



## Sound magician in Hradec Kralove



MILUJE KLAVÍRY PETROF. „Moje rodina pochází z Hořic,“ říká v rozhovoru pro Sedmičku guru všech zvuků Mark Levinson. Foto z/ Tomáš Rubelka

**HE LOVES PETROF GRAND PIANOS.** „My family comes from Horice,“ says the guru of all sound experts, Mr Mark Levinson.

### My mother was from Horice, says Levinson



JAZZMAN A ZVUKAŘ. Marku Levinsonovi ušlechtila píana Petrof. „Ten nástroj má duši,“ tvrdí muž s pověstí zvukového mága. Foto z/ Tomáš Rubelka

**JAZZMAN AND SOUND ENGINEER.** Mark Levinson was attracted by PETROF sound. “This instrument has soul,“ says the man with the golden ear.

His mother comes from Horice, but he was born in the United States, where his family had escaped from the Nazis to in the thirties. Today Mark Levinson, one of the most influential sound engineers, is returning to the East of the Czech Republic in order to cooperate with the PETROF Company.

Jana Krejčová/Tomáš Libánek  
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Every branch has its big legend. Movie directors worship Ingmar Bergman, rock musicians Elvis Presley or Jimmy Hendrix. Among sound engineers, the name of Mark Levinson carries the same respect. The greying American jazzman with absolute pitch is now standing beside a grand piano in front of us. In the PETROF Company, he is now trying a new system for music recording.



“We have several new things which we are putting together for the first time in history,” Levinson says.

**What is that?**

I am using a special recording system, which gives new opportunities to musicians. It brings great freedom to them and also an opportunity to express themselves. I have been using the system for some time, but it is the first time I have cooperated with PETROF in the Czech Republic. We are putting together a new recording system, a great pianist and wonderful piano. So we shall see what will happen.

**In which way is the system new?**

It is actually quite a simple idea to let musicians make music naturally. We have an excellent grand piano, Beata Hlavenkova (jazz composer and pianist) will play on it and I will do the recording. I use only two microphones and I can find the best place for them, which is really important. And we do not mix music. It is like back in the twenties, when just one microphone was used for a recording, and that's it. It is an old idea realized with better modern equipment.

**In your life, you have had a chance to collaborate with many important artists. You play many instruments. You study Indian music. Do you think you are more an audio-file or a musician?**

I am a trouble-maker. People think I am a sound engineer or constructor, but my real desire and what pleases me most is to make music. I am absolutely delighted, when I can play. When I was young, I was lucky enough to catch the end of the jazz era so I had an opportunity to play with musicians like John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins and other great musicians.

**These must have been really amazing meetings. Was there anything particular, which pleased you the most?**

When me and my brother were teenagers, we went to a jazz workshop in Boston, where Bill Evans played.

**Did you play with him?**

Are you kidding? No, I listened to him. Of course we played there – me on the trumpet and my brother on the piano. Bill came to us and asked: „What are you playing?“ And we said: „We are listening to you compositions.“ Well, and he gave us his music papers. You see, my brother copied Bill Evans in breaks. These were really amazing times. You know, if I had been more courageous, I would have been a musician. But I would also have been hungry. With recording, you can make money, but I must say that I have always been fascinated and attracted by making music.

**When we are talking about the past; I heard your mother originated in Horice. Is this one of the reasons why you are here?**

No, I am on business here. I have never been to Horice, I must go there one day. My mother comes from a Jewish family Hirsch. They had a textile company in Horice. They escaped when the Nazis came. But not all of them were lucky like my mother. My uncle hesitated. He wanted to stay with his factory and employees there. Finally it was too late for him so he ended up in Auschwitz. After the war, the factory was taken from us. And I was born in America.

**So you came to Hradec Kralove just thanks to your cooperation with PETROF...**

PETROF builds amazing pianos. You have to look for the excellent instrument in which Beata plays today. It is not like when you come to a store and buy it. Most pianos, I repeat most of them, are made for conventional playing. But this grand piano Mistral gives you many more possibilities. It drew my attention mainly by its dynamic range, by its rounded clear tone and by the color of its tones. This instrument has soul.

**What feedback do you expect for this project?**

The music industry is collapsing. Recording companies do not have money, no one wants to buy CDs. It's ok, because this system has never worked anyway. Most of the industry people think that this problem does not have a solution. The industry is paralyzed by fear, but it is important to do something. Otherwise you are finished. Some companies do nothing, but right now here in Hradec Kralove, PETROF and I are preparing really important things for music. We are looking for a part of a solution. And nobody else is doing that.

**SOUND MAGICIAN MARK LEVINSON:**

- was only 21 when he built the mixer through which the Woodstock music festival sound system was fed in 1968.
- played with jazz musicians Sonny Rollins, Paul Bley or Jimmy Garrison.
- has a six months old son Anton.