

Skvorecky novels worth reading

The Bass Saxophone Dvorak in Love by Josef Skvorecky **Lester and Orpen Dennys**

review by Elaine Ostry

overs of music, politics, and good writing can't miss when it comes to Josef Skvorecky. The Bass Saxophone and Dvorak in Love are typical of his work.

The Bass Saxophone, recently translated into English, stems from Skvorecky's early days in the '60's, when he was a writer/ newspaper editor in Czechoslovakia. This book is made up of an essay, "Red Music", and two novellas, "Emoke" and "The Bass Saxophone".

Nostalgia colours these works, and Skvorecky uses music as a means of sharing nostalgia. The sharp edge of political realities, however, keeps Skvorecky from becoming too sentimental.

In the autobiographical essay "Red Music", Skvorecky talks about the repression of both Nazi and Soviet rule in Czechoslovakia, and how they affected the jazz bands there at the time. Skvorecky played jazz as an amateur. To him, music, as an expression of the spirit, transcends politics. Jazz was a form of rebellion against the system. He recalls the strict rules imposed by the Nazis upon the jazz or swing bands.

For example: "strictly prohibited is the use of instruments alien to the German spirit (so-called cowbells, flexatone, brushes, etc.) as well as all mutes which turn the noble sound of wind and brass instruments into a Jewish-Freemasonic yowl (so-called wa-wa, hat, etc.)."

The Bass Saxophone, a novella, plays on the relationship between music and

politics. Here, however, a boy stumbles upon a German jazz-band in rehearsal Perhaps he shouldn't be playing music with the enemy, but they seem like ordinary people, and besides, he's never had the chance to play a bass sax before... Music draws people together; politics separate

"Emoke" is an evocative novella about a love affair that fails before it has a chance to begin. Emoke is the young widow with whom the hero falls in love. The centerpiece of the story is when they dance: Skvorecky's style here is intensely musical and romantic. But misunderstandings ensue due to a spiteful, jealous schoolmaster. The hero later takes his revenge in petty means.

Dvorak in Love is a later work, and not one that concerns itself with politics. This isn't surprising since it is set in the late 1890's. It is aptly subtitled "A lighthearted dream". The novel shows Dvorak's visit to New York. The Bohemian composer encounters not only the New World but new musical forms (such as the blues) that influence him.

The novel is made up of various anecdotes and letters. Each chapter, with a few exceptions, is told from the point of view of a different character. Like Skvorecky's other works, Dvorak in Love is nostalgic and, yes, somewhat sentimental. As the title hints, it is a love story, and one that's both funny and sad. The characters are very interesting, although on a first reading it's disappointing that you never hear from Dvorak himself. Skvorecky has a great ability to recreate the setting of an America just beginning to feel its strength.

Josef Skvorecky, now living in Canada, shows a remarkable understanding and empathy for both European and American situations in these two novels. Both are well worth reading.





C.A.B. CAFETERIA (Central Academic Building) Wednesday, October 5 • 11 am-1:30 pm and 4:30 pm-6:30 pm

Roast Tom Turkey (with Sage Dressing and Cranberry Sauce)

Baked Virginia Ham (with Honey-Mustard Sauce)

- · Creamy Mashed Potatoes

Pilgrims Pumpkin Pie

\$3.99

LISTER HALL Thursday, October 6 • 4:30-6:00 pm

Roast Tom Turkey (with Sage Dressing and Cranberry Sauce)

Baron of Alberta Beef (with Horseradish - carved to order)

- Oven Roasted Potatoes
- Kernel Corn
- Glazed Baby Carrots
 Pilgrims Pumpkin Pie

\$3.99

Pilgrim's Special:

Pumpkin Pie and Medium Coffee or Tea \$1.65 Served at all Housing & Food Service locations, from

University of Alberta Housing and Food Services

