

Pavel Haas

# THE CHARLATAN

Opera in seven scenes from 1937,  
libretto by Pavel Haas based on the novel "Dr. Eisenbart" (1928)  
by Josef Winckler (1881–1966)

National Moravian–Silesian Theatre

8.11.2024

7pm, Mahen Theatre

**Conductor** Jakub Klecker  
**Director** Ondřej Havelka  
**Set design** Jakub Kopecký  
**Costumes** Kateřina Štefková  
**Choirmaster** Jurij Galatenko  
**Dramaturg** Juraj Bajús  
**Assistant director, stage manager** Bohuslava Kráčmarová  
**Assistant conductor** Lada Valešová  
**Répétiteurs** Jana Hajková, Jan Novobilský  
**Prompter** Hana Kluzová

**Concertmasters of the Orchestra  
of the Opera Company at the  
National Moravian-Silesian Theatre** Jan Šošola, Lucie Staňková

**Cast**  
Doctor Pustrpalk,  
a travelling doctor  
Rozina, his wife  
Bachelor (Bakalář)  
Sourmilk (Kyška), a cook  
Cobweb (Pavučina)  
Pickled Herring (Zavináč)  
Fire-eater  
Strongman  
Snake charmer  
First servant / First student  
Second servant /  
Jochimus's groom  
Second student  
Third student  
Amaranta, a beauty  
Jochimus, a monk  
Innkeeper / Shabby (Šereda),  
the Quacksalver  
The King  
Parkour  
Dancers

Pavol Kubáň  
Eva Dřízgová-Jirušová  
Václav Čížek  
Vít Šantora  
Josef Škarka  
Vincenc Ignác Novotný  
Juraj Nociar  
Michael Kubečka  
Petr Urbánek  
Jonáš Slovák

Tomasz Suchanek  
Tomáš Krpec  
Ihor Maryshkin  
Soňa Godarská  
Martin Gurbaľ

Václav Morys  
Pavel Divín  
Ondřej Friedrich, Adam Holub  
Adina Mlčáková, Petra Sejkorová,  
Júlie Svitičová, Petr Hýl,  
Stephen McIntos

Intermission after Scene IV

# Synopsis

## Act I

### Scene I

In the town square of a small town, a crowd gathers in front of the tent of the travelling doctor, Pustrpalk. Two members of his troupe, Sourmilk and Cobweb, entertain the audience with incredible tales of the doctor's renowned medical expertise. Accompanied by fanfares, Pustrpalk enters and begins treating patients. While he truly helps a man suffering from mumps, the rest of his "successful treatments" are contrived performances with his accomplices to impress the onlookers and convince them to buy his reliable medicinal products. Servants bring in the beautiful wife of professor Meticuloso, Amaranta, who became partially paralyzed after a tragic childbirth and is seeking help. Pustrpalk cleverly sees through the nature of her illness and seats her, back exposed, into a basket filled with nettles. Enchanted by Amaranta's beauty, the doctor invites her to join his troupe. The entire scene is watched by the ominous figure of a mysterious monk, Jochimus, a man hiding his true identity beneath his monk's habit.

### Scene II

Pustrpalk's troupe travels from town to town.

### Scene III

This time, the troupe camps in the empty square of another town. Amaranta, who joined the troupe after her recovery, arrives in an enormous crinoline. As Pustrpalk tries to help her into a carriage, he is spotted at the worst possible moment by his jealous wife, Rozina. A heated argument between the couple and both women turns into a public spectacle, and with Jochimus still pursuing him, Pustrpalk and his troupe are forced to leave the town in haste.

## Act II

### Scene IV

The troupe camps outside the mill of a sick miller. Pustrpalk confesses his love to Amaranta, whose coy rejections only further fuel his passion. After they part, Pustrpalk, hiding behind a wagon, overhears a plot by his companions Pickled Herring and Strongman, who plan to rob him. He confronts the conspirators, sharply rebuking them for their ingratitude, but eventually forgives them and decides to share his wealth with the entire troupe. They celebrate with wine, but the merry drinking soon escalates into a brawl, ending in tragedy. The troupe sets the mill on fire, and Pustrpalk flees in panic with Amaranta and Bachelor.

### Intermission

### Scene V

Pustrpalk, Amaranta and Bachelor arrive in a larger town during a carnival. In the square, they watch a performance by Shabby the Quacksalver, to whom Pustrpalk offers a partnership. Pustrpalk draws widespread attention, and even the king, disguised among the crowd, is impressed by his skills. The king rewards him generously and declares him the greatest man of his time. Pustrpalk, celebrated by the crowd, searches for Amaranta, but in the meantime, she has been kidnapped by Jochimus's henchmen.

## Act III

### Scene VI

Time passes, and Pustrpalk still longs for his lost love, Amaranta. His companion Sourmilk informs him that they are bringing in a seriously ill monk. It is Jochimus, who finally reveals his true identity and begs for forgiveness and salvation. Pustrpalk performs a quick surgery... Afterwards, he flees with his companions as a mob accuses him of murder and declares him a charlatan.

### Scene VII

Years later, when Pustrpalk's glory has long since faded, his former companions gather in a tavern. They recount the unfortunate fate of their former master, who nowadays is said to suffer from paranoia and has turned to drink. A worn-out and drunk Pustrpalk enters and generously offers drinks to three poor students. The students try to guess his identity, and when they finally recognize him, Pustrpalk, in a fit of grandeur, improvises a mocking, self-ironic song about his miraculous healing methods. His former companions join in. In the midst of the revelry, Pustrpalk suddenly sees a vision of the monk Jochimus. He charges at the apparition with a sword but falls to the ground, lifeless.

# Pavel Haas

The Czech composer of Jewish origin Pavel Haas (1899–1944), who was destined by a bitter twist of fate to die at the Auschwitz concentration camp, is today one of the most internationally acclaimed Czechoslovak composers of the interwar period. Haas first studied composition privately with Jan Kunc and Vilém Petrželka, though his studies in Leoš Janáček's masterclass at the Conservatory in the years 1920–1922 were of greater importance to his creative development. Being Janáček's student, however, required a great deal of humility and determination. On one hand, Janáček epitomised the beguiling and genial artist, though on the other his students often felt the force of his volatile and explosive temperament. The influences of the Western European avant-garde, particularly Igor Stravinsky and Paris's "Les Six", began to permeate Haas's compositions from the second half of the 1920s onwards, though he also felt a synergy with the jazz that had made its way to Europe. With the arrival of the German occupiers in Czechoslovakia in March 1939, Pavel Haas was subjected to persecution and, like a large number of other people of Jewish origin, was suddenly excluded from cultural life. He concealed a disguised protest against the occupiers in his *Suite for Oboe and Piano* with quotations from the Saint Wenceslas Chorale and the Hussite Chorale and in the monumental *Symphony* that he did not get time to finish. In December 1941, Haas was taken to the concentration camp in Terezín, where he spent his final years contributing to the cultural life of the prisoners. His *Study for String Orchestra* and *Four Songs to the Words of Chinese Poetry* have survived as evidence of Haas's unceasing artistic industriousness during the time of his imprisonment in Terezín. He died in a gas chamber in Auschwitz on 18 October 1944.

# The Charlatan

Pavel Haas was driven by a desire to compose an operatic work from his youth, but he only began to think more seriously about the composition of an operatic work at the end of the 1920s when he already had a successful series of chamber and orchestral compositions and songs behind him. The selection of subjects that attracted Haas in the years 1927–1929 covers a wide variety of genres. *The Penitent Venus* by the writer Stanislav Lom was a profound ideological drama based on biblical material, *The Outlaw* by Karel Čapek represented a vitalistic love comedy, and finally *The Dybbuk* by the Eastern European playwright Salomon An-sky represented a vast dramatic legend from the folk environment of the Eastern Jews. Negotiations with both Lom and Čapek ended in fiasco, and Haas was beaten to *The Dybbuk* by Italian composer Lodovico Rocca. Haas's attempt to enter into a collaboration with Vítězslav Nezval in 1932 also ended in failure.

Pavel Haas apparently got his hands on the novel by the German writer Josef Winckler (1881–1966) about the life of the travelling Baroque doctor Johann Andreas Eisenbarth during the summer months of 1933. Winckler's book impressed the composer so much that he decided to turn it into a work of opera. He was undoubtedly attracted by the dramatic potential of a number of passages in the book, though personal motives undoubtedly also played a fundamental role in his decision. The theme of the novel was connected to a considerable extent with Haas's own situation in life, as he was surrounded by the medical environment associated with his mother's illness and was engaged in a romantic relationship with the doctor Soňa Jakobsonová.

The novel about Doctor Eisenbarth was first published by Josef Winckler in 1929. The writer held a position as one of the successful conservative authors in the German literature of the time, whose works were characterised by regional motifs drawn primarily from his native Westphalia and Rhineland. The chronicle in novel form about Doctor Johann Andreas Eisenbarth falls into this territory. After its publication, it not only

gained considerable success among readers, but was also greeted with enthusiastic words by the German literary critics, including Thomas Mann. The real Johann Andreas Eisenbarth (1663–1727), whose life inspired the subject of Winckler’s book, came from Oberviechtach in the Upper Palatinate. He inherited the profession of surgeon from his father. The healers and surgeons of the time came mostly from the barbers’ guild, so their occupation was seen and recognised as one of the trades of the time. As these surgeons could seldom earn a living in their place of residence, they mostly became itinerant doctors traveling from town to town, setting up their stage at fairs and festivals, often accompanied by acrobats, jugglers and musicians of all kinds so as to attract the attention of the audience. This was also the case of Eisenbarth, who travelled and healed the sick in German towns and cities at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He gradually gained fame and recognition, culminating in a privilege from King Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia who awarded Eisenbart the title of “Royal Prussian Court Oculist and Councillor” for his merits. From 1716, Eisenbart no longer treated the sick at markets, but only at selected inns and the houses of noble society. His fame, however, gradually declined and old age set in. He died after a short illness during one of his travels at the “Wild Man” inn in Münden, Lower Saxony. Soon after his death, Eisenbarth’s eccentric appearance gave rise to a number of legends and fantastic stories about his medical arts, which were turned into a novel by Josef Winckler in the 1920s.

Pavel Haas approached the author of the novel in the autumn of 1933 with a request for an opera adaptation. The path to obtaining Winckler’s official permission, however, turned out to be highly complicated. Hitler was already in power in Germany at the time, anti-Semitism was gaining momentum, and anti-Jewish regulations were quickly being introduced. Despite the considerable risk, Winckler was not afraid to oblige the composer to a certain extent and wrote to him to take his time

to think about the work and that perhaps political conditions would soon change. Perhaps this was merely an attempt to console Haas, or perhaps it was the writer’s naive imagination. In any case, the Nazi regime held on to power in Germany for almost the next eleven years. In the summer of 1934, Winckler had to cut off contact with Haas once and for all, as communication with the Jewish composer had already begun to become dangerous for him. Pavel Haas did not, however, intend to give up on the tempting subject, and so he decided not to wait for the author’s permission and to write an opera libretto from the novel himself. He completed work on the libretto at the beginning of July 1934. He made the names of the members of Eisenbarth’s troupe and the name of the main protagonist sound more Czech in his text. Doctor Eisenbart first became Doctor Bledovous and later Doctor Pustrpalk, whose name Haas took from the medieval Czech play *The Quack*. He also decided to omit all geographical names and the names of certain historical figures that localised the plot in the German environment.

Soon afterwards, on 21 August 1934, Haas began a musical sketch, and by the end of September he already had more than half of the first scene and part of the second scene of the first act set to music. The composition of the entire opera took almost three years and was completed on 24 June 1937. In order to draw the audience’s attention to his opera before its performance, Pavel Haas wrote a five-movement orchestral suite in 1936 in which he included music from the first two acts. His *Suite from the Tragicomic Opera The Charlatan* was given its premiere on 14 June 1937 on Brno Radio, where it was performed by a radio orchestra under the baton of conductor Břetislav Bakala. Haas had also evidently changed the title of his opera from *Doctor Pustrpalk* to *The Charlatan* during the course of 1936. Even before its completion, Pavel Haas submitted the score of his opera to the Provincial Theatre in Brno, which accepted it for performance in the 1937/1938 season.

The staging of Haas's *The Charlatan* at Brno's Provincial Theatre was undertaken by leading artists, first and foremost director Rudolf Walter who endeavoured to give Haas's opera the character of commedia dell'arte in co-operation with designer František Muzika who was responsible for the sets and costumes, as a number of the opera's leading characters, as well as its Baroque setting, corresponded to this genre. The musical staging of the opera was undertaken by Guido Arnoldi, a talented Italian conductor who had studied composition and conducting in the class of František Neumann in Brno and then worked as a conductor at Milan's La Scala from the 1940s onwards. The Provincial Theatre also engaged its best singers in the principal roles – baritone Václav Bednár as Doctor Pustrpalk, soprano Alexandra Čvanová as the beauty Amaranta, soprano Božena Žlábková as Rozina, tenor Emil Olšovský as the quack healer Shabby (Šereda), and baritone Géza Fischer as the monk Jochimus. The premiere of *The Charlatan* took place on 2 April 1938. The name of Josef Winckler as the author of the original work was kept secret at the time for understandable reasons. The theatre posters announced to visitors that “*the text according to an old theme was written by Pavel Haas*”.

Haas's first opera was a success with critics. They credited *The Charlatan* with “*considerable maturity*” and “*stage effectiveness*”. They compared it with the operas of the time by Bohuslav Martinů, with whom he shared an endeavour to “*revive opera first and foremost as theatre*”. Almost without exception the reviewers mentioned the unmistakable influence of Haas's teacher Leoš Janáček in the work's musical conception and compositional technique. *The Charlatan* was also a success with audiences. By the end of the season, the opera had been performed on a total of seven occasions. In December 1938, Haas still had time to receive the prestigious award from the Bedřich Smetana Jubilee Foundation for his opera, but by that time Europe was headed inevitably for military conflict. The Munich Agreement came in the autumn, and Bohemia and Moravia were then

overrun in the German occupation of March 1939. *The Charlatan* became the last of Haas's compositions that could be heard freely before the occupation.

Ondřej Pivoda



# Ondřej Havelka

## Director

Director, actor, singer and tap dancer. Founder of the swing big band Melody Makers with which he plays jazz, swing and the popular music of the 1920s–1940s. His most important achievements as a director include *Nagano, Hockey at the Opera* (Martin Smolka, The National Theatre), *The Bartered Bride* (Bedřich Smetana, National Theatre Brno), *Gianni Schicchi / Pagliacci* (Giacomo Puccini / Ruggero Leoncavallo, National Theatre Brno), *La bohème* (Giacomo Puccini, The State Opera Prague), *The Tales of Hoffmann* (Jacques Offenbach, The National Theatre), *The Cunning Little Vixen* (Leoš Janáček, The National Theatre Prague), *Con che soavi accenti* (Magdalena Kožená, La Cetra), *La finta giardiniera* (Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Aalto Theater Essen), *The Lord in White* (Jaroslav Křička, The National Moravian-Silesian Theatre), and *The Secret* (Bedřich Smetana, The National Theatre).

# Jakub Klecker

## Conductor

Jakub Klecker studied conducting at the Music and Dance Faculty at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (HAMU) and then began working as a conductor with the Janáček Opera at National Theatre Brno, becoming its chief conductor for a number of years. Last year he staged and conducted a new production of Antonín Dvořák's *The Jacobin*. The premiere was broadcast live all over the world on the opera platform Opera Vision. He headed the opera ensemble at the National Moravian-Silesian Theatre in Ostrava in the position of music director in the years 2015–2020. Jakub Klecker also works with the National Theatre in Prague. He made his debut with Verdi's *Aida* at Nuremberg State Theatre in January 2013. He worked as chief conductor of the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra in Olomouc in the years 2019–2022. He works regularly with the majority of the Czech and Slovak orchestras (The Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, the FOK Prague Symphony Orchestra, PKF – Prague Philharmonia, and many others). He has performed with Udine Symphony Orchestra and the Jena Philharmonie in Germany. He led the Brno Philharmonic on concert tours of Japan in 2007 and 2009. He has appeared repeatedly at the International Music Festival Brno, Janáček Brno, Smetana's Litomyšl and the Rheingau Musik Festival. He conducted at the festival Prague Spring in 2009, 2016 and 2024, and made his debut at the Wrocław Opera in 2017. He was twice a guest conductor at the Golden Hall of the Wiener Musikverein in the autumn of 2019. He teaches Orchestra Conducting at Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno (JAMU). He became an associate professor and, at the same time, head of the Department of Conducting and Opera Direction in 2022.

# Jakub Kopecký

## Set design

Jakub Kopecký studied set design at the Theatre Faculty at Prague's Academy of Performing Arts (DAMU). He works with leading Czech directors and artists across the country and across genres (Jan Kodet, Jiří Adámek, Jiří Nekvasil, David Drábek, Petr Hašek, Cirk La Putyka). He has been an important collaborator with the directing duo SKUTR from the very beginning (e.g. the Archa Theatre, the Theatre in Dlouhá Street, the National Theatre Prague, National Theatre Brno, the Klicpera Theatre in Hradec Králové, the Summer Shakespeare Festival, the National Moravian-Silesian Theatre, the Josef Kajetán Tyl Theatre in Plzeň, the South Bohemian Theatre). He worked at the Minor Theatre in Prague on the productions *Robin Hood* and *The Snow Queen* with director Lenka Vagnerová and on the biographical productions *Zá-to-pek!* and *Brothers of Hope* with Jan Jirků. He has won three Theatre Critics' Awards (*Froth on the Daydream*, *Wild Flowers*, *Brothers of Hope*), has received honourable mentions at the review *Ballet* for outstanding creative production design (*The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, *Human Locomotion*), and has won the Skupova Plzeň Award (*Brothers of Hope*) and the Theatre Newspaper Award (*Brothers of Hope*).

# Kateřina Štefková

## Costume design

Kateřina Štefková studied scenography and costume design at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (DAMU) in the years 1989–1994. She began working with director Petr Lébl at the Labyrinth Theatre and then at the Na Zábřadlí Theatre in 1992 while she was still studying. She designed the costumes for all Lébl's productions in the years 1995–1999 as principal costume designer at the Na Zábřadlí Theatre. In 1999, she took part in the Prague Quadrennial for the first time and contributed to the Czech exposition that was awarded the Golden Triga. Since 1999, she has been working with many Czech theatres and has created sets and costumes for more than a hundred productions. Her collaboration with the National Theatre in Prague, for which she produces sets and costumes for drama, opera and ballet ensembles, is particularly important, though her work has also appeared on the stages of National Theatre Brno, the Dlouhá Theatre, the Rokoko Theatre, etc. She has also worked with foreign theatres in places such as Tel Aviv and Budapest. She has been repeatedly nominated for the Alfréd Radok Award and has been nominated once for the Slovak Dosky Awards. Kateřina Štefková also works for film; she won a Czech Lion in 2015 for the fairy tale *The Seven Ravens*. She has been a teacher at the Department of Scenography at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague for more than ten years.

# Pavol Kubáň

## Doctor Pustrpalk, a travelling doctor

The Slovak baritone Pavol Kubáň is a graduate of the Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica, where he attended the singing class of Professor Eva Blahová. He further developed his singing skills at the prestigious Italian schools La Scuola dell'Opera Italiana in Bologna and Accademia del Belcanto di Rudolfo Celetti. He has won a number of international competitions and was a finalist in the Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition in Vienna. He has been a soloist at the National Theatre in Prague since 2021, though he also performs as a guest on the stages of Czech theatres in Brno, Ostrava, Plzeň and Liberec, as well as foreign stages in Dresden, Florence, Bologna, Palermo, Zurich, Halle and Basel. He has also performed repeatedly at the Festival della Valle d'Itria in the Italian town of Martina Franca. Kubáň has played such characters as Don Giovanni, Marcello (*La bohème*), Sharpless (*Madama Butterfly*), Figaro (*The Barber of Seville* and *The Marriage of Figaro*), Zurga (*Les pêcheurs de perles*), the Music Master (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), Šiškov (*From the House of the Dead*), Belcore (*L'elisir d'amore*), Schwanda the Bagpiper, Giorgio Germont (*La traviata*), Jauféré Rudel (*Love from Afar*), Roberto (*Iolanta*), Taddeo (*L'italiana in Algeri*), Baron di Kelbar (*King for a Day*), Ford (*Falstaff*) and Mr Astley (*The Gambler*). He made his debut on the stage at the National Moravian-Silesian Theatre in the role of the Prince (*Verlobung im Traum*) and subsequently played the roles of Lescaut (*Manon*) and Wolfram (*Tannhäuser*). He is currently playing Doctor Pustrpalk (*The Charlatan*). He was nominated for a Thalia Award for the roles of Lanciotto Malatesta and the Baron in Sergei Rachmaninov's operas *Francesca da Rimini* and *The Miserly Knight* which he played at the F. X. Šalda Theatre in Liberec. In the current season, the roles of Jupiter (Rameau's *Platée*) and Valentine (Gounod's *Faust*) also await him at the National Theatre.

# Václav Čížek

## Bachelor (Bakalář)

Václav Čížek studied singing at the Church Conservatory in Opava under Sylva Pivovarčíková, Karel Smolka and Alexander Vovk. He continued his studies first at Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno (JAMU) with Zdeněk Šmukař and then at the University of Ostrava in the class of Alexander Vovk. He works regularly as a soloist and a member of vocal ensembles with the orchestras Collegium 1704, Musica Florea, Ensemble Inégal, Czech Ensemble Baroque and Hof-Musici and with conductors such as Václav Luks, Hans-Christoph Rademan, Vojtěch Spurný, Roman Válek, Adam Viktora, Marek Štryncl and Michal Klauza. He has performed in productions directed by Ursel Herrmann, Constance Larrieu, Ondřej Havelka, Linda Keprtová, Karel Drgáč and Michael Ramach. He is a regular guest performer at prestigious festivals and on concert and opera stages in France (Opéra Royal de Versailles, Théâtre de Caen, Opéra de Dijon, Festival de La Chaise-Dieu), in Benelux (Festival Oude Muziek Utrecht, Bozar Brussels, Musica Antiqua Bruges), in Germany (Bachfest Stuttgart, Tage Alter Musik Regensburg), Austria (Konzerthaus Wien), Poland (Chopin Festival Warsaw, Festiwal Muzyki Polskiej Krakow) and the Czech Republic (Prague Spring, Smetana's Litomyšl, Saint Wenceslas Music Festival). Václav Čížek has taken part in a number of recordings, mainly of works by Jan Dismas Zelenka and Johann Sebastian Bach, with the orchestras Collegium 1704 and Ensemble Inégal.

# Soňa Godarská

## Amaranta, a beauty

Slovak soprano Soňa Godarská comes from Poprad. She is a recent winner of a Thalia Award for the role of Manon at the J. K. Tyl Theatre in Plzeň. She studied classical singing at Prague Conservatory. She attended master singing courses in Vienna and has taken part with great success in many international competitions, such as the International Antonín Dvořák Singing Competition in Karlovy Vary, Prague Singer, the Imrich Godin International Vocal Competition in Slovakia, and the Vissi D'Arte International Singing Competition in Prague. She made her debut as Pamina (Mozart's *The Magic Flute*) in Germany, Belgium and Holland. She has been on numerous foreign tours in the operas *The Magic Flute*, *Rusalka*, *Aida* and *Thaïs*, and made her debut with great success in 2020 as Norina (Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*) at the Mallorca Opera Festival in Mallorca. She was awarded the South Bohemian Thalia in 2022 for the role of Margherita (Boito's *Mefistofele*) at the South Bohemian Theatre. In June 2023, she was cast in Oscar-winning director Bille August's film *Ehrengard*, in which she acted and sang a live excerpt from the duettino *Sull'aria* from Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. In January 2025, she will be performing at New Year's concerts with the State Chamber Orchestra of Žilina with conductor Oliver von Dohnányi, while a solo part in the cantata *Carmina Burana* awaits her in the spring at the cathedral in Palma de Mallorca, as well as the role of Judith at the J. K. Tyl Theatre in Plzeň at the end of the season.

# Martin Gurbal'

## Jochimus, a monk

The charismatic bass Martin Gurbal' comes from eastern Slovakia. He studied at the Conservatory in Košice with Ludmila Šomorjaiová in the years 1991–1997 and later studied at the University of Ostrava, where he has also been teaching since 2015. He was named absolute winner at the International Antonín Dvořák Singing Competition in Karlovy Vary while he was still studying at the conservatory (1996) and later won second prize at the Mikuláš Schneider-Trnavský International Vocal Competition and at the Lucia Popp Vocal Competition in Bratislava. He was a soloist with the opera company in Košice in the years 1995–2001, before taking up an engagement with the opera company at the National Moravian-Silesian Theatre in Ostrava. He has been a regular guest performer at the National Theatre in Prague, National Theatre Brno, the Slovak National Theatre and other leading opera houses in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland. He specialises in the works of Giuseppe Verdi, Antonín Dvořák and Leoš Janáček. He has performed essential bass roles in both the Czech repertoire (including the Forester in *The Cunning Little Vixen*, the Water Goblin in *Rusalka* and Kecal in *The Bartered Bride*) and the world repertoire (including Don Pasquale and Bertram in *Robert le diable*), as well as landmark works of the twentieth century (including Bluebeard and the Gold Merchant in *Cadillac*). In addition to opera, Martin Gurbal' is also involved in concert activities; he has sung under the baton of prestigious Czech conductors such as Jiří Bělohlávek, Tomáš Hanus, Tomáš Netopil and Jakub Hrůša. He has performed on the stages of European opera houses and concert halls with the Czech Philharmonic, the Slovak Philharmonic, the Giuseppe Verdi Orchestra in Milan, the Budapest Symphony Orchestra in Hungary, the Odense Symphony Orchestra in Denmark, the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra in Sweden, the Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra and the Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra. He is also a frequent guest at such festivals as the Saint Wenceslas Music Festival, Smetana's Litomyšl and Janáček Brno, and has also performed at the Miskolc Opera

Festival and OPA Pisa – Anima Mundi. He sang the role of the Forester for the BBC in the Czech version of the animated film of Leoš Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*.