

Foreword

It must have been strange those pre-war years in Paris. Cross any street and you might have met Bohuslav Martinů sipping Cordiale Medoc in a café after a concert. You might have seen Ježek, Voskovec and Werich, or Rudolf Firkušný walking along the Seine. You could have seen the painter Jan Zrzavý looking for an ideal subject, or even the incandescent Vítězslava Kaprálová walking arm in arm with Jiří Mucha.

It is tempting to think that something like Czech culture could survive so far from home. But cultures are strange things, easier to mention than to define. More likely we can agree that during the years between 1938 and 1945 at least three closely interlinked musical cultures were destroyed in Czechoslovakia: the German, the Jewish, and the Czech. The Jews were mostly exterminated; the Germans driven out, suppressed, or murdered; and the Czechs, flung wildly about: some were killed, some were exiled, and some few remained to build a new culture.

There is no extant proof, of course, that Kaprálová died because of the war, but it seems certain that wartime played the role of Death's Angel in her case, creating the stress, chaos and displacement that breeds disease. Anything can happen anywhere, but it is difficult to imagine such a vivacious young woman dying in such a way back home in the village of Tři Studně, the family home in Moravia, or during a time of stability in Paris. For all their terror and uncertainty, casualties in battles or death camps are easier to measure than civilian deaths at home.

And we should keep in mind what happens when such young stars die. The argument for individuality is a perilous one, for it causes us to suppress antecedents. This is true, say in the case of Janáček. Biographers usually strive to paint him as a solitary figure on the landscape whose mania for "speech melodies" renders him piercingly individual. But a sure sign of artistic vitality is

the presence of followers. What about Janáček's followers? Some imagine that he was too strange and prickly to have followers. I would disagree and suggest that Janáček's real spiritual followers, those brilliant young Moravian musicians Pavel Haas, Gideon Klein and Vítězslava Kaprálová, did not make it through the war, irrevocably changing the musical begets and the musical languages of those who survived.

But we may move away from death, for this is a classic moment of rebirth, and we find ourselves at Kaprálová's time, her moment. Now that modernism is appropriately identified, not as the only artistic approach, but rather as a powerful and significant movement sharing the stage with other vital artistic movements, Kaprálová and many of her contemporaries can be rescued from something like oblivion. Now that there is a genuine passion for looking at women composers, and evaluating them freshly with many different artistic lenses, Kaprálová can spring into focus in ways we had not considered. Now that technologies allow us to send sound bites across our artistic universe, her aesthetic story can be told quickly and powerfully, and her legacy can be made available to broader and newer audiences. At a time when many feel that the world was robbed of a brilliant generation through death, displacement, and exile, Kaprálová can be part of attempts, taking place throughout North America and Europe, to devote renewed attention to those figures and the places where they lived and died.

The volume you are about to read is the first scholarly effort in English attempting to put the puzzle of Kaprálová together in a coherent form. All historical figures are puzzles. There is no right way to bring history to life, and certainly no correct method for introducing the wonders of a musical work. But this book represents the collective thought of the most serious scholars who have devoted themselves to studying Kaprálová and her work, and sets a high standard for those to follow.

A final word about nation, nationality, and nationalism. Rightly, nationalism has gotten something of a bad rap. The irrational formulations and the actions resulting from toxic "groupthink" have created havoc in places from Bosnia to Bergen Belsen and from Darfur to Rwanda. Continually we find that the effort to create the category of "us" directs negative energies towards "them," whoever they might be. But that is not the entire story. To put it bluntly, if there is a group of Albanians stranded on an island, who is going to get them if not the Albanians? And if there is a seventeenth-century poet-composer who set Czech texts, like Adam Michna, it is unlikely that Icelandic scholars will swoop into action. Rather it is Czechs who will seek to rehabilitate that composer, often as a matter of Czech pride. So if Kaprálová is to be reinvented as a composer for our time, it will be scholars concentrating on Czech musical culture who will lead the way. The hope, of course, is

that one day soon, the buttresses of nation—and gender—will fall away and quickly too, so that such figures as Kaprálová will be recognized without their modifiers, as simply fascinating and valuable creative forces. Then, of course, the modifiers can be reintroduced or not, without undermining the power and individuality of the artist.

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New Rochelle, New York
October 14, 2010