



ON AIR
Radiožurnál
Český rozhlas

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Regular radio broadcasting began on May 18, 1923 at 8:15 pm in a tent borrowed from the Boy Scouts.



Interior of tent, May 18, 1923

IT ALL BEGAN IN A TENT (1923)

Radiojournal, the station that would later become Czech Radio, began its broadcast on May 18, 1923. A mere six months after the first broadcast of the oldest national broadcasting organization in the world, the BBC.

It was a time packed to the brim with positive energy. The world war had ended not long ago, and it seemed as though radio would be able to get everyone on the same jazzy wavelength.

Three centuries later, the Czechs finally shed their uncomfortable propinquity with Austria, and began to enjoy their renewed independence. Nothing was impossible, people reacted to new challenges with pep and without formality.

The first broadcast of Radiojournal boasted the same lack of formality. The transmitter stood near the Kbely airport just outside of Prague. The studio was right next to it, inside a tent borrowed from the Boy Scouts. A carpet was laid out on the grass and on it stood a piano, even though its wheels sank into the soil.

There was only one radio receiver in the whole of Prague. It was placed in front of the screen at the Sanssouci movie theatre, where the cream of the crop from the city gathered. The majority of the first historical broadcast consisted of music, even opera singer Růžena Topinková sang a tune for the microphone. The production was befallen by a thunderstorm and a wet dog made his way into the tent, thus ensuring the very first live broadcast of barking in the history of radio.



Public radio broadcast of football match, 1926.



Public broadcast of sporting event, taking place in front of city bank, sound operator Mr. Vlach and director Ed. Svoboda

A WINNERS' PODIUM (1926)

A lot has changed since then. Czechoslovak Radio resides under a more traditional roof, and dogs are, for the most part, no longer allowed on air. However what has remained true is that Czechoslovak Radio holds the position of one of the best radio houses in the world, and its employees still resolve issues without unnecessary formality. Radio stations from across the globe had always tried to cover the most enticing of sporting events. Their lack of success could always be attributed to technical difficulties. Sportsmen could not be brought into the studio as opposed to actors or singers and stadiums and pitches could not be broadcast from.

Radiojournal, today known as Czech Radio, aired the first sports broadcast on August 2, 1924. It was a boxing match. In one corner, we had the Czechoslovak champion

František Růžička, also known as Frank Rose, and in the opposite corner we had British heavyweight champion Harry Rock Knight. The radio audience heard about the development of the thrilling match with considerable delay. The commentator spoke into a telephone, on the other side a reporter wrote everything down on paper, which was then brought into the studio, where the moderator read it into the broadcast.

The first real sports report broadcast directly from the venue took place on October 3, 1926. It still holds up as the first ever continental sports broadcast. The football match between SK Slavia Praha and Magyar TK Budapest took place on the Letná plane, and was commented by legendary commentator Josef Laufer. The Czechoslovaks won 2:1, and although it may not have been apparent then, it was then and there that the phenomenon of virtual reality was established.



News caster Karel Maňoal during the Prague uprising in 1945.



Josef Stanislav Krofta (bottom left with gun), former sheriff's deputy in New York, shortly after defending the Strašnice radio transmitter against the SS.

VERDAMMT! WHERE IS THE BROADCASTING STUDIO? (1945)

It was the broadcasting of Czech Radio that kicked off the Prague uprising, which took place on May 5, 1945. As of six o'clock in the morning, the broadcasters spoke solely in Czech and played songs by Karel Hašler, a singer tortured to death by Nazis at the Mauthausen concentration camp, and many forbidden Czech songs.

At this point, the Nazis were presented with the chance to verify the saying that the pen, or word in this case, is mightier than the sword. Although a solid one hundred army men, all armed to the teeth, and with the infamous Waffen SS soldiers among them, searched the whole building, they were unable to stop the insurrectionary broadcast. The “laughing

beasts” (a nickname given to the Czechs by one of the most powerful men of the Third Reich, Reinhard Heydrich) managed to remove all German navigation signs from the building, and the SS therefore couldn't find the studio from which the broadcast was emitted. The bloody battle for the Radio lasted until May 9, until Prague was definitely freed by the Red Army.

In their onslaught on Czech Radio, the Nazis utilized tanks, cannons from armoured trains, and bombardment from the state of the art turbojet plane Messerschmitt Me 262. Though that may be the case, they failed to conquer or destroy it. The brave Czech patriots – workers from Czech Radio, soldiers, policemen and other rebels – did not hesitate to lay their lives down during the Battle for the Radio. Thanks to their sacrifice and bravery, a free broadcast prevailed through a hailstorm of bullets, a feat unprecedented in any of the cities under Nazi occupation.



Prague, August 21, 1968, image by Josef Dostál.



Prague, August 21, 1968, image by Josef Dostál.

RADIO WITH A HUMAN FACE (1968)

After the victory of the Communist party in the parliamentary elections of 1946, Czechoslovakia quickly became a mere satellite of the Soviet Union. A stern dictatorship of the working class was installed. Thousands of people ended up in labor camps, prison, or even a scaffold. The state seized ownership of large factories, mines and small businesses. The situation improved at the beginning of 1968. The parliament dissolved the strict censorship. People were suddenly allowed to speak about the politically motivated trials of the 1950s, as well as current issues. The new “socialism with a human face” was a huge hit.

But not with everyone. The Soviet Army returned to Prague during the night between August 20 and 21. This time around, they entered as invaders acting upon the invitation of five Czechoslovakian traitors. When faced with political

pressure Czechoslovak Radio did not buckle. A steady stream of uncensored information about the invasion of the armies of the Warsaw pact was being broadcast. The newscasters urged the public to stay safe and engage in forms of nonviolent protest against the invaders. And so, once again, Prague bore witness to another battle for Radio.

The Soviets sent a total of six tanks to destroy the free radio they feared so much. The building was however guarded by hundreds of Prague citizens, who cleverly managed to destroy three of them, despite being almost unarmed. Driving a pickaxe into the oil tank set the juggernaut ablaze. Although the invaders managed to seize control of the building of Czechoslovak Radio in during the morning hours of August 22, the free broadcast was still airing from hidden locations. Within the first three days, the Soviets took control of the Communist party, the government, newspapers and television. The Radio thus remained the nation's only source of unbiased information, and remained so until September 13, 1968. On that day, full censorship was reinstated.



Demonstration at Wenceslas Square, 1989, image by Jan Šibík.



A photograph of Václav Havel, Autumn, 1990, image by Jan Šibík.

VELVET ETHER (1989)

The communist regime was well aware that public opinion is best swayed using mass media, and therefore held them with a stern grip. In the second half of 1989, it became very apparent that due to incompetent leadership, the rule of the Bolsheviks is coming to an end.

The police forces, boasting the ironic name of “Public safe-guard” brutally suppressed a student demonstration taking place in Prague on November 17. The crackdown became the fuse which ignited the Velvet Revolution.

In the upcoming days the public expressed their distaste for the state and content of the broadcasting right outside of the building of Czechoslovakian Radio. And so, for the first time since 1968, live, free and unbiased journalism returned to air.

Czechoslovakian Radio joined in the nationwide strike of university student on December 11, 1989. The jingle of the main news casting segment based on “Kupředu, leva!” (Forward, by the left!), a patriotic Soviet song, symbolically fell silent three days later. Instead of censored content, the radio station aired forbidden authors. The station was no longer a tool for tyrants, but a medium of public service and objective information. Let us hope it stays that way.

CZECH RADIO TODAY

NATIONWIDE STATIONS

Radiožurnál

The fastest news service, providing news from home as well as from abroad: politics, economy, culture and sport. Interviews, interesting tidbits and current affairs.

Dvojka

Entertaining, history focused, and musical programs, readings in multiple installments, and radio drama. A large part of the broadcast is taken up by a steady stream of music and contributions from the moderators.

Vltava

All of culture in one place. Original literary work, radio drama and reading. Classical music, jazz, pop, news casting, interviews, interesting personalities and commentary.

Plus

Only spoken word, no music. In depth current affairs and news. Discussions with politicians, scientists and the audience as well. Commentary, analysis, reportage.

Radio Wave

Broadcasting by young people, for young people. Journeys across niche musical genres and overviews of cultural and sports events and social happenings.

Radio Junior

The only live radio for children in the whole of Czech Repub-

lic. Fairytales, songs, reading, games, competitions, helplines and more.

D-dur

An uninterrupted concert of classical music, everything from Renaissance to contemporary music. Insightful commentary from illustrious personalities of the musical world.

Jazz

A 24 hour service dedicated to everything jazz. Presenting a wide array of subgenre, from the beginnings of jazz itself all the way to contemporary fusion, Jazz accents contemporary Czech and European production. News services, concert and album recommendations, regular competitions and a vast archive of jazz related programming.

REGIONAL STATIONS

Regina

Metropolitan radio. News and traffic overviews from Prague. Public integrating programming, reportage, music and entertainment. Programs aimed at ethnic and religious minorities.

Brno | **České Budějovice** | **Hradec Králové** | **Karlovy Vary**
Olomouc | **Ostrava** | **Pardubice** | **Pilsen**
Region – Central Bohemia | **Region – Vysočina**
North | **North – Liberec** | **Zlín**

Czech Radio is a Czech public service institution. It currently hedges nationwide, and regional broadcasting as well as international broadcasting. The very basis of the programme is unbiased, and independent news casting and original literary and dramatic works.

The signal is transmitted via a network of grounded analog and digital transmitters, via internet, cable television and satellite. Czech Radio operates a number of orchestras and music ensembles, organizes cultural and charitable events and publishes the Týdeník Rozhlas weekly magazine.

FOREIGN SERVICE

Radio Praha

A regular Foreign Service broadcast began as early August 31, 1936. Radio Praha broadcasts 24 hours a day in English, German, French, Spanish, Russian and Czech.

ORCHESTRAS AND ENSEMBLES

Prague Radio Symphonic Orchestra

This orchestra stands among the most acclaimed and oldest Czech ensembles, having been founded in 1926. Aside from working for Czech Radio, the orchestra is a welcomed guest in concert halls around the world. The position of head conductor was held by the likes of Otakar Jeremiáš, Karel Ančerl, Ondrej Lenárd and Jaroslav Krombholc. Among the acclaimed guest performers are Václav Talich, Václav Neumann, Gennady Nikolayevich Rozhdestvensky or Charles Mackerras. Legends of classical music such as Sergej Prokofjev, Arthur Honegger, Aram Khachaturian and Krzysztof Penderecki performed their own music alongside the orchestra as well.

Brno Radio Orchestra of Folk Instruments

Gustav Brom Czech Radio Big Band

Legendary musician, conductor, composer, songwriter and singer Gustav Brom founded his jazz Orchestra in July 1940. Working its way up, the big band soon became among the most acclaimed orchestras of its kind in the world. USA based DownBeat magazine placed it among the top ten big

bands in the world. The big band performed in the company of the most stellar of personalities of jazz and pop such as Maynard Ferguson, Dizzy Gillespie, Diana Ross and The Supremes, Ray Conniff, Ray Charles, or Liza Minnelli. The members of the orchestra often author music themselves often merging styles and incorporating classical music.

Radio Swing Orchestra of Václav Hlaváč

It was founded in 2004 by trumpet player and pedagogue Václav Hlaváč. The Orchestra boasts a classical big band format and a repertoire full of well-known swing bands, such as Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman or Count Basie and others.

Disman Radio Children's Choir

It bears the name of its founder Miloslav Disman, an outstanding educationist and radio creator, since 1935. He worked with children with the aim of creating professionals capable of working with artistic word, poetry and song. The members of the ensemble starred in many radio dramas and other programmes and a good number of them grew up to be famous actors.



Czech Radio Symphonic Orchestra, Head Conductor Alexander Liebreich.

Publisher: Czech Radio, Vinohradská 12, 120 99 Prague 2

Copy writer: Petr Stančík

Editors: Anna Vošalíková, Zuzana Matějovská,
Markéta Bouchalová, Dušan Radovanovič, Tomáš Dufka

Translation: Anna Vošalíková

Language Revisions: Mark Henderson

Art Director: Jakub Šolín

Graphic Design: Czech Radio Graphic Studio

Cover photo: Jan Němeček, Tlapka, the Golden Retriever

Photographs: Josef S. Krofta, František Dostál, Jan Šibík,
and Czech Radio Archives

Production: Anna Vošalíková



The trigger to the 1989 Velvet Revolution, image by Jan Šibík.