

From derelict, out-of-tune upright in Nový Jičín to a grand piano in a fully-booked Carnegie Hall; from self-taught musician to one of the best jazz students at the prestigious Berklee College in Boston... The journey of Tomáš Kačo – a pianist endowed with natural talent and immeasurable diligence, but also a composer, singer, and arranger – is a fabulous story of dreams come true. He builds his solo recitals on improvisation, with which he plays out his unique fusion of classics, jazz, and traditional Romani music into inimitable musical landscapes. Tomáš Kačo, the fourth of twelve siblings, began playing the piano at the age of five; but his only tuition was his intuition, and he had to understand the principles of play himself. His first introduction to sheet music, scales, and technique was at music school aged twelve. Looking back, he sees the positive side of his freedom in style and technique: “The fact that I started with improvisation and playing by ear was one of my greatest advantages, as far as musical sensitivity goes.” This was followed by studies at Janáček Conservatoire in Ostrava under the renowned Professor Pavel Motloch, whom Tomáš Kačo considers his personal mentor. His key teacher at the Academy of Music in Prague was Professor Ivo Kahánek. He then “squandered” the prize money from a young composers’ competition on his American opportunity – on the entrance exams to Berklee College in Boston, which he completed after two years of study in 2017. He decided to stay on the west side of the Atlantic.

Thanks to the open environment of one of the best schools of contemporary music in the world, he could begin to see his Romani descent as an interesting distinction and asset, which was exemplified by the programme of his recital in Carnegie Hall in 2018. Subtitled ‘Classical Edge & Gypsy Soul’, the concert was a mix of his own compositions and arrangements of the works of Johann Sebastian Bach and Frédéric Chopin, that is, music that is neither Romani, nor Czech, nor classic, nor jazz – “every listener can take from it what they like.”

Tomáš Kačo has performed numerous recitals in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, Israel, in Kennedy Center in Washington DC, Chicago and Los Angeles. He has had a long-lasting collaboration with Ida Kellarová, including their joint 2010 album *Romská balada* (Romani Ballad), he works with several Czech symphony orchestras, for which he writes arrangements. He openly declares that his stay in the United States is not just for his own sake – he wants his proverbial “musical tenacity” to serve as an example to other Romani children. Although his primary goal is music

itself, music unlimited by genre or style, he trusts that it can also prove an effective weapon against racism and can help find common ground between majorities and minorities. Tomáš Kačo released his first solo piano album entitled *My Home* in November 2018, which was sponsored by the Bakala Foundation. *My Home* features bass player John Patitucci, singers Ondřej Brzobohatý and Veronika Kačo, as well as children Kühn Children's choir. An applause-shaken Carnegie Hall is just one of the paths to his dreams fulfilled – the others include releasing an album of his own works and, one day, perhaps, a Grammy.