

Jacob Beranek

CO BŮH? ČLOVĚK?
(What Is God? Man?)

for Soprano, Clarinet, Violoncello, and Piano

(SCORE)



BERANEK MUSIC

INSTRUMENTATION

Soprano
Clarinet in Bb
Violoncello
Piano

Total Duration: *approx.* 8'

Performance materials available for sale at www.BeranekMusic.com.

TEXT

Excerpts from *Co Bůh? Člověk?*
by Bedrich Bridel, S.J. (1658)

(Translation by composer.)

Co Bůh? Člověk?
Kdokolivěk?
Co já? Co Ty,
Bože svatý?
Cot' mám před Tebou říknouti?

What [is] God? [What is] Man?
Anyone?
What [am] I? What [are] You,
Holy God?
What have I to say before You?

Slovem: nic jsem.
 Kapka rosy tekoucí,
 krůpěje ranní, jedinká,
 prázdný ořech padoucí...
Ó Bože můj, ach, co jsem?

In a word: I am nothing.
 A drop of dew flowing,
 a morning drizzle, alone,
 an empty nut passing away...
O my God, ah, what am I?

Ty's propasti dno, svršek,
já nejmenší krůpějička,
Ty jsi slunce okršlek,
já jeho malá jiskřička.
Ty jsi květu samý květ,
já jsem jen pejíř polední,
rosy's rosa, nový's svět,
já pak bublínka večerní.

You are an abyss, top to bottom,
I, the smallest flicker,
You are the brightest sun,
I, its little spark.
You are the very flower of a flower,
I am only a midday wisp,
You are dew of the dew, a new world,
I, but a little evening bubble.

Z Tebe jde všechna pravda,
není tu nedokonalost,
s Tebou vše býti žádá,
nebs všech věcí dokonalost.
 Ty jsi neskončená radost.

All truth comes from You,
there is no imperfection,
everything wants to be with You,
for You are the perfection of all things.
 You are endless joy!

Plamen jsi, než bez dejmu,
moři jsi velikému.
Růže jsi, než bez trní,
konec poslední, první,
jakož bylo od počátku.
Studně nemaje začátku,
pres jsi bez presování,
láska bez pečování.

Ach, kdo Tebe mi ukáže?
Ach, Bože můj! Co jsi Ty?

Proč si hledám líbosti
světa ve vši okrouhlosti?
Proč si hledám sladkosti
v samé a pouhé hořkosti?
Proč hledám jásnost, světlost
z slunce anebo z měsíce,
proč hledám líbost, milost
v žluči, v pelýnku na louce?

Proč hledám naušnice,
proč perly, drahé zápony?
Perly, drahé kamení,
jenž se stkvějí svou sličností,
i jiná všecka jmění
nic nejsou k Boží milosti.

Co Bůh? Člověk?
Co já? Co Ty,
Bože svatý?

You are a fire, yet without smoke,
You are a vast sea.
You are a rose, yet without thorns,
the end of the last, the first,
as it was from the beginning.
A bottomless well,
You are a press without pressing,
love without worrying.

Ah, who will show You to me?
Ah, my God! What are You?

Why do I look for pleasure
all around the world?
Why do I look for sweetness
only in bitterness?
Why do I look for clarity, illumination
from the sun or from the moon?
Why do I look for pleasure, grace
in the gall, in the sagebrush of the meadow?

Why do I look for earrings,
why pearls, precious clasps?
Pearls, precious stones,
which sparkle in their likeness,
and all other wealth,
are nothing compared to the grace of God.

What [is] God? [What is] Man?
What [am] I? What [are] You,
Holy God?

PROGRAM NOTE

When Ken-David and Melinda Masur approached me for a piece in Czech to commemorate the International Year of Czech Music in 2024, I immediately began looking for a text that held both historical and cultural significance to the Czech lands while remaining somehow outside the typical themes commonly used to represent Czech nationalism. For example, much has been made of the Hussite movement and its impact on Czech identity. These 15th- to 17th-century Protestants fought battles against the Catholic Church, campaigned for religious services in Czech (instead of Latin), and even composed hymns that have influenced every Czech composer of note since Smetana.

In my search for something different, I was impressed to come across a 17th-century Catholic priest, Bedřich Bridel (1619–1680), who wrote profound, mystical poetry in Czech—the language of the people—not in Latin (the language of the church) or German (the language of business). In fact, Bridel spent much of his career in Prague translating texts from Latin and German into Czech, before leaving his position in Prague to become a full-time missionary, spending the final twenty years of his life preaching throughout Bohemia, ministering to the sick, and eventually dying of the plague in 1680. Here, clearly, was a man of the people and a figure of significance.

Bridel's poem *Co Bůh? Člověk?* (1658) grabbed my musical imagination from the moment I read its tersely dramatic first lines: “What [is] God? [What is] Man?” Clearly rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition stemming back to the Psalms and the Song of Songs, the poem “dazzles with intellectual rigor combined with literary precision,”¹ as Jan Linka writes in the new edition of Bridel's works. The only issue was its length: at twenty-five pages long, the poem needed to be excerpted for the size of my composition. Once I trimmed the text into a tighter arc of my own devising, the compositional work unfolded swiftly.

The piece opens with strident upward gestures as the singer poses the main questions—What is God? What is Man?—until the music becomes transfixed at the words “Bože svatý” (Holy God). The contrast between these two emotions—restless searching and speechless awe—define the entire work. After a tumultuous section in which the poet attempts comparisons between himself and God, a lyrical middle section emerges when the text only focuses on God. But, the same searching questions return, and with them, musical instability. After the restatement of the opening upward gestures, a repeat of the tumultuous material reaches its desperate climax: “Why do I look for pleasure [...], pearls, precious stones? [...] They are nothing compared to the grace of God!” Following a brief silence, the opening material returns once more, this time hushed, as the first questions are posed in a new light.

This composition is dedicated to my late mentor Juraj Filas, who was a great example to me in his belief in the power of music to touch souls and glorify God.

— Jacob Beranek

¹ “Oslňuje intelektuální náročností skloubenou s precizním literárním zpracováním.” Bedřich Bridel, *Hymny, písně, legendy*, ed. Jan Linka (Brno: Host, 2022), 483.

Score in C

Co-commissioned by the Chelsea Music Festival and
the National Czech-Slovak Museum & Library for the 2024 Year of Czech Music

+ In memoriam Juraj Filas (1955–2021) +

Co Bůh? Člověk?

(What is God? Man?)

“Co Bůh? Člověk?” (1658)
Bedřich Bridel, S.J.

Jacob Beranek

Agitato (♩ = c. 116) (♩ = ♩) **sempre** *fp* *f*

Soprano
Clarinet in Bb
Violoncello
Piano

Co Bůh?

4 *fp* *f* *ff* *mf*

Sop.
Cl.
Vc.
Pno.

Člo - věk? Kdo - ko - li - věk?

Meno mosso (♩ = c. 50)

7 (a tempo) rit. *f* *p* **10** (*p*) *eterico, lirico*

Sop. Co — já? — Co Ty, — Bo — že sva —

Cl. *f* *pp* *n* *n*

Vc. *mf* *mp* *pizz.* *arco* *pp*

Pno. *f* *p* *pp rubato, rapsodico* *mp* *8va*



11 *mp* *pp*

Sop. — — — — — tý. — — — — —

Cl. *ppp* *n* *n*

Vc. *n* *ppp* *n*

Pno. *cristallino, misterioso* *pp* *p* *ppp (l.v.)* *8va*

senza misura **rit.** **Tempo I** (♩ = c. 116)

14 *mf* *mp* *mf* *p*

Sop. *mf* *mp* *mf* *p*
Co' mám před Te-bou řek - nou - ti?

Cl. *mp* *pp* *n* *f*
(subitamente) 9

Vc. *f*
(subitamente)

Pno. (l.v.) *mp* *f*
(subitamente) 3

16 *f* *ff* *f* *ff*

Sop. *f* *ff* *f* *ff*
Co Bůh? Člo - věk?

Cl. *f* *ff* *f* *ff*

Vc. *f* *ff* *f* *ff* *mf*

Pno. *f* *ff* *f* *ff* *mf*

19

Musical score for measures 19-20. The score includes parts for Soprano (Sop.), Clarinet (Cl.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The Soprano part has a rest in measure 19 and begins in measure 20 with the lyrics "Slo -". The Clarinet and Violoncello parts feature complex rhythmic patterns with slurs and dynamic markings of *fp* and *mp*. The Piano part consists of a dense, rhythmic accompaniment with slurs and dynamic markings of *fp* and *p*.



Musical score for measures 21-24. The score includes parts for Soprano (Sop.), Clarinet (Cl.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The Soprano part has lyrics "vem," in measure 21 and "Slo - vem," in measure 22. The Clarinet and Violoncello parts continue with rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings of *mp* and *p*. The Piano part features a complex rhythmic accompaniment with slurs and dynamic markings of *mp* and *p*. The score includes a double bar line between measures 21 and 22, and a change in time signature from 2/4 to 4/4 between measures 22 and 23.

23 *f* *mp* *mf*

Sop. nic j-sem Kap - ka ro - sy

Cl. *f* *p* *mf*

Vc. *f* *p* *mf*

Pno. *f* *p* *mf*

25 *(rubato)* *p* *mf cant.*

Sop. te - kou - cí, krů - pě - je ran - ní, je - din - ká

Cl. *p* *n* *p* *mp*

Vc. *p* *n* *p* *mf cant.*

Pno. *p* *mp*

27 *mp* *mf* *mp*

Sop. Práz - dný o - řech pa - dou - cí.

Cl.

Vc. *p* *mp* *mf* *p*

Pno. *(mp)* 6 6 6 3

29 *f* *ff*

Sop. Ó Bo - že můj, ach, co

Cl. *f* *f*

Vc. *f*

Pno. *f* 8vb 7 7