
Constructing the Sound of Devils: Dialectical Interactions between Culture, History, and the Construction of the Czech Vozembouch



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Abstract: The *vozembouch* is a folk instrument that has evolved through centuries of dialectical interactions with Slavic (and Germanic) cultures. The instrument has developed from a percussive bowed single-string fiddle to being primarily a percussion instrument, often constructed without strings, and it has shifted back and forth over time between being a prominently used or all-but-extinct instrument in Czech culture. *Vozembouchy* (pl.) have evolved from medieval pagan ritual enhancers to minstrel instruments to percussion reminding some Slavic people of their heritage in troubled times, and has been part of a folk music revival that has resulted in renewed interest in traditional performance on the instrument, as well as new, modern musical directions embraced by players spanning many generations. Today, it is only manufactured on a small scale because many Czech players place a high value on *vozembouchy* being built by the person performing on it. As a result, the instruments are almost entirely unique, incorporating materials at hand and personal

playing styles to inform construction decisions. Alongside this individuality, however, some staple elements have been maintained, which contribute to the instrument's almost ubiquitous familiarity among Czech people. One of the elements is the use of anthropomorphic/zoomorphic heads to adorn the top of the instrument. Often, these heads will evoke characters from folk tales, most commonly a devil head or *čertí hlava*. In this paper, I draw from literary sources and my fieldwork with *vozembouch* makers and players to discuss the ways in which dialectical engagement of the *vozembouch* with Slavic culture has shaped the evolution of its construction, and suggest how a detailed study of the making of this instrument can highlight the development of the *vozembouch*'s cultural value that has made it an iconic Czech folk music instrument.

Keywords: Czech *vozembouch*, instrument construction, cultural entanglement, folk-artisan dichotomy, functional evolution, sonic/visual performativity

The dialectical interactions that take place between musical instruments and the arenas in which they are built and played have long been the subject of academic discussion. Racy clearly shows that instruments are both adaptive (“organic entities that change in response to different ecological and aesthetic realities [over time]”¹) and idiosyncratic (stable entities that “may be borrowed and accepted as physical and acoustical ‘packages’”²), interacting “dialectically with surrounding physical and cultural realities, and as such, they perpetually negotiate or renegotiate their roles, physical structures, performance modes, sound ideals, and symbolic meanings.”³ One aspect common to both the adaptive and idiosyncratic models is the role of the instrument’s construction. Referring to artisans, Gell argues that creators of works and objects instill their wares with “intentionalities” that are manifestations of expectations and values constructed through the agency the artist exercises during the creative process.⁴ The same can be said of musical instrument builders. Stobart points out that “sometimes highly effective feedback mechanisms exist between [players and makers] where innovations in [musical instrument] construction both enable and respond to shifting performance possibilities and expectations.”⁵ Makers, through the construction of their instruments, engage material, social, and cultural realms,⁶ realms in which the players, members of their musical community, and the instruments themselves develop and interact. Musical instruments, then, are also decidedly intertwined dialectically with these realms and “can embody a variety of traits through which they may take on cultural and social importance, such as market value and status, constructing ethnic identity, strong historical associations, and their influence on genre performance preferences or constraints,”⁷ and an instrument’s design, material constituents, and resultant aesthetics merge to act as a catalyst to construct, storage for, and means to develop these relations.

This paper is intended to embrace this notion by presenting research that focuses closely on the construction of a musical instrument in order to unveil aspects of dialectical interactions that may not be as apparent when taking a research approach that highlights

¹ A. J. Racy, “A Dialectical Perspective on Musical Instruments: The East-Mediterranean Mijwiz,” *Ethnomusicology* 38(4) (1994), 37.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 38.

⁴ A. Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 271.

⁵ H. Stobart, *Music and the Poetics of Production in the Bolivian Andes* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 73.

⁶ K. Dawe, “People, Objects, Meaning: Recent Work on the Study and Collection of Musical Instruments,” *The Galpin Society Journal* 54 (May 2001), 225.

⁷ W. Connor, “Constructing Musical Associations through Instruments: The Role of the Instrument Maker in the Maker-Instrument-Player Network within the Neo-Medievalist Gothic Music Scene” (PhD. dissertation, Royal Holloway University of London, 2011), 8, <http://pure.rhul.ac.uk/portal/files/10140566/2012ConnorWKPhD.pdf>.

other methodologies. For this discussion, I have chosen a case study in which I look at the construction of the Czech *vozembouch* to show that the sensibilities and intentionalities of the makers and players are paralleled simultaneously in the variation of models and the consistency of construction staples of the instrument, and, furthermore, that these construction traits and their evolution generate, develop, and perpetuate the “Czechness” of the instrument through iconography, timbre, usage, heritage, and cultural associations.

My first encounter with *vozembouchy* (pl.) was in 1996 at a flea market in Berlin's Tiergarten. I noticed a unique-looking stick zither in a state of disrepair with percussion attached to it and a glaring but semi-comical devil head atop the instrument. I asked the vendor what it was, and he did not seem to know. He merely said he thought it was a curious item and had just received it from another vendor to resell. All he knew about it was that it was older, but of an undetermined age. I saw two more of these instruments at the same market: the second was completely broken in half, being sold for decorative purposes because of the wooden devil head carved on one end; the third was more intact than the first two, but seemed to be made with more recently acquired materials and was perhaps mass-produced. These subsequent two vendors also did not know the name of the instrument, although one guessed it was called a *Teufelschläger* (devil stick); however, the final vendor was certain it was a Czech instrument.

Years later, after I had moved to the UK and was playing percussion in a Celtic/Medieval band that included two musicians from the Czech Republic, I inquired about it. I described the instrument I had seen in as much as detail as I could remember. Immediately both Czech bandmates recognized it, one of them saying, “That’s an old Czech instrument called a *vozembouch*!”

The Czech word “*vozembouch*” means “to stamp on the ground” and is descriptive of the main performance technique used with the instrument. Generally speaking, contemporary *vozembouchy* are made using a long central stick approximately 3–4 feet in height, there is a resonator of some sort, usually a small drum or *riq* (drum with jingles), cymbals and/or jingles, bells, and rattles of various sorts, and often a string or set of strings is attached at the bottom and run over the resonating body then connected to a tension-setting device (tuning peg of some sort) near the top. Furthermore, in almost all cases, the instrument bears a wooden head at the top, most often a devil head.

Vozembouch is the primary name used for the instrument in Western Czech areas as I encountered it during my fourteen months in the Czech Republic, but according to Kunz⁸ it has several names: *Ozembouch* or *Ozembuch* and sometimes *Zembuch* in central Moravian areas; and *Bambus*, *Bumbus*, *Boomba*, or *Řimbus* farther east and in Slovakian areas. It also takes on other, similar forms or is simply transplanted to adjacent areas,

⁸ L. Kunz, *Nástroje lidové hudby v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku*. (Four volumes. Rožnov pod Radhoštěm, Valašské muzeum v přírodě, 2008.)



Picture 1. Tata Bojs with a vozembouch on stage

like the related Polish/Kashubian *Diabelskie skrzypce* and, as mentioned, the German *Teufelschläger* (Devil Stick), *Teufelgeige* (Devil Fiddle), or *Poispil*. The instrument even appears as far away as North America as a Stump Fiddle or Devil's Fiddle, mostly in Northern Midwestern states or Southern border states where there are notable contingencies of Western Slavic communities, but they are also occasionally found in parts of the Southern Appalachian Mountains where I grew up, as well; and has been likened to the folk version of a *tromba marina*.⁹

With so many versions and names for the same or similar instruments, what makes the vozembouch decidedly Czech to those within its circles of engagement? Many or all of the instruments mentioned above possess the same staple elements of a central stick, jingles, and often strings or something similar, such as long springs, and regularly they are associated with devils on some level, yet the vozembouch, which is common but not

⁹ L. Tyllner, *Lidová kultura: Národopisná encyklopedie Čech, Moravy, a Slezska* (Věcná část O–Ž) (Praha: Mladá fronta, 2007), 700.

necessarily a “core” folk instrument in the Czech Republic, seems to be distinguished instantly from other incarnations of this instrument by Western Slavs, and furthermore it is recognized specifically as being Czech. Is it a visual association? The sound the instrument makes? The performance settings in which the vozembouch has appeared? Or something entirely different and/or a combination of these associations? By looking more closely at the ways in which the vozembouch has been and is being constructed, we may find clues to possible answers and potentially unravel the ways in which these connections have developed, evolved, and been maintained or altered.

What goes into constructing a vozembouch, then? Today's vozembouchy comprise such a wide variety of designs and construction techniques that it is difficult to specify any exact traits related to their construction, but perhaps this lack of specific design and building techniques can be taken as a construction trait in its own right. Vozembouchy are considered to be folk instruments by many scholars, players, and makers (although not all, with Tyllner arguing that the instrument was used in non-folk contexts primarily until the end of the 19th century¹⁰), in part because vozembouchy are not standardized on a major level, nor are they mass-produced. Manufactured models can be purchased, but more regularly players build their own vozembouch. During my research in the Czech Republic in the fall of 2014 and spring of 2015, I interviewed a number of players and makers, and when I asked for their opinions on performing with a manufactured vozembouch, all but one interviewee stated that they felt it was “not the Czech way” or that a player could not have the “connection” needed with their vozembouch to play “properly.”¹¹ One performer, Jaroslav Reisig, owns and uses a mass-produced instrument, stating it is sturdier than one he could build himself, and therefore he felt more confident using a factory-built vozembouch when playing gigs that required extended duration of performance time,¹² but he also owned a vozembouch he had built himself that was his preferred instrument. Less than three months after my interview with him, Reisig sent me a photograph of a vozembouch he had recently made, stating it was “better” and “stronger” (embracing a more streamlined design), and that he intended on using it professionally.¹³

I have found this to be case almost unanimously: players prefer vozembouch built individually, most often by the player, and almost always specifically for the performer in question. I have encountered a range of players on a spectrum of amateur-professional engagement, from occasional performers playing in local impromptu bands or simply playing vozembouch as a hobby at home or on special occasions to professional performers who play regularly with corporate-function bands or similar professional groups,

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Author's interviews with H. Filipis (2014), V. Slavík (2014) and P. Krátká (2014).

¹² Author's interview with J. Reisig (2014).

¹³ Author's interview with J. Reisig (2015).



Picture 2. Reisig's mass-produced vozembouch

performing at weddings, large folk music festivals, or within the tourist industry. Out of over 100 performances I have witnessed live or on film, not once have I seen a mass-produced vozembouch played (with one exception, where it was slightly altered by the performer). Several interviewees¹⁴ claimed that manufactured models were more targeted for sale to tourists. However, traveling through Praha, Brno, Pardubice, Hradec Králové, and other cities and towns as a tourist, I did not encounter vozembouchy as being a readily available commodity, even in standard musical instrument stores. In fact, I have encountered only one company (Kalouda a synové, s.r.o.) who seem to be mass-producing vozembouchy, and I found that they sell their wares primarily online or via music shops as special orders. Furthermore, Kalouda and Sons have reduced their number of models offered online from five (two small vozembouchy intended for very young players, a small stream-lined model with no extra noisemakers, a mid-sized simple model with one string for players looking for a lighter instrument, with fewer features, and a larger, slightly heavier model with the largest amount of jingles, three strings, and larger cymbals) to just offering the largest vozembouch through most vendors. I have not spoken with the manufacturer, but an explanation for the reduction in models offered could be related to sales and demand, reflecting the fact that the smaller, less intricate versions were not as popular or profitable.

¹⁴ Author's interviews with V. Slavík (2014), J. Reisig (2014), Š. Honc (2015), O. Honc (2015), H. Filipis (2014), P. Krátká (2015), and others.

The lack of mass-produced vozembouchy is accompanied by a lack of uniformity in design. With individual players making their own instruments, vozembouchy designs are as numerous as there are players. The diversity of instrument styles, however, does not lead to a great diversity in the ways these instruments are seen as being Czech. On the contrary, the uniqueness of each vozembouch supports the Czech associations, according to Viktor Slavík, a vozembouch maker and player based in Praha. Slavík did not elaborate when asked about these associations, but was quick to point out that an “authentic” Czech vozembouch was made by the person intending to play it, and the fact that they made it is exhibited in the ways that a vozembouch is personalized through its design and construction materials. The importance of a player’s building their own vozembouch was also exhibited by Reisig, who was reluctant to be interviewed by me, even with the help of translators, until I mentioned that, in part, I wanted to get advice from him about building my own vozembouchy. The fact that I was planning on building my own instrument seemed to be Slavík’s greatest concern, and Reisig’s attitude towards discussing vozembouchy with me changed from reserved to excited once it was made clear that I was in the process of building my own vozembouchy to play, and not just as part of my research.

The high value that vozembouch players place on the homemade nature of their instrument seems to have a strong impact on the construction of the instrument. Honza Filips, a Czech folk music specialist in Nový Bydžov, suggested that part of this mentality is rooted in historical associations with Czech soldiers making their own vozembouchy during the two world wars. Although the Czech area of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Czechoslovakian state that appeared in 1918 were among the most advanced economies in Europe at the time, supplying the resources needed to support, or even actively avoid, wartime activities is demanding and would necessarily be reflected in the ways in which any culture engages material resource management and the subsequent approach to construction of civilian products, especially those deemed less paramount during wartime.¹⁵

Štěpán Honc, Czech musician and historical musicologist, adds to this discussion that Czech culture highly values innovation and improvising, as well as self-instigated and completed projects, both in relation to vozembouch making and in a broader, general sense.¹⁶ He recalled popular animated children’s television programs (*Pat a Mat*, for example) that featured home improvement stories, architect and building-construction themes, and morality depicted within these shows that highlighted a sense of accomplishment

¹⁵ For detailed discussions of resource management, economic transitions, and reform efforts in Czechoslovakia from 1918 to 1991, see R. Naranyanswamy, “Czechoslovakia: Reforming under Pressure,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 23(22) (1988), 1112–1114; S. Steiger, “Czechoslovakia: Political Crisis and Economic Reform,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 27(22) (1992), 1131–1132; and L. Kopačka, “Industry in the Transition of Czech Society and Economy,” *GeoJournal* 32(3) (1994), 207–214.

¹⁶ Honc, 2015a.

and achievement being associated with positive and model social standing. This is not to say, of course, that a positive light shed on completing a task or self-motivated improvement projects are specifically or inherently Czech, but it does point out the value Czech producers of children's television may have placed on such activities and how they are embraced. In turn, then, potentially there are deeper, more tangible associations with designing, building, and completing a project, such as making a vozembouch, that are seen as upholding "good Czech values" and which partially inform the values placed on vozembouch construction and subculture.

Sennett, in his book on craftsmanship, relates that a sense of quality is highly subjective and may be derived from a range of traits as they are perceived by the person evaluating an artisan's work,¹⁷ in this case a vozembouch. For Slavík and Reisig, the homemade nature and the innovations reflecting the fact that the maker is also a player (for example, material choices that are made in order to create a lighter instrument for a longer performance duration), then, would not only represent quality but also how "Czech" the instrument is and therefore how "authentic."

This sense of authenticity can be highlighted as a means by which the construction of a vozembouch becomes Czech. Bigenho defines several types of ways in which concepts of authenticity are constructed,¹⁸ citing among others experiential authenticity (related to personal encounters) and cultural-historical authenticity (encompassing concepts of ethnicity and nationality, as well as associations with specific eras). Slavík and Reisig seem to inform their experiential constructions of authenticity through sensibilities related to vozembouch construction that is in turn derived and supported by culturally and historically informed notions of what it is to be "Czech", instilling or removing from the design of vozembouchy inherent Czech qualities. Furthermore, authenticity relates directly to concepts of heritage,¹⁹ and Filips connects self-built vozembouchy using materials at hand directly to this.²⁰ He recalled that during the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia constructing one's own vozembouch was one of the ways in which Czech people could embrace their heritage and even protest governmental regulation of arts and humanities without presenting a sizable threat to the USSR's communist/socialist sensibilities; therefore folk music and the construction of folk music instruments thrived. Filips claims this encouraged Czech people to engage with folk music on a semi-vigorous basis. In part, Filips says, this engagement followed the release of several albums of music by Jaroslav Krček.

¹⁷ Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 240.

¹⁸ M. Bigenho, *Sounding Indigenous: Authenticity in Bolivian Music Performance* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 20–21.

¹⁹ D. Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 7.

²⁰ Author's interview with H. Filips (2014).

Krček (b. 1939) is a Czech composer, arranger, and performer who has released over 60 albums on the Supraphon label, conducting and playing compositions and interpretations of Czech folk melodies and medieval songs with his project Musica Bohemica, which he formed in 1975. The LPs contain his arrangements and performances of Czech songs performed on indigenous and period instruments. Krček states, in the liner notes to the 1981 release *Vánoční zpěvy z doby husitské*, that he sees his work as being new takes on folk and medieval music, including a major focus on Czech and Western Slavic music from a range of historical eras. As a result, there is less fully documented information about the source music as would allow for more historically accurate recreation of the material.²¹ His approach to performing and composing historically influenced music, as described by Krček himself, partially parallels his approach to experimental composition (primarily electronic works, but also orchestra and chamber pieces) and focuses on utilizing unique timbres.²² His engagement with this body of historically derived works includes the use of instrumentation that evokes the time periods from which the music is informed and often provides these unique sounds. Krček says he feels this merger of old and new musical approaches, which includes building instruments to facilitate the realisation of his pieces, is a distinctly Czech approach.²³ In an interview with *Harmonie Online*'s Marie Kulijevyčová,²⁴ Krček says he was not always able to obtain the instruments he wanted for Musica Bohemica. He would use instruments borrowed from museums, if available, but many of these were not performance-ready, often being fragile and in various levels of disrepair. Instead, he commissioned makers to build them or he built them himself, working regularly with wood craftsman and luthier Vladimír Dufek. Filips feels that Krček gained some of his popularity and appreciation through his home-built instrumentation, suggesting that an increased level of perceived authenticity of his music came from his decision to make and use certain folk instruments deemed to be Czech, such as the *famfrnoch* (another percussion instrument played commonly in Czech folk music) and the *vozembouch*.²⁵

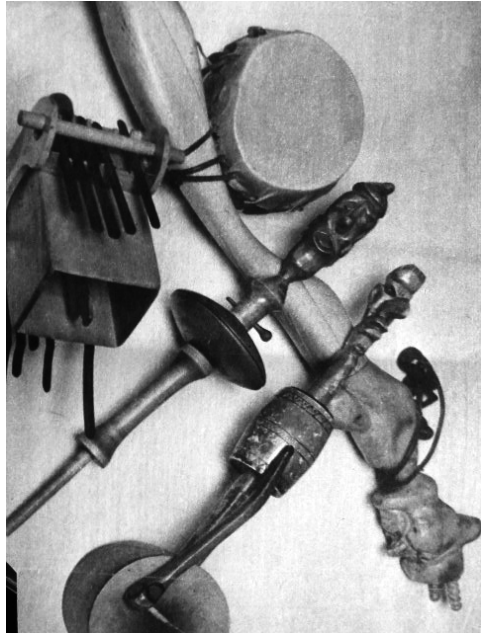
²¹ For a detailed discussion of historical performance issues and perceptions of accuracy and authenticity, see R. Taruskin, "The Authenticity Movement Can Become a Positivistic Purgatory, Literalistic, and Dehumanizing," *Early Music* 12(1) (1984), 3–12; R. Taruskin, *Text & Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 383; R. W. Duffin, ed., *A Performer's Guide to Medieval Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 601; J. Butt, *Playing with History: The Historical Approach to Musical Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 267; and B. Haynes, *The End of Early Music: A Period Performer's History of Music for the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 283.

²² J. Krček, *Vánoční zpěvy z doby husitské*. (sound recording) Supraphon 1117 2985 G, 1981.

²³ J. Krček, *České lidové písně*. (sound recording) Panton-Supraphon CD 10980-10981, 1995/2010.

²⁴ M. Kulijevyčová, interview with Jaroslav Krček, *Harmonie Online*, 13 April 2006, <http://www.casopisharmonie.cz/rozhovory/rozhovor-s-jaroslavem-krckem.html>.

²⁵ Author's interview with H. Filips (2014).



Picture 3. Jaroslav Krček's tabletop vozembouchy

One vozembouch construction design manifestation that Krček introduced to Czech culture was the “tabletop vozembouch” (also called *semtambouch* by music critic Lubomír Fendrych²⁶). According to Krček,²⁷ standard sizes of vozembouch (meaning instruments intended to be played while standing, therefore approximately one to two meters in height) were too big for certain common performance situations. He proposed that a much smaller model (approximately half a meter in height or less) would suit travelers, and that performances at smaller, impromptu folk music sessions would benefit from having a smaller, highly portable version of the vozembouch. Krček further surmised that these smaller vozembouchy would not be played by stamping them on the ground, as a more traditional standing performance technique would dictate, but rather by stamping on a tabletop or chair, within reach of a seated player. Seated playing of “traditional-sized” vozembouchy in less formal or more rigorous performance settings seems to be a common technique, but my research has not shown that Krček’s tabletop instruments have gained the same popularity that larger, “standard” vozembouch enjoy. Still, according to Filips,²⁸ these tabletop vozembouchy are recognized as being Czech as much as “full-sized” designs. Many construction factors align when comparing tabletop vozembouchy and full-sized models, so it is not surprising that they are regarded as being the same or similar instruments from

²⁶ L. Fendrych, *Neviditelný pes. Hudba a zvuk*, 2001. <http://archiv.neviditelnypes.zpravy.cz/hudba/010925hud.htm>.

²⁷ Author's interview with H. Filips (2014).

²⁸ Ibid.

the same culture. Although the ergonomically informed placement of battery and strings on tabletop vozembouchy are adjusted for their height and expected performance techniques, the staples of the design remain the same, and they still feature the resonators, strings, bells, jingles, cymbals, and even the bottom protection on the stamping end, and wooden heads on the top. Furthermore, it appears that self-built vozembouchy have increased the ways in which Krček's musical efforts support his call to embrace folk music as a means to maintain and develop Czech cultural heritage.²⁹

Krček, then, in a manner of speaking, bridges folk traditions with classical mentalities and brings forth the use of, and self-built nature of, folk instruments to a platform valued as being upper class, acceptable to the Soviet government of the time, and propelling the trend of using folk music and folk instruments in a classical context embraced by many Czech composers. Dvořák, Smetana, and Janáček, among others, have had considerable impact on Western concert music, building what has been seen as a legacy of "Czech music,"³⁰ as well as assisting in establishing various class associations and traits within and outside of Czech social circles.³¹

Krček suggests indirectly that some of his incentive for arranging and performing Czech folk music-based material was to retain the Czech musical traditions in the face of Soviet occupation and oppression.³² The USSR encouraged the Czech people to create works that were for and about the Czech people (and the Soviet government), but this activity was heavily regulated and it was also encouraged to make creative efforts that perpetuated "forward motion" culturally and socially speaking.³³ Krček made Czech folk-song arrangements that contained elements of Western classical music to appeal to the Soviet sense of the upper or educated class while simultaneously appealing to Czech classical music enthusiasts and retaining as much Czech folk/medieval song material as possible. Thus, Krček encouraged his listeners to rethink definitions of what Czech music encompassed and the validity of folk music as an art form, as well as inviting them to re-embrace it, supporting the preservation of Czech cultural heritage in the face of difficult times. Filip

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ As well as being the focal point of extensive musicology research and discussions; for examples of this, see M. Ota, "Why is the 'Spirit' of Folk Music So Important? On the Historical Background of Béla Bartók's Views of Folk Music," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 37(1) (2006), 33–46; and H. Hollander, "The Music of Leoš Janáček—Its Origin in Folklore," *The Musical Quarterly* 41(2) (1955), 171–176.

³¹ For a detailed discussion of class and status in relation to classical music and musical instruments, see R. C. Kraus, *Pianos and Politics: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggle over Western Music* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 308.

³² J. Krček, *České lidové písně*. (sound recording) Panton-Supraphon CD 10980-10981, 1995/2010.

³³ This was a common approach to regulating and "re-packing" folk music in communist-ruled countries; for a recent example, see Tibet Information Network, *Unity and Discord: Music and Politics in Contemporary Tibet* (London: TIN Press, 2001), 51.

claims that part of re-embracing Czech music and cultural heritage manifested as an increase in performing folk music and building folk instruments, such as vozembouchy.³⁴

The high status associated with Czech classical music composition extends to the making of classical orchestral and concert band instruments. Czech musical instrument manufacturers, such as Bohemia Pianos (pianos and harpsichords) and Amati (brass wind-instrument makers), pride themselves on being part of what they call a “rich tradition” and “a high music culture.”³⁵ Czech-built classical instruments are framed as a high-ranking export commodity, an upper-class vocation focusing on elaborate ornamentation and performance quality, and a prime candidate for financial investments of stockholders. The instruments to which this publication refers range from higher-cost orchestra instruments to instruments that may be played in a folk setting, such as banjos or accordions, but the tone of the discussions describing the manufacture of these instruments is decidedly one of extensive education, high technology, and “world-class trade”, removing the notion of musical instrument construction from what one might consider homemade, “low tech,” or improvised model designs (which may be perceived as associated with vozembouch-making).

This governmental construction of values placed on classical musical instrument-making would suggest a duality of opposing attitudes that may simultaneously have influence on vozembouch-making. On the one hand, a sensibility of separation between upper class and “common people” is established, and therefore a separation between classical music and folk music, which can easily rally folk musicians and the makers of folk musical instruments to actively seek new avenues of construction and materials, almost in a rebellious fashion, leading to a divergence from consistency and machine- or artisan-tooled craftsmanship. On the other hand, great pride is placed on participation in what is referred to as a long-standing Czech tradition, that of the making of musical instruments, and thus the very act of building a vozembouch becomes an act of embracing Czech culture. This notion is extended by suggesting that innovation, durability, and timbral/visual aesthetics strengthen the connection to Czech heritage associations, each of which can be embraced through construction decisions and design. Slavík supported both aspects of this argument, stating that he felt it was the duty of vozembouch players to embrace the Czech tradition of making instruments, but that vozembouch players should not be constrained by the attitudes of classical music enthusiasts, players, or instrument makers, which he deemed elitist.³⁶

³⁴ Author's interview with H. Filips (2014).

³⁵ Taken from a promotional pamphlet published by the Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic; see F. Němeček, “Czech Musical Instruments,” Supplement of *Czech Business and Trade* (1–2) (2006), 28.

³⁶ Author's interview with H. Filips (2014).



Picture 4. Amateur folk musicians with accordion and vozembouch

Part of what Slavík noted as the difference between vozembouch-making and classical musical instrument-building were perceptions of validity with regard to timbre and the visual aesthetics of instruments.³⁷ These are both aspects of vozembouchy that are entangled in a series of connections, making them one of the primary networks of dialectical interaction between the instrument and Czech culture. When describing my research on vozembouchy to Brno-based Neo-Medievalist bagpipe/lute player Richard Závada, I asked him if he was familiar with the instrument. He replied without hesitation, saying, “Oh yes! The old percussion instrument with a devil head on it!” As I discuss below, not all vozembouchy have devil heads, or any heads at all, but contemporary vozembouchy often have a wooden head carved in the shape of a devil that sits above a crossbeam that acts as the nut for string(s), if the model has any, supporting cymbals or jingles. In each of my interviews with vozembouch players/makers, I asked why there was a devil head on the instrument, and, unanimously, I was given a similar response—that vozembouchy make the “sound of the devil.”

A nickname Krátká occasionally uses for the vozembouch is “čertí housle,”³⁸ meaning the Devil’s Violin, which coincides with the idea that vozembouchy have an association with devils. However, this notion is not unique to Czech culture. Deciphering what makes the connection with devils primarily Czech for certain observers is complicated, and blends general historical associations and specific Czech conceptualizations. It is useful, therefore, to discuss both and to highlight dialectical interactions that pertain to both Czech and general European engagements.

³⁷ Author’s interview with V. Slavík (2014).

³⁸ Author’s interview with P. Krátká (2014).

Honza Filipš imparted that vozembouchy were once used in pagan rituals related to protection from devils.³⁹ This idea is modernized and not entirely accurate, but illustrates the Czech association between the instrument and the conceptualization. Information on vozembouchy prior to their incorporation in musical contexts is limited. Based on Lewis's descriptions of the use of percussive sounds in relation to pagan beliefs and rituals in which "rattles [and] jingles are used to warn intrusive entities to withdraw,"⁴⁰ "percussion is associated with and connects to Earth energies [and symbolically] Hell and its devils,"⁴¹ and that "spell casting is enhanced with percussion instruments,"⁴² it would be logical to imagine the vozembouch's predecessors as being devices enhancing pagan rituals to protect people or villages from "negative energy" or "dark forces" and being intended to either drive away these forces or mask the practitioners so they would be seen as fellow entities and therefore ignored, much like the Samhain rituals that have developed into today's Halloween costumes. Vozembouch-like noisemakers could then have provided "the vibration of sound [...] used in natural magic to summon spirits, dispel negativity, and to cleanse, purify, and heal."⁴³

Lewis further elaborates that "demons and devils are Christian (or other organized religion) based constructions that have no place in Pagan/Wiccan rituals or belief systems, but that Poltergeists and similar disruptive spirits do exist in Pagan/Wiccan discourses, and it is these 'Knocking Spirits' (literal translation of the German term poltergeist) that gives rise to stamping, jingling, and percussive sounds being associated with devils and demons, as Christianity (and others) mapped their terms onto the existing Pagan concepts in Medieval times."⁴⁴ In fact, for Czech culture the introduction of Christian concepts of devils can be tied directly to the *Chronica Slavorum* (Chronicle of the Slavs), written by the German monk Helmold of Bosau in approximately 1172.⁴⁵ Helmold described Chernobog, the Slavic Black God of Winter, attributing characteristics to him including horns, wings, black skin, and the head of a disfigured half-man, half-goat covered in black curly hair.⁴⁶ Wendish and Polabian concepts of evil were more forcibly replaced in the 12th century by Helmold and other German clergy who were invited to Bohemia by Vladislav II to enrich university studies and library holdings as part of a politically driven

³⁹ Author's interview with H. Filipš (2014).

⁴⁰ J. R. Lewis, *Witchcraft Today: An Encyclopedia of Wiccan and Neopagan Traditions* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1999), 299.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 323.

⁴³ Ibid., 420.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 76–77.

⁴⁵ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Helmold of Bosau," 17 April 2015, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Helmold-of-Bosau>.

⁴⁶ J. Lumpkin, *Fallen Angels, the Watchers, and the Origins of Evil* (Blountsville, AL: Fifth Estate, 2006), 126.



Picture 5. A picture of an early vozembouch, circa 1600

movement to strengthen Czech heritage and thus gain public support.⁴⁷ Röhrich explains that devils, as commonly described today, “appear first during the late Middle Ages. At this time, the outer visual characteristics of the devil appear. The devil is the epitome of ugliness, with horns, hook nose, a limp and a stench. In the 15th century, a devil with a horse’s foot appears for the first time. Earlier, he had clawed feet, such as those found in birds of prey.”⁴⁸ Features such as these do, in part, match many of the devil depictions on vozembouchy made by 20th- and 21st-century Czech builders/players, but how and when did these visual characteristics become commonplace in vozembouch construction? Slavic folklore and religious studies specialist Walt Richmond says that although Slavic ritual items, such as wands or musical instruments used in pagan rituals, would have had depictions of supernatural beings on them in the form of carvings, he also states that the motif of the devil would be a late mutation of these depictions, not appearing until as late as the 19th or even 20th century.⁴⁹

The earliest example of a vozembouch, according to Tyllner, is a surviving artifact housed at the National Museum of Prague and built in the mid-1500s.⁵⁰ A woodcut from

⁴⁷ J. F. N. Bradley, *Czechoslovakia: A Short History*. Short Histories of Europe Series, 2 (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1971), 6.

⁴⁸ L. Röhrich, “German Devil Tales and Devil Legends,” *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 7(1) (June 1970), 23.

⁴⁹ W. Richmond, email conversation with the author (2015).

⁵⁰ Tyllner, *Lidová kultura*, 700.

the same period has been reproduced in the publication *Knížka o houslích* by Micka.⁵¹ Given the information above, it would not be out of place to find a carved wooden devil's head atop these instruments, but neither vozembouch have such an adornment. In fact, as Richmond predicted, it is not until after World War I that devil heads begin to appear on vozembouchy (see discussion below), but that does not mean that the instrument was not associated with the concept of devils. Tracing the evolution of vozembouch performance settings makes this clear.

It is not documented exactly when vozembouchy started being incorporated into musical settings, but Tyllner outlines vozembouch performance as commencing somewhere prior to 1500, when the instruments were used to create “hollow bass tones” intended to accompany melodic instruments.⁵² A performance technique used in addition to stamping the instrument on the ground, and with greater prevalence, was bowing the cat-gut string that was a consistent design feature for vozembouchy in the 16th and 17th centuries.⁵³ Kunz's *Encyclopedia of Czech, Moravian, and Slovakian Folk Music Instruments* lists primarily lutes and woodwinds as ensemble instruments that used vozembouchy for drones and pedal tones as well as rhythmic enhancements.⁵⁴ Typically, ensembles would perform music that possessed an element of humor and often accompanied puppet shows by traveling puppeteers.⁵⁵ Petra Hubálková tells us that puppet performances during the Middle Ages up to the Enlightenment period typically consisted of comedies that included popular folk-tale characters.⁵⁶ Röhrich points out that, in general and in German folk culture, “this devil in [...] folk tradition is not completely untheological; however, he is considered as antiquated and belonging to medieval theology, and [has been] passed into the folk tradition. In folklore, the devil is one of the most important and most popular figures. He appears in all the various kinds of folk tradition, in legends, folk beliefs, tales, Christian legends, jokes, anecdotes, folk plays, proverbs and sayings, and in folk customs.”⁵⁷ This can certainly be considered the case within Czech folk culture as well, and notably with the comical personality traits retained and highlighted. Not long after the German introduction of the concept of the Christian devil, “(in the 15th and 16th centuries) the devil became a popular figure of pranks.”⁵⁸ Perhaps this developed through what Lewis describes as

⁵¹ J. Micka, *Knížka o houslích a mnohé kolem nich* (Praha: Panton, 1975).

⁵² Tyllner, *Lidová kultura*, 700–701.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 701.

⁵⁴ L. Kunz, *Nástroje lidové hudby v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku*, four vols. (Rožnov pod Radhoštěm, Valašské muzeum v přírodě, 2008), 687.

⁵⁵ Tyllner, *Lidová kultura*, 701.

⁵⁶ P. Hubálková, “Puppetry,” *Hello Czech Republic*, 18 October 2010, <http://www.czech.cz/en/Life-Work/Living-here/Puppetry>.

⁵⁷ Röhrich, “German Devil Tales and Devil Legends,” 25.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

poltergeists (or negative entities or forces in pre-Christian concepts) being considered “playful spirits,”⁵⁹ a concept that is congruent with the Slavic concept of *čerti* (devils), which may have developed into character traits for devils in Czech *pohádky* (folk tales). Czech *pohádky* regularly include the antics of devils,⁶⁰ and they are often represented in seasonal cultural, religious, or social events and jovial celebrations, such as *Masopust* (Carnivale), *průvod Svatého Mikuláše* (Saint Nicholas parades), and *Pálení čarodějnic* (*Walpurgisnacht*—primarily witches are depicted at this celebration, but Death (*Smrt*) and devils also regularly appear).⁶¹ Hana Tillmanová, a Czech dance historian and performer of historically informed dance and music, recounts that *vozembouchy* “[are] ideal to play wherever there is a need to attract attention and where people want to be entertained. [One] can expect [to hear *vozembouchy*] most in folk music, at events such as feasts, carnivals, Easter processions, and in informal settings—family celebrations or federal ones [meaning nationally embraced events], in conjunction with accordion, violin, brass, or guitar, and of course singing. [*Vozembouchy* would not be heard at] funerals and celebrations of national holidays, but I can imagine [a *vozembouch* being played] on the stage of the National Theatre—[for example] in [a production of] *The Bartered Bride* in a procession of comedians.”⁶² According to this assessment, *vozembouchy* take on the nature of *čerti* as being playful, jovial, mischievous, and are associated with gregarious and boisterous activities, which, in turn, partially informs the intentionalities behind their design.

In an effort to explain that devils, specifically Czech *čerti*, are not necessarily evil, as a more fundamentalist Christian view would describe, Ondřej Honc escorted me to the Muzeum čertů in Uštěk. Here there is a gallery of devil-related artworks, a tour of a series of underground rooms with exhibits and performances about *čerti* intended for very young audiences, and a shop selling *čert*-related merchandise. The theme and demeanor of the establishment is definitely humorous and deemed suitable for all ages. Honc asked the hostess and part-curator how the museum came to be, and her answer was that fellow curator, artist, and *vozembouch* maker Jaroslav Stejný felt the need to ensure that children knew *čerti* were not bad, just often misunderstood or ignorant, and not something to be afraid of. The representations of *vozembouchy* in the museum are extensive, with many paintings, sculptures, puppets, and mechanical automatons depicting *čerti* playing *vozembouchy* (somewhat ironic given the history of the instrument), as well as a large *vozembouch* made by Stejný that greets visitors in the lobby.

⁵⁹ Lewis, *Witchcraft Today*, 191.

⁶⁰ For examples, see *Zapomenutý čert* (Drda. 1985:60–82), *O statečné princezně* (Lada. 1983:5–24), or Jan Teufel’s collection *Čertovské pohádky* (Praha: Nakladatelství Vilém Šmidt, 1993).

⁶¹ M. Kratochvíl, conversations with the author (2014a).

⁶² H. Tillmanová, email interview with the author, trans. by R. Závada (2015).



Picture 6. The vozembouch in the lobby of the Muzeum čertů

So how does the playful nature of the devils with which vozembouchy are intertwined dialectically engage the construction of the instrument? Perhaps the performance settings can offer some answers. Referring back to Tillmanová's comment that vozembouchy are used to simultaneously enhance exhibitionism and bring an air of joviality to celebratory or informal music performances suggests that spectacle is an important element of vozembouch performance. In terms of the visual and timbral aspects to which construction and design can contribute, ornamentation and outstanding sounds may become highly desirable. The inclusion of noisemakers in vozembouch design can be seen as both valuing attention-gathering sounds and dictating the sonic qualities of vozembouchy in parades, festivals, and folk music performances.

Visual characteristics of vozembouch may then be valued in similar ways, highlighting designs and features that would be considered festive or even outlandish. Embracing this sensibility can be attained through overall instrument design and through the details of embellishments and material choices within the design. Contemporary models of vozembouch seem to engage festiveness through functional (playable elements) and non-functional (visual only) instrument dressings and what I call "diablomorphism," or the manifestation of characteristics of concepts of devils. Before I define diablomorphism further and outline its possible connections with the construction-culture-history network in which vozembouchy exist, I will review other historical periods of vozembouch performance style, settings, and construction.

From use in pagan rituals (most likely by a precursor to the instrument documented in the 1500s), the vozembouch eventually became a musical instrument, potentially after ~900 AD, after Rostislav, the leader of Great Moravia, invited the Greek Christian church to send the monks Cyril and Methodius to attempt to convert his people to Christianity. As Christianity became more established, two styles of practice emerged: Latin-rite sects that embraced a more strictly Greek version of Christianity and Slavic-rite sects that merged Greek Christianity with local pagan practices, shifting the emphasis from sacred to secular in regards to some pagan practices.⁶³ Tyllner suggests also that the appearance of vozembouchy in a musical context may have come after the introduction of the concept of music in a Western compositional context took root.⁶⁴ Tyllner and Tillmanová agree that the first ensembles were probably trios of traveling minstrels accompanying puppet shows or street performers.⁶⁵ Vozembouchy at that time were most likely stamped on the ground, based on the assumption that the name was similar or the same and knowing that there were jingles/rattles attached to the instrument, but we also know that the vozembouch in the earlier Middle Ages was primarily a bowed instrument, providing a pedal tone.⁶⁶ Not enough is known about the performance techniques used beyond that it created a low, probably loud sound. No one can say if the instrument was melodic in terms of playing various notes during a performance, whether the pitch was changed with fingertips without a fingerboard (like a Chinese *erhu*), with the back of the fingernail (like a Mongolian *morin khuur*), or with a slide or movable nut (like a Brazilian *berimbau*). The general consensus from Tyllner, Kunz, and Kurfürst is that the vozembouch was more akin to a *tromba marina* and used as a single-note drone monochord, re-tuning as necessary to fit the scales of different songs.⁶⁷ What is known is that a larger horsehair bow was used, and that the resonator was made from an animal bladder, which often also served as the bridge for the string. Tyllner and Kurfürst both describe the sound as being loud and “hollow.”⁶⁸ There is no way of determining if this description is correct and, furthermore, if the bowed-string timbre represented the sound of the devil at the time, but, given the associations outlined by musicologist Todd Sullivan and a discussion on the anthropology website EsoterX, bowed string instruments have been connected to devils (Christian and pagan) since AD 200, and documentation of European associations between devils and bowed string instruments appear sporadically from the 8th century and more regularly from the 1500s.⁶⁹

⁶³ Bradley, *Czechoslovakia: A Short History*, 6–7.

⁶⁴ Tyllner, *Lidová kultura*, 700.

⁶⁵ Tyllner, *Lidová kultura*, 700, and Tillmanová, email interview with the author (2015).

⁶⁶ Tyllner, *Lidová kultura*, 701; and P. Kurfürst, “Co je to vozembouch?” *Melodie* (1977), 278.

⁶⁷ Tyllner, *Lidová kultura*, 701.

⁶⁸ Tyllner, *Lidová kultura*, 700, and Kurfürst, 279.

⁶⁹ T. Sullivan, “Instrument of the Devil,” liner notes for R. Barton, *Instrument of the Devil*. Cedille Records CDR041, 1998; and EsoterX, “The Devil’s Fiddle: Mephistopheles the Music Man,” 1 December 2012, <http://esoterx.com/2012/12/01/the-devils-fiddle-mephistopheles-the-music-man/>.

Still, sonic associations cannot be drawn from textual references, but it is fair to say that the associations of devils followed the instrument from the ritual context to the performance context, including the timbral qualities and, as a result, the construction design.

The timbres and associations that developed alongside concepts of devils are also, necessarily, part of a larger network of social and cultural interactions. Röhrich states that “legends and folk tales are or contain cultural-historical incidents that reflect the mentalities, beliefs, social and cultural contexts in which they were told originally.”⁷⁰ This would most likely extend to the folk-tale-based puppet shows accompanied by the vozembouch ensembles, generating a new series of connections that would include new or additional political and moral value commentary. Tyllner and ethnomusicologist Matěj Kratochvíl describe protest performances called “cat serenades,” which entailed an ensemble (typically, if not always, including a vozembouch) playing loudly under the window of a political figure or prominent citizen, depicting them as being immoral or corrupt, in fact often likening them to a devil or perhaps even as being possessed by one (metaphorically speaking).⁷¹ While there is no direct evidence that cat serenades contributed to the development of vozembouch construction, it is known that the cat serenade ensembles grew out of the traveling minstrels and puppet performances (in the 1500s to 1600s) and altered their instrumentation to purposefully increase the volume and “harshness” of the timbres being incorporated, adding accordions, brass, guitars, hurdy-gurdies, and additional percussive noisemakers (from approximately the 1600s to the 1700s).⁷² During this 300-year period, vozembouchy went from being bowed with a horsehair bow, which was potentially more gentle, to being bowed with a wooden stick with saw-toothed notches carved along its shaft, which, when dragged across the strings, made what possibly would be a louder, more audible sound.

The history of vozembouchy seems to have been less well documented during the Enlightenment, however. This paper is drawn from the first steps of investigation on this project, and I hope scholars can uncover much more information on the vozembouch in the future. What can be said, according to Röhrich, is that in German culture, “the Enlightenment rendered devils less ‘demonic’ and rationalism overtook the concept of a devil as a being, likening Hellishness to becoming more of a state which embodies bleak and horrible happenings.”⁷³ While both German and Czech communities experienced similar difficulties, in particular over the past 120 years, a different attitude has been more prevalent within Czech circles, one in which the concept of devils has further embraced the lightheartedness of *čertovské pohádky*, perhaps as a response to German concepts

⁷⁰ Röhrich, “German Devil Tales and Devil Legends.” 25.

⁷¹ Tyllner, *Lidová kultura*, 701; and Kratochvíl, conversations with the author (2014a).

⁷² Tyllner, *Lidová kultura*, 701.

⁷³ Röhrich, “German Devil Tales and Devil Legends,” 25.

or an alternative reaction to hardship, in addition to the extension of joviality already cultivated within the conceptualization of Czech devils. Tangible descriptions of concepts are difficult to define; however, there is still usefulness in outlining the notion that a difference exists. Through acknowledging this difference, it is possible to discuss development of the associations with devils that are specifically Czech and have come to be linked with *vozembouchy*, which has, as we have seen, affected the design and material constituents of the instruments.

Furthermore, *vozembouch* design was influenced by industrialization. As broad a generalization as this may seem, its effects on *vozembouch* construction are clear. Tyllner and Kunz describe gut strings being replaced by iron or copper wire in the early 18th century, and bladder resonators being exchanged for tin cans⁷⁴—both products of factory output. Construction of *vozembouchy* seems to have stabilized until the onset of World War I, when the pool of construction resources and location of construction changed significantly. Czech soldiers in the field would make various instruments to play in ensembles.⁷⁵ Such musical endeavors served to boost morale and maintain cultural traditions that supported nationalism and political causes, and therefore were common when feasible and regularly encouraged by superiors. It is during this time period that the visual documentation of *vozembouchy* begins to be substantial and photographic evidence of designs and material constituents can be assessed.

The self-built nature of *vozembouchy* made in these settings is to be expected. Beyond the standard materials and noisemakers that would be used in a civilian model, materials for soldiers' instruments would be drawn from a new set of resources. According to Honza Filip⁷⁶, cymbals were crafted from door hinges, metal plates, hub caps, and hammered from sheets of tin; (presumably broken) gears and small engine parts became bells and jingles; resonators were no longer just empty tin cans that once contained perishables, but also petrol cans and halved mortar shells grew to be commonplace in *vozembouch* construction. Although, I wasn't able to find specific photographic evidence of this in pictures of Czech troops deployed in WWI, there was significant evidence within photographs of German troops from the same time period (as well as a wide variety of other instruments built by different European military personnel), depicting similar instruments using construction materials of the same description to suggest Czech soldiers followed a similar course when building *vozembouchy* in the field. (For instance, many clear examples can be found in the Cigarbox Guitar World War I photo archive of instruments built on tour.⁷⁷)

⁷⁴ Tyllner, *Lidová kultura*, 701; and Kunz, *Nástroje lidové hudby v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku*, 267.

⁷⁵ Filip, interview with the author (2014).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ N. Lanciano, 2015. Cigarbox Guitar Historical Photo Archives – World War I Homemade Instruments <https://www.cigarboxguitar.com/knowledge-base/world-war-i-photos/>

The impact of necessity on material choices for construction exceeds the obvious substitutions as well, feeding into the status surrounding home-built instruments and, indirectly, continuing to adhere to the concepts of devils. Filipš⁷⁸ talks of Czech soldiers likening German troops to devils and says that he heard of vozembouch players who (jokingly?) made noise with their self-made instruments to ward off enemy forces. The mentality and subsequent actions described here, then, fit the traits of general and Czech-specific associations between vozembouchy and Czech concepts of devils.

Still, carved wooden devil heads did not appear on vozembouchy until after World War I. Richmond suggests that although Christian characteristics attributed to devils would have begun to appear regularly in the 1300s within folk tales and certain forms of entertainment,⁷⁹ resistance to conforming to Christian-enforced changes to traditions would have inhibited the inclusion of devil heads as a living part of folk culture until much later,⁸⁰ when outside conflict would encourage nationalism and strengthen imagined communities. Potentially the devil heads that appeared on similar instruments in other cultures did so at a similar time, and took on the characteristics of the localized concepts of devils in which the incorporation occurred.

This diablomorphism (defined above) simultaneously encompasses a larger scale, reflecting the influence of centuries of religious teachings and practice, as well as degrees of political and social commentary, and a more focused engagement of localized, culturally informed characteristics that semiotically engage identity, heritage, and nostalgia. Diablomorphism within Czech vozembouch construction spans this range. The dialectical interactions that form a network of Czech culture and concepts of devils have, in turn, developed a coexisting series of dialectical interactions that engage the construction of vozembouchy via diablomorphism. It is the network within a network of diablomorphism (the broader, more widely shared network combined with the largely locally informed network) that renders the vozembouch as being recognizably Czech to the body of observers who possess a working knowledge of these dialectical interactions and developments (regardless of the level of consciousness they possess in regards to the networks). Czech-specific diablomorphism is inseparable from, and has developed alongside, Czech-specific timbral and visual design traits. For example, the incorporation of dried seeds or beans in vozembouch resonators in Moravian or Southern Czech-style instruments,⁸¹ and devil heads that exhibit *čertovské pohádky* characteristics, then, are not merely diablomorphism, but Czech diablomorphism.

⁷⁸ Filipš, interview with the author (2014).

⁷⁹ Mostly those directly associated with *pohádky*, such as puppetry.

⁸⁰ Richmond, email conversation with the author (2015).

⁸¹ Kunz, *Nástroje lidové hudby v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku*, 639.

Furthermore, the self-built, unique designs common to vozembouchy can be related to diablomorphism in more abstract concepts. Lewis, when referring to modern-day pagan practices, says creativity is greatly encouraged among Wiccan/Pagan practitioners as a means to connect one's inner self with the spirit world.⁸² Specifically, playing music and building ritual objects are cited as being among the best ways to engage in creativity.⁸³ Richmond says that in pre-Christian Slavic pagan cultures, talismans would have been made to facilitate this link between creativity and spirituality, and that "there is no doubt that [vozembouchy] were originally talismans that generated noise (through jingles, drums, strings, or other devices) to ward off evil spirits" prior to their use in a musical context.⁸⁴ This would link directly to the building of vozembouchy and their use in performance.

Instilling a vozembouch with traits that emulate devils requires a preconception of a devil's characteristics. Given that devils are "supernatural" and cannot be physically studied or referenced, makers of vozembouchy must rely on their individual perceptions of devils to produce their artistic renditions of them. This is not to exclude the argument that a maker's technical ability, accessibility to equipment and materials, artisan training, and economic considerations play a role in the manifestation of a finished product from its conception,⁸⁵ but these crafting factors do not negate the reliance on personal notions of a devil's traits, beyond what would be encountered in depicting a more tangible subject. The unique designs of vozembouchy and the homemade aspects surrounding the construction of the majority of instruments would, then, extend the dialectical interactions between construction and Czech culture.

According to Filipš, because folk music was one of the less-regulated ways in which cultural heritage could be embraced following World War II, when Czechoslovakia was under the wing of the Soviet Union, there was a sort of revival of folk music that gradually built up until the 1970s, especially after Charter 77 was written,⁸⁶ and then more strongly as Krček more publicly promoted the embrace of folk culture, equating it to "high culture" and placing it at a similar level of importance to classical music and university-level education. I suggest that it was during this period that the first devil heads began to appear consistently on vozembouchy. Research is still being conducted, but to date I have uncovered no model of vozembouch with any semblance of a devil head prior to the 1990s. Reisig remembered his grandfather building a vozembouch with a devil head when he was a child, placing that construction around 1960, and Reisig built his first vozembouch (with a head)

⁸² Lewis, *Witchcraft Today*, 419.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Richmond, email conversation with the author (2015).

⁸⁵ See Sennett, *The Craftsman*; and Keller and Keller, 2008.

⁸⁶ Filipš, interview with the author (2014); and H. G. Skilling, "Charter 77 and the Musical Underground," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 22(1) (1980), 1–14.

in 1977. He claims that, at the time he began to play with his first self-built vozembouch, he did not know of other vozembouch players, and only began to see others enter the folk music scene in his area (Liberec, Czech Republic) in approximately 1990.⁸⁷ Photographs of vozembouchy after Soviet forces left the Czech Republic almost all exhibit wooden heads.

Today it seems that heads on vozembouchy are not only common but also preferred, and are seen as a traditional approach to construction. The values placed on folk music, vozembouchy, and their construction have evolved to alter the concepts of the ways in which they engage Czech culture and society. Folk music revivals can instigate these changes. Livingston and Boyes describe the rise of interest in folk music culture outside of a folk setting as being typically brought about through engagement by upper-middle class enthusiasts.⁸⁸ While the resurgence of Czech folk music and instruments was not a thriving trend to rekindle or an “all but forgotten” tradition, the model Livingston uses to discuss folk music revivalism is applicable. Economic support for building vozembouchy is less likely to have taken place on a level that would contribute to an increase of instruments or the ways in which they are built, but indirect engagement with other thriving entities may have had an impact. As folk music became more acceptable and well-known to an audience who also strongly embraced classical music, for example, the values placed on classical music (and orchestral instruments) would reconfigure the values of folk music (and folk instruments). Ondřej Honc argues that the adornment of heads on classical instruments, such as angel/cherub heads on viola da gamba, for example, were initially a reflection of the ways in which the sounds those instruments made were associated with their audience, specifically upper-class listeners. He likens the introduction of devil heads on vozembouchy to this, not only in terms of sounds, as discussed above, but also in terms of class association, with vozembouch makers recognizing a difference in audience class, but still emulating the parallel classical music mentalities.⁸⁹ Livingston says that the interest in folk music from new groups of enthusiasts, specifically those outside a folk culture setting, would engage with folk music (and thus instrument-building) in an attempt to perpetuate or propel the scene, introducing new outlets for folk music to be heard, expanding the possibilities for a folk music industry, and affording the emergence of additional performance settings and folk music-related businesses.

After the Soviet withdrawal, the development of tourism⁹⁰ directly engaged folk music and led to the appearance of buskers performing on vozembouchy, wider publicity for

⁸⁷ Reisig, Interview with the author (December, 2014).

⁸⁸ See T. E. Livingston, “Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory,” *Ethnomusicology* 43(1) (Winter 1999), 66–85; and G. Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology & the English Folk Revival* (No Masters Co-Operative; 2nd ed. 2010)

⁸⁹ Honc, interview with the author (October, 2015a).

⁹⁰ The Ministry for Regional Development, responsible for tourism, was formed in 1993 (Czech Tourism, 2015).

existing folk music festivals at which *vozembouchy* are played, and the mass production of *vozembouchy*. Livingston also refers to the ways in which folk music evolves through enthusiasts' attempts to maintain a revival's activity. She outlines that traditionalism is more strongly embraced at the onset of a revival (be it historically accurate or reconstructed), but later, when the revival has settled into stability within a culture, innovations take place to revive interest in the folk music scene.⁹¹ In relation to *vozembouch* construction, I offer that a spectrum of current folk music performance styles and settings facilitates the innovation Livingston suggests, bringing forth another layer of dialectical interactions that engage design and material choices.

Contemporary settings for *vozembouch* players range from performances that may be considered more traditional to styles and settings far removed from tradition. In addition, *vozembouchy* have appeared in non-musical contexts, in part because of their iconic construction. Folk music is still quite alive and vigorously embraced in the Czech Republic. Folk festivals take place almost every month, primarily during the spring and summer, but the Czech Folklore Society lists 386 festivals and local groups that host events throughout the year. These festivals pride themselves on presenting modern versions of historically informed music and dance, which often includes a *vozembouch* built to reflect the current concept of an authentic traditional instrument, with tassels and colorful dressings to accompany the tamborine resonator, cymbals, wire strings, and wooden heads. Function bands who perform at celebrations where traditionalism is highly appreciated and expected will include a *vozembouch* in their instrumentation; for example, wedding bands or groups playing at town-wide events, at least while performing outdoors, will employ an ensemble of accordion, saxophone, or trumpet, a lower-tuned drum such as a marching snare, an altered floor tom from a drum kit, or a *davul/tapan* bass drum, and a *vozembouch* to accompany vocals by the entire group. Even indoors, when the bands change instrumentation to a rock band line-up, a *vozembouch* may still remain in the performance to bridge the modern and the traditional. Buskers seeking to evoke a sense of exoticism for passing tourists will often use a *vozembouch* to introduce a visual and sonic element (often a comical one) with which potential patrons may not be familiar.

Vozembouchy played in these settings primarily embrace what is currently considered to be a more traditional construction, but still with tolerance and appreciation for innovative alterations and uniqueness of design. The heads on *vozembouchy* today still tend to portray devils, but, as Slavík pointed out, "any head will do, as long as [your *vozembouch*] has one!"⁹² Judging from recent photographs, devils are not the only *pohádky* characters to be depicted. *Vodník* (a water spirit), *smrt* (the personification of Death), *čarodějnice* (witches), and *šášek* (jesters) heads have joined *čerti*. Popular culture has also made an

⁹¹ Livingston, "Music Revivals", 69–71, 82.

⁹² Slavík, interview with the author (2014).



Picture 7. Viktor Slavík and his vozembouch featuring Pat from *Pat a Mat*



Picture 8. Jaroslav Reisig's newest vozembouch, featuring the head of a *vodník*

impact on the choice of vozembouch heads. One of Reisig's vozembouchy has the head of a character from a cartoon, and Slavík's singular working vozembouch has the head of Pat from *Pat a Mat*, the claymation series written for children that features stories of construction projects.

Rock bands that do not perform at traditional folk music-based functions have also been known to incorporate a vozembouch. Tata Bojs, a Prague-based band, enhance their alternative pop-rock music with a vozembouch and, although used humorously, I was shown a video of a Czech black metal band who had a person dressed in a devil costume playing a vozembouch made out of a shovel on stage with them.⁹³ Even non-musical public figures embrace vozembouchy to exhibit connections to Czech culture. Politicians attempting to appeal to potential voters who highly value nationalism or traditionalism have used photographs of themselves holding (not playing) a vozembouch for publicity.

⁹³ Anonymous, video shown to author on phone of passer-by during a citywide parade in Pardubice, Czech Republic, 2014.



Picture 9. Former President Václav Klaus with a vozembouch

One nationally acclaimed visual artist and filmmaker, Tereza Janečková, has been outspoken about embracing the vozembouch as a Czech icon. In a television interview on Česká televize, she made a call to other artists and the general population to use vozembouchy in various contexts to increase awareness of its usages and cultural-historical importance. One of Janečková's contributions to this movement was a series of short films that showed her "playing" a vozembouch, heavily edited to create a new version of the soundtrack and visual aspect of the performance reminiscent of techno-electronic dance music.⁹⁴ Regardless of the fast-moving visuals and non-traditional music, the video retains the clear imagery of Janečková's focal point—the vozembouch and its connection to Czech culture. She achieves this through timbral and visual aesthetics that are intertwined with the construction of the vozembouch, launching her campaign by acknowledging and inviting participation in the dialectical interactions with the instrument partially outlined in this paper.

The vozembouch is an interesting and clear example of how an instrument's construction engages various aspects of cultural and social environments. Through the uniqueness of the designs, the values placed on self-built instruments, and the recreation and reinvention of ways to make and use the "sound of devils," the vozembouch is "performing," so to speak, an entanglement of aesthetics, meaning, and catalysts of interjections via the agency of makers, players, and other members of the community of which the instrument is a part.

⁹⁴ T. Janečková, "Vozembouchej," television interview, *Art Mix*, Česká televize, 25 September 2013, trans by A. Honc, 2014, <http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/10123096165-artmix/213562229000007/video/>.

This project is by no means complete, and further investigation is planned for the immediate and distant future. Therefore, new findings may reveal further points of discussion and/or conclusions to help unravel the complex ties between instrument design, material choices, and construction methods, and the web of networks to which these are connected. The work to date, however, is a valuable beginning, and exhibits the usefulness of embracing this research model. The methodology is also not unique to this Czech vozembouchy project. This approach can lead to a deeper understanding of cultural and social engagement in other similar studies, not only focusing on a musical instrument's construction, but also expanding to several material culture topics and beyond, and can afford the researcher the ability to frame or reframe the focus of a study, and to follow the connections between topics and subjects as they emerge, allowing for highly useful information to be brought forward. It is my hope that this paper has shown the usefulness of this methodology and that it will encourage other researchers to utilize the discussions and the suggestions for study outlined within to yield additional exciting, informative, and significant contributions to the study of dialectical interactions and musical instrument research.

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