

# The Kapralova Society Journal

A Journal of Women in Music

## Letters to Kaprálová and Other Correspondence of Bohuslav Martinů in the Music History Department of the Moravian Museum in Brno

Kateřina Maýrová



### Special points of interest:

American women composers  
of choral music

### Inside this issue:

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| K. Maýrová: Letters to Kaprálová and Other Correspondence of Bohuslav Martinů in the Music History Department of the Moravian Museum in Brno | 1     |
| G.D. Cannady: American Women Composers of Choral Music   | 6     |
| Publications   | 5, 12 |

Despite its relatively short history, the Music History Department of the Moravian Museum in Brno holds a highly respected place among specialized archives thanks to the modern conception of its acquisitions program and administration. The institution owes its foundation to the initiative of Dr. Vladimír Helfert (1886-1945), a music historian with a far-sighted conception of the tasks of modern musicology, who in 1919 began systematically building a musical archive within the regional museum. In addition to a valuable collection of early manuscripts of musical tablatures, the core of the museum's musical holdings consists of music manuscripts and prints from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, archives of various musical associations, and materials from the estates of Moravian composers of the twentieth century. Over the course of time, this museum has also assembled a significant quantity of written, non-musical archival materials pertaining to Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů, including very valuable and interesting correspondence between him and composers, performers, theatrical artists, teachers, and critics associated with Brno's musical life.

Immensely important as a source of facts is Martinů's correspondence with the Czech composer, music critic, organizer of Brno musical events, and long-time director of the Brno State Conservatory, Prof. **Jan Kunc** (1883-1976). His written communication with Martinů is documented in a collection of twenty letters and one postcard from Martinů, covering the period from 31 January 1928 to 14 August 1935, and eight typewritten copies of Kunc's responses, dated from 5 January 1929 to 19 August 1935. The content of this correspondence has already been aptly described by the Brno composer, pedagogue and musicologist Dr. Zdeněk Zouhar, who

was also Martinů's friend, so here I shall only refer to the most important issues discussed. What should be mentioned above all, are the efforts, over the course of several years, by Prof. Kunc, who became head of the Brno State Conservatory in 1923, to recruit Martinů as a professor of composition. The first document revealing the composer's reaction to this appealing offer is a letter dated 15 December 1928 in Paris:

Dear Sir:

I have received your parcel (the Quartet)<sup>1</sup> and, of course, I consent to your having had a copy made of my composition. As to the job opening, although my situation here is not excellent by any means, I shall not apply for the position because I have different plans, which, though they don't guarantee me a living, I must pursue [to] the end and struggle to bring to fruition. You will appreciate that when I have risked everything I cannot run away from this, even if it is for a position so attractive as the post succeeding Janáček. Since I have held out so long I will hold out to the end, especially because my plans are going well [...]

Prof. Kunc attempted several more times, both verbally and in writing, to get the composer interested in his proposal to nominate Martinů professor of composition at the Brno State Conservatory. The definitive answer - once again negative - came in a letter Martinů wrote in Paris on 23 March 1932.

Another area of communication, on which Martinů's correspondence with Kunc focused, included the possibility of having Martinů's new works performed in concerts and entered in a variety of composer competitions. In the years between the

## Bohuslav Martinů: Letters to Kaprálová

wars, Martinů lived in Paris very modestly and any award, especially the one that carried with it a financial reward, meant a most welcome addition to his household budget, especially after he married Charlotte Quennehen (1894-1931) in 1931.

Another valuable acquisition of the Music History Department of the Moravian Museum is the very personal correspondence between Martinů and the composer **Vítězslava Kaprálová** (1915-40), his twenty-five years younger pupil. They first met in Prague in the spring of 1937. Over the course of the ensuing year, during Kaprálová's stay in Paris where she studied conducting with Charles Munch at the École Normale de Musique, Martinů, a married man by that time, gave in to the irresistible charm of his private composition student and fell hopelessly in love with her. The thirty-seven letters and one picture postcard Martinů wrote to Kaprálová between 11 September and 31 December 1938, plus a single letter from 5 June 1940 written to her when she was succumbing to a sinister illness in a Montpellier hospital (fig. 1) provide a testimony to this amorous passion. In the fateful year of 1938, when the Nazis of Germany no longer concealed their desire to rule the world and when the powers of Western Europe facilitated the realization of Adolf Hitler's plans with their cowardly stance, Martinů - otherwise always a private, introverted man - experienced a double disillusionment. After the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia in Munich he was bitterly disappointed by the policies of France, in whose cultivated and enlightened spirit he had always believed. And in his private life, he was hurt by his woman idol, whose image he had once envisioned so splendidly in the heroine of his operatic masterpiece *Juli-etta*.

As a sample of the letters that Martinů sent to Vítězslava Kaprálová I would like to cite the one written 'on Monday evening' [probably 19 December 1938 in Paris]:

Vitulenko,\*

I am writing to you again because I'd like you to think about me a lot and remember me, and because it seems to me that I'll be sad here [without you] during the holidays, but then I will remember that you are happy at home and that you love your Špalíček,\* and that you are looking forward to seeing him, or not. And tell me, tell me, my Little Song,\* would you like to be always with me? Keep telling me that, will you? I would like it so much if one day we had Christmas for the two of us, for the two of us alone, or at most with a tiny crying thing, would you want that? You know, my Fairytale\* I am convinced that you would be happy with me and that I would do anything to make you content, smiling, and merry, and we would have a Christmas tree and presents and love. And I cannot give up the hope that it will turn out as we both wish, why would have otherwise things developed the way they did at a time when I knew that a change was in store for me - some-

thing tremendous and beautiful [was meant to happen]. After all, I have been expecting you for a long time, my Little Fairytale, I knew that one day you would appear in my life and bring me strength and happiness, and also, of course, a few of those bugs and boogeymen. And if I hesitate and ponder sometimes, it's not for my sake but yours, my dear girl. I ask myself whether I have the right to request that you join your life with mine when there are so many obstacles, serious and unsurmountable. And that is why I hesitate because I wouldn't want you to reproach me some day, after you'll have come to know life better (although you're already experienced) and after you'll have seen that your inclination toward me is not a mere fantasy of a girl. And don't be angry, you don't have to get upset right away - I know I have already said this many times. Oh, my Little Flower,\* my Little Seahorse,\* you have caused such a confusion in my little head, and I must have been a cause of several bitter moments of yours [...]

Another interesting set of letters held in the composer's collection are the six letters Martinů wrote between 1935 and 1938 to Prof. **Gracian Černušák** (1882-1961), one of the most important musicologists, music critics, and lexicographers in Brno. Prof. Černušák began following the development of Martinů's compositional talent as early as in the mid-1920s, and in his reviews in *Lidové noviny* (The People's News) and *Listy Hudební matice - Tempo* (The Music Fund Journal) he tried to provide an objective, unbiased evaluation of the composer's works. Martinů appreciated Černušák's responsible approach in assessing artistic achievements of his as well as those of other composers. The open and friendly relationship between Martinů and this otherwise feared music critic is evidenced in a letter Martinů wrote in Paris on 16 February 1936 and which reads almost like a confession:

Dear friend,

My heartfelt thank you for your letter that was so dear to me. I'm taking a moment upon my return [from Prague] to give you my impressions of the Prague performance [of the opera *Hry o Marii* (The Plays of Mary)] and to tell you about things that are associated in some way with my future work. The opera made a very powerful impression on the Prague audience but it made me realize once again what a pleasure it is to work in Brno and how flexible they are there, where everything is somehow taken completely as a matter of course, and how hard it is to work in Prague against the rigid conventions and desire for everything to be comfortable. I am writing to you about this because during my stay in Prague I met several young artists in all fields [of artistic endeavours] who are also interested in the direction that I am pursuing, and because I also count you among those who are not afraid of hard work. I am writing to you again about my plans and about my

Wednesday, 5. VI. 40.

Písničko,\*\*

You don't write so I assume that you must have had your surgery and that I have to be patient [ *just a bit longer and believe* ] that everything will now turn to the better. Well, perhaps not everything but at least all that concerns you, and so as soon as it is possible, write me a letter or send me [ *your news* ] via someone, but good news, will you? You must have often thought about what we have all been doing during this time, and if I were to be frank with you, I would have to admit that I don't really know; the only thing I know is that the time is speeding by so madly that it seems the day has not yet begun and it is already gone, and then I realize that all I did was just a few gestures, a few steps, and the day is over [ *so fast that* ] I'm afraid it will not last long enough for me even to take a shower. From all this you may have concluded that either I don't know what I am doing or that I am doing nothing, and both would be correct, only that I am not even conscious of myself doing nothing[. T]his is such a surreal world in which we all live, and I in particular, because for me something has ended so abruptly, something that was filling my life or at least a big part of it, and now it is over so suddenly, so quickly that I haven't been able to fully process it because those other events cover and deafen it, and the same may have been happening to you, and then in a flash of a moment I catch a glimpse of something resembling a memory, a glitter of light, a distant little image as if one looks through the wrong end of binoculars, a kind of a miniature landscape, so miniscule and yet with everything in place, but in a rather unusual way[. A]nd then, all of a sudden, memories appear in a strange arrangement as a fantasy, a thought; an image of Tři Studně near the mill, [ *a glimpse of* ] an alley of chestnut trees, and I am searching [ *in my mind* ] where is it until I find it - it is close to the Observatoire; or I am rushing somewhere, always, and every day, [ *riding* ] on a bus, passing by all the bus stops, the stores that I know, the church, the bridge and the embankment, all in close proximity to each other, and yet I am asking myself whether they have ever existed and whether they are real, and then I run there to assure myself that they are still there, and it is as if all has been in my memory and at the same time erased - [ *this is* ] such an unpleasant feeling; and then I suddenly happen to be somewhere else in my mind, [ *somewhere* ] where I have never been before, and I am looking, looking for...you know what, won't you. As if life has stopped and now is waiting, waiting... And all that which is happening around us, we let pass by, despite the fact that it affects us directly; but it is beyond our control anyway, we no longer can change it, yet we are unable to accept it without action [ *and thus feel* ] as if we were torn out from our own selves; well, all that would not matter a bit if only I knew that you were finally feeling well or at least better, and that they have done the surgery and you are on your way to recovery; that would be at least something concrete that I could build on; and so I am telling myself that tomorrow there must be a letter [ *from you* ] but then I realize that it cannot be here yet and decide to leave it for later[. I] want you so much to get well soon, to make a full recovery. Will you, please?

Thinking of you,  
Yours

Špalíček

## Bohuslav Martinů: Letters to Kaprálová

views, and I assure you it is a great source of joy for me that you have expressed so much interest in my achievements. I felt that clearly during the time of the rehearsals in Prague and in [your] response to the reviews, of which hardly any touched on points that were very important, let alone attempted to do so in any way. It is evident that the Prague performance, despite all the efforts, remained to a large extent within the limits of those operatic conventions that have become a complete mannerism in the N.d. [the National Theatre], although [I should say] they made an unusual effort to accommodate my requirements, as it is no simple matter, after all, for them to get rid of all their habits [just] for me. Nevertheless, the production was quite new and capable of showing some of my intentions. I am concerned neither about the work itself nor about its favorable reception or condemnation. I myself might be mistaken in my interpretation of certain efforts, but I clearly sensed a failure to grasp the very aim of this work, mainly on the part of the critics, who reacted clearly to things that are completely subordinate. And that's why I would like to tell you about the results of my Prague stay and my convictions.

What I am concerned about is neither I nor my work but rather a change in the entire way of looking at things that is rooted in our country, which is, in my opinion, false, namely such complete dependency on German interpretation in all cultural expressions. My orientation is a western orientation not because I live in Paris but because I consider it a decisive trait of the Czech character, which, as I am fully convinced, is not compatible with those opinions that prevail in our country and which are [merely] echoes of the influence of the culture [geographically] closest to us, the German culture. And, therefore, I consider this struggle of mine to be very important, though long and difficult, and for that reason I welcome every chance for collaboration. I am fully convinced that the entire outlook of our aesthetics is derivative, maintained out of some sort of desire to be comfortable, and that it neither corresponds to nor expresses the Czech character. I observe carefully and constantly the life and the expressions of identity of our people, both in the rural and urban areas, including those that I encountered abroad in a different environment, and I find few or none of the traits that in our country are dictated by these points of view. Likewise, I do not find them in myself. It is likely that in our history, both in music and in other [artistic] fields, our leaders expressed themselves differently than how they are now interpreted. So it is clear [to me] that interpretation [of their legacy] has followed a wrong path and it is absolutely vital for us to be aware of this and work at correcting it, if not for ourselves then for those who come after us. I hope that after my vacation I will be able to visit Brno again and speak with you about this more and more clearly than how it can be done in brevity in a letter.

With best wishes,  
Yours, B. Martinů

Two letters from Martinů from 1926, as well as a picture postcard from 1957, have been preserved in the estate of the Czech conductor and composer **Břetislav Bakala** (1897-1958). Both letters document their artistic collaboration - Bakala led the successful premiere of Martinů's ballet *Kdo je na světě nejmocnější?* (Who is the Most Powerful in the World?) on 31 January 1925 at the National Theatre in Brno - and reveal Martinů's desire to utilize the opportunity of Bakala's short-term guest conductor appearance in the United States to promote there this particular ballet and other new works he composed in the genre: *Vzpouřa* (The Revolt) and *Motýl, který dupal* (The Butterfly that Stamped).

Another four letters from the composer (from 1935 and 1936) have been preserved in the estate of the conductor and composer **Antonín Balatka** (1895-1958). In this correspondence, Martinů gave detailed instructions to Balatka, who conducted the world premiere of his four-part opera *Hry o Marii* on 23 February 1935 in Brno, for performance of the many choral scenes in this operatic work. It was only natural that Martinů was concerned with the quality of the performance, after he had been informed that the head of Prague's National Theatre, Otakar Ostrčil, and representatives of prominent sheet music publishing houses from Vienna (Universal Edition) and Mainz (B. Schott's Söhne), with all of whom he had been corresponding about his music, would attend the premiere. He also asked Balatka whether the vocal parts and piano reduction of the scores of *Legenda o svaté Dorotě* (The Legend of St. Dorothy) and *Svatební košile* (The Wedding Shirt) from his new ballet *Špalíček* (The Chapbook)<sup>2</sup> had already arrived in America, where they were sent to the then well-known Czech choreographer, dance master and pedagogue Ivo Váňa-Psota, on whose help he counted to have it (i.e. in the first version from 1931-32) performed by the famous Ballets Russes of Sergey Diaghilev (1872-1929). (He had seen the Ballets Russes first at the age of twenty-three in the New German Theatre in Prague.) In addition, he informed Balatka of his hopes to have the opera *Hry o Marii* performed at the National Theatre in Ljubljana and wrote about another new work of his - the opera-ballet *Divadlo za branou* (The Suburban Theatre) - which Balatka premiered at Brno's National Theatre on 20 September 1936.

Another source for mapping Martinů's contacts with performing artists in Brno is his two letters to singer and pedagogue **Věra Wasserbauerová-Střelcová** (1906-75) who became the first performer of Paskalina in the premiere of *Hry o Marii* and also Colombina in the premiere of *Divadlo za branou*.

We know that Martinů also exchanged letters with **Antonín Kolář** (1886-1964), a long-time administrator of



the prominent Czech singing association in Brno called 'Beseda brněnská' and Secretary of the Smetana Foundation. A letter dated 24 September 1935 attests to Kolář's support of Martinů in an annual composer competition held by this foundation. The success of Kolář's efforts is evidenced in Martinů receiving the foundation's First Prize in the competition for his opera *Hry o Marii* that year.

The one letter of Martinů that documents his correspondence with the pedagogue and choreographer **Ivo Váňa-Psota** (1908-52) has already been printed in Miloš Šafránek's book *Divadlo Bohuslava Martinů* (Bohuslav Martinů's Theater), published in 1979 by Editio Supraphon. In this letter, Martinů discusses the possibility of having two parts of the ballet *Špalíček*, *Legenda o svaté Dorotě* and *Svatební košile*, danced by the famous Ballets Russes which was at the time performing in the United States. He also asks Váňa-Psota to draw the attention of professional musical circles there to his new opera *Hry o Marii*, where ballet and pantomime mix with the operatic component with a prominence that warrants performance by the Russian ballet ensemble.

The last set of Martinů's letters consists of the two he wrote to the music director, music writer and composer **Otakar Zítek** (1892-1955). One of them, dated in Paris on 8 April 1925 pertains to the promotion of his recently premiered ballet *Kdo je na světě nejmocnější?* outside Czechoslovakia. In this letter, Martinů informs Zítek about the success of his compositions in Parisian concert venues. In his second letter, dated 9 May 1929, Martinů congratulates Zítek on his appointment as Director of the National Theatre in Brno and suggests the possibility of presenting his opera *Les trois souhaits* (The Three Wishes), on which he was working at the time, in Brno and in Germany.<sup>3</sup>

Martinů's correspondence in the Moravian Museum of Brno documents the composer's lively communication with the many personalities of Brno's musical community despite his living abroad, and illustrates the important share that the National Theatre in Brno had in premiering his operas and ballets from the 1920s and 1930s, giving them the highest quality performances. In 2009, when we will be commemorating the 50th anniversary of Bohuslav Martinů's death, we should remind ourselves of the essential role the Brno theatrical scene had once played in furthering Martinů's musical career and look at it as a challenge for the new generation of artists in the promotion of the composer's music.

## Notes:

This text is a revised and expanded version of an article *Correspondence of Bohuslav Martinů in the Music History Department of the Moravian Museum in Brno* by Kateřina Maýrová, first published in the *Bohuslav Martinů Newsletter* 1 (2004): 16-18. It is reprinted here with the permission of the author and the newsletter editor. The letter on p. 3 is published separately from the article.

\* 'Vitulenka' is a diminutive form of the name Vítězslava which Martinů uses here in the vocative case ('Vitulenko'). "Špalíček,"

with its double meaning a 'little chunk of wood' and a "chapbook" - in reference to Martinů himself - was Martinů's private nickname given to him by Kaprálová. In the Czech language the name of almost any object and creature, if put in a diminutive form and in the vocative case, can be used as a term of endearment for addressing a person for whom one feels affection.

\*\* 'Písnička' - in reference to Kaprálová - which Martinů uses here in the vocative case ('Písničko') means 'Little Song.'

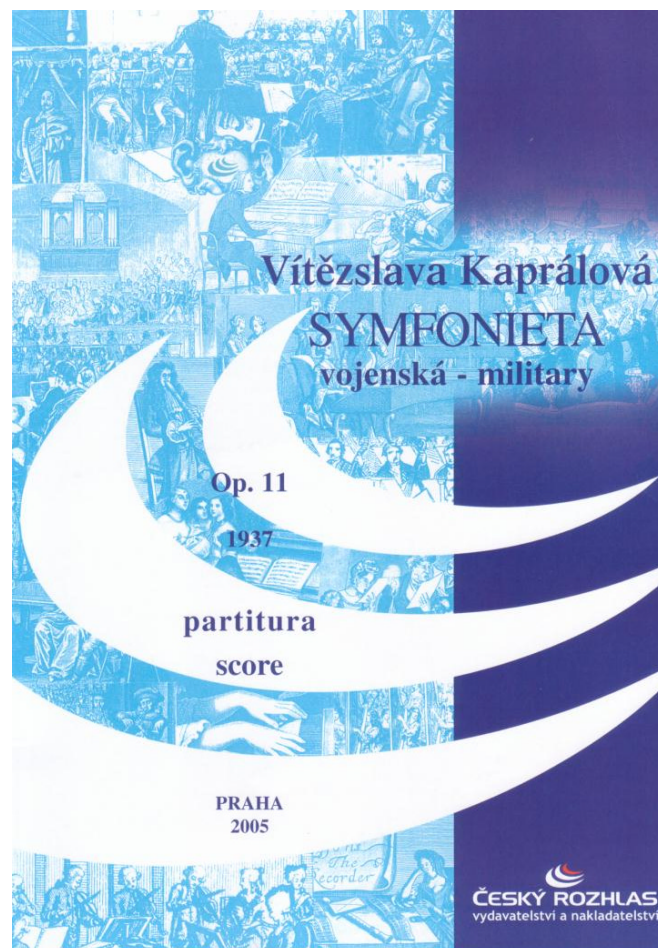
<sup>1</sup> Martinů's *Quartet for Clarinet, French Horn, Violoncello, and Side Drum*, H. 139 from 1924.

<sup>2</sup> The *Legenda o svaté Dorotě* comes at the beginning of the third act in the second version of this ballet. In the first version the second scene was *Svatební košile*, inspired by Erben's famous ballad.

<sup>3</sup> In fact, the work was not performed in Brno until after Martinů's death. Its first performance there was given at the Brno State Theatre on 16 June 1971, under the baton of the late Václav Nosek. This was the opera's Czechoslovak premiere.

## About the author:

Kateřina Maýrová holds a doctoral degree in musicology and ethnography from Charles University in Prague. She works as curator at the Czech Museum of Music in Prague and serves on the board of the Bohuslav Martinů Foundation. She is also a member of the Kapralova Society.



## American Women Composers of Choral Music

Greggory Darrel Cannady

As music scholars and choral directors in the twenty-first century, our knowledge of contemporary American women composers remains limited, and collected editions or even single copies of these works are not easily available in most university libraries. Furthermore, few choral organisations program the music of American women composers; and, therefore, the choral libraries of these institutions and organisations also lack an adequate representation of this literature. Although the author recognizes the contributions of Canadian women composers such as Nancy Telfer (b. 1950), Eleanor Daley (b. 1955), and Ruth Watson Henderson (b. 1932), in the limited scope of this article, the term American composers refers to composers from the United States.

Modern choral directors of amateur choral ensembles recognize women arrangers of American spirituals and folk songs such as Florence Price (1887-1953), Undine Smith Moore (1904-1989), Margaret Bonds (1913-1972), Salli Terri (1922-1996) and Alice Parker (b. 1925). Contemporary American women composers Emma Lou Diemer (b. 1927), Williametta Spencer (b. 1932), Mary Goetze (b. 1943) and Gwyneth Walker (b. 1947) rival the popularity of American male composers. Modern children's choirs, women's choirs and other treble choirs often promote choral music by American women composers. One can only speculate why choral music for amateur, church, school and treble choirs by American women composers seems to be more widely known than their extended works or music for professional choruses.

Early American stereotypes of women composers included the perception that women write "prettier" music than male composers. Women composers were thought to be more suited to parlor songs, sentimental love songs and graceful piano pieces than to serious music. In *Unsung: A History of Women in American Music*, Christine Ammer quotes some of the prevalent attitudes reflected in writings by American music journalists in the early nineteenth century. They maintain that women lack the talent, perseverance, concentration and dedication needed to compose "great" music.<sup>1</sup>

Although interest and scholarship on women in music has increased, "standard texts for courses in music history still omit all but a few women."<sup>2</sup> This article will review some of the factors that have limited the choral works produced by women composers throughout the history of Western music. These limitations might explain why male composers play a predominant role in music history; however, most of these limitations do not exist today. Yet, today's students of choral music still spend most of their time studying the choral music of male composers.

Contemporary American women composers of choral music have become the innovators, promoters and

creators of many of the choral works that are most valued today. The availability and popularity of their works continues to increase each year, as choral directors and scholars discover the exceptional quality and quantity of choral music by American women composers. One need only turn back a few years the pages of music history however, to discover the many obstacles that women composers have faced. Only in recent music history have women composers been given opportunities that were previously afforded only to male composers.

### Middle Ages

Knowledge of women composers in the Middle Ages comes mainly from convents. The music composed by nuns in these convents was functional music used primarily for religious services. The unique popularity and acceptance of the polymath German nun and composer Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179) does not reflect the general status of women in convents.

The role of women in secular music of the Middle Ages extended from singing women poets to that of music patronesses. Only a few songs by the *trobairitz* (secular women who wrote poetry and music) are known today, however. Noblewomen in the Middle Ages, tutored at home, in convents, or in a very few coeducational academies became important patrons of the arts.

### Renaissance

Renaissance women composers, instructed within the court, include a pupil of Antoine Busnois (d. 1492), Mary of Burgundy (1457-1482), and Isabella d'Este (1474-1539), an important woman composer associated with the development of the *frottola*. In 1568 *Primo libro de madrigali* (First Book of Madrigals) by composer, lutenist, singer, and teacher Maddalena Casulana (c1540-c1590) became the first complete volume of music to be published by a woman composer. "In a field dominated by men, Casulana was counted among the leading composers of her time, regardless of gender."<sup>3</sup>

Elizabeth I (1533-1603) in England and Leonora de Medici Orsini (c1560-1634) in Italy were influential as patronesses of music in the Renaissance. Women of this era also played the harpsichord and the lute in their homes, but professional opportunities and education for most women in music continued to be restricted. Renaissance women were expected to be subordinate to men, and women were excluded from universities and cathedrals where polyphonic musical styles were developed and taught.

The Catholic decrees resulting from the Council of Trent cloistered nuns from life outside of the convents. Singing nuns were hidden, and outside music education was forbidden. The decrees also placed limitations on polyphonic music and restricted women to plainchant, claiming that polyphony was too sensuous for them. Rare

publications of sacred music by nuns include those by Sulpitia Lodovica Cesis (c1577-1619?), Lucrezia Orsina Vizzana (1590-1662) and Claudia Sessa (c1570-c1619).

During the Reformation, significant opportunities for women in sacred music also arose from an emphasis on congregational singing. "Calvinist or Lutheran, woman or man, girl or boy, all could sing the praises of God with one voice."<sup>4</sup>

### Baroque

In 1522 Venice established four foundations known as *ospedali*. The *ospedali* were originally hospices for the chronically ill and included orphans and reformed prostitutes. Eventually the *ospedali* became schools for orphaned and abandoned young girls, and within these schools, the most talented girls were provided with music training. Antonio Vivaldi was one of the male composers employed by the *ospedali* to train and prepare the all-female choir and orchestra for performances designed to encourage almsgiving by the public. Eventually, women students became the teachers at the *ospedali*.

Isabella Leonarda (1620-1704) composed over two hundred works in twenty volumes, making her the most prolific of all the nun composers.<sup>5</sup> In both Catholic and Protestant churches, the male choir tradition prevented women from singing, and discouraged their composing. Protestant women were allowed to sing hymns in church as members of the congregation, but since seventeenth-century men also dominated Protestant church music, careers for women musicians of the Baroque period arose from the new concept of public opera and the music performed at the courts. The secular music presented at court invariably included opera, and women began to be known as singers in these court operas, eventually singing in public opera houses and participating in performances of oratorios and cantatas.

Daughters of well-known musicians and aristocratic women were also often trained in music, and became teachers, performers and composers. "The remarkable Caccini family led in the development of the dramatic style of solo song accompanied by figured bass at the beginning of the seventeenth century."<sup>6</sup> Giulio Caccini's oldest daughter, Francesca Caccini (1587-c1645), composed secular songs, works on sacred themes, and the first extant opera by a woman, *La liberazione di Ruggiero dall' isola d'Alcina* (The Liberation of Ruggiero from the Island of Alcina).<sup>7</sup>

### Classicism

The period of music history known as the Enlightenment provided additional opportunities for women performers and composers in the court. Women in the growing middle class primarily composed and performed music for themselves and for their family and friends.<sup>8</sup> Social, economic and political changes expanded these music opportunities for women to the private salons of aristocratic families and newly developing concert venues. Upper-middle-

class women often hosted musical gatherings in their homes, and these salon performances invariably became the main venue for solo and chamber music genres.

Female singers were well known during this time, but women composers were known primarily for songs, keyboard sonatas, and pieces for the amateur market. More complex works by women composers were confined to pieces written for their own performances, and they were rarely published. Women composers from the classical period include Maria Teresa Agnesi (1720-1795), Marianne von Martinez (1744-1812), Juliane Benda Reichardt (1752-1783), Bettine von Arnim (1785-1859), Anna Amalia, Princess of Prussia (1723-1787), Anne-Louise Boyvin d'Hardancourt Brillion de Jouy (1744-1824), and Marie Emmanuelle Bayon Louis (1746-1825).

### Romanticism

With the nineteenth century fight for women's rights, some women encountered increased opportunities in music performance, education and composition. Some of music history's most famous female composers emerged as a result of increased opportunities accorded to women. Despite social pressures that discouraged women from pursuing careers in music, Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel (1805-1847) and Clara Schumann (1819-1896) attained the highest level of musicianship. Increased opportunities for women composers in the nineteenth century to study advanced theory and composition in music conservatories allowed such composers as Ethel Smyth (1858-1944) to create works in the larger forms, even though "the notion of a woman composing large-scale works was more difficult for nineteenth-century audiences and critics to swallow."<sup>9</sup>

Regardless of social attitudes and pressures that prevented many women from pursuing careers in music, a noticeable change emerged in the role of women in music. Ultimately, the door opened to women composers who had the strength and determination to fight for equality in the musical arts.

### America: The First New England School

In the 1720s, the Yankee tunesmiths developed a new school of musical composition to be used in the singing schools. Although the early tunesmiths were mostly male, one can find a few American women, such as Miss M.T. Durham, who composed two hymns included in *Southern Harmony* (1835). The public thought it socially unacceptable for early American women to pursue a professional career in performance, and women were not encouraged to study composition in American universities.

Women composers of parlor songs and ballads did not seem to offend the public, but most professional music positions, church positions (except for organists), and positions in professional orchestras remained closed



## American women composers of choral music

to women. Organist and composer Augusta Browne (1821-1882) became one of the first early American women composers of choral music. In 1842 she composed *Grand Vesper Chorus* for four-part chorus. Combining the temperance ballad with chorus, Susan McFarland (1836-1918) was well known in the 1860s for *Father's a Drunkard* and *Mother Is Dead*.<sup>10</sup>

### America: The Second New England School

Foreign musicians dominated nineteenth-century classical music in the United States, especially musicians from Austria and Germany. In America, male composers Edward McDowell (1860-1908), Horatio Parker (1863-1919) and George Whitefield Chadwick (1854-1931) represented this group of musicians composing in German styles reflecting late nineteenth-century genres, forms and compositional techniques. American women composers of choral music in the Second New England School, however, truly set the stage for American women composers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The emerging group of women composers of choral music in the Second New England School included Amy Marcy Cheney Beach (1867-1944), Margaret Ruthven Lang (1867-1972), Mabel Wheeler Daniels (1878-1971), Mary Elizabeth Turner Salter (1856-1938), Harriet Ware (1877-1962) and Lily Strickland (1887-1958).

Amy Marcy Cheney Beach (1867-1944) was a child prodigy, concert pianist and the first American woman known to have composed a Mass and a symphony. She composed in a diatonic style reflecting late nineteenth century European influences. Like Brahms, Beach effectively undermined tonality through unconventional chord progressions combined with her frequent use of augmented sixth chords and chromatic scales. Beach's romantic compositional style displayed sensitivity to the relationship of music to text. She frequently composed long melodic lines, sometimes emphasizing modal scale degrees, often accompanied by mixed modes and expressive use of modulation.

Beach taught herself orchestration and other compositional techniques by translating treatises of Berlioz and Gevaert into English. She became well known for her instrumental works, partsongs, Episcopalian anthems and service music. The extensive list of works by Beach include the Mass in Eb, op. 5 (1890) for mixed chorus and orchestra, *Te Deum* (1922) for flute, tenor, three voice male chorus and organ, and *The Canticle of the Sun* (1928) for soloists, mixed chorus and orchestra.

Regarded as dean of American women composers, Beach actively promoted and assisted other women composers. She was also actively involved in several musical organisations including the Music Educators National Conference, and in 1925 she became first president of the newly founded Society of American Women Composers.

When Beach married in 1885, her husband Dr. H.H. A. Beach limited her performance career and made her

promise never to teach, believing that a man should be able to support his wife financially. What fees she did receive for public performances were donated to charity.<sup>11</sup> She concentrated on developing her compositional skills, adding to her style impressionistic techniques, such as unresolved dissonances, atmospheric textures, chords with added ninths and non-chord tones. After her husband's death in 1910, Beach travelled to Europe and resumed her concert career, returning to America with even greater fame as a virtuoso performer and composer. Her later compositions employ linear textures and increased dissonance, moving away from triadic harmony, while still remaining tonal.

Unlike Beach, Margaret Ruthven Lang (1867-1972) was not a child prodigy; however, she studied music with the most eminent teachers of her time, including her father, Benjamin J. Lang, and George Chadwick, one of the leading composers of the Second New England School and Horatio Parker's student. Many of Lang's works were featured as part of the American Composers' Concert movement of the 1880s and 1890s. Her *Dramatic Overture*, op. 12 was the first work by an American woman composer to be performed by a major symphony orchestra (1893, Boston Symphony Orchestra).

Compared to Beach, Lang's compositional style displays a restrained harmonic vocabulary and a judicious exploration of dissonance. Within a tonal framework, she often used Scottish and Irish folk elements, impressionistic sonorities and unique harmonies. Using a variety of musical styles, Lang composed *The Jumbies* (1890) for baritone, male chorus and two-piano accompaniment. Based upon limericks by Edward Lear, *The Jumbies* consists of a series of humorous pastiches and utilizes onomatopoeic effects. Lang's skill for reflecting the spirit of the text can be seen in *The Heavenly Noël* for mezzo-soprano, women's chorus, organ, piano, harp and string quartet.<sup>12</sup>

Mabel Wheeler Daniels (1878-1971) also studied with George Chadwick and in Munich. Upon her return, Daniels published her memoirs, *An American Girl in Munich: Impressions of a Music Student*. Although she was active in women's rights and successfully composed in larger forms, Daniels believed that the ordinary routines of life and physical limitations of women had caused women to compose primarily in smaller forms.<sup>13</sup> Daniels' compositional style integrates non-functional triadic harmony with modal shifts, often resulting in angular melodic contours. Her later works begin to display contemporary idioms.

Daniels' association with glee clubs led to the composition of several operettas in her early career and to *The Voice of My Beloved* (1911) for women's chorus, two violins and piano. Her parents sang in Boston's Handel and Haydn Societies and Daniels sang in the Cecilia Society. Her choral works for these societies and her choral works for Radcliff rank among her best known compositions. They include *The Desolate City*, op. 21, a cantata for baritone, mixed chorus and orchestra (1913), *Exultate Deo*:



*Song of Rejoicing*, op. 33, for mixed chorus and orchestra (1929), and *The Song of Jael*, op. 37, a cantata for soprano, mixed chorus and orchestra (1937), written for the Worcester Festival.

The Second New England School of composers also includes three well-known American women composers of songs and choral music, Mary Elizabeth Turner Salter (1856-1938), Harriet Ware (1877-1962) and Lily Strickland (1887-1958). The romantic style of the Second New England School of composers soon gave way to composers who looked to Paris rather than Germany for musical training and inspiration. The First World War also contributed to America's turn to French influences, especially toward impressionistic music.

### **Impressionistic American Women Composers**

American women composers Mary Howe (1882-1964) and Marion Bauer (1882-1955) were attracted to impressionistic music. Their compositional styles represent a bridge between late romantic and impressionistic music, blurring tonality through extended and colorful harmonies. Both of these women studied in Europe with Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979). They both spent many summers at the McDowell Colony where they met important American women composers Amy Beach, Mabel Daniels, Miriam Gideon (1906-1996) and Ruth Crawford (1901-1953).

Actively supporting musical organizations and women in music, Howe and Beach helped organize the Society of American Women Composers in 1925. As pianists, Howe and Beach gave the Washington premiere of Beach's Suite for Two Pianos at the McDowell Colony. For the Worcester Festival, Howe composed *Chain Gang Song* (1925), scored for chorus and orchestra. Another important choral work from Howe is *Prophecy, 1792*, (1943), composed while she was a volunteer during the war.

Marion Bauer (1882-1955) co-founded the American Music Guild in 1921 and also became a member of the Society of American Women Composers. Bauer taught at New York University and Juilliard, was active as a music critic and an advocate for modern music, and wrote the book *Twentieth Century Music*. In addition to many vocal and instrumental works, Bauer composed *Fair Daffodils* (1913), a trio for women's voices accompanied by piano and, two years later, *The Lady of the Four Winds* for men's voices accompanied by piano.

### **Neoclassical American Women Composers**

The following American women composers of choral music studied with Nadia Boulanger: Marion Bauer, Mary Howe, Louise Talma, Elinor Remick Warren, Margaret Bonds and Julia Perry.

Although born in France, Louise Talma (1906-1996) was raised and educated in New York City, and she studied with Boulanger for 17 summers. Talma's three stages of compositional style begin with her neoclassical period. *In principio erat verbum* (1939) for mixed chorus and organ

and *Let's Touch the Sky* (1952) for mixed chorus, flute, oboe and clarinet exemplify her neoclassic style. After hearing Irving Fine's String Quartet, Talma became fascinated with twelve-tone writing. Her second period's twelve-tone technique operated within free tonality in *Voices of Peace* (1973) for chorus and strings. Talma's late works abandoned *serialism* entirely for a neo-tonal style in which certain pitches serve as tonal centers by being asserted and reasserted. *Celebrations* (1976-77) is one of many choral works composed in the neo-tonal style of her third period.

African-American composer Julia Amanda Perry (1924-1979) studied with Boulanger and Luigi Dallapiccola. *Ruth* (1950), a cantata for narrator, baritone, chorus and orchestra, exemplifies the dissonant harmonies, contrapuntal textures and lyricism of her neoclassical style. Her later neoclassical compositions incorporate black folk idioms into her style. Perry's arrangements of African-American spirituals will be mentioned further in the American Idioms section of this article.

### **Neo-romantic American Composers**

The most important American neo-romantic composers of the twentieth century included Howard Hanson (1896-1981), Samuel Barber (1901-1981), Elinor Remick Warren, and Gian Carlo Menotti (1911-2007), who moved to the United States in 1928.

Elinor Remick Warren (1900-1991) was well known for her vocal, choral and orchestral works. Her prolific career began with the publication of her first song while she was still in high school. From 1921 through the 1940s, Warren toured the United States as an accompanist and assistant to leading singers from the Metropolitan Opera. Her works reveal a dramatic and emotionally intense style employing strong melodies, expressive harmonies, and the use of canon and counterpoint. The *Harp Weaver* (1932) for baritone, harp, women's chorus and orchestra, reflects Warren's attraction to mysticism.

Warren lived in Los Angeles, and many of her works reflect her interest in the beauty of nature found in that area. In 1940, the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra performed *The Passing of King Arthur* (1939), a setting of Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, for tenor, baritone, chorus and orchestra. After studying with Nadia Boulanger in 1959, Warren revised the orchestration of many of her earlier works, including *The Passing of King Arthur*. She even re-titled this piece *The Legend of King Arthur* (1974). She also added chorus parts to *Abraham in Egypt* (1959) for baritone and orchestra.

Warren's later compositional style became more progressive and angular than in her earlier works, and this new approach can be found in *Requiem* (1965) for soprano, baritone, chorus and orchestra, commissioned by Roger Wagner. Occidental College commissioned *Good Morning America* (1976) for narrator, chorus and orchestra, with the help of a grant from NEA.

## American women composers of choral music

Williametta Spencer (b. 1932) was a student of Hal-sey Stevens (1908-1989). Her choral compositions unite music and text using the compositional techniques employed by other neo-romantic composers. Spencer's association with college and high school choirs could easily justify listing her compositions under *Gebrauchsmusik*, both before and after 1975. Her "little masterpiece *At The Round Earth's Imagined Corners* (1965), *Four Madrigals on Texts by James Joyce* (1970), and *Missa brevis* (1974), all for unaccompanied mixed chorus, gave hope to high school conductors starved for good twentieth-century repertoire."<sup>14</sup> Williametta Spencer's choral works written after 1975 include *The White Rose is a Dove* (1996) and *Flute Player* (2001).

### Atonal Expressionistic American Composers

Most of the American women composers mentioned so far in this article have imitated European compositional styles. Like Charles Ives (1874-1954), Ruth Crawford (1901-1953) was one of the first composers to truly develop an American style. Also like Ives, Crawford took an aggressive approach to dissonance, melody and rhythm.

Crawford's individual style first assimilated late romantic and impressionistic techniques, but urged by avant-garde composer Henry Cowell (1897-1965), Crawford moved to New York and studied with Charles Seeger (1886-1979) from 1929 to 1930. There she learned dissonant counterpoint, avoiding consonance within a fabric of separate melodic lines. The heterophony employed in her twisting chromatic melodies, non-repetition of pitches, sprechstimme, and use of palindrome all reflect her fascination with Schoenberg's twelve-tone system.

In 1930, Crawford became the first woman to hold a Guggenheim fellowship in composition, which made possible a year of study in Berlin.<sup>15</sup> While in Berlin, Crawford composed her critically acclaimed String Quartet, and it was there that she also composed *Chant*, a group of three choral movements (Nos. 1 and 3 for women's chorus and No. 2 for mixed chorus). Crawford is an important American woman composer developing a compositional style that would pave the way for post World War II composers like Vivian Fine (1913-2000) and Miriam Gideon.

Ruth Crawford married Charles Seeger in 1932. Around 1935, she stopped all original composition and began to arrange folk tunes. She transcribed nearly 1,000 songs from field recordings in the Archive of American Folk Song in the Library of Congress. Her arrangements of these folk songs for children remain popular today, and her interest in folk songs must have influenced her stepson, Pete Seeger. Crawford resumed original composition in 1952 with her Wind Quintet, "which shows a return to her radical language of the 1930s while absorbing the rhythms and patterns of folk materials."<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately she was diagnosed with cancer the following year and

died soon afterward.

Mostly known for her instrumental works and song cycles, Miriam Gideon's (1906-1996) atonal expressionistic style exhibited in her choral works achieves a perfect union of her very modern compositional techniques with a lyricism and form that can be successfully performed by professional and amateur choral ensembles alike. Gideon composed *Shirat Miram L'Shabbat* (A Sabbath Evening Service) in 1974 for cantor, mixed chorus and organ. A highly chromatic organ part provides introductions and interludes between vocal entrances. When the voices enter, the organ part assists them by doubling the voices and introducing pitches and tonal areas. The vocal entries alternate between the cantor's chant-like solos and homophonic hymn-like statements by the choir.

### American Idioms

At the turn of the century, several American composers and ethnomusicologists collected and transcribed American music. Lucy McKim Garrison (1842-1877) published a collection, *Slave Songs of the United States*, in 1867. Ruth Crawford not only collected and transcribed American folk music, she also assimilated this music into her own compositions. The interest in American idioms, especially African American spirituals, was promoted by choral ensembles, including the Fisk Jubilee Singers, and developed through arrangements by American women composers Florence Price, Margaret Bonds, Julia Perry, and Lena Johnson McLin (b. 1929).

Conventional European musical training is evident in most of these transcriptions and arrangements of American spirituals. African-American Florence Beatrice Price (1887-1953) studied with Chadwick and Crawford, and became one of the first women composers to arrange American spirituals. A prolific composer of art songs, spiritual arrangements, piano and organ works, symphonies and concertos, Price combined her European training with her Southern roots. One of her songs, a solo arrangement of *My soul's been anchored in the Lord* (1937), was a favorite of Marian Anderson.

A student of William Dawson (1899-1989) and Florence Price, Margaret Bonds (1913-1972) credits the influence of composer Will Marion Cook (1869-1944) for the style of her choral arrangements that are "jazzy and bluesy and spiritual and Tchaikovsky all rolled up into one."<sup>17</sup> Her *Ballad of the Brown King* (1954) for chorus and orchestra effectively combines the American spiritual with larger forms and European influences.

Julia Perry (1924-1979) has already been discussed for her neoclassical choral compositions. Perry arranged spirituals more subtly than Bonds in *Song of Our Savior* (1953) for a cappella chorus, employing the Dorian mode, hummed ostinato and a call-and-response structure. Integrating African American spirituals into her works, Lena Johnson McLin (b. 1929) also fused the twentieth century

idioms of blues, gospel, jazz and rock into her compositions. *Free at Last* is a cantata about Martin Luther King Jr., in which McLin set five spirituals in a gospel style.

Alice Parker (b. 1925), well known for her settings of American folk songs, hymns, and spirituals, has arranged hundreds of songs, including her popular *Hark, I Hear the Harps Eternal* (1965) for mixed chorus. Parker's works cross the boundaries between categories of works before and after 1975. A contemporary of Alice Parker, Sallie Terri (1922-1996) arranged choral music for one of the leading choral conductors of the twentieth century, Roger Wagner. Intrigued by the Shakers, Terri composed *Shaker Worship Service* (1971) as well as countless folk song arrangements.

### Gebrauchsmusik in America

Emma Lou Diemer's (b. 1927) *Three Madrigals* for SATB chorus, accompanied by piano and using texts by William Shakespeare, were composed in 1960 and are still known and performed by countless Junior High and High School choirs. These beautifully crafted compositions evolved from the Young Composers Project established by the Ford Foundation and the National Music Council. This program linked twelve composers with twelve American school systems. Emma Lou Diemer was the only female composer in this group, which included Philip Glass, Arthur Frackenpohl, and Peter Schickele.

### Modern Idioms in American Choral Music

Composer, accordionist, and teacher Pauline Oliveros (b. 1932) has influenced American music profoundly through her work with improvisation, meditation, electronic music, myth and ritual. "As a child, Pauline Oliveros used to tune the radio to the hiss, whistles and static between stations. This fascination with listening intently to any and all sounds has remained central to her work in music."<sup>18</sup>

Oliveros combined her fascination for electronic sounds with the human voice in *Sound Patterns* (1961), a textless chorus using non-traditional notation and imitating the sound of electronic noise. A sense of ritual and ceremony became central to her work in the 1970s as she experimented with multimedia presentations. She is especially known for her work with The Deep Listening Institute, Ltd. The Deep Listening Chorus is open to all, and participants meet once a month, lie on the floor, improvise, listen and perform meditative works.

The American women composers discussed in this article have accomplished much. They have opened doors, challenged stereotypes, and composed music that must be regarded as significant masterpieces of American choral literature. It is not enough that we merely appreciate and study the music of American women choral composers. By programming, performing, and recording their works, we

validate the beauty, influence, and quality of their music. These women have truly set the stage for modern American women composers of choral music.

### Notes:

Christine Ammer, *Unsung: A History of Women in American Music*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 2001), p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Sylvia Glickman and Martha Furman Scheifer, eds., *From Convent to Concert Hall: A Guide to Women Composers* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2003), p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Karen Pendle, ed. *Women and Music: A History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 74.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>8</sup> Glickman and Scheifer, p. 92.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 156-157.

<sup>10</sup> Ammer, p. 95.

<sup>11</sup> Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian: The Life and Work of an American Composer 1867-1944* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> Ammer, p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>14</sup> Nick Strimple, *Choral Music in the Twentieth Century* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 2002), p. 261.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Machlis, *Introduction to Contemporary Music*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), p. 370.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>17</sup> Strimple, p. 258.

<sup>18</sup> Sophie Fuller, *The Pandora Guide to Women Composers: Britain and the United States 1629-Present* (London: Harper-Collins, 1994), p. 227.

### About the author:

Greggory Darrel Cannady holds a B.A. in Music Education from Colorado State University, an M.A. in Music Education from the University of Wyoming, and D.M.A. in the Literature and Performance of Choral Music from the University of Colorado in Boulder. He has 23 years of choral experience in public schools, universities, and churches and has directed choirs in Colorado, Wyoming, and Oregon. He is currently a faculty member of the Mount Olive College Department of Music in North Carolina where he teaches choir conducting and directs the Mount Olive College Singers. This article is based on one of the chapters of his doctoral dissertation *Selected Choral Music Since 1975 by American Women Composers*.

For more information on American women composers of choral music, visit [kapralova.org](http://kapralova.org)



VÍTĚZSLAVA KAPRÁLOVÁ

SONATA

APPASSIONATA

OP. 6

PIANO

AMOS EDITIO  
PRAHA  
AM 0052

*First, critical edition.*

*This project was initiated and financially supported by the Kapralova Society.*

**The Kapralova Society Journal**

Editors: Karla Hartl, Editor-in-Chief, and Eugene Gates

[www.kapralova.org/JOURNAL.htm](http://www.kapralova.org/JOURNAL.htm)

[editor@kapralova.org](mailto:editor@kapralova.org)

**Mailing address:**

34 Beacham Crescent  
Toronto, Ontario  
M1T 1N1 Canada

© 2008 The Kapralova Society, all rights reserved.

ISSN 1715 4146