

# THE CZECHOSLOVAK SPECIALIST

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## CZECHOSLOVAK FIELDPOST IN WESTERN BOHEMIA IN 1945

What was it like in the Spring of 1945 in Bohemia and Moravia?

On April 11, 1945, advance units of the Second Ukrainian Army entered the first Moravian city — Lenžhot. Within four days, troops of the Fourth Ukrainian crossed the border in the area of Velké Petrovice in northern Moravia. Finally, on April 18, the U.S. Third Army reached the Czechoslovak border in the area of Cheb, and on May 1st a token Czech unit entered the country from the west.

A few words to explain these events: On April 18, 1945, the Czechoslovak Defense Ministry in London requested Gen. Bosý-Sklenský, Commander of the Czechoslovak Mission in London, to intervene in the British military command. The object was to secure participation of Czechoslovak troops in the liberation of their country. As a result, an independent Czech armored brigade was attached to the Twenty-First Army Group and thus came under British command. Attached to units of the British Army at Dunkerque, it was to participate in the encirclement of the German garrison on October 5, 1944. Though this did not materialize, 140 of its men were attached to a combined combat division on April 23, 1945, and sent from Dunkerque to the east on orders of General Montgomery. This token group comprised anti-aircraft batteries and units of a motorized infantry consisting of three tracked and four half tracked vehicles. At noon on May 1st, it crossed the border at Cheb and planted the National Flag on Czech soil. The unit was later absorbed into the U.S. Third Army.

With this historical background, it is understandable that transfer to the U.S. Third Army resulted in change of fieldpost. Originally Czech mail was carried by the British fieldpost. At Dunkerque, it utilized the Canadian fieldpost. Later its mailing was handled by the American fieldpost.

The surrender of German garrisons at Dunkerque at 9:15 A.M. on May 9, 1945, initiated a shift of the brigade to Czechoslovakia which began on May 12 and 13. By the end of the month the entire transport had arrived in Pilsen.

A participant recalls the events of those days. At Dunkerque, he was with the motorized transport. The advancing armies were followed by a large convoy of about 3,500 vehicles. On Friday, May 18 at 12:25 P.M., he crossed the Czech border at Šumava. The first garrison was Kolínek at Klatov. Postal services were not in full operation, but an ingenious postmaster found a means of delivering mail to soldiers' families. He even created his own stamp cancellation. At that time, the Czechoslovak army unit administration was located in the town of Stříbrné Hory. A Czechoslovak fieldpost office was functioning there at the "U Horáčku" tavern.

No less interesting was an item published in the journal *Čs. Filatelie* (1945, no. 7, page 99). It was in the August issue that the following appeared:

"It is a lovely sunny August day. We stopped our car in a small village somewhere in Bohemia in front of a ground-level tavern. A black sign with the Czechoslovak tricolor and white lettering tells us that we are at the field postoffice — of the former Czechoslovak Armed forces in Britain."

The anonymous author goes on to describe in detail the long row of tables in the hall for sorting and cancelling mail. A smiling master sargent and two or three junior officers were all that remained of its personnel which sufficed for its reduced services. There had been daily deliveries of foreign mail by car for its soldiers from an American fieldpost. After sorting, the mail was dispatched by courier to their addressees. Couriers then brought mail from the addressees to be sent back overseas. This was transmitted by Czechoslovak fieldpost to the American fieldpost office (APO, or Army Post Office). This involved overseas Airmail which had to be prepaid. For that reason, U.S. stamps were sold there. For Palestine mail, the rate was 70 Kč. The visitors bought some U.S. stamps from the master sargent and they were able to obtain favor sheets and cancellations.

It is likely that Czechoslovak fieldpost mail from Europe existed from September 9, 1944, when the Czech force moved from England to France. Correspondence addressed for England bore no franking provided it was marked "On active service." To other countries, mail had to be franked with British stamps. It is alleged that in France, British stamps with Czech cancellations were used.

The above-published article respected military secrecy back in its day. We of course know there was a Czech fieldpost at Stříbrné Hory. The founder and commander of the Czechoslovak fieldpost was Oldřich Večerek. Later he was succeeded by Staff Captain Josef Sommer. The following soldiers served there: Staff Sgt. Evžen Janda and Staff Sgt. Otakar Kurfirst. One of them had to be present at the "U Horáčku" tavern, as per the article in the 1945 Čs. Filatelie. Further names include Sgt. Robert Lehrfeld, Sgt. Jan Ofiešek, Cpl. Adolf Bočet, Cpl. Bedřich Kittel, Pvt. Rotislav Bajer, Pvt. Otmar Hložek, Pvt. Bernard Šeffler, and enl. men František Macešek, Jan Rakowski and Rafael Rudolf.

The final item to be resolved is the location of APO (the U.S. fieldposts) which linked the Czechoslovak fieldpost with the rest of the world.

A letter addressed to a non-commissioned officer of the Czech force and mailed from Chicago on September 17, 1945 (Fig. 1) is rather interesting. According to existing custom, it was addressed via New York Postmaster to APO number 305. *The Czechoslovak Specialist* in March 1983 published an article listing the U.S. fieldpost in western Bohemia.

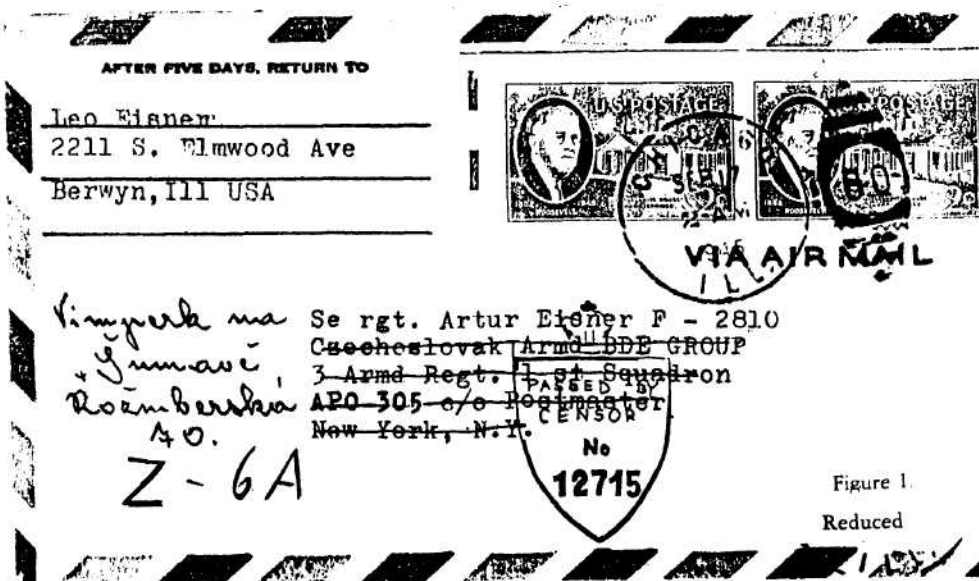


Figure 1.  
Reduced

2 - Plzeň, Domažlice, 5 - Vimperk, 26 - Volary, 79 - Cheb, Aš, Františkovy Lázně, 80 - Mariánské Lázně, 94 - Strakonice, Sušice, Prachatice, 137, 205 and 305 - Plzeň, 254 - Sušice, 258 - Rokycany, Holýšov, 412 - Planá u Tachova, 44 - Konstantinovy Lázně, Tachov.

It therefore appears that the letter traveled from Chicago via APO to Pilsen. British censors affixed their number 12715. It was then cancelled by the postoffice at Horaždovice on December 2, 1945. A code number "Z-6A" was added by pencil. The address was obliterated with red ink and a new address to Vimperk added.

Mailings by the U.S. Army through APO in western Bohemia are scarce. A V-Mail letter (Fig. 2) and two items sent in the Czechoslovak Fieldpost (Figs. 3 and 4) are presented.

So much for the historic fieldpost in western Bohemia during the year 1945.

M.V.

Print the complete address in plain letters in the space below, and your return address in the space provided on the right. Use typewritten, dark ink, or dark pencil. Faint or small writing is not suitable for photographing.

TO <i>Post Box 2, Mladá 27112 0000</i> <i>Č. 27158, Horaždovice, Plzeň,</i> <i>Pr. 254, 2. Postovního</i> <i>Nový Pátek, N. J.</i>	FROM
	<i>77, 20, Václavské náměstí</i>
	<i>Prague 1, Cze.</i>
	<i>Edith Jones, Mrs.</i> <i>April 19, 1945</i>

SENDER'S COMPLETE ADDRESS ABOVE

SEE INSTRUCTION NO. 2

SECRET, sweetheart + Daddie -  
 Well honey, thought I would drop you a few  
 lines by mail tonight hope they find you safe  
 & healthy. This leaves us all just fine, staying  
 out by the fire tonight. This is bad, night  
 wind wanted me to come over a while but it  
 being out, so I stayed home. I saw Ethel +  
 Ruby a while they came over on the bus.  
 Didnt get any more mail from you today  
 but maybe I will tomorrow. A. Eva was up a  
 while today said Ruby might be down between  
 15 + 20 of this mo. Genie R. is still in the  
 states I guess he is so good for nothin  
 they wouldnt have him any place else.  
 Well honey what are you doing now, I guess  
 I will go to Carl's tomorrow + have dinner  
 + later + mom will take A. Loggy down to  
 U. Harmon's it has rained so much I know  
 the roads is plenty bad I will close send-  
 ing all our love to our darling Lacie now +  
 forever from his loving father Elizabeth + Bobie

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?

**V-MAIL**

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?

Figure 2

R-511 cet. Rudolf Herlinger,  
3. rota, 13. tankova brigada,  
P l z e n.



Figure 3

R1452. Svob. Kestenbaum Alex.  
Oš. samostatná kmenová  
brigada 1. plázeň 1R.  
Pravá



*J.P.*

REDAKCE A ADMINISTRACE  
REPATRIAČNÍ ODBOR.



Figure 4

Reduced

Praha II.  
Pauševá 8.

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*Changes of address to International Secretary*

## MUSIC IN THE CZECH LANDS AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA

By Gerald M. van Zanten

Over the years many Czechoslovak composers have been portrayed on stamps of Czechoslovakia. It is my intention to have a closer look at all these music makers in a series of articles, the first of which deals with the famous Benda family.

At the conclusion of the series I will then focus on the theatres of Prague in which these musicians performed, thus covering the music scene more fully. After all, it was Bohemia where the flag of musical independence was first raised and where Smetana created a National School of Music.

### František Benda (1709–1786)

Now let us take a brief look at some of these music makers. Chronologically, the first one shown on a Czech stamp is František Benda who lived from 1709 to 1786. He is commemorated on the 15h stamp of the Culture stamp issued in 1959 (Pofis 1057). The artwork for this stamp was by K. Svolinský and a total of 3,045,000 stamps was produced.



František was the son of Jan Jiří Benda who was born at Mstětice in Bohemia on April 25, 1686, and died near Potsdam on December 4, 1757. He was a village musician who married Dorota Brixi of a well-known Bohemian musical family in 1706.

Jan Jiří's first child was František, who was born on or about November 25, 1709, at Staré Benátky. From the age of nine, he was a chorister and sang as a soprano at St. Nicholas Church in Prague, but in 1720 he ran away to Dresden, where he sang in the Hofkapelle. When his voice broke, he returned home and studied the violin.

By 1723 he became an outstanding virtuoso of this instrument, and he was one of the most important personalities in the Baroque period in his field.

In 1732 he was appointed violinist of the Crown Prince, later Prussian King Frederick the Great, and in 1771 he became Royal concert master and remained in the Kings service till his death.

Gout forced him to give up public performances in the 1760s. He died near Potsdam on March 7, 1786. He is remembered as the founder of an important new school of violin playing. Few of his works were published during his lifetime. Only recently has his contribution to the mainstream of Western music come to be fully appreciated. The stamp mentioned above shows the composer in somewhat younger years than the usual portrait seen of him, which was three years before his death.

(III. I.)

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Illus. 1

### Jiří Antonín Benda

Jan Jiří Benda had six children, the third of which was born at Staré Benátky in June of 1722 and was christened Jiří Antonín. From 1739 to 1742, Jiří went to the Jesuit college in Jičín, which is 97 km from Prague via Mladá Boleslav.

In 1742, he emigrated with his parents and sister Anna Františka to Prussia, where he joined his brothers as a violinist in the court orchestra.

In May 1750 he became Kapellmeister to Duke Friedrich III of Saxa-Gotha, he wrote cantatas for the court chapel as well as instrumental works. His only Italian opera "Xindo Ricconosciuto" was performed on August 11, 1765; after that he was granted six months' paid leave to study in Italy.

In August 1770, he was given the new title of Kapelldirector in recognition of his services.

In 1774, he commenced writing German stage works, the first of which was "Ariadne auf Naxos," about which Mozart was very enthusiastic; several others followed.

In March 1778 he resigned as Kapelldirector for personal reasons and in October of that year he left for Vienna where his melodramas were generally well received. However, in 1779 he returned to Gotha. There he retired on a small pension and lived in seclusion. During this time, he collected his keyboard pieces and songs for publication. He interrupted his isolation once when, in 1781, he went to Paris to direct a performance of "Ariadne." Back in Gotha, he composed his final work in 1792, a cantata for soprano entitled "Benda's Klagen."

He died at Köstritz on November 6, 1795. He is mainly remembered for his German stage works and melodramas. However, five of his six children became noteworthy musicians. Eventually there were twelve of the Benda family who became involved with music. Jiří Antonín was commemorated on a Czechoslovak stamp in the Prague Spring Festival set issued on May 12th, 1956. It is the 60h value, of which 3,595,000 were issued (Pofis No. 889).

(Ill. II.)





Illus. 2

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## THE CZECHOSLOVAK MUSIC SCENE JAN V. STAMIC 1717-1757

By G. M. van Zanten

Thus reads the legend on the 60 h stamp issued in his honor on the May 12, 1957, as part of the "Prague Spring" series. This stamp is Pofis 938; a total of 3,540,000 stamps were printed.



Stamic was not only a composer but was also a solo violinist. He was born at Německý Brod (now Havlíčkův Brod) situated on the Sásava River, approximately half-way between Prague and Brno. He was the third child of Antonín Ignác and Rozina (nee Boěm) Stamic. The spelling of the name is extraordinarily erratic, the most common variants being Stamiz, Steinmetz, Steinmez, Stammiz, Stamic, Stamic, Stamic, Stamic, Stamic, Stamic, Stamic, Stamic; it appears however that signatures of members of the family all used the form Stamic. However, I shall call him Stamic as shown on the stamp.



Also born at Havlíčkův Brod was the great Czech journalist and writer Karel Havlíček Borovský, but that was just over one hundred years later in 1821.

Stamic's father, who was organist and choirmaster of the Dean's church, and later became a wealthy landowner, doubtless gave the young Jan his interest in music.

From 1728 to 1734 Stamic attended the Jesuit Gymnasium in Jihlava, where high standards of musical education were set and whose pupils included the foremost musicians in Europe. It is known that he spent the academic year 1734-1735 at Prague University, but the following six years are, however, a mystery. He was appointed at the Mannheim court probably in 1741, when he was just 24 years old.

The earliest appearance by Stamic at a public concert dates to June 29, 1742, according to an advertisement. This was in Frankfurt am Main at which he was to perform on the violin, viola d'amore, cello and double bass; in this year he also played at the coronation of Emperor Karl VII.

In 1743 he was first violinist at the court of Mannheim, and according to payment lists he was on a salary of 900 gulden, the highest of any instrumentalist at Mannheim.

In 1745, or perhaps 1746, he appears to have been awarded the title of Konzertmeister and in 1750 he was appointed to the post of director of instrumental music. He was responsible for developing the Mannheim orchestra into the most renowned ensemble of the time, and he is regarded as the founder of the "Mannheim School."

In 1744 he married Maria Antonia Lüneborn. They had five children, two of whom also became composers. In the late summer of 1754 Stamic went to Paris for a year, where he was active in public concerts and performances of his compositions were frequent. He probably returned to Mannheim in the autumn of 1755. He died less than two years later at the age of 39.

His symphonies are the most important compositions, some 58 of which are extant, also his orchestral trios as well as concertos, two for harpsichord, eleven for flute, one for oboe and one for clarinet, not to forget a large amount of chamber music and eight vocal works, which includes his widely circulated Mass in D—, altogether a substantial output for a relatively short life. There are, however, problems as to authenticity of his works as there were at least five other musicians in the 18th century bearing the name Stamitz in one form or another; four were members of his immediate family.

#### WAS MRS. BENEŠ A COLLECTOR?

Probably not — but according to information derived from RNDr. M. Vostatek's conversation with the former Commander of Czechoslovak Field Posts, Mr. O. Večerka, such commemorative post marks were regularly sent to Mrs. Beneš and were appreciatively acknowledged.

H.H.



Mrs. Benešová

9 Grosvenor Place

London W.1.

# THE CZECHOSLOVAK MUSIC SCENE

## JOSEF SLAVÍK

26-3-1806 to 30-5-1833

By Gerald van Zanten

A short life; but in this brief period he became the first modern Czech violinist who achieved international reputation.

He was born at Jince 14 km North of Píbram in Bohemia on the 26th day of March 1806.

His father Antonín Slavík was a teacher who taught him the basics of violin playing. At the age of only nine Josef became a member of an amateur quartet, which usually met in the flat of Josef Lábor in Hořovice.

From 1816 to 1823 Slavík studied at the Prague Conservatory, where under B. V. Pixis he learned the violin as well as theory and composition under B. D. Weber.

He appeared for the first time at a conservatory concert on the 30th of March 1821. He attracted the attention of a critic for the Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung of Leipzig, who envisioned a great artistic career for Josef.

In 1823 he became a member of the Estates Theatre, later renamed the Královské Zemské Divadlo (Royal Provincial Theatre, 1861) and later still the Tylovo Divadlo (Tyl Theatre 1945). This theatre is shown on Pofis No2615 of 1983. He remained there until 1826. During this period he became associated with the Prague literary circle whose members included the foremost Czech historian Palacký.

He made several appearances in Prague, Teplice, Karlovy Vary and Hořovice; in 1826 he went to Vienna where he taught the violin and became acquainted with Schubert. In 1828 he met Paganini in Vienna and they became good friends and this in turn influenced Josef's artistic development.

In October of 1828 he went to Paris but met with limited success because of strong international competition. In 1829 he was back in Vienna, where he gained great popularity at the Viennese Hofkapelle with the concert going public. At this time, too, he toured Bohemia regularly where he was also very popular. In 1830 he struck up a friendship with Chopin and they planned to compose jointly variations for violin and piano on a theme by Beethoven.

His last concert took place on 28 April 1833 and that was a great artistic triumph. He started a journey to Budapest but illness overtook him and he suddenly died on May 30th of that year. Only few of his works survive, but even with this small number one can establish that Slavík was a Romantic virtuoso composer.

He is shown on a 75 h stamp commemorating the 120th anniversary of his death. The stamp was issued on 19 June 1953 in indigo as one of the "Prague Spring" series. The design is by J. Liesler and shows the young artist with his violin and above his picture the legend: "Slavný Houslový Virtuos" (famous Violin Virtuoso). Below his portrait the artist's name as well as year of birth and death. The picture is completed by a branchlet of a linden tree.

A total of 3,620,000 of this stamp were issued, the engraving for which was done by S. Jindra, despite the fact that the Pofis catalogue gives the name of J. Schmidt.

### FOOTNOTE:

Did you know that in 1955 concerts of state orchestras in Czechoslovakia numbered 1444 and drew an attendance of 1 million?

- In 1960 the figures were 3491 concerts; attendance 2.3 million.
- In 1970 the figures were 3553 concerts; attendance 2.08 million.
- In 1980 the figures were 3503 concerts; attendance 1.83 million.
- In 1983 the figures were 2454 concerts; attendance 1.23 million.



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(Advertisement)



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