

The Kapralova Society Journal

A Journal of Women in Music



Special points of interest:

Art songs of
Vítězslava Kaprálová

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Kaprálová's *Jablko s klína*, op. 10

Tereza Jandura

Vítězslava Kaprálová's cycle of four songs, *Jablko s klína* (An Apple from the Lap), composed between 1934 and 1936, appeared during an important point in Kaprálová's life: she was about to graduate from the Brno Conservatory and leave home to continue her music studies in the country's capital. She completed the cycle at the Master School of the Prague Conservatory, at the young age of twenty-one. The songs are quite remarkable in their own right, but the fact that they were composed by such a young composer makes them even more so. Not only does the cycle demonstrate a broad spectrum of musical languages that Kaprálová was already able to use to her advantage, but it also provides an insight into her personality and life through her choice and treatment of poetry.

For the *Jablko s klína* cycle, Kaprálová chose the poetry of the critically-acclaimed twentieth-century Czech poet Jaroslav Seifert. Written in 1933, Seifert's *Jablko s klína* is the first of a string of poetry collections considered to be part of his mature output. In the context of interwar Europe, some of the poems of the *Jablko s klína* collection may seem simplistic at first glance, but they deliver complex themes with a delightful economy of text. Three of the poems chosen by Kaprálová for her song cycle named after the collection, *Píseň na vrbovou písťalku* (Song on a Willow Fife), *Matka a dítě* (Mother and Child, which Kaprálová entitled "Ukolébavka" or "Lullaby"), and *Jarní pouť* (Spring Fair), follow this pattern; these poems are simple and seem relatively straightforward, but each of them offers a subtle twist.

There is little doubt as to why Kaprálová chose to set Seifert's poetry to music. The mood of the poems suits well Kaprálová's personality and character. They reflect her energetic and charismatic nature, while offering a depth and communicative ability, something that Kaprálová valued highly in literature and music alike. For instance, in her article "Propaganda hudbou" (Propaganda by Music), Kaprálová wrote: "Do not forget, music is a diplomat that speaks to the heart."¹ More importantly, Kaprálová's attraction to this particular set of poems may have been even deeper than simple aesthetic appeal. The poem *Matka a dítě* (Kaprálová's "Ukolébavka") seems to have a personal connection to Kaprálová's own life; it is certainly not a typical lullaby, as it deals with the bitterness of a young mother who is neglected by her spouse.²

Píseň na vrbovou písťalku (Song on a Willow Fife)

One of the most notable characteristics of the *Jablko s klína* cycle is the variety of musical expression Kaprálová has been able to achieve in it. This is illustrated in the very opening of the first song, "Píseň na vrbovou písťalku" (Song on a Willow Fife). Kaprálová chose to set this poem in a through-composed manner, which suits the text well, since it also flows forward and does not repeat any sentiment.

Additionally, Kaprálová preserved the organization of the poem by mirroring the basic form of the structure. Like the poem *Píseň na vrbovou písťalku* it begins optimistically, with the coming of spring and

the anticipation it entails, transitioning into a passionate plea for even the weak to survive, and ending with a sobering statement about the human spirit.

This mirroring of the text is evident in the accompaniment. The imagery of the accompaniment comes from the very first line of the poem. One can hear the swirling of the spring breeze in the left hand of the piano with its eighth-note whole-step *ostinato*, while the right hand pattern suggests the “raining down” of pollen from the catkin. Each hand of the piano is in a different key, the F-natural and G-natural of the right hand contrasting with the F-sharp and G-sharp of the left. The sequence of chords in the right hand is expressed in a stepwise motion down a C major scale with the chords Am, F, and Dm against the F-sharp/G-sharp *ostinato* of the left hand. Kaprálová’s use of bitonality here is interesting, since there is a definite sense of a D9 chord, where the F-sharp against the F-naturals works as a sort of cross-relation. This cross-relation helps to expand the depth of the sonorities and create the feeling of the pointed brightness of the sunlight in early spring. These patterns are prevalent throughout the introduction and first verse, with transpositions of both motives reminiscent of the changing of the wind.

Example 1 “Píseň na vrbovou píšťalku,” *Vítězslava Kaprálová: Songs* (Prague: Amos Editio, 2005), mm. 1–5. © Amos Editio 2005.

It is measure six that finally grounds the floating quality of the first five measures. The bass is brought in for the first time in the left hand, with a low D5 open fifth, which introduces the root of the chord. This is significant since the open fifth, in various transpositions, appears throughout the song, distinct because it is the only use of the lowest register of the piano, and firmly grounds the sonorities above them. Additionally, the transpositions of this open-fifth root cycle through the entire chromatic scale throughout the song. Kaprálová’s use of the open fifth is a common device throughout this cycle, and was indeed a common practice at the time among post-Impressionist composers. Here, the nakedness of the open fifth sonority in the bass seems to fulfill the function of aiding the depiction of bareness of the early spring earth that is mentioned in the poem. In addition, the uncertainty of the sonority—since it is neither major nor minor—shows the post-

Impressionistic character of Kaprálová’s music.

Example 2 “Píseň na vrbovou píšťalku,” m. 6

The raining of pollen in the introduction is briefly interrupted by another important descending motive in mm. 8–9 with an E-flat/B-flat suspension chord in the right hand that works as an appoggiatura figure to the B-flat m9 chord in the left hand on the downbeat of each measure.

Example 3 “Píseň na vrbovou píšťalku,” mm. 8–9

This appoggiatura figure is introduced here as a foreshadowing of the plea and statement of the human spirit, since the only time this figure is used with the voice is with the text “Lord, let even the smallest one of them find a little grain upon Your spring earth,” and “[only man can], in times of strife, survive on dreams and hopes.” The figure is used very skillfully throughout the song as it builds the urgency of the climax and provides the song with direction from the very onset.

The climax comes shortly after its halfway point, in m. 30, with the passionate plea “Lord, let even the smallest one of them find a little grain.” Here, the marking in the piano and voice is *forte*, and for the first time, the voice and the piano join together with the appoggiatura figure to help highlight the text. From this point on, the bass open fifths are prominent in every measure throughout the remainder of the song. The first few measures of this section also feature a progression that centers around Am. This begins at first in one-measure phrases and then a two-measure phrase that also uses a version of the appoggiatura figure. The difference of treatment of the appoggiatura figure this time is the inclusion of the voice. Kaprálová brings attention to this climax by using harmonies and harmonic progressions that are more conventional, as illustrated in mm. 30–32 where the right hand

and left hand of the piano combine for A-minor and B-minor 7 chords that follow the movement of the voice.

Example 4 “Píseň na vrbovou písťalku,” mm. 30–33

Harmonic devices are not the only way in which Kaprálová chose to illustrate the text. Thematic transformation also works well to illustrate the last two lines of the poem. The text “For only man, in times of strife, can survive on hopes and dreams” returns to the downward motive in the right hand, but this time going up a half-step before going down to the next note, resulting in a stagger that depicts the “times of strife,” heightened by the menacing bass open fifth that, for the first time, sounds for the entire measure and acts as a strong grounding element.

Example 5 “Píseň na vrbovou písťalku,” mm. 41–42

This sense of uncertainty remains until the final measures, where, in m. 48, there is a sense of resolution on the word “nadějemi” (“hopes”), with a solid-sounding $D\flat 9$ chord that is then transformed into an eerie $D\flat 13/11$ sharp9, with the solitary B-flat octave (the thirteenth of the chord) in the treble that creates a kind of elipsis leaving the listener in suspense (Ex. 6).

The song demonstrates Kaprálová’s compositional allegiance to post-Impressionism. Kaprálová’s blurring of the borders of tonality through the use of bitonality, diatonic planing (parallel chord movement), non-traditional chord formations, open fifths, and extended harmonies (such as ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth chords) are all characteristic of this school of thought. The opening few measures of the piece especially link Kaprálová with this compositional movement, with the strong cross-relation (see

Ex. 1), the ambiguous key, and the idea of creating a mood or atmosphere. However, there are also aspects of this song that do not fall into this category. In reaction to the deeply passionate music of the Romantic era, Impressionists sought to create music that portrayed a mood or atmosphere rather than specific emotions or passions. “Píseň na vrbovou písťalku,” however, creates a great sense of passion in the climax section, with the use of the appoggiatura motive that becomes the desperate plea.

Example 6 “Píseň na vrbovou písťalku,” mm. 48–50

The care that Kaprálová had given to the form and harmonic construction of the song is also evident in the vocal line. There are many instances of word painting, such as in mm. 25–27, where the peeping of the chicks is depicted in the leap of the vocal line up to a high F-sharp:

Example 7 “Píseň na vrbovou písťalku,” mm. 25–27

More important, however, is that Kaprálová respected the scansion of the text and the placement and treatment of stressed/unstressed syllables. As in all of her songs of this cycle, her setting of Seifert’s poem is so careful that the words flow in the exact manner they would in their recitation. Kaprálová captures inflection and subtle nuances of the Czech language with great artistry. Non-Czech speakers may not realize the significance of this statement. In Czech, except for certain regional dialects, the stressed syllable of every word always falls on the first syllable. One can immediately see how this would present a challenge to a composer. To fit the language into a musical meter, and, at the same time, to give it artistic nuance and shape, is not something that is achieved eas-

ily. Since it would be difficult to place every stressed syllable on a strong beat, Kaprálová devised other ways of highlighting stressed syllables, such as giving them longer note values. But perhaps more noteworthy is how she translated the flow of the spoken text into musical notation. Kaprálová structured the phrasing in a way that it follows the flow of the spoken text, at the same time maintaining the flow of the music. If the text of the poem is recited in the approximate note values Kaprálová wrote, the reader suddenly becomes an expert reciter.

Ukolébavka (Lullaby)

The second song of the cycle, “Ukolébavka” (Lullaby), is apparently a simple, two-page song that emulates the peaceful, serene nature of a lullaby. But, as in the poem, the music hints at something amiss. Kaprálová chose to set the text as a simple ABA'B' form, which works well to highlight the spirit of the poem. In the A section, Kaprálová set the text that deals with the narrator’s disappointment with her marriage. The music here shows the woman’s struggle between trying to lovingly soothe her child with a lullaby and to quell her anxiety and feelings of resentment towards her husband.

The short B section, beginning with the text “Sleep in your lace peacefully,” is the culmination of this struggle, where the text deals with the soothing of the child, but the music portrays a greater distress. The text “Let’s leave Daddy to carry on” signals a return to the A music, with an A' section that is much shorter than the original A. The B' section brings back the more pained, distressed music on the word “zvyká” (becomes accustomed to), and leaves no doubt as to the woman’s true emotions.

It is highly probable that Kaprálová was drawn to this poem not only because of its high literary merit, but because it touches her personally. It is as if her own father is the capering father and her own mother the despairing and resigned woman in the poem.³

A greater evidence of Kaprálová’s personal connection to this poem is the fact that it is the only poem in the song cycle that she adapted. The remaining three poems she chose were set verbatim, but this poem *Matka a dítě* (Mother and Child), which Kaprálová renamed “Ukolébavka” (Lullaby), underwent major changes. Apart from one minor word addition (in the first line of the second stanza), Kaprálová chose to shorten the poem into two verses by omitting several lines and combining the last two stanzas of the text. It is interesting to see that the lines she omitted are the ones that most vilify the father in the poem.

Although “Ukolébavka” is slightly more reserved and simple in nature than “Píseň na vrbovou píšťalku,” it too demonstrates Kaprálová’s ties to the post-Impressionist movement. This becomes clear in the very opening measures which begin quite serenely with a soft, rocking arpeggiation of F, followed by, in the third measure on the word “přijde” (“is coming”), an A-flat augmented chord, which is a third-relation to the F chord. This third-relation is then repeated with the following chord, D minor 7, which to the ear can also sound like an F6, since it returns to a similar pattern in the piano.

These opening measures may also show the true nature of the lullaby. Each measure begins on a solitary note, from which the bass and the treble voices expand in opposite directions of each other. Perhaps in this way, Kaprálová is demonstrating the different lives of the young woman and her spouse.

Example 8 “Ukolébavka,” *Vítězslava Kaprálová: Songs* (Prague: Amos Editio, 2005), mm. 1–5. © Amos Editio 2005.

Further use of post-Impressionist devices to illustrate the nature of the text occurs in the B section of the piece. The woman’s distress is signified by an abrupt change from the serene, flat side of the circle of fifths to a dramatic shift to the use of sharps. Measure 23 also explores a heightened sense of urgency of this unexpected turn to a D-sharp minor 7 going to G/F-sharp in the last beat of m.23 (which functions as an escape chord), followed by an F-sharp minor 7 chord in m. 24 (Ex. 9).

It is here that a new motive is introduced in the treble of the piano: eighth-note broken octaves that seem to fall like tears throughout this B section. Measure 23 began an alternation between sharps and flats in two or three measure phrases, with an abrupt change back to flats in mm. 25–26, and then a calmer shift to sharps in mm. 27–29. These changes in color perhaps reveal the true state of uncertainty of the woman in the poem.

The “different lives” of the spouses that the narrator mentions later (mm. 36–37) are reflected in m. 30 (Ex.10), where the treble of the piano (the voice of the mother) plays a G-flat chord, while the bass of the piano (the voice of the father) plays a C chord—two chords that are very remote indeed. All this time the treble is high-

lighting the falling tears, which slowly fade as the mother calms herself to return to the A'.

Example 9 “Ukolébavka,” mm. 23–26

Example 10 “Ukolébavka,” mm. 30–31

The A' section returns to the mood of the beginning of the piece, almost identically, until it reaches the word “zvyká” where the harmonies of the B section return with a resurgence of the tears in the treble of the piano in a truncated B' section. The first four measures of the piano part of the original B section are used here to bring us into a gloomy postlude that uses diminished seventh chords. The mood of the narrator is brought to a close that leaves little hope for the despairing mother with a *ppp* Fm6 chord that incorporates the tears, the D sounding dissonant as it hangs over the low F5 in the bass.

There are many aspects of this seemingly simple song that reveal Kaprálová's fondness for the techniques of post-Impressionism. The first is the use of extended chords, many of which omit one or several notes. Also, the root movements of the chords throughout the piece utilize third-relations, as well as relationships of fourths and fifths. Perhaps even more important is how Kaprálová's use of color (shifts between flats and sharps, colorful chord structures, etc.) is quite indispensable in reflecting the moods of the text in this song, with sudden shifts as well as gentle transitions that echo the unstable emotions of a woman betrayed by her spouse. These shifts are even more important when viewed in the context of the position in which we find the narrator: she has a child, and is perhaps at the most vulnerable state that a woman can imagine, in utmost dependence on her spouse, physi-

cally, financially, and emotionally. The manner in which Kaprálová flows from color to color and chord to chord in “Ukolébavka” reflects this uncertainty and vulnerability of the mother in the poem.

“Ukolébavka” is a prime example of Kaprálová's individual voice as a composer. The nuances that she creates add a multitude of colors and facets that enhance the text in a way that only a master can achieve. In short forty-nine measures, Kaprálová is able to portray an entire family dynamic and history, and depict the full spectrum of emotion of a wife who hopes against all odds that her husband may one day return her affection.

Bezvětří (Calm)

The text of Seifert's poem *Bezvětří* comes as a bit of a surprise in the context of the rest of the set. Although the other three poems that Kaprálová chose for the cycle also involve symbolism and hidden meaning, they involve humor and irony as well, and can be readily understood at face value. “Bezvětří” (Calm), however, is much more abstract, and requires a deeper level of analysis. The imagery in the poem is vaguer and open to any number of interpretations. The same is true for Kaprálová's setting of the text.

The poem *Bezvětří*, which can also be translated as “windlessness” or “stillness,” uses the nostalgic theme of Seifert's output in the 1930s in a more ominous way, as it discusses the inescapable fate that life has in store for each of us. The “sorrowful dreams” that exist “in the calm of old wounds” describes wounds that, whether physical or psychological, never truly heal; the “luciness of virtuous dirt” reveals the skeleton in the closet that each of us, no matter how virtuous, owns; the “lazy crows” depict the idleness of expectation. The poem brings to light that each life harbors sorrow and disappointment, and that the true glory of life is tragically short, as one proceeds to his own demise, as it was with the ancient city of Nineveh.

Similar to the poem, the song is very different in aesthetic and construction from the rest of the cycle. As with the other three poems selected for the cycle, Kaprálová's setting of this poem captures the essence of the text in great detail. The form is a simple AB with a transition between the two sections, which comes between the two main stanzas of the poem. Perhaps most significant is the fact that this song is also by far the most atonal of the cycle—and indeed of her entire song output—and purposefully so.⁴ Especially in the first section, mm. 1–13, any feeling of tonality or tonal center

is avoided with great care. However, although the atonality of the song is reinforced by the fact that by m.7 all twelve pitches of the chromatic scale have been used, it is clearly not an example of serialism or dissonant counterpoint; thus the organization of the music must be sought elsewhere.⁵

The structure of the song reflects the structure of the poem in that it also does not use conventional elements. Rather than being based on harmony or melody, the first section of the song is based on two primary gestures that come from the first two measures of the voice part. The first, in m. 2, is a gesture involving a step and a leap. The step can be either a whole- or half-step, and the leap also varies in interval. The second basic gesture appears in m. 3 of the voice part and is a basic neighbor-tone movement. These two gestures occur throughout the piece in different transpositions, intervals, and inversions, even throughout the B section that is organized in a more harmonic fashion.

Example 11 “Bezvěťí,” *Vítězslava Kaprálová: Songs* (Prague: Amos Editio, 2005), mm. 1–3. © Amos Editio 2005.

The piece begins with a solitary E in the piano, out of which grow the voice part and the right hand of the piano in contrary motion in the step/leap gesture. The first instance of greater harmonic sonority occurs in mm. 9–10, which also breaks the gesture pattern of the preceding measures. Here the voice sings a very recognizable whole-tone scale that reflects the diving of the lazy crows, while in m. 10 the piano plays a G major 7/B chord. The tonality of this chord is negated by the whole-tone scale in the voice.

Example 12 “Bezvěťí,” mm. 9–10

Measures 14–20 form a transition that takes the lis-

tener from the gestures of the A section to the more harmonic B section. Measures 14–16 are still primarily based on the gesture pattern, with mixed-interval and diminished chords. Although the A section does contain almost no harmonic structure, this aspect is abandoned in the B section. Perhaps Kaprálová chose to set the second stanza of the text more harmonically and with a more structured rhythm, as a contrast to the more atonal A section, because the imagery of this part of the poem is also slightly less abstract. There are still, however, aspects of the A section that remain. It is still built upon the two basic gesture patterns of the A section, but these are expanded and modified. Measures 22–24 in the voice part develop the neighbor-tone gesture, while mm. 25–31 use the step/leap gesture. Here, Kaprálová also devises some very interesting harmonies in the piano, such as in m. 25, where the piano plays a false quartal chord. This chord looks like a quartal chord on the page, but is really a series of stacked diminished and augmented fourths. The same is true for the left hand in m. 26, while the right hand moves down an F-flat chord, and returns to the false quartal chord in m. 27.

Example 13 “Bezvěťí,” mm. 25–27

The song ends with a return to sentiments of the A section with the step/leap gestural motive and an ominous-sounding A, the lowest note on the keyboard, in the bass of the last measure, which perhaps is the signal of the demise of the city of Nineveh.⁶

Example 14 “Bezvěťí,” mm. 31–34

As with the other songs of this cycle, the voice and its accompaniment are relatively independent of each other, which is emphasized by the fact that the voice part is written in flats, while the piano accompaniment is written in sharps, which makes the interchange of notes

between the voice and the piano on the second and third beats of m. 2 almost unnoticeable. The melodic lines of the voice and the piano are closely interwoven and seem to grow out of each other, picking up where the other left off, as can be seen in the interplay between the voice and piano in mm. 3–6. However, amidst the atonality of the A section, Kaprálová inserts a few fleeting moments of consonance in which, at certain points, the voice and piano meet at the same pitch on either the first or last beat of the measure, as in mm. 3, 5, 7, 10, and 12, only to be plunged once again into the elusiveness of atonality.

It is the interplay between the voice and piano, as well as the austere, harsh sounds of the melody and harmonies that create a mood very suitable to the text. The text deals with death, disappointment, and demise, themes that Kaprálová was able to bring out by stressing the dark qualities that mirror the uncertain feeling that the text exudes.

Jarní pouť (Spring Fair)

Even in today's Czech Republic, town fairs are considered one of the main events of the year and are awaited with much expectation. This is doubly so for spring fairs that mark the end of a long and dreary winter and celebrate the explosion of spring color that replaces the monochromatic palette of winter. In the final song of her cycle *Jablko s klína*, “Jarní pouť” (Spring Fair), Kaprálová depicts the nature of fairs in small towns in Bohemia.

The form of this song also stems from the form of the poem. It is a simple ABA'B' form, with an extended solo piano introduction and conclusion that use similar thematic material. The A sections deal with the more descriptive stanzas of the text (stanzas 1 and 2–3), while the B sections highlight the romantic aspects (the lips “swollen from kisses”) of the second and fifth stanzas.

The festive mood of the song begins in the very first measure with a fanfare that announces the arrival of the spring fair and ends with an excited trill on a B in the treble of the piano. The note B then becomes a pedal point that accompanies the treble melody, while the left hand plays a D flat 5 open fifth ostinato in the bass in a different key than the right hand. The B trill/pedal point becomes an important element throughout the song in that each time it is used it signifies the beginning of a new section.

The dissonance of the bitonality between the right hand melody and left hand ostinato in the opening measures is reminiscent of the sounds of a far-off fair, where

all the various sounds intermingle and create the cacophony of the fair. One can hear in the bass ostinato the sound of a far-off band, while the melody in the right hand is also reminiscent of the sounds of the fair—perhaps the music of a carousel. Similar to “Bezvětrí” and “Píseň na vrbovou písťalku,” Kaprálová has introduced one of the main devices of the song—the open fifth ostinato in this case—in the first few measures of the song. The harmonic patterns and melodies are based mainly on open-fifth sonorities which work well for this poem and add to the open, anticipatory mood of the text.

Example 15 “Jarní pouť,” *Vítězslava Kaprálová: Songs* (Prague: Amos Editio, 2005), mm. 1–3. © Amos Editio 2005.

The musical score for Example 15 shows three measures of music. The top staff is in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The tempo is marked 'Allegro ma non tanto'. In measure 1, the treble clef has a trill on B4, and the bass clef has a fanfare. In measure 2, the treble clef has a melodic line, and the bass clef has a bass line. In measure 3, the treble clef has a melodic line, and the bass clef has a bass line. Dynamics include *f*, *sfz*, *pp*, and *p*.

In the measures following the introduction, Kaprálová depicts the atmosphere of the fair, and, as the sounds become more consonant, and although m. 9 includes an A-flat 6 chord, she continues to preserve the quartal/quintal pattern with its spacing. This approach to chord spacing is used throughout the piece, and, similarly to the use of the open fifths, adds a folk-like or modal element to the sonorities of the song.

The trill preceding the *poco meno* section in m. 23 (Ex. 16) signals the beginning of a new idea (B section) that begins again on a B-natural (as did the introduction after the fanfare and entrance of the voice). Here, any feeling of key is neutralized by the staccato chromatic passage in the left hand that paints the image of the shooter and its string of pipes. The string of pipes is then also depicted in the voice part in mm. 24–25, accompanied by the same bass passage, but this time with an added melody that is picked up by the voice. Here, Kaprálová makes use of an interesting scale, a series of alternating pairs of whole- and half-steps. In conjunction, the left hand utilizes an unusual progression of harmonies, including a B5, three tritones, D, A minor, B diminished, while the chord on the last eighth-note is a C-sharp 7 (omit 3), but interestingly, it is also made up of the pitch-class set of the preceding three eighth-notes [1, 4, 6], a device that is repeated later in m. 24. This unusual scale, simply a re-ordered chromatic scale spanning the fourth from C to F, brings the ear farther away from the use of tonality or tonal harmonies of the previous section.



Virginia Eskin



Stephanie Chase

Virginia Eskin, a California native and long-time Boston resident, is a remarkably versatile solo pianist and chamber player, known for both standard classical repertoire and ragtime. A long-time champion of the works of American and European women composers, she has recently created and hosted 'First Ladies of Music,' a 13-program radio series sponsored by Northeastern University and produced by WFMT Chicago, carried by over 100 radio stations in the United States and abroad.

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Jonathan Woolf, *Musicweb.uk*

Example 16 “Jarní pout’,” mm. 23–25

23. *Poco meno*
Na střel-ni - ci je lev a šňů - ra dý - mek,
crescendo poco a poco

The most notable event of the C section comes in the second half of m. 27 with the arrival of the D-flat 7. This is only the second time a chord is featured prominently and clearly as a block chord. The D-flat 7 signals the romantic theme of the lips swollen from kisses, and is followed in m. 28 by another soothing chord, F9, with the excitement of the secret trysts underscored in the bass on an F and a dissonant A-flat in the bass of the left hand. The phrase “od polibků” (from kisses) comes to a rest on another D-flat 7 chord. The next full chord comes in m. 29, with another D-flat 7 on beat three on the word “ret” (lips). The “romance” chord, D-flat 7 returns later in mm. 55–56 in the return of the C section to describe the young women’s lips swollen from kisses. This use of the romance chord perhaps implies that the women’s lips are swollen from the narrator’s kisses.

Example 17 “Jarní pout’,” mm. 27–29

rit. *p*
je ho-tov můj sní - mek, od po-lib - ků
subito pp
29. o - puch-lý mám ret,

The return of the trill in m. 32 then beckons the return of the A section. The use of the material from when the

voice first enters is mirrored in the text, since it has returned again to the excited surveying of the spring fair scene. With the exception of rhythmic alteration for the text, mm. 33–38 are identical to mm. 15–20, but the B section here is expanded to accommodate for the extra stanza of the text.

The use of the romance chord also extends in a manner to the plaintive, somewhat affected weeping of the narrator because it is accompanied by yet another full seventh chord, an A-flat 7, the dominant of the D-flat 7 romance chord, in m. 47.

Example 18 “Jarní pout’,” mm. 47–48

p *mf*
plá - či ji
subito p *mf*

In addition to using recurring harmonic elements to signify ideas, the use of word painting in this song is more pronounced, and adds to the humorous nature of the text. For instance, the motive in mm. 24–25 is used in the first B section to depict the string of pipes on the shooter, but upon its return in the second B section, this same motive is used even more amusingly as the tiptoeing of the young women who return “a bit tousled from their lovers.”

Example 19 “Jarní pout’,” mm. 51–52

Poco meno *rit.*
Kaž - dá při-chá - zí ko-nec kon-ců
mp *crescendo*

As it was with the “Píseň na vrbovou píšťalku” and the “Ukolébavka,” the song “Jarní pout’” also uses post-Impressionist language. The use of short melodic motives, perfect fifth, perfect fourth, and tritone intervals, as well as the addition of a fourth or fifth to a melodic line (Ex. 20) all belong to the post-Impressionist movement. However, the music in this song directly linked to certain

ideas, depicting the storyline and, in certain places—such as the “kisses” motive—revealing ideas that cannot be found in the text alone.

Example 20 “Jarní pout’,” mm. 9–10



The overall mood of “Jarní pout’” is one of joyful anticipation, as depicted clearly in the setting of the text. The voice part is punctuated by lively rhythms and active melodic lines. In both the piano accompaniment and the voice line, one motive jumps to another, as the mind of the narrator wanders around with excitement. Kaprálová’s setting of this song reflects not only her sense of humor but also displays the depth of her imagination and versatility as a composer.

Although the *Jablko s klína* cycle is a mere ten minutes in length, it provides an excellent study in the compositional style of its author. The songs display a great diversity of Kaprálová’s style, and, from a theoretical point of view, require a broad spectrum of analytical tools. For instance, her style contains many elements that link her to the post-Impressionist school: the use of bitonality, extended tertian harmonies, chord planing, non-traditional root movements of chords, departure from major/minor scales in favor of others, perfect fourth, fifth, and tritone intervals, and new chord formations. The songs of this cycle that most resemble the ideals of post-Impressionism are “Píseň na vrbovou píšťalku,” “Jarní pout’,” and “Ukolébavka;” but “Bezvětrí,” with its sparse, atonal A section, rejects some fundamental Impressionist ideas. Indeed, a thorough analysis of *Jablko s klína* reveals that although Kaprálová’s style favored post-Impressionism, it was not her sole means of musical expression, for she was able to draw from any number of musical techniques that would best portray her interpretation of the text. The result of this commitment to the poetry is a cycle of songs in which each song has its own character and can stand alone on its own merit.

This aspect of the songs comprising *Jablko s klína* confirms that in Kaprálová’s art songs, the text is of ut-

most importance. Each of the songs in this cycle bears evidence that Kaprálová was extremely careful with her text setting. Not only did she depict the moods and emotions of the text through harmonic and melodic means, but, through rhythmic manipulation and by utilizing the strong and weak beats of the measure, Kaprálová was also able to set the text in such a way that its proportions in sung verse reflect almost exactly the proportions of expert recitation.

Although each song stands apart from the others in one way or another, there are also many unifying factors that can be attributed to Kaprálová’s compositional style. Examples include the use of bitonality, open fifths, recurring motives and harmonies that signify specific ideas or connections, word painting, and the use of non-traditional harmonies and scales. This is not to say that she relied on these devices solely but rather used them as a way to enhance and interpret the text. The cycle displays a great diversity of compositional language, and also reflects the crossroads at which Kaprálová found herself at the time. For example, the cycle shows the use of tonal centers in “Ukolébavka,” the non-functional harmonies of “Píseň na vrbovou píšťalku” and “Jarní pout’,” and the use of atonality in “Bezvětrí.” This is important, as it demonstrates that Kaprálová not only understood modern techniques of composition, but was also skilled in these techniques herself. Each song in *Jablko s klína* takes on a completely different character that is determined by the text, which leaves little doubt that Kaprálová was able to use all the musical possibilities available and to create a voice that was entirely her own. In the works that followed, every aspect of her musical language would be a deliberate choice that stemmed from her own ideals and principles. *Jablko s klína* has an important place in Kaprálová’s catalog not only because it is a remarkably well-written song cycle, but also because it provides a glimpse of Kaprálová’s personality in the choices she made—and would make—as a composer.

Notes:

1. “Nezapomeňte, hudba je diplomat mluvící k srdci.” Vítězslava Kaprálová, “Propaganda hudbou,” *Československý boj* 2 (1940): 8.
2. Kaprálová was only eight when her parents separated so that Václav Kaprál could live with his mistress.
3. Kaprálová’s parents separated while she was a child but they never divorced, not even after her death. According to Dagmar Kvapil (b. 1925), who rented a room in the Kaprál family apartment after the war, Kaprál was living with his mistress, yet he would bring her every so often to the apartment he had shared with his wife for dinner, cooked by Kaprálová’s mother herself.
4. This is not a new concept in Kaprálová’s work, since her String Quartet, op. 8, written around the same time (1935–36), also exhibits atonal tendencies.

5. Dissonant counterpoint is a technique that reverses the rules of traditional counterpoint by focusing on dissonance rather than consonance.

6. Nineveh was the capital of ancient Assyria, often mentioned in the Bible. It enjoyed a short-lived period of great prosperity before it was tragically destroyed, along with its citizens, in a battle that was the end of the Assyrian Empire.

About the author:

Dr. Jandura has received her doctoral degree from the University of Arizona. Her deep interest in Czech art music has translated into both her performance and research. In 1996, she took part in a world-premiere presentation of a multimedia performance of Leoš Janáček's *Intimate Letters*. More recently, her research on Czech art song introduced her to the songs of Vítězslava Kaprálová, which was the subject of her doctoral dissertation. This article is based on this dissertation.

CD REVIEW

Women of Firsts: Art songs by the first important Twentieth Century women composers from the Czech Republic, Poland, United States, and France. Composers: Vítězslava Kaprálová, Grażyna Bacewicz, Amy Beach, Lili Boulanger. Performers: Daniel Weeks, tenor; Naomi Oliphant, piano. Centaur Recordings, CRC 2966 (2008).

Upon first glance, one would assume that a CD entitled *Women of Firsts* would feature a female voice and piano duo. However, this CD features tenor Daniel Weeks and pianist Naomi Oliphant in a wonderful recording of familiar and unfamiliar vocal compositions from four female composers who were “true pioneers in their field.” Kaprálová was the first woman to conduct the Czech Philharmonic; Bacewicz was the first female composer in Poland to receive national and international attention; Beach was one of the first American women composers to successfully compose in large compositional forms in addition to garnering critical acclaim in Europe; and Boulanger was the first female composer to win the famed Prix de Rome at only 19 years old.

The first three tracks on this recording feature the cycle *Navždy* (Forever) by Vítězslava Kaprálová. These evocative songs are typical of Kaprálová's compositional style, displaying an ethereal and otherworldly quality through the use of interesting harmonies and unexpected modulations coupled with expansive vocal lines and frequent wide intervallic leaps in the melody. This set is beautifully performed by Weeks and Oliphant, with Weeks demonstrating exquisite phrasing and musicality, in addition to expertly negotiating the contrasting demands of parlando and bel canto singing.

This is followed with Grażyna Bacewicz's song cycle, *Trzy pieśni do słów arabskich z X wieku* (Three songs to words from the tenth century Arabic poetry). Originally scored for tenor and orchestra in 1938, and later arranged for tenor and piano, this brief yet highly varied set certainly deserves its place in art song repertoire. “Mamidło” (Mirage) was a lovely surprise for me, as it is accessible and tonal, yet with brief flashes of chromaticism

and a melancholy sensation all at once. However, the highlight of this cycle is the second song, “Inna” (Other Woman). A mere 43 seconds in length, the song features the piano as the more prominent character, employing “a polytonal, ostinato pattern to invoke the nearby lover, while more lyrical and flowing material is used with expressive and tonal harmonies to illustrate the other woman.”

Although Amy Beach's cycle, *Three Browning Songs*, have been recorded by numerous artists, Weeks' and Oliphant's version is to be commended. The best part of this set is Weeks' high notes—they are glorious and plentiful. Although the tempo in the first song, “The Year's at the Spring,” is a bit slow, Weeks and Oliphant make up for this in the second song, “Ah, Love, but a day!” This is their best performance of the entire CD. Oliphant plays the poignant piano part with utmost clarity, and Weeks' facility with his upper register is quite remarkable. His high notes are loud, resonant, and beautiful.

The final cycle on the recording is *Clairières dans le Ciel*, by Lili Boulanger. This cycle is also well-represented in numerous recordings, although it is performed by more sopranos despite the fact that it was composed for tenor, David Devriès. Although many of the tempi are too fast in this recording, mention must be made of *Par ce que j'ai souffert*. The dramatic and intense suffering in this piece is expertly performed, and the duo makes this extremely difficult song sound incredibly easy, with seamless transitions between tempi, dynamic, expressive, and harmonic changes.

The CD liner notes are thorough, well-written and insightful, offering information on each composer, describing compositional techniques, discussing historical context, and providing translations. *Women of Firsts* is a thoughtful presentation of important female composers whose music deserves to be heard more often.

Michelle Latour



VÍTĚZSLAVA KAPRÁLOVÁ



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