An open letter to our Texas Czechs:

As participants and lovers of music from around the United States and across the globe gather at the University of North Texas College of Music for our 3rd International Festival of Czech Music, this occasion has afforded me the opportunity to reflect upon my first two plus years here at UNT.

Even as I came to UNT from Nebraska, which itself has a thriving Czech community, I’ve been delighted and surprised by what I’ve encountered in Texas. One of the many hidden gems I’ve discovered is not only the love of the Texas Czechs for anything related to preserving their heritage, but their tremendous encouragement and financial support of the College of Music in making the world aware that “everything is bigger in Texas” . . . and twice over if it’s related to the Texas Czechs.

In addition to a robust international exchange of performers and scholars, including a longstanding and active student-exchange program with the Janáček Academy of Music in Brno, our partnership with the Texas Czechs has yielded some remarkable, large-scale events.

Many of you, I’m sure, have attended the performances of the Petr Mička cimbalom orchestra and the Stříbrňanka and Moravská Jedenáctka brass bands that we’ve been able to bring to your local communities.

We’ve been able to bring both the Wallinger Quartet and the Škampa Quartet from Prague, as well as pianist Radoslav Kvapil from Brno, for residencies that have brought our students in contact with world-class Czech musicians with whom they might never have been able to study.

We’ve been able to produce three international festivals of Czech music, now being co-sponsored by the Janáček Academy of Music and Palacký University Olomouc. In addition to the on-campus portions of these events, it has become our tradition to tour the state with the keynote works of our festivals—Bedřich
Smetana’s opera Prodaná nevěsta (The Bartered Bride) in 2013, the Česká mše vánoční (Christmas Mass) in 2015 and 2017 and, in just a few weeks, scenes extracted from Leoš Janáček’s opera Příhody lišky Bystroušky (The Cunning Little Vixen).

None of this would have been possible without the generous financial support of the Texas Czechs, and without the encouragement, foresight, and sage advice we’ve received from the Czech Educational Foundation of Texas.

Where will this lead? After only 14 years in partnership with the Texas Czechs, the UNT College of Music has become the leading center of Czech music—both classical and folk—in the United States. I expect that our relationship with the Texas Czechs will grow and strengthen in the years to come to take advantage of opportunities not yet imagined. I cannot wait to see where this all will lead!

With much appreciation,

John W. Richmond, Ph.D.
Professor and Dean
UNT College of Music