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## National Artist and Music Composer Milan Novák and Folklore Motifs in His Compositions (Selected Works)

### About Milan Novák

The composer Milan Novák is a representative of Slovak Musical Modernism. He is the last living composer to have been honoured by the Ministry of Culture with the title of *National Artist*, which he received in 1988.

Furthermore, he was also awarded the title *Knight of International Culture by the Foundation for the Regional Development of Culture in (2012) for his life work achievement in the development of musical culture*. The Foundation of Local Culture Trustees acknowledged the work of Milan Novák as a conductor, artistic director, author of operas, cantatas, symphonic and chamber works, as well as his educational activities. Milan Novák has made significant contributions to the development of choir music in Slovakia, his cooperation with the Slovak Radio Children's Choir in and the Poprad Children's Choir being highly successful indeed. Selflessly committed to supporting amateur music culture and national activities through his works, he has worked for various international committees, enriching Slovak, Czech and Hungarian choral music as a composer. „Aiming to pay tribute to Milan Novak as a highly respected member of the Slovak cultural community, the project was proposed by the Bratislava-based Liszt Society. As many as 183 proposals for the Knight of International Culture Award were considered by the Advisory Board of the Foundation for the Development of Regional Culture, which consists of 70 members from 14 countries and three continents”<sup>1</sup>. The Knight of International Culture Award was given to Milan Novák

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<sup>1</sup> K. Mednansky, *Tvorba Milana Nováka v repertoári umeleckých súborov Prešovskej univerzity*, [www.konference.osu.cz/khu/file.php?fid=17](http://www.konference.osu.cz/khu/file.php?fid=17) [access 23.04.2014].

on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 2012 at the gala of the XVII. Day of Hungarian Culture held at the in. Holders of the title are registered in the book of Knights of Culture, which is highly appreciated by the European Union as an exemplary achievement within the development of regional culture. This award does not substitute or compete with official national awards, and its credit is not reduced by the fact that it is not a financial reward – it was created by renowned personalities who have devoted their lives to the development of national cultures.

## **A Biography of Novák**

The composer, conductor, public life organizer and National Artist Milan Novák was born on 12 August 1927 to a family with a rich musical history. His grandfather was a contrabass player in a 40-member Roma band, his father a multi-instrumentalist. His three brothers played the cello, clarinet, and the obo, Milan Novák composing music for them. Later, he composed for his four talented children. His daughter Kristína studied harp music, Michaela studied flute music, Lucia studied ballet dancing, and his son Marek studied cello music. His first wife, Dobroslava, was an actress and a pedagogue at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava („VSMÚ”), and died in 1998, he was captivated by the leader of the Poprad Children’s Choir, Mária Sokolová, the two of them having been brought together by The Festival of Children’s Brass Bands and choir music. She has been his devoted wife and great support ever since.

Milan Novák was born in Trakovice. Later, he left his home village situated near Hlohovec, moving to the culturally more developed town of Leopoldov, where he, at the age of nine, would stand in for a local organist, later playing the French horn in a local brass band.

He studied piano music at the Music School in Nitra, putting his knowledge into practice as a member of the school orchestra. At that time he started singing in a children’s choir and playing in a saloon ensemble, making his first efforts to compose his own music<sup>2</sup>.

When his family moved to Bratislava in 1939, he started going to grammar school at the age of 12, joining the School of Music in 1943 as well. He likes to remember Eugen Suchoň, who was his teacher during the first year, helping him use his potential in the area of composing. Nonetheless, he also studied several other subjects: his piano classes were led by Fric Kafenda, his conducting classes by K. Schimpl, and, later on, his composition classes by A. Moyzes. Prof Kafenda did not let Novak study the piano, composition and conducting at the same time,

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<sup>2</sup> [www.pulib.sk/web/kniznica/elpub/dokument/Mednansky1/subor/6.pdf](http://www.pulib.sk/web/kniznica/elpub/dokument/Mednansky1/subor/6.pdf) available online [access 26.04.2014].

though, so Novak had to choose his way. He chose composition (Prof Eugen Suchoň) and conducting (Prof Kornel Schimpl). As a result of this decision, he usually went unnoticed by the professor. Only after three of his graduation concerts in 1949, Prof Kafenda came to congratulate him, telling him he had made the right decision.

In the same year, he joined The Slovak Folk Art Ensemble („SLUK”), where he worked for a short spell. „After his graduation in 1949, he became a student of Václav Talicha”<sup>3</sup>. It was no doubt an honour for him to be the first Slovak to be tutored by such a significant Czech conductor<sup>4</sup>.

In the same year, he won an audition for the conductor of the symphonic orchestra of the Czechoslovak Radio in Bratislava, which was a lot more interesting opportunity.

In 1950, he was drafted for military service in Brno, where he managed to establish the Military Art Ensemble („VUS”), later receiving another command to stay in this Ensemble in year later, he became the conductor and artistic director of the Ensemble in 1953. Step by step, the Ensemble became a representative body both at home and abroad. Milan Novák continued working with the Ensemble until he retired in March 1988. Novák earned the rank of *Colonel*<sup>5</sup>.

Meanwhile, he had a chance to tutor a large number of significant Slovak artists, such as M. Lasica, J. Satinský, and S. Dančiak, including opera singers (O. Babjak) and famous conductors (O. Lénard, P. Breiner). Milan Novák was awarded the title of National Artist a few months after being discharged from the Military Art Ensemble<sup>6</sup>. Being the highest artistic rank, the National Artist title was awarded at the Prague Castle. On top of it, the composer also won the *Union of Slovak Music Composers Award*, the *Mikuláš Schneider-Trnavský Award*, *Vít Nejedlý and Antonín Zápotocký Award*, etc. In 1973, he won the *Ján Levoslav Bella Award* for his work entitled **Prekroč náš čas** („Step Over Our Time”). Military Awards: For Outstanding Work, For Service to the Fatherland, Order of the Red Star, Music Fund Slovakia Awards, the Union of Czechoslovak and Slovak Composers Award, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Defence Award, and the First Prize at the International Radio Competition in Finland for the children’s song entitled *S pesničkou, pesničkou (With a Song, by a Song)*.

<sup>3</sup> L. Dohnalová, *Milan Novák*, [w:] M. Jurík, P. Zagar (Ed.), *100 slovenských skladateľov*, Bratislava 1998, p. 212.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.podtatransky-kurier.sk/clanky/hudba-nepozna-hranice> available online [access 26.04.2014].

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.podtatranske-noviny.sk/clanok?category=3&page=7&perpage=200&article=14765> available online [access 26.04.2014].

<sup>6</sup> Compare <http://www.podtatransky-kurier.sk/clanky/hudba-nepozna-hranice> available online [access 26.04.2014].

In 1987, Novák even became *Chair of the Union of Czechoslovak Music Composers and Concert Artists*. His compositions have *received the Music Fund Slovakia Award several times over*.

## Novák's Works

„The focus of Novák's artistic contribution lies in compositional works covering a whole range of genres, from minor instructive compositions and folk song covers, through scenic and choral music, songs, music and dance scenes, to major scenic and dramatic forms. Novák's works are characterised by optimism, temperamental rhythm, and a sense of elegantly arched vocal lines. Novák's creativity has always been guided by spontaneous musicality. His compositions reflect both technical and technological proficiency and a dose of sound intuition rooted in his natural musicality”<sup>7</sup>.

*Novák's works offer a wide range of genres*. His musical pieces include „instructive compositions, scenic and choral music, songs, dramatic forms and, in his later period, also concert and symphonic-vocal works”<sup>8</sup>.

Some of his remarkable works illustrating this variety are listed below:

### Stage Works:

– **Prestávka** (*A Break*, 1985) – one-act opera; **Plná poľná lásky** (*A Kit Bag Full of Love*, 1957) – operetta

– **Nie je všedný deň** (*No Ordinary Day*, 1959) – a musical comedy in three acts, **Opera Mafiózo** (*Mafioso Opera*, 1981), musical in two parts,

### Orchestral Works:

a) Compositions for orchestras:

– **Lezginka, Dve fanfáry pre symfonický orchester** (*Two Fanfares for a Symphonic Orchestra*), – **Štyri prelúdiá pre symfonický orchester** (*Four Preludes for a Symphonic Orchestra*, 1980), **Rapsódia pre symfonický orchester** (*Rhapsody for a Symphonic Orchestra*, 1982), **Scherzo pre orchester** (*Scherzo for an Orchestra*, 1982),

b) Compositions for chamber orchestras:

**Gaudeamus** A minor old-style suite for a chamber orchestra (1983), **Slávnostná predohra** (*Festive Overture*, 1983), **Rondino pre komorný orchester**

<sup>7</sup> L. Dohnalová, op. cit., p. 212.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, p. 213.

(*Rondino for a Chamber Orchestra*, 1987), **Jesenné rondino pre sláčikový orchester** (*Autumn Rondino for a String Orchestra*, 2007),

c) Vocal-instrumental compositions with an orchestra:

**Štyri tváre roka** (*Four Faces of the Year*) – A cantata for a children’s choir and an orchestra/piano, **Canere Est Proprium Officium Homini** for a children’s choir, brass quintet and organ (2004),

d) Compositions for solo voice(s) and orchestras:

**Kto chce novú vojnu** (*Who Wants Another War*) – four songs for baritone and an orchestra, – **Deň clivo dohára** (*A Lonesome Dusk*, 1966) – four songs for soprano and an orchestra (piano) based on old Chinese poetry; **Prekroč náš čas** (*Step Over Our Time*, 1972) – a song for baritone and an orchestra (piano), – **Hory a srdce** (*Mountains and the Heart*, 1973) – four songs for bass and orchestra (piano), – **Aby bol život na zemi...** (*Preserving the Life on Earth...*, 1975) – Cantata for soprano, organ, strings and percussions.

e) Compositions for solo voice(s), choirs and orchestras:

– **Dumka z hôr** (*A Mountain Muse*, 1972) for a reciter, a male choir and an orchestra, **Nežnosti** (*Tenderness*, 1986) – Cantata for tenor, a mixed choir and an orchestra,

f) Compositions for solo instrument(s) and an orchestra:

**Concertino** for trumpet, strings, piano four hands and percussions (1964), **Retrospektívy** (*Retrospective Views*, 1996),

h) Compositions for solo instruments accompanied by an orchestra:

*Romanca* for cello and strings, **Elégia** (*Elegy*, 1951) for violin and string orchestra, **Tri skladby** (*Three Compositions*, 1965) for oboe and orchestra (piano), *Reminiscences* (*Reminiscencie*, 1969) for the cello and an orchestra, **Koncert pre harfu a komorný orchester** (*Concert for Harp and a Chamber Orchestra*, 1972), **Koncert pre violončelo a orchester** (*Concert for Cello and an Orchestra*, 1977), **Hudba pre trombón a sláčikový orchester** (*Music for Trombone and a String Orchestra*, 1985), **Parafrázy pre flautu a sláčikový orchester** (*Paraphrases for Flute and a String Orchestra*, 1985), **Koncertino** (*Concertino*) for accordion, strings, harp and percussion (before 2001), **Popradské concertino** (*Poprad concertino*, 2006) for piano and a chamber (pupil) orchestra, **A od Prešova** (*On the Way from Prešov*, 2009) – small variations for flute and strings, **Five O’clock** – concert for flute and an orchestra (before 2013).

The Slovak Performing and Mechanical Rights Society („SOZA”) has registered around 700 works by Novák. However, the author says there are a lot more,

so they cannot be listed here in their entirety. He has composed a number of works for two solo instruments and an orchestra, three solo instruments and an orchestra, instrumental and chamber pieces, solo instruments, duets, trios, quartets, quintets, vocal-instrumental chamber pieces, solo voices accompanied by the piano, instructive pieces, vocal-instrumental instructive pieces, theatre music (e.g. *Tanec nad Plačom* (*Dancing after Crying*), *Škriepky v Chioze* (*Squabbles in Chioza*) (1955), *Federico Garcíá Lorca: Dom Bernardy Alby* (*Federico Garcíá Lorca: Bernarda Alba's House*) (1957), *Macbeth* (1958), *Zbojníci* (*Highwaymen*) (1959), *Sluha dvoch páňov* (*Servant of Two Masters*) (1963), *Herodes a Herodias* (*Herodes and Herodias*) (1968), *V zajatí doby* (*Stuck in Time*) (1973), *Hamlet* (1974)), pieces for mixed choirs, female, male and children's choirs, choirs and instruments, film music, dramatic music and music for revue shows. Milan Novák has composed solo pieces for all musical instruments except for the French horn.

#### **Music inspired by folklore:**

Let us focus on works inspired by folk motifs. Now, let us focus on the author's works inspired by folk themes. They include the following:

- *Tri Tatranské bukoliky* (*Three Tatra Bucolics*, 2004) for cello and accordion
- *Sonatina for clarinet and piano*
- *A od Prešova* (*On the Way From Prešov*, 2009) – small variations for flute and strings
- *Folk song variations for piano accordion*
- *Bucolic for oboe (recorder) and piano*
- *Hory, hory zelené* (*The Green Woods*) – Slovak folk songs for piano
- *Middle I., II., III., IV., V.* (1999)
- *Putovanie s medvedíkom* (*Wandering with a Teddy Bear*, 2001)
- *Pri Prešporku na Dunaji* (*On the by Pressburg*, 2004) for flute and string orchestra
- *Horela Lipka* (*Burning Linden-Tree*, 1973) for a male/children's choir, *Ej, pobili Janička* (*Oh, They Have Killed Our Little John!*, 2003),
- *Zažblnkala vlnka* (*Plopping Wave*, 1971) – six nursery rhymes for a children's choir and Orff Instruments,
- *Vtáčie dialógy* (*Birds Talking*, 1995) for a children's choir and piano,
- *Worlds Evergreens* (1991) for a children's choir and an orchestra – 20 compositions
- *Slovenské koledy* (*Slovak Carols*, 1992) for a children's choir and an orchestra – 18 carols

**Tri Tatranské bukoliky** (*Three Tatra Bucolics*). The author comments on his work: „I finished working on the *Three Tatra Bucolics* early this year. They were written upon request by two extraordinary artists and friends of mine, and R. Kákoni. This work is my first composition for such an unusual cast – and it was an attractive opportunity to deal with this combination of instruments. ... My

purpose was to share my feelings and impressions about the Tatras with the outstanding artists the composition is dedicated to, using a bit of an old man's sentiment. Tatra Bucolics represent a single motif changing its form throughout three different musical miniatures, just like the Tatras change their look in each season"<sup>9</sup>. **Individual parts:** 1. *Bucolic*, 2. *Romance*, 3. *Scherzo*. **Premiered in Slovakia** on 17 November 2004 on the Slovak Radio in Bratislava. Performed by: Eugen Prochác (vc), Boris Lenko (ac). The author also says the composition is characterised by considerable resemblance to Slovak folk songs.

**Sonatina for clarinet and piano consisting of two parts:** *Allegro scherzando, Molto moderato, Moderato*. The work was recorded and premiered by: Milan Novák – the author (piano) and Tibor Novák (clarinet) – the author's brother.

Many of the compositions were created for the **Poprad Children's Choir**. The late Dr. Jozef Búda was its choirmaster for many years. It was under his leadership that the Choir became an acclaimed ensemble. At the same time, Búda worked as a director of the **Slovak Sinfonietta** in Žilina. Therefore, it was a great challenge for Novák to compose for such ensembles. His compositions for the Children's Choir and the Orchestra include: A cycle entitled *Štyri tváre roka (Four Faces of the Year)*, *World's Evergreens* and *Slovak Carols (Slovenské koledy)*.

It is the cycle entitled *World's Evergreens* composed for a children's choir and an orchestra that includes folklore motifs from all over the world. Each of the songs reveals the national song of a certain country, *such as Požalej* (Russia), *Alouette* (France), *El condor passa* (South America), *Funiculi, Funicula* (Neapolitan song), *Red river* (American cowboy song), *Les sabots* (the Netherlands), *Měsíček svítí* (the Czech Republic), *Macejko* (Slovakia), *Guraľu* (Poland).

**Slovak Carols for a children's choir and an orchestra** were composed in a similar fashion. This composition represents a cycle of 18 Slovak carols for a children's choir and a chamber orchestra. Each of the carols is characterised by the composer's typical stylistic elements.

The piece entitled **A od Prešova** (*On the Way From Prešov*) resulted from the long-term partnership between Novák and Prešov University ensembles. The cycle of variations entitled *A od Prešova*, consisting of variations for flute and a string orchestra, was dedicated to the chamber orchestra *Camerata academica* and its conductor Doc. Karol Medňanský, PhD. The repertoire of this ensemble comprises several pieces composed by Novák. After their successful premiere, many of them have established themselves permanently in the repertoire. *On the Way From Prešov* was premiered on 13 April 2010 on the occasion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Spring Concert of *Camerata Academica* and guests and, at the same time, the opening concert of the 7 Academic Chamber Concerts held at the University of Prešov.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.hc.sk/hudba/dielo-detail/11194>, (Bulletin NSH 2004, author) [access 28.04.2014].

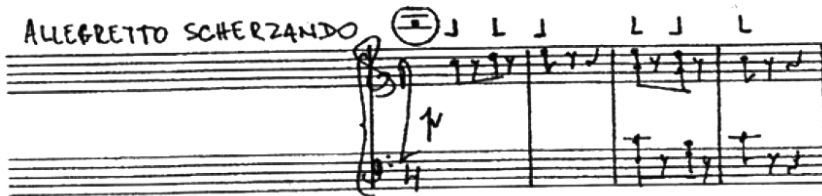
The basis of this work is represented by a well-known folk song originating from the Šariš Region, abundantly varied by the author in his own way<sup>10</sup>.

The composition for children entitled **Putovanie s medvedíkom** („Wandering with a Teddy Bear”), namely the version composed for baritone accordion, is in fact a variation of the children folk song *Medved'ku, daj labku* („Give Me Your Paw, Teddy”) reflects Novák’s sensitive compositional style, which is particularly visible in songs for children. The simple motif of the song varies in another eight instrumental pieces in the form of other nations’ dances, which gives the composition a multicultural feel.

The theme of the song *Medved'ku, daj labku* serves as the basis for the entire thematic content of the composition. Every child has its fluffy teddy bear. Listening to the song, children can imagine wandering with their teddy bear, visiting different countries, meeting different cultures, dances and „national temperaments”. The composition is rich and diverse and children are bound to be fascinated by the variety of its motifs. The composition includes a *leitmotif* that stimulates children’s attention.

When dealing with the central theme, the author uses the technique of variation, which is also used to unify all the other compositions in this cycle.

The **introduction** provides the main motif of *Allegretto scherzando* in double stroke. The first four strokes represent the main motif (the melody of the folk song Give Me Your Paw, Teddy).



Example Nr 1. The author’s style – the first four strokes, central motif – the melody of *Medved'ku, daj labku* („Give Me Your Paw, Teddy”)

The composition continues smoothly into the **first part** – entitled *Into the World*, in which the author uses *cascatas*, *chromatics*, and *non-diatonic intervals*.

The triple meter and vigorous *con brio tempo* of **the second part** – entitled *Barcelona* comprises Spanish rhythmical and dance elements with an accompaniment. The rhythm is characterised by *passo doble*, which is incorporated within the whole composition. The example shows the variation technique used in the second part:

<sup>10</sup> www. konference.osu.cz/khu/file.php?fid=17 [access 28.04.2014].





Example Nr 2. The author's style – the motif variation of the second part based on the rhythm of *passo doble*

Characterised by minuet dance elements, **the third part** – entitled *Viedeň*, i.e. *Vienna*, establishes the calm atmosphere of old pair dances brought from France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In his *dolce*, the author presents a combination of sweet expression and warm performance. The variation technique implemented in this part is characterised by the triple metre of minuet:



Example Nr 3. The author's style of variation in the third part

**The fourth part** – entitled *Warszawa*, i.e. *Warsaw*, is based on the rhythm of mазurka, which starts with the ninth stroke. The author also incorporates two basic choreographic forms of mазurka – the face to face position and pairs standing one behind the other, peeking at the partner. The fourth part takes the form of mазurka:



Example Nr 4. The author's style implementing mазurka in the fourth part

Employing the tempo of Allegretto, **the Fifth Part** – entitled *Tatry*, i.e. *The Tatras*, is characterized by double meter again, with features of odzemok (*Robber's Dance*), a Slovak national male dance. Originally, odzemok was a Heyduck dance with crouches and hops, its roots going back to old military and shepherd's dances. Its characteristic double metre with emphasis on the second note is accompanied by a bagpipes quint. In the fifth part, the author implements the rhythm of odzemok indicated in the bass line.



Example Nr 5. The author's style in the fifth part – motif variation

Based on the rhythm of *blues*, **the Sixth Part** – entitled *USA*, can be understood as an emotional pause for the author's soul, expressing a whole variety of feelings. Having a slow *Andante* tempo, the sixth part is built on eight-stroke segments in the rhythm of blues with a typical shift of emphasis:



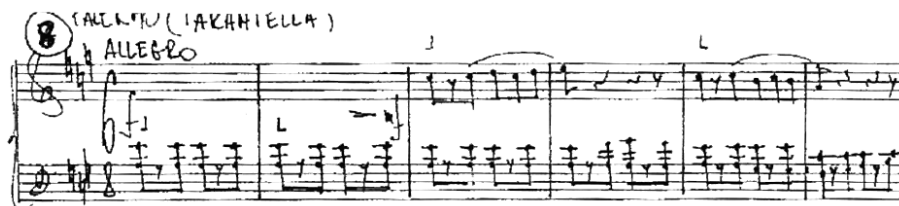
Example Nr 6. Author's style – motif variations based on the rhythm of blues in the part entitled *USA*

**The Seventh Part** – entitled *Tranquillo*, takes us to *Norway*. The slow beginning employs a four-stroke metre, taking us into the world of fairies and elves, the realm of imagination and dreams. After a short intro, the author lets us swing on the waves of his triple meter, the variation of the leitmotif employing the same type of meter.



Example Nr 7. Triple meter variation – the author's style

Employing the fast tempo of *Allegro* and the Italian dance called *tarantella*, **the Eighth Part** (entitled *Palermo v Taliansku*, i.e. *in Italy*) takes instrumental virtuoso forms. The central motif is based on the rhythm of tarantella, which is composed in 6/8 stroke, its typical rhythm being as described in the picture.



Example Nr 8. The author's style – motif variation in the last part

The whole composition consists of small single-, double- or triple-part songs employing Da Capo with the following structure:

*Introduction*

1<sup>st</sup> Part: *Do sveta* („*Into the World*”) – single-piece song **a**

2<sup>nd</sup> Part: *Barcelona* – two-piece song **ab**

3<sup>rd</sup> Part: *Viedeň* („*Wien*”) – single-piece song **a**

4<sup>th</sup> Part: *Warszawa* („*Warsaw*”) – two-piece song **aa1 – variation**

5<sup>th</sup> Part: *Tatry* („*The Tatras*”) – single-piece song **a + coda**

6<sup>th</sup> Part: *USA* – three-piece song **aba + coda**

7<sup>th</sup> Part: *Nórsko* („*Norway*”) – two-piece song form with an introduction, a bridge and a coda **iama+coda**.

8<sup>th</sup> Part: *Palermo* – two-piece song **aa1 + coda** (the coda carries the main motif in augmentation, modified from A minor to the same tone in A major, representing the final conclusion, gradation and termination of the whole cycle)<sup>11</sup>.

This work for children represents a very good example of various composition methods used by the author, as well as his feelings associated with the world of children and imagination. From the pedagogical point of view, the added value of his work lies in its interdisciplinary nature as it includes geography, history (old dances), imagination (the world of fairies and elves), multicultural and regional studies, etc. In his works for children, Novák demonstrates his mastery of emotion and rich imagination in the sphere of composition.

In conclusion, it can be said that the numerous works created by Novák cover all genres possible – in his own words, the only solo instrument missing from the portfolio of his compositions is the French horn. His life has been closely connected with many Slovak cities, from Bratislava, through Poprad, to Prešov, the range of his works being similarly wide as it includes stage works, film, chamber, choir or instructive pieces, as well as richly elaborated folk motifs. Therefore, I hope that he stays sound in mind and body, keeping up that surprising sense of humour of his and creating many more masterpieces in the future – because we all need him, and so does the world of music.

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## References

**Resources:** Interview with Novák – by Jana Hudáková.

<sup>11</sup> Note: The form analysis of the musical pieces and the used abbreviations according to L. Zenkl: *ABC hudobných foriem*, 1990, **a, b** – composition structure, **i** – introduction, **m** – bridge, **coda** – sequel.

## **Summary**

### **National Artist and Music Composer Milan Novák and Folklore Motifs in His Compositions (Selected Works)**

This paper aims to give an insight into the life of Milan Novák, the last living composer to have received the title of National Artist. A representative of Slovak Musical Modernism, Novák has received numerous awards, too. His compositional works are both copious and inventive, covering a whole range of genres from minor instructive compositions and folk song covers, through scenic and choral songs, music and dance scenes, to major scenic and dramatic forms. This paper focuses on Novák's works inspired by folklore in particular.