychedelic, Soul and Underground. I will send the list of LPs.”

⁷³ *Melodie* 7 (1969, 1): p. 24.

be debatable, but it is what paves the way,” while Josef Kotek perceives it as incompatible with the domestic environment: “*I think that underground music is a fact that is quite justified and necessary in the West. But that other influences will probably interfere with our practice after all.*”

Along with the commentaries on Anglo-American reality, Czech journalism is beginning to reveal the inspiration for the Czech scene, initially in a purely musical sense. In *Aktuality Melodie* 1969, Tůma praises the Czech band Blue Effect’s songs, which “are really exceptionally high quality and surprisingly stylish and resemble the highly appreciated music of American underground bands”⁷⁴. Petr Dorůžka states that the Czech Tom Cats “played taken over from underground groups,”⁷⁵ or Jiří Havelka comments on Framus Five that “the original soul sphere of activity is beginning to shift to the white blues and perhaps even further – somewhere to underground music”.⁷⁶ Moreover, Honza Hruža, in his review of the Primitives Group’s Bird Feast concert, refers to the expression again only in terms of the inspiration of the song repertoire.⁷⁷ Although his review faithfully describes the artistic, scenic, and happening accompanying phenomena of the concert (several metric cents of feathers, a feather girl in a display case, giant ethylene balloons, and live birds), he perceives them more as a curiosity than as an artistically equal part of the performance.

Jaromír Tůma’s intoxication with the new expression led him to an exaggerated remark about the 2nd Czechoslovak Beat Festival in December 1968 as an event that was “under the sign of underground music”.⁷⁸ In one of his other sentences, he even talks about expression as a term and does not perceive its content only from a musical point of view: “The term underground is, however, questionable in our case, because it cannot be associated only with music, but above all with the textual side of the compositions, which is suppressed in our groups.”

The theoretical grasp of the term underground, its setting in a broader artistic context and especially in the new social context of Czechoslovakia after August 1968 was made by Ivan Jirous.

Jirous had been publishing reviews and essays since 1966, but initially exclusively in the magazine *Výtvarná práce* [Fine Art Work] and thus on fine art topics. It was not until 1968 that he first touched on music in the essay “Mesaliance, či zasnuby mezi beatovou hudbou a výtvarným uměním?” [Mesaliance, or the Engagement Between Beat Music and Fine Arts?].⁷⁹ He praises the example of the interconnection of both creative spheres in the Primitives Group, to whose art team he belongs to a large ex-

⁷⁴ *Aktuality Melodie* 1 (27. 1. 1969, 2): p. 4.

⁷⁵ *Aktuality Melodie* 1 (12. 5. 1969, 10): p. 5.

⁷⁶ *Aktuality Melodie* 1 (13. 10. 1969, 21): p. 3.

⁷⁷ “The repertoire again consisted of the compositions of Mothers of Invention, Doors, Fugs and other equally well-known American underground bands” - see *Pop Music Expres* 2 (1969 2): p. 3.

⁷⁸ *Melodie* 7 (1969, 2): p. 48.

⁷⁹ See JIROUS, *Magorův zápisník*, p. 151–155. In the essay, he disapprovingly quotes from journal *Mladý svět* Jiří Černý, who “saw in emphasizing the external side of things” one of the dangers of our beat music, and Jaroslav Pacovský, who even ridicules the effort for audiovisual synthesis by comparing it to themes of devils and hell in paintings of Josef Lada or in fairy-tales.

tent: the stylised background of the scene for the performance was painted by Jirous's sister Zorka Ságlová, her husband and Jirous's classmate Jan SágI photographed portraits, and their other contemporary from his native town Humpolec, painter Dušan Kadlec, created the gilded death masks of musicians.

Jirous sharply opposed renowned music publicists who, in contemporary reviews, e.g. at the 1st Czechoslovak Beat Festival in Prague 1967, celebrated mainly brilliant rock bands, whose advantage is in their maturity and chemistry, and perceived the artistic accompaniment of concerts more as a crutch, justifying a lower musical quality.⁸⁰ A year later, the author repeated a similar reflection on the 2nd Czechoslovak Beat Festival 1968, published again in *Výtvarná práce*. It is a repeated apologia of the Primitives Group concept and, as if in return, sharp mocking criticism of those who received awards at the festival, especially Petr Novák with the group George & Beatovens.⁸¹ The word underground does not appear in these articles. For Jirous, it first appears in the article "The Primitives Group – the Czech face of the underground", published in the magazine "Sešity pro literaturu a diskusi" [Workbooks for Literature and Discussion] in April 1969.⁸²

Here Jirous also explains the perception of the difference between the concepts of psychedelic and underground:⁸³

"The essence of psychedelic music is to induce extraordinary mental states through music, light play, incitement to aggressive states, etc.; the consumption of drugs is not necessary to achieve the desired effect."

"The underground movement (I draw information about it mainly from R. R. Rygulla's afterword to the anthology FUCK YOU!, Darmstadt 1968) is primarily a reaction to the commercialism and perfection of the environment in which it was created. Rygulla explicitly points out that the phenomenon of the underground is typical of the US, because its prerequisite is an absolutely perfect and self-regulating society."

The representatives of the underground recognised that nothing could change within legality, and corresponding to mass socialisation and conformism by extremely individualistic actions that are anti-consumer and anti-civilisational. It goes without saying that an important role in the compositions of underground groups is played by the lyrics of songs, which are sharply critical of the reality of American society."

While the American protagonists of the underground undoubtedly belong to the intellectual class, the Czech version of it has a significantly different mycelium. The Primitives Group, which represents the Czech form of the underground, is not composed of intellectuals but of people born 'from below', as is the majority of the Czech beat. This

⁸⁰ JIROUS, *Magorův zápisník*, p. 153.

⁸¹ Jirous quotes the American band Jefferson Airplane, who said of themselves, "The stage is our bed and the audience is our partner. We don't entertain them, we make love to them" and he recommends to Petr Novák a paraphrase in an altered version "We don't entertain them, we masturbate in front of them" (JIROUS, *Magorův zápisník*, p. 159).

⁸² *Sešity pro literaturu a diskusi* 4 (1969, 30): p. 49–50. Also in JIROUS, *Magorův zápisník*, p. 692–696.

⁸³ JIROUS, *Magorův zápisník*, p. 692–693.

essentially eliminates the implementation of Ed Sanders' demand for an "all-out attack on culture" – and also the second sting of the underground, escalated against the society of consumerism and commerce, is of course unthinkable in our circumstances. In addition, The Primitives Group interprets the repertoire of English and American psychedelic groups, so the perception of the content of the lyrics cannot directly affect the tone of the production. If nevertheless, we can consider this group to be representatives of the underground movement, it is mainly because it is impossible to fully agree with Rygull's assertion about the exclusive attachment of the underground to the US environment. If one assumption of the underground in our country – a perfectly functioning consumer society – is only in the bud, if it is possible to talk about its existence at all, why did The Primitives Group choose The Grateful Dead, The Mothers of Invention and The Fugs to interpret from a confusing line of bands? In the concept of Primitives, an equally important component of psychedelic music and the underground is emphasised – namely, a kind of revolution of feeling, creating and inhabiting its own world, based largely on emotions and instinct, a society established away from it, whether immaculately functioning or chaotic and unsatisfying even basic human needs. In the case of Primitives, we could probably speak of mental involvement, ether than political, but it is precisely this cultural area that rejects such divisions, or more precisely: it does not care."

In his first treatise on the underground, Ivan Jirous does not differ in principle from the perception of music journalists. He only applies the knowledge to a Czech group. The main feature of the American underground – an open protest against an overly rigid social order – adapts the Czech environment to the level of feeling, emotion, and instinct. A more noticeable shift in the Czech understanding of the underground is expressed in a concise and colloquial form in a short documentary, *Plastic People of the Universe*,⁸⁴ directed by a student of the FAMU film faculty César de Ferrari, under the supervision of Otakar Vávra in 1970. Jirous no longer bases his thesis on the Primitives Group, which disbanded in 1969, but on the Plastic People of the Universe, founded in October 1968 and briefly operating as a professional group under the PKS agency. The documentary found the band in a period when they had to return their instruments and gear after unsuccessful recordings,⁸⁵ and Ivan Jirous, as its artistic director, arranged for the musicians to work in the woods near Humpolec and play at local events in order to earn funds for the new gear. Jirous characterised the music of the ensemble as psychedelic, which, in addition to their rock style, also includes light and artistic components. Jirous characterised the creative underground attitude in which the abovementioned shift from the quoted article occurred. This time, he accepted the thesis of Ed Sanders from the American group The Fugs about an all-out

⁸⁴ *Plastic People of the Universe* [online], YouTube.com, Studio FAMU, dir. César de Ferrari, 1970, January 2015, accessed April 2021, available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GeCQP5gaxy0>.

⁸⁵ Retraining exams were one of the manifestations of the so-called normalization after the Soviet occupation in August 1968 – artists were repeatedly tested not only for musical skills, but especially in terms of political opinions and attitudes.

attack on culture directed against established society as valid for Czechoslovak conditions. These began to change inexorably during the 1970s. Like other representatives of free thought, rock bands started to be controlled, influenced, restricted, banned, and weaned from the possibilities of normal operation in the spirit of the established so-called normalisation cultural policy.

Jirous elaborated the same ideas in great detail in the Report on the Third Czech Musical Revival, published in 1975.⁸⁶ The concept of the underground in the conditions of communist Czechoslovakia extends to more general positions:

“Underground is not tied to a particular art direction or style, although in music, for example, it manifests itself mainly in a rock form. The underground is the spiritual position of intellectuals and artists who consciously critically define themselves against the world in which they live. It is a declaration of struggle against the establishment. It is a movement that works largely with artistic means, but whose representatives realise that art is not and should not be the ultimate goal of artists’ efforts.”

Jirous characterised the goal of the underground in the West as destroying the establishment. In contrast, he believed the goal of the underground in our country was to create a second culture, utterly independent of official communication channels, social appreciation, and the hierarchy of values of the establishment. Since 1973, Ivan Jirous and the Plastic People of the Universe started being associated with other supporters of a similar approach to the possibilities of self-realisation within communist society. The culmination of their few activities, in addition to recordings, was mainly three editions of festivals of the second culture. As a result, islands of free thought and action began to crop up throughout the country, experiencing more or fewer problems with the authorities or even the police.

Let’s summarize that the underground in Czechoslovakia of the 1970s and 1980s refers to the activity of a diverse community of people who, as a result of censorship and bans, had given up on creating and consuming culture offered and mediated by official institutions and the media and were trying to create their own mechanisms and platforms of cultural and social life.

The core of the Czech underground, associated with Ivan Jirous, was radical in its opinions and evaluations and closed to a large extent.⁸⁷ The activities of people who did not want to submit to the establishment humbly, but did not want to give up on the possibility of official employment at any cost or did not have the opportunity to be in contact with the already existing underground activities, had much wider limits

⁸⁶ „Zpráva o třetím českém hudebním obrození”, see JIROUS, *Magorův zápisník*, p. 1971-178.

⁸⁷ His distance from Jirous’s conception of the underground, whose representatives “respect nothing but themselves and their opinions”, was expressed in 1975 by the artist Milan Knížák, whose ensemble Aktual otherwise naturally fit into the underground context. In a “Letter to all who know the circle around Jirous and also me”, entitled “The Avant-Garde as Terror”, he states, among other things: “I am happy that these people do not have power, [...], if they came to power, I would be (and probably not only me) sentenced to life imprisonment” (ALAN, *Alternativní kultura*, p. 542).

in this period. During the second half of the 1970s, the musical expression of some musical ensembles, especially when they participated in events organised by the Jazz Section of the Union of Musicians⁸⁸, began to be referred to as alternative. The pioneer of this term was the music publicist Josef Vlček. He expressed his basic thesis, defining its content and scope, in a 21-point text “Úkoly české alternativní hudby” [Tasks of Czech Alternative Music], published as an editorial to the program of the 9th Prague Jazz Days at the beginning of November 1979.⁸⁹

Vlček defined that “alternative music is a current that seeks to create distinctive music beyond the commercial and aesthetic dictates of the media.” He sharply contrasted it with the character of normalising pop culture: “the artistic norms of our media in the entertainment industry are a badly disguised cloak of self-interest, hypocrisy, corruption, narrow-mindedness, conservatism...” He elevated the pursuit of originality, spontaneity, quirkiness and sincerity above technical “prowess, perfection or proximity to modern jazz or classical music.” It encouraged musicians to record their own on tapes or cassettes instead of gramophone records, the production of which was controlled by state labels and inaccessible to most alternative musicians.

We can see that the theses of the alternative scene overlap in many ways with Jirous’s conception of the underground, especially with its absolute contempt for the establishment and its cultural consequences, as well as with the elevation of authenticity and sincerity above mere musical skills. However, Vlček distanced himself from the underground in the last point of his thesis, while at the same time not declaring a cultural revolution but only accusing the regime of the current state: “Alternative music is not an underground, voluntarily isolating from reality. Alternative music will not change the world, or even just our culture; it is not the cause of its future changes, but the consequence of its crisis.”

In this period, the understanding of the terms “amateur” and “professional” also changed. The phrase “amateur musician” and “amateur music” began to be perceived as a free musician whose work does not have to be subject to agency or party requirements. Paradoxically, “professional” began to be identified with terms such as subordinate, sold out, and obsequious. Many musicians of the alternative scene were employed in easier jobs such as night watchman, stoker and the like so that they could direct all their creative energy into their musical creation, performed on an amateur basis. Similarly, the term “commercial” was understood very pejoratively, and the opposite was the positively perceived expression “non-commercial.” At that time, the lucrative gainful activity of quality music was simply given up in our country.

Groups or singer-songwriters of the alternative scene developed an unprecedented activity at that time in terms of recording and distributing homemade au-

⁸⁸ For larger context of Jazz Section activities see VLADIMÍR KOUŘIL, *Jazzová sekce v čase nečase 1971–1987* [Jazz Section in Time of Non-time 1971–1987], Praha: Torst 1999, *passim*, and KAREL SRP, *Výjimečné stavy: Povolání Jazzová sekce* [States of Emergency: Profession Jazz Section], Praha: Pragma 1994, *passim*, or web pages <https://jazzova-sekce.cz/nas-pribeh/>.

⁸⁹ The text is available online at <https://jazzova-sekce.cz/storage/ostatni-publikace/9PJD-Scena-alternativni-hudby.pdf>.

dio recordings, including their own packaging, especially on demo tapes. Due to the much greater frequency of these activities compared to the musical underground, the functioning of the alternative scene fulfilled some attributes of the second, parallel culture more than the underground itself. However, the boundaries between the underground and the alternative scene were very loose and permeable, and many bands such as “Pší vojáci” [Dog Soldiers] or “Garáž” [Garage] were seen as part of both spheres.

In his later retrospective view of the alternative scene in 2001,⁹⁰ Josef Vlček ultimately included the Czech music underground itself. The title of his chapter, “Alternative Musical Scenes”, thus expresses a broader category, within which the musical underground is one radical variant. The creators of a multi-part documentary series of the same name on Czech Television (1997–2001)⁹¹ also signed up for the alternative culture connection. They also understand the cycle “about foreign and Czech art on the edge and beyond it” very broadly, both in terms of artistic and social activities and the degree of communication with official institutions and the media. The meaning and scope of the terms alternative, alternative music or scene have been widely clarified and specified by authors such as Mikuláš Chadima,⁹² Pavla Jonssonová⁹³, and Jana Petrová⁹⁴.

The alternative scene or music in Czechoslovakia of the 1970s and 1980s can therefore be defined as the activities of a diverse community of people who, within the framework of censorship and prohibitions, tried to use the possibilities of creating and consuming culture, offered and mediated by official institutions and media, but not at the cost of major concessions and loss of control over the result. If they failed in this, they looked for other opportunities and platforms for cultural and social life, including those on the border of legality.

The category of the grey zone occupies an even wider and more ambiguous space. Several subjective explanations are heard in the three-part documentary of the same name by Czech Television. For example, in the first part of the cycle, the Slovak archaeologist and politician Ladislav Snopko characterised it succinctly as “official people in unofficial situations”. The singer-songwriter Jaromír Nohavica called it

⁹⁰ ALAN, *Alternativní kultura*, p. 201–263.

⁹¹ *Alternativní kultura [Alternative Culture]*, two series, thirteen parts, Česká televize, dir. Petr Slavík, 1997–2006.

⁹² See memoirs of CHADIMA, *Alternativa, passim*, and CHADIMA, *Alternativa I, passim*. See also his chapter in on alternative scene in a book on Czech subcultures *Kmeny 0* (VLADIMÍR 518 et al., *Kmeny 0 [Tribes 0]*, Praha: BIGGBOSS and Yinachi 2013, p. 368–401), where a brief treatise on the underground was written by Josef Rauwolf (p. 110–135).

⁹³ PAVLA JONSSONOVÁ, *Devět z české hudební alternativy osmdesátých let [Nine of the Czech Musical Alternatives of the 1980s]*, Praha: Karolinum 2019, *passim*. In addition to references to sources, the content of underground and alternative categories is also compared on the basis of her own experience and findings from many of her own interviews with musicians.

⁹⁴ JANA PETROVÁ, *Zapomenutá generace osmdesátých let 20. století: Nezávislé aktivity a samizdat na Plzeňsku [The Forgotten Generation of the 1980s: Independent Activities and Samizdat in the Pilsen region]*, Plzeň: Jana Petrová 2009, *passim*. The author adapts the general theoretical basis to the local conditions of the region.

“the space between the underground and collaborationism” in the second part. In the third part of the cycle, Jan Rejžek expressed this in a similar way, describing the category by analogy to playing with the Bolshevik on the edge of the possible. In this work, however, more derogatory analogies appear as well. The singer-songwriter Jan Burian identifies the grey zone with the petty bourgeoisie, and the documentarist Miloš Kroupa likens it to an imaginary treaty with the Bolsheviks, according to which the people of the grey zone will be free only in private, but everything public will be a lie.

Trever Hagen⁹⁵ quotes Josef Škvorecký’s article from 1986,⁹⁶ where the Czech writer characterises the grey zone kindly as

“the conspiracy of normal people who stand between the fanaticism of the orthodox, the cynicism of the pragmatic on the one side, and the abnormal moral courage of the dissidents on the other. They have no organisation unless human decency is an organising principle. They [make] really existing socialism livable.”

A separate essay on the category’s content was written in September 1989 by Jiřina Šiklová.⁹⁷ She refers to a samizdat article from 1988, whose authors described historians who remained “in the structure” but did not lose contact with former colleagues who were expelled during the purges after 1968. Šiklová herself delimits the grey zone much more broadly. First, it defines two innumerable distinct and socially active groups of people – the socialist establishment, made up of paid officials, security forces and so on, on the one hand, and a circle of dissidents on the other. Among them, she sees two large groups – the silent majority, which is primarily consumer-oriented and not interested in politics, and the grey zone, made up of qualified, professionally erudite people who “are employed in the structure in places roughly corresponding to their qualifications, are not in a ‘ghetto’, they want to keep the small benefits, which the regime provides to those who are in the norm. At the same time, they try to do nothing, do no harm to anyone.”⁹⁸

The grey zone cannot be precisely defined, and in fact, this expression is rarely used in music journalism or historiography. Let us, therefore, settle for a general definition of the grey zone as a very broad sphere of activity of a diverse community of people in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s. Its members do not want to build a career at the cost of collaborating with a regime they disagree with, but they also do not want to expose themselves to the danger that any visible activity runs against the assumptions of the official regime bodies and institutions would cause.

⁹⁵ HAGEN, *Living in Merry Ghetto*, p. 53.

⁹⁶ JOSEF ŠKVORECKÝ, „Hippness at Noon: Communism’s Crusade against Jazz and Rock in Czechoslovakia, *The New Republic* (December 17, 1986): p. 17–25.

⁹⁷ JIŘINA ŠIKLOVÁ, “Šedá zóna a budoucnost disentu v Československu” [“The Gray Zone and the Future of Dissent in Czechoslovakia”], *Reportér* (2, 1990, supplementum): p. 140ff.

⁹⁸ ŠIKLOVÁ, “Šedá zóna a budoucnost disentu v Československu”, p. 143.

The place of the underground in the development of Czech rock music

The primary musical and genre affiliation of the Czech underground is undoubtedly rock.⁹⁹ The development of Czech rock music in the 1950s–1960s and 1980s–1990s could be seen as innovation through foreign impulses and a gradual adaptation and assimilation within the natural stylistic-genre tension and Czechisation. However, a much broader view of the 1970s needs to be applied.

The situation in Czechoslovakia, which arose in the early 1970s, can be characterised as the disintegration of the rock movement. It certainly had subjective causes (the inclination of many performers towards the financially more prosperous mainstream of popular music, the effort of others to find employment abroad, the too rapid growth of demands on interpretive and sound quality, etc.). However, there were mainly objective causes (a fundamental change in the cultural-political atmosphere after August 1968, resulting in sharpened ideological criteria, strict requirements for band names in Czech and Czech lyrics, short hair of musicians and questioning the functions of rock music in society in general).

Objective causes amplified and multiplied the aforementioned subjective motives. The following stratification of Czech rock music can thus be traced in five isolated, internally even more stylistically differentiated lines of opinion, determined by the attitude to the new social reality after August 1968: 1. a complete transition to popular music mainstream, 2. a partial inclination to the popular music mainstream, 3. a mainstream rock line, 4. an alternative scene, 5. an underground.

1. An extensive stream was represented by singers and instrumentalists who completely abandoned the context of rock music at that time and moved to the less controversial and relatively trouble-free sphere of mainstream modern popular music, which they greatly revived with their interpretive and sometimes creative contribution. Most of them, especially solo singers, remained in the pop sphere: Hana Zagorová, Marie Rottrová, Petr Spálený, Karel Černoč, Pavel Novák, Petr Novák, Martha and Tena Elefteriadu or Pavel Fořt, Jan Obermayer and others. Some, especially instrumentalists, working in the accompanying groups of mainstream singers, returned to rock in the 2nd half of the 1970s: Slávek Janda, Vladimír Kulhánek, Jan Kubík, Pavel Váně, Zdeněk Kluka, singers such as Michal Prokop. Several originally rock singers found refuge in the lucrative sphere of domestic and especially foreign bars (Viktor Sodoma, temporarily also Jiří Korn or Petr Rezek).

2. The second stream was represented by ensembles or soloists who retained the stylistic orientation from their previous work but moved the overall expression and concept closer to a less flexible and less distinct position of the middle stream of modern popular music: for example, the Olympic (groping in search of a concept,

⁹⁹ The following passages are an abridged version of the middle part of a three-part review series on the development of Czech rock music, published by in 1990: ALEŠ OPEKAR, “Základní vývojové tendence v české rockové hudbě, 2. část: 70. léta” [Basic Tendencies in the Development of Czech Rock Music, part 2: the 1970s], *Hudební rozhledy* (12, 1990): p. 567–570.

especially on the fourth album from 1973) or Pavel Bobek and Karel Kahovec, who more closely adhered to gradually commercialised country music with Czech lyrics.

3. The third line was created by bands trying to maintain the continuity of authentic rock development even in changed difficult conditions. Several LPs also played a positive role here, completing the last period of the work of some influential groups of the previous decade: *Barnodaj* by the Progress Organisation 1971, *Město Er* by the Framus Five 1971, *Kuře v hodinkách* by Flamengo 1972. In the last two albums, thanks to its cooperation with Czech poet Josef Kainar, Czech rock has merged with Czech poetry and, by extension, with Czech folk songs, especially by the principle of the musical grasp of verses, consistently respecting the content and mood of the lyrics, and the recitative character of the singing. The former singer and author of the bands Blue Effect and Flamengo Vladimír Mišík came the farthest in this direction, who also began to set to music older poems by Josef Kainar and other poets (Václav Hrabě, František Gellner). While, for example, Pavel Chrastina's lyrics for the Olympic were still largely captive to their music, subordinated to the rhythmic models adopted, and thus revealed, especially in phrasing, the influence of English, this period brought an important step forward – an approach from the opposite side: rock music accommodated the Czech lyrics and rhythmically and expressively adapted more to the character of the Czech language. This orientation was supported by occasional collaborations between rock musicians, folk singer-songwriters, and folk-rock ensembles such as the C&K Vocal and the Marsyas.

Other stylistic focuses that resulted in the primary rock development line of the 1970s were art-rock (Collegium Musicum, Progres 2, Modrý efekt, Synkopy, Ab-raxas), jazz-rock (Jazz Q, Energit, cooperation of the M.efekt and Jazz Orchestra of Czechoslovak Radio, Impuls, Bohemia, Mahagon, Prague Big Band of Milan Svoboda, Pražský výběr Michaela Kocába and hard rock, prevalent especially at country dances (Orient, Benefit, Marquis John, Adepti, Boomerang, Koule, Katapult). New bands, formed in 1971-3 on an amateur basis, were based on the hard rock or blues-rock repertoire and found it challenging to find their own style (Abraam, Inrou, Feeling Free, Expansion).

Since the beginning of the 70s, the Hanspaulka blues scene in Prague was born in relatively autarkic, subcultural conditions, the centre of which was the restaurant "U Tyšerů". Especially the Žízeň band gradually gave rise to satellite formations, which became an integral part of the Prague rock scene (Žlutej Pes, Yo Yo Band, Nahlas, Bluesberry, Krausberry, Hlava B).

This third trend of the period also includes a wave of rock'n'roll revivalism that occurred at the end of the 1970s (Transit with Miki Volek, Gram and later Cadillac with Pavel Sedláček, Classic Rock'n'roll Band and later also Matěj Čech with his band).

4. The fourth stream, which illustrates the situation in Czech rock music of the 70s, was the alternative scene. It was formed as an inevitable reaction of the minority but tastefully defined layers of younger musicians and listeners to the change in the cultural-political and organisational conditions. The alternative scene was created by amateur ensembles, inclined to their own distinctive concept, usually without direct

responses to hard rock or blues, but with the ambition to experiment with various forms of rock, folk, jazz and non-traditional sound sources. They created their own musical culture as an alternative to popular music, accepted and offered by the mass media, even at the cost of losing prospects for wider social application, including professionalisation. An alternative scene can be talked about since 1972 when the bands Extempore and Stehlík were formed. Three years later, the Elektrobus ensemble joined them, and in 1976 Extempore was joined by its later leader, saxophonist Mikuláš Chadima. In 1977-79 the bands Stehlík and Elektrobus disbanded and, with other musicians, regrouped into the formations Kilhets, Švehlík and Amalgam.

From the various initial foreign musical influences, it is possible to generalise the common denominator in the work of Frank Zappa, but some ensembles (F.O.K., Extempore) initially tended more towards folk music expression. The musical character of the alternative scene was most often based on a more complex irregular rhythm, over which an experimental guitar sound was built. The compositions mostly reached larger dimensions, especially in instrumental passages, which prevailed over the use of singing (Stehlík, Švehlík). The stylistic dispersion of the scene was not limited in any way. Therefore free rock with industrial inclinations, tending towards performance (Kilhets), as well as music inspired by Japanese and Indian traditions and Zen philosophy (Amalgam, Relaxace), could appear here. Orthodox rock'n'roll ensembles (Classic Rock'n'roll Band) were thus connected with the alternative scene, and the first ensembles were influenced by punk and the new wave (Zikkurat, Antitma 16).

The alternative scene was closely connected with the activities of the Jazz Section of the Union of Musicians¹⁰⁰, which also offered it the most concert opportunities at its Prague Jazz Days¹⁰¹. The circle of alternative bands from the 1970s disintegrated as a scene between 1981 and 1982, largely in connection with the culmination of restrictive measures and pressures of state and police authorities towards the Jazz Section. Its activists were later charged and convicted on the pretext of illicit economic activity. However, many personalities emerging from the alternative scenes (Alexandr Hájdošský, Mikuláš Chadima, Pavel Richter) continuously devoted themselves to home studio recording and occasional performances, which continued to be perceived as an alternative.

5. The fifth stream, which concludes the overview of the stratification of the Czech rock scene of the 1970s, is the underground. It originated as a feeling of belonging to the predominantly musically understood meaning of the expression in the second half of the 60s. Later, however, it brought together creators who decided to operate entirely outside the official social structures due to totalitarian cultural-political conditions and circumstances. The creators were thus constantly exposed to repressive pressures from state and security authorities, and many of them were senselessly pun-

¹⁰⁰ In Czech "Jazzová sekce Svazu hudebníků". For more information see footnote 66.

¹⁰¹ In Czech "Pražské jazzové dny", organised from 1974 to 1979. The 10th edition, scheduled for September 1980, was completely banned at the last minute.

ished by the courts. The phenomenon of the Czech underground thus acquired the character of conscious life and spiritual attitude.

Of the foreign musical influences, the strongest initial impulses were given by the creation of American psychedelic groups, British rhythm & blues groups, the American underground of the 1960s (Velvet Underground, Mothers of Invention, Fugs, Captain Beefheart and others) and by extension, the ideas of Allen Ginsberg and Timothy Leary. However, Plastic People of the Universe soon developed their own distinctive style, based on the non-melodic, distinctly declamatory treatment of lyrics and contrasting melodic interplays with the characteristic use of the saxophone. This style, which coincidentally was similar to the abovementioned Vladimír Mišík's setting of poetic Czech lyrics to music, was later imitated by many other domestic ensembles of the underground scene. From 1969 to 1970, the Plastic People group gained professional status. However, in 1971 and 1973, the band did not meet the "normalisation" agency requirements (appearance changes, including long hair, censorship of lyrics, shifting English names to Czech ones, political awareness...). As a result, it started to operate permanently only outside the state-permitted possibilities. They were the only ones from the underground scene to continuously record demos released abroad on gramophone records (the most famous is *Egon Bondy's Happy Heart Club Banned* with recordings from 1973–75 with poems by Egon Bondy).

In 1973, the scene was expanded by DG 307, Umělá hmota and Bílé světlo. As other representatives, we can name Aktual (founded by artist Milan Knížák in Mariánské Lázně in 1967, with inspiring happening use of non-traditional and purely non-musical instruments), the Sen noci svatojánské band, Sanhedrin, Dr. Prostěradlo Band, Hever & Vaselína Band, Old Teenagers (later Classic Rock'n'roll Band). Several times, the ensembles of this scene met at the Festivals of the Second Culture (in Czech "Festival druhé kultury"), initiated by Ivan Jirous: 1st September 1974 at Postupice near Benešov, 21st February 1976 at Bojanovice near Prague and 1st October 1977 at Hrádeček (Václav Havel's cottage).

The general view of the period of the 1970s and the 1980s testifies to the disproportionate growth and expansion of the so-called middle stream (mainstream) of popular music, which gradually became completely alienated from rock impulses, from which it initially drew its viability. As a result, it lost its internal developmental potency.

On the other hand, the orthodox rock itself was completely pushed out of the mass media and condemned to peripheral subsistence. On gramophone records, it was released sporadically and unsystematically. Nevertheless, the 3rd Czechoslovak Beat Festival in Prague's Lucerna in April 1971 was still organised with difficulty. Foreign participation from Hungary (Omega) and Poland (Czesław Niemen) heralded the cult of these national scenes, to which a part of domestic rock fans clung for some time.

The leading cause of the crisis of our popular music in the 70s was the normalisation line of party cultural policy, according to which popular music was politically abused in the so-called crisis years of 1968–69 and thus became a co-bearer of ideas and moods of the social processes of that time. Resolution of the Government of

Czechoslovakia on the situation in entertainment music No. 63/1975¹⁰² completed the centralisation measures, strict registration of artists and control of the contents of their work. The first legislative manifestation of this line was already expressed in Government Resolution No. 212 of 1972, which recommended the reconstruction of the existing agency system and the start of retraining procedures. The retraining system, insensitive to the essence of musical manifestations of subcultural provenance, disrupted the natural continuity of rock development. It caused the disintegration of many formations, meant that many musicians chose to move to the commercial shores of popular music and, finally, pushed part of the scene into an unofficial, sometimes even underground position. The alternative and underground scenes had a limited, specialised audience, communicating with their music on a subcultural basis with the unmistakable participation of costume, artistic elements, theatrical elements, performances, etc. (long hair, blue jeans, visual and action accessories of concerts). The relatively isolated and sometimes outwardly intolerant way of existence of the individual, above-described lines of opinion resulted in insufficient mutual inspiration and confrontation between the individual stream, causing a deepening of the overall lagging behind global development of modern popular music, which was reflected especially in the decreasing quality and increasing rigidity of the domestic mainstream of pop music. The misconception that mainstream popular music could do without contact with other domestic subcultural impulses (i.e., at that time, mainly new forms of rock) was most clearly reflected in the absolute conservatism of the mass media.

Pluralistic structures in the production, organising and journalistic front were gradually liquidated and replaced by the monopolisation of state and party institutions (Supraphon and Panton; “Pražské kulturní středisko” (PKS) and regional cultural centres; the only specialised magazine on popular music *Melodie*, next to the slightly younger *Gramorevue*, which, however, primarily defended the interests of the publisher – Supraphon; decisive control influence of national committees, their commissions and inspectors...). It was only in 1976-77 that specialised programs about popular music appeared on radio and television with a more or less interesting dramaturgy, into which rock music also penetrated (e.g. “Větrník”, “Toulky”, “Písničky pod rentgenem”, “Hitšarada”).

However, in the given conditions, difficult due to increasing repressive pressures, enthusiastic activities were born at the same time, trying to substitute some of the functions of the dismantled platforms despite the obstacles. As an example, we can mention Miloš Čuřík’s programs “Labyrint” in clubs and cultural houses like Cíl, Invalidovna, Rokoska, in which, in addition to spoken word, films and recorded music, unconventional rock bands also got the opportunity to perform. Čuřík’s shows of amateur groups, organised within the framework of the methodical centre he built, became an attractive part of the Prague Jazz Days. Their organiser – the Jazz Section of the Union of Musicians – gradually arrived at a more general and broad conception

¹⁰² See e.g. ANTONÍN MATZNER, IVAN POLEDŇÁK and IGOR WASSERBERGER (eds.), *Encyklopedie jazzu a moderní populární hudby* [*Encyclopedia of Jazz and Modern Popular Music*], část věcná [factual volume], Praha: Editio Supraphon 1983, p. 274.

of jazz culture. They built a broad and professional platform as a refuge for diverse, unconventional and socially not preferred spheres of culture (setting up ensembles, consultancy, lectures, exhibitions, regular festivals and shows, and the internal magazine *Jazz Bulletin*, in which the space devoted to rock music grew). Hidden censorship pressure and information blockade from the Anglo-American world contributed to stabilising the importance of spoken journalism in the form of so-called listening discotheques (anti-discotheques by Jiří Černý, later also programmes by Josef Vlček, Jan Rejžek or Petr Dorůžka).

Some clashes of the creative rock front with the bodies and instruments of political power led spontaneously to strengthening the process of forming an active and conscious political opposition. The exemplary trial of underground musicians in 1976 (Plastic People, DG 307, some folk singer-songwriters) played a unifying role, provoking a wave of solidarity and protests by some free-thinking representatives of the cultural front, the intelligentsia and other citizens, and thus became a decisive impulse for the establishment of Charter 77 and related civic initiatives.

A new generation of underground groups arose in the 1980s not only in Prague (Psí vojáci, Národní třída, Hally Belly) but also in various Czech regions: Žatec (É Ucho Debil Accord Band, Orchestr Bissex), Sokolov (Beatový družstvo), Vsetín (Posádková hudba Marného Slávy), Valašské Meziříčí (Slepé střevo), Brno (Odvážní Bobříci, Ještě jsme se nedohodli, Pro pocit jistoty). Some followed the example of older underground ensembles of the 70s, others became part of punk and the new wave of the rock scene. During the 1980s, the communist regime changed its strategy towards rock music, which it began to tolerate, but tried to continue to control it (see, for example, the Rockfest festivals 1986–89). Underground artists, however, remained out of the way of official employment until the Velvet Revolution in November 1989.

Overlaps beyond the rock style and normalisation era

Artistic, literary and theatrical activities were part of the Czechoslovak underground, and we can also extend the view of the musical side of the phenomenon beyond the explicit rock sphere. From the beginning of the 70s, folk singer-songwriters such as Svatopluk Karásek, Charlie Soukup, or Dáša Vokatá were an integral part of events otherwise focused predominantly on rock. The singer-songwriter Vlastimil Třešňák became a part of the underground apartment theatre performances. Other singer-songwriters worked in the alternative scene (Oldřich Janota) or the grey zone (Vladimír Merta). Some modern jazz groups, especially the Free Jazz Trio from Olomouc, were introduced into the underground context by Jan Blüml.¹⁰³

Chanson singers created their own limited spaces in case of emergency, although in their case, it was rather a grey zone, as discussed above.¹⁰⁴ Fans of contemporary

¹⁰³ See KUDRNA, *Od mániček k undergroundu*, p. 162–167.

¹⁰⁴ More detailed circumstances are described by ILONA BORSKÁ, *Opravná dušička – založena 1969 [Repair of Souls – Established 1969]*, Praha: Asociace hudebních umělců a vědců 1994, *passim*.

classical music also gathered in apartments or cellars. Composers Marek Kopelent, Zbyněk Vostřák, Jan Klusák, Miroslav Kabeláč and the musicologists Vladimír Lébl and Eduard Herzog listened to new Czech compositions or other avant-garde music, not available elsewhere and discussed it. In 1978 the first performance of Marek Kopelent's composition since the onset of normalisation took place, and, as reported by Petr Kofroň¹⁰⁵, "the Czech musical semi-dissent came in large numbers". Some of the composers were members of the Prague Group of New Music (Pražské skupiny Nové hudby) at the time of the Prague Spring (Pražský Jaro) (1967–68), and after 1989 they became part of one of the domestic associations for contemporary music – the music association Ateliér 90.

To what extent can we talk about the underground even after 1989? On the one hand, they may see themselves as underground adherents of skinhead culture and other extremist groups that defy the law and must hide from police punishment. However, such an approach is not entirely in line with the former theses of John Peel or Jirous's source R. Rygulla from the late 1960s and, of course, not even in accordance with Jirous's concept, adapted to local conditions since the 1970s. Musicians from the underground of the 1970s could perform and travel abroad freely from the 1990s onwards, and Plastic People became almost a government band during Václav Havel's presidency. In the following periods, their situation returned to conditions reminiscent of the underground, but the hallmark of an artist who had merit in the past does not belong to the current underground. As such, have the traits characteristic of the underground passed on to newer provocative genres, which have started exploring new directions or will do so in the future? After the rock underground, it was more of an electronic dance scene with its illegal techno parties, the first steps of Czechoslovak hip-hoppers and night sprayers, the Internet culture, building its time on community platforms and servers, and in a way, any bunch that despises the media offered by the establishment, and publishes and distributes its own creations via the Internet or anything to which it has free access. The rock underground of the 1970s and 1980s is already history.

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¹⁰⁵ PETR KOFROŇ, "Skladatel, který si udržel vnitřní integritu" ["Composer Who Maintained His Inner Integrity"], *Lidové noviny* 28. 4. 2012, p. 12.

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