

*A Journal of Women in Music***Kaprálková and the Muses: Understanding the Qualified Composer***Diane M. Paige**Special points of interest:*

- Kaprálová as Muse
- Kaprálová's Piano Concerto

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We cannot deny that Vítězslava Kaprálová (1915–1940) was a female Czech composer, but qualifiers may be more harmful than helpful. Mike Beckerman has noted in his studies of Czech music that qualifiers are a way to define what something is not.¹ Kaprálová was neither male, nor western European—she was an outsider. Ideally, we would examine her works from some kind of level playing field free from qualifiers, but none exists in the writing of history. The qualifiers attached to Kaprálová will naturally direct us towards specific strands of inquiry and compel us to highlight certain qualities over others as we examine her oeuvre. A closer unqualified look reveals a richer picture. What began as an inquiry into the nature of musical muses and Kaprálová's part in it, became an exploration of a composer who lay outside paradigms often used to understand the phenomenon of a woman composer.

Part and parcel of Kaprálová studies is the mention of her affair with Bohuslav Martinů, a Czech composer 25 years her senior. It is well documented that she served as a muse for the composer. But before examining this relationship, I will provide a short précis of how muses have served their creators in Western history.

Since antiquity the female Muse has served as an important helpmate to creative artists of all kinds. In early Greek culture, the muses were erotic and beautiful beings who induced an irrational state in men, a condition that favored creative acts. In the *Ion* by Plato, Socrates remarked, "a poet is a delicate thing, winged and sacred, and unable to create until he becomes inspired and frenzied, his mind no longer in him; as long

as he keeps his hold on that, no man can compose or chant prophecy."² In another Platonic dialogue Socrates classified this process as "possession and madness from the Muses, seizing a tender and untrodden soul, arousing it and exciting it to a Bacchic frenzy toward both odes and other poetry."³ Plato warned that men be wary of the Muse's powers which created a state of possession and thereby might interfere with matters of state: "If you admit the Muse of sweet pleasure, whether in lyrics or epics, pleasure and pain will rule as monarchs in your city, instead of the law and that rational principle which is always and by all thought to be best."⁴

In the Christian Middle Ages, classical muses were conceived of as passive sources of inspiration rather than forces that overtook their artists. However, the erotic imagery of the Muse and the link between sexual desire and poetic genius would remain an important aspect of her character well into the Renaissance. Whether exalted by troubadours or Elizabethan poets, the Muse was a beautiful font of creative potential. The spiritual aspect of the Muse surfaced at this time and served as an alternate means of interpreting her power. The cult of the Virgin Mary or Dante's adoration of Beatrice is proof of the notion that the Muse was a means to bring the artist closer to God. Much later, with the advent of Romanticism, a third aspect of the Muse emerged: her inherent connection to nature, her natural creative force, and her ability to help man reconnect with the lost paradise.

Through history, the Muse has assumed several guises: as an erotic or sexual

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being, as a spiritual channel to God, or as a vital force of the natural world. Whether configured as pure Virgin or as Mother Earth, all muses share certain characteristics. All are objectified by the artist; captured images for his use. She is the ideal, unattainable woman, the beloved; he the subject and lover. He becomes whole by incorporating her feminine creative powers into his own sensibilities.

There are several examples of composer–muse relationships, such as Peter Tchaikovsky’s correspondence with the widow Nadezhda Filaretovna von Meck, affording the composer a confidante from a safe distance. As he battled self-doubt and anthropophobia and struggled to compose his Fourth Symphony, her presence was of great importance to him. Other composers, such as Alban Berg, captured the beloved through symbols and hidden messages in musical compositions. For example, in the famous D-Minor Interlude at the end of his opera *Wozzeck*, Berg attributes the inspiration to the powers of his Muse, his future wife Helene. “The Interlude at the end I owe to you and you alone. You really composed it, I just wrote it down.”⁵ It is not surprising that references to his beloved Helene as Muse virtually disappear once the couple married. Part of the allure of the Muse is that she is unattainable and holds illusory powers. Marriage affords neither. Later, Berg found another muse, Hanna Fuchs-Robettin, and references to her are embedded in his *Lyric Suite*. Because her presence is encoded, Berg prepared her a specially annotated copy that detailed where she and Berg symbolically appear in the work.

There are at least three Czech composers whose works are indebted to muses: Zdeněk Fibich (1850–1900), Leoš Janáček (1854–1928), and, as already mentioned in connection to Kaprálová, Bohuslav Martinů (1890–1959). Fibich treated his muse Anežka Schulzová as the subject of his most notorious composition, *Nalady, Dojmy a Upomínky (Moods, Impressions, and Remembrances)*. This work, a cycle of 376 small works for piano, represents musical reminiscences of their love affair, while some are explicit descriptions of the beloved’s body. Janáček’s relationship with Kamila Stösslová famously served as the impetus for four operas (*Káťa Kabanová, The Cunning Little Vixen, The Makropulos Affair, and From the House of the Dead*) as well as several chamber works. Janáček, 37 years her senior, was fascinated by Kamila’s vibrant personality. Theirs was a bizarre relationship; highly erotic yet apparently unconsummated, intimate and painfully honest, yet with few personal contacts. While he penned several hundred letters to her, she replied infrequently. This condition, strikingly similar to Franz Kafka’s correspondence with Felice Bauer, made for the perfect artist–muse relationship. Before his acquaintance with Bauer, Kafka

had yet to produce any major piece of work. She served as an inspiration, as helpmate, and as an idealized creative force for him all the while at the safe distance in Berlin, away from Kafka’s Prague.

Unlike Kafka or Janáček, Bohuslav Martinů’s relationship with his muse Kaprálová was not generally conducted from a distance; rather the two composers were collaborators who spent a great deal of time in one another’s company. The professional and personal relationship between the two began in Paris in the fall of 1937. It is known that they had a romantic affair and for a time, Martinů even considered leaving his wife for Kaprálová. The young Kaprálová returned his devotion and even spent the morning of her wedding to Jiří Mucha with Martinů.⁶ Mucha would later pen an autobiographical novel that included details of his wife’s affair with the composer.⁷

There are obvious ways in which the relationship between Martinů and Kaprálová suggests that she served as Martinů’s Muse. For example, even short spans of physical distance spurred creativity. It was during their first significant separation from September to December 1938 that Martinů penned 33 letters to her. In these, he refers to her by pet names, such as “little song,” “fairytale,” or “little flower.” In one letter he expresses his longing for her: “...tell me, tell, my Little Song, would you like to be always with me? Keep telling me that, will you? ...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.”⁸

Capturing one’s Muse through letter writing was a common means to identify the female figure as a source of idealized love and creativity. In this sense, Martinů saw her as a muse. When the two were apart during two instances in 1938, Martinů composed two works associated with his beloved: the Double Concerto and the String Quartet no. 5 which carried extra-musical meaning for the composer and features musical symbols associated with Kaprálová throughout all four movements.

To date, the most compelling evidence of Kaprálová’s role as Muse to Martinů comes in the way in which the composer reused motives and harmonic gestures from his opera *Julietta*, a surreal love story where the two lovers Julietta and Michel may only be together by existing in a dream world without real memories. Unlike most musical works inspired by muses, *Julietta* was written before the composer had even met Kaprálová, some nine months before their initial meeting, but for both of them the opera would have held symbolic significance. In the opera, *Julietta* is unreal and therefore cannot be Michel’s in any true

sense, much as the creator sees the muses as unattainable, uncanny figures.

As stated above, muses are imaginary figures that the artist is drawn to but can never have. *Julietta*'s story is a strong parallel for both the real affair between the two and what could have been if Martinů had not been married and/or if the couple were not in exile under extraordinary circumstances. Erik Entwistle has made a compelling case for Martinů's use of the so-called *Julietta* three-note motive and accompanying chords as a symbol of an idealized Kaprálová, and has examined their continued use in Martinů's works following her death.⁹ Works by Martinů that prominently feature musical symbols associated with his beloved include his *Tre Ricercari*, *Concerto Grosso*, *Fantasy and Toccata*, and *Memorial to Lidice*. Musical symbolism is used more pervasively and more insistently after Kaprálová's death, no doubt in part due to the grief suffered by Martinů, but also because of the palpable absence of his beloved—with her physical absence she could truly become a muse.

Unlike that of Felice Bauer and Franz Kafka, or Leoš Janáček and Kamila Stösslová, Martinů and Kaprálová's relationship was atypical of the roles of creator and muse. Musical muses are almost always non-musicians and often intellectual inferiors whose image, rather than abilities, inspire. Kaprálová was an accomplished and recognized composer in her own right: at the 1938 Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) in London, where she was slated with Béla Bartók, Benjamin Britten, Aaron Copland, Karl A. Hartmann, Paul Hindemith, Ernst Křenek, Olivier Messiaen, and Anton Webern, she presented her *Military Sinfonietta* as the festival opening work. And rather than simply serving as a passive source of inspiration, Kaprálová collaborated with Martinů on works such as the *Tre Ricercare*, and her opinions and compositional skills in writing what he called "our little ricercars" were clearly respected: "And do you know that our little ricercars were a great success in Venice, [...] and rightly so, as it was my Little Song [Martinů's nickname for Kaprálová] who was helping me, and it would be indeed sad if two such talents would not be able to put together something substantial."¹⁰ The pair was also to collaborate to produce music for a series of folk plays, although the project never came to fruition due to the War.¹¹

While Kaprálová clearly inspired Martinů, it is more difficult to characterize his role as a source of inspiration for her because the notion of female creativity is paradoxical by definition. In Antiquity, Plato's mind-body split led to other gendered dualisms such as culture-nature and the mental-physical, and thus categorically exempted woman from any creative role save childbearing. Rousseau was unconvinced of woman's creative

potential and Renoir considered women artists as "merely ridiculous."¹² However it was defined and argued, creativity remained a male privilege, though not one that ignored the female entirely. By the 19th century, a true creator was a biological male with a feminine psyche, a condition succinctly defined by French critic Edmond de Goncourt: "There are no women of genius; the women of genius are men."¹³ The female creator, on the other hand, was faced by a double-bounded notion of creativity that "denies or misrepresents either her sexuality or her artistry."¹⁴ She could not be both woman and creator and when she attempted to do so, she either became androgynous, a monster, or an artistic fraud. As more female authors and visual artists gained prominence in the 19th century, all creative acts, whether high art or mass culture, were coded respectively as male and female domains (consider, for example, the 19th century novel). All great art remained male, even though the creative act itself is feminine in nature: "Creativity is a complex and subtle form of power, one that involves sensitivity, patience, and other qualities that seem feminine."¹⁵

Despite the ambivalence faced by the female creator and obstacles placed in her way, many succeeded; in the early twentieth century Kaprálová was one such artist and one whose works were inspired by her mentor and lover Martinů. Rather than allude to a distant, unattainable love, her musical inspiration was a dialogue of sorts between herself and Martinů. She shared a kind of compositional reciprocity with him by using musical symbols from his opera *Julietta* in her own works, perhaps as a way to openly acknowledge her love affair with her mentor and collaborator. For example, she used *Julietta* materials in a re-setting of a love song that Martinů had set himself, as well as in other works, such as her *Partita* and the *Variations sur le carillon de l'église St-Etienne du Mont*.

What, then, was Martinů's relationship to her creative work? The literature configures his role as mentor and lover, but not as Muse. This is hardly surprising since men by definition cannot be muses and female creators rarely identify muses as inspirational vehicles. It is clear though that when life events separated the two, whether it was through physical separation or with the separation brought by Kaprálová's marriage, she alluded to Martinů's unseen presence in her compositions. For example, five days following her marriage to Mucha she penned a song *Dopis* (Letter) based on a text by Petr Kříčka. The text is an epistle by a man who mourns a lost relationship. On the back of the French version of the song, Kaprálová wrote the following paraphrase of the original Czech text:

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A young man responds to his love. You said “no.” So be it! It was fate that separated us; I regretted it but I can see that you are happy and that’s why I am also happy. I don’t want to judge who’s to blame, whose loss is bigger. Just the other day, there were two paths; today, there is only one. Perhaps, you will return one day. For the Lord God is a great artist and no one knows his plans...¹⁶

Paradoxically, Kaprálová served as Muse, as valued collaborator, and at times relied on a male helpmate/Muse in several of her works. There are other ways in which she lies outside of the norm of what we expect of women composers; she wrote in large scale genres and in an abstract modernist language, and enjoyed notable successes early in her career. How was she afforded such opportunities? Traditional scholarship might be tempted to assign her successes to pure luck (passing fame), since women composers are secondary figures at best in standard music histories. In fact, there were several factors that led the way to her early critical acclaim and allowed her to develop her natural talent and skills as a composer and conductor. These include the role of mentors and supporters and advocates, her access to the academy and other institutions, her decision to move to Paris to study with Martinů and Charles Munch, and her large body of works in small-scale genres, though she was equally productive in large-scale orchestral works.

Support and advocacy by her father, by Martinů, and others gave her opportunities and opened doors for her. Martinů noted such support in a letter to his biographer Miloš Šafránek, referring to his desire to take her to America with him: “She is very energetic and has been lucky, someone influential in the music circles has been helping her.”¹⁷ Research about the development of female creative endeavors in the arts notes the importance of mentors and familial support in successful creative women. Often fathers become a model of ideals and parental encouragement is key; although in Kaprálová’s career that was not the case at first—Václav Kaprál had reservations about her choice of career as a conductor and composer, but he was to become one of his daughter’s staunchest supporters.

Kaprálová’s decision to leave Czechoslovakia to study in Paris may well have encouraged her as a young composer, since that city was a vibrant locale that encouraged exchanges between art, literature, and music and one that was open to expatriates both male and female, a place that embraced American jazz, and a city in the midst of the heady days of early modernism. Kaprálová would have found an atmosphere that would allow female creators to express themselves.

Unlike the case of many female composers, her reception history is one that does not privilege genres historically coded as feminine. It is possible, however, that by choosing to write also piano works and art songs, some of the most performed works of her oeuvre, Kaprálová may have helped to ensure that her music would be favorably received. From the 19th to the early 20th century, these two genres were seen as the most appropriate musical media for female expression. Women composers’ concentration on them arose in part from the Romantic emphasis on amateur piano studies for young women and the growth of amateur singing. Genres are hierarchical; novels, for example, associated with females were of lesser substance than biographies, associated with male authors. Such critiques were not limited to females who chose these “lesser” genres. Composers such as Chopin who wrote in these genres were often considered as feminine or as outsiders.¹⁸

Female composers were often compelled by the practicalities of the music industry in their choice of genre rather than by aesthetic preferences. Sonata form and large scale genres were the epitome of true creativity, and those that were absolute music were even better. Small genres, on the other hand, were more likely to see a live performance, albeit in intimate rather than concert settings; thus a female composer who wanted to hear her works in her lifetime was wise to concentrate on such *gemütliche* genres. When Kaprálová was urged by an early love and fellow student in Brno Ota Vach to abandon high art for that which would appeal to the masses, Kaprálová was guided by principles rather than practicalities: “Even if the times worked against me, if everything tried to stop me, nothing will uproot me and steer me away from my path. I don’t care for your ‘utility ends,’ they are not for me and I would not consider them, as no truly committed musician would. Such a musician is too idealistic—almost simple—but courageous.”¹⁹ In the end such principles served her well. Many of her most successful and critically acclaimed works are large scale genres such as *Military Sinfonietta*, Partita for piano and strings, and the *Suita rustica*.

Unlike music by many twentieth century female composers, much of Kaprálová’s music is abstract and thoroughly modern. Modernism associated with female creators often relied on the discourse of Romantic notions of genius, thereby excluding the modernist female composer from contemporary musical developments. Had Kaprálová relied on earlier stylistic approaches, she would have reinforced the notion that she was a female composer. Despite the fact that she chose to focus on large scale works, highly abstracted musical language, and eschewed consistent musical and

topical references to her homeland, her works received high praise and serious recognition both at home and abroad; in this way she is outside the paradigms commonly used to understand the female composer.

Even if we could somehow negate her gender and choice of genre in our estimation of her works and remove her from the category of Other, Kaprálová would remain an Outsider to the Western art tradition. She remained, and will always remain, a Czech composer, despite her international training and cosmopolitan musical style, just as her compatriots Dvořák and Janáček. Despite any musical style that Czech composers will adopt, they will always be referred to as “Czech” composers, as if one must qualify their successes. Such a qualifier directs our attention at what works should represent that composer and what works might be included, if at all, in standard histories of Western music. In order for Dvořák to gain favor with Viennese audiences, for example, he wrote folk-like Slavonic Dances; he would eventually enjoy wider success as a composer but would always remain a Czech composer. Embracing the folk style paid off, since Brahms was able to arrange for an influential connection with the music publisher Simrock.

As with her compatriots, Kaprálová’s works that refer to political events and social climate of her country were well received because they support the image of a “Czech” composer; however, these would not become typical of her musical output. She did not achieve recognition as a Czech composer by writing music that fit the image of the peasant composer (à la Dvořák). Her many successes, however, do not trump her modifiers. For example, when she appeared as composer and conductor at the 16th annual ISCM Festival in London, the correspondent for *Time* magazine referred to her as a “good looking Czechoslovakian girl,” while the other composers (all male) were given no physical description by the review’s author.²⁰ A review of the same performance by a London newspaper described her as a “little girl conductor.”²¹ While her works and her conducting were well-praised, they were as qualified as those by a young attractive woman, an anomaly to be noted.

The field of musicology still privileges the male and the Western European despite significant advances in the last thirty years; history textbooks have come a long way, but there is still much road to cover. For the female composer the challenges remain as well. Seven decades after Kaprálová’s debut as conductor with her *Military Sinfonietta* the qualifier is still a significant part of the music of the female composer and her works. The flimsiness of the claim that the gender barrier has been broken in classical music is shown nowhere better than at a concert of pieces composed by women. Even now at the start of the 21st century, decades after the dawn of the contemporary feminist movement saw a rise in women’s orchestra’s and gen-

der-based musicological studies and long after the inclusion of a single piece by a female composer on a concert program has ceased to be remarkable, a whole concert of music by women, performed by women, still feels unusual. It remains an exception to the classical music norm, which is a concert of music written entirely by men.

As historians, we should step back in an effort to understand how qualifiers (woman, Czech, Jewish, African American) have shaped the creation and reception of works by composers so qualified. Such a critical assessment allows us to better understand the challenges that composers such as Kaprálová faced as they made their way in the world. Despite her short career Kaprálová achieved a great deal; one cannot deny the quality and size of her compositional output, her highly favorable reception at home and abroad, her ability to successfully master an abstract modernist compositional style in large and small scale genres. These are facts that compel us to conclude with the unqualified reality: Vítězslava Kaprálová was a remarkable composer whose work defies those paradigms traditionally used to understand the female composer, and her work and life deserve further scholarly attention.

Notes:

This article is partially based on a book chapter I wrote, “Janáček and the Captured Muse,” in *Janáček and His World*, ed. Michael Beckerman (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 79–98.

¹ Michael Beckerman, Foreword to *The Kaprálová Companion*, ed. Karla Hartl and Erik Entwistle (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), x–xi.

² Plato, *Ion. Hippias Minor. Laches. Protagoras*, trans. R. E. Allen (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 14.

³ Plato, *Gorgias and Phaedrus*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 174.

⁴ Plato, *Plato’s Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1974), 251.

⁵ Berg, Alban, *Alban Berg: Letters to His Wife*, ed. and trans. Bernard Grun (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1971), 19.

⁶ Karla Hartl, “Vítězslava Kaprálová: An Annotated Life Chronology,” *The Kaprálová Companion*, 138.

⁷ Jiří Mucha, *Podivné lásky* (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1988).

⁸ Bohuslav Martinů to Vítězslava Kaprálová, 19 December 1938. Letter reprinted in Kateřina Mařová, “Z archivu Moravského zemského muzea. Korespondence Bohuslava Martinů,” *Harmonie* 10 (2004): 26.

⁹ Erik Entwistle, “To je Julietta. Martinů, Kaprálová and Musical Symbolism,” *The Kapralova Society Newsletter* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 1–15.

¹⁰ Hartl, “Chronology,” 146n47.

¹¹ Karla Hartl, “Vítězslava Kaprálová: An Annotated Catalog of Works,” *The Kaprálová Companion*, 187n37.

¹² Linda L. Clark, *Women and Achievement in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 82.

¹³ Cesare Lambruso, *The Man of Genius* (London: Scott, 1863 r/1891), 138.

¹⁴ Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius. Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 46.

¹⁵ Ravenna Helson, "Creativity in Women. Outer and Inner Views over Time," in *Theories of Creativity*, eds. Mark A. Runco and Robert S. Albert (London: SAGE Publications, 1990), 47.

¹⁶ Hartl, "Chronology," 152n90.

¹⁷ Bohuslav Martinů to Miloš Šafránek, 18 March 1939. Quoted in Hartl, "Chronology," 148n66. (While Kaprálová may have had a few fierce supporters, mainly her father and Martinů himself, she had quite a few influential enemies as well, including the wife of the Czechoslovak Ambassador in Paris who was behind the initial denial by the Ministry of Education to renew Kaprálová's scholarship at the Ecole normale for the 1938–39 school year—eds.).

¹⁸ Jeffrey Kallberg, *Chopin at the Boundaries: Sex, History, and Musical Genre* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1996), 30–61.

¹⁹ Kaprálová to Ota Vach, n.d. Quoted in Hartl, "Chronology," 142n17.

²⁰ "International Egg Rolling," review of Kaprálová's performance of *Military Sinfonietta*, *Time* magazine, June 27, 1938, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,759885,00.html>

²¹ Quoted in Bohuslav Martinů, "Mezinárodní festival v Londýně," *Lidové noviny*, June 28, 1938, 7.

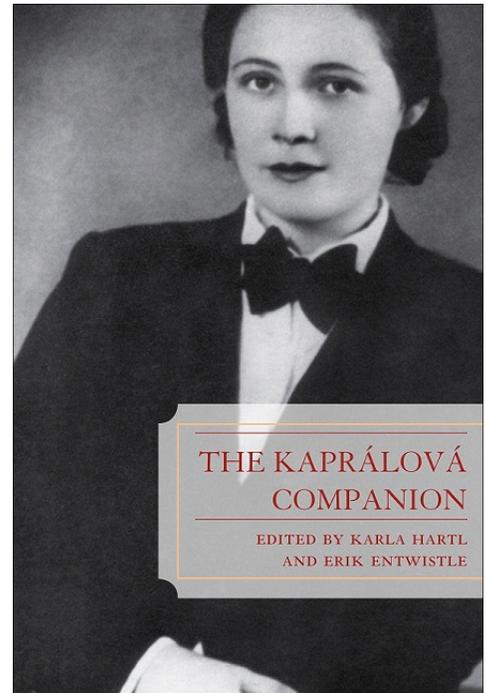
About the author

Diane M. Paige received her Ph.D. in Musicology from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her dissertation, entitled *The Women of Janáček's Operas*, explored the archetypes and female roles of the Czech composer's mature operas. She has published in *The Musical Quarterly*, with Princeton and Cambridge (forthcoming) Presses, and is currently at work on a book about music and war from the American Revolution to present. She has presented her research at a wide variety of venues including BBC Radio 3, Lincoln Center for the Arts, and the Bard Music Festival. Dr. Paige chairs the Hartwick College Department of Music and also serves as the Arkell Hall Foundation Chair in the Arts.



Koch Records KIC-CD-7742 (2008)

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"A remarkable book! Since her death at age twenty-five in the midst of WWII, Kaprálová's brilliant musical legacy and story have fallen through the cracks. But now this book brings her music, in all its variety and power, to the fore. This collection, by a range of distinguished scholars, offers insights and investigation into Kaprálová's creative work and life. Nothing short of a revelation!" —Liane Curtis, Brandeis University

"This volume is the first scholarly effort in English attempting to put the puzzle of Kaprálová together in a coherent form. It represents the collective thought of the most serious scholars who have devoted themselves to studying Kaprálová and her work, and sets a high standard for those to follow." —Michael Beckerman, New York University

"Karla Hartl and Erik Entwistle's *The Kaprálová Companion* is a superb, long overdue contribution to the studies of women in music in general and, specifically, to the analysis of the remarkable composer Vítězslava Kaprálová. A thorough, well-written, and insightful guide." —Michelle Latour, UNLV

Kaprálová's Piano Concerto in D Minor, op. 7

Karla Hartl

The Czech Radio's label Radioservis has recently added to its catalog a unique recording—Kaprálová's Piano Concerto in D Minor, op. 7.¹ The CD also features Kaprálová's Sonata Appassionata, Variations sur le Carillon de l'église St-Etienne du Mont (—the latter work once charmed Kaprálová's friend Bohuslav Martinů so much that he arranged to have it published with La Sirène éditions musicales in 1938 in Paris), and the Three Piano Pieces (with its unconventionally conceived passacaglia that once amused another mentor of Kaprálová—Vítězslav Novák).

The brief but intense life of Vítězslava Kaprálová (1915–1940), set between the two world wars, ran a close parallel with that of the First Czechoslovak Republic,² to whose modernist movement Kaprálová belonged. The composer's creative development began in her hometown of Brno—a major musical centre of the new republic, second only to Prague—and was stimulated by the cultured environment of her family and its circle of friends—composer Theodor Schaefer and musicologists Vladimír Helfert, Ludvík Kundera, and Gracian Černušák. A further stimulus came with Kaprálová's move to Prague (and her studies under Novák and Václav Talich at the Prague Conservatory plus her involvement in the Presence society for contemporary music, founded by avant-garde composer Alois Hába); and eventually to Paris, where Kaprálová relocated in 1937 to advance her education at the Ecole normale. In Paris she also found her mentor (and soulmate) in Bohuslav Martinů. His often cited influence on Kaprálová's musical development has been rather overestimated, however, for the music of Igor Stravinsky and her father in particular exerted as strong an influence on Kaprálová.

Like her father, Kaprálová was drawn to piano as her natural instrument, and piano compositions are well represented in her relatively large output that includes about fifty compositions. Piano also played a crucial role in her music as a compositional tool with which she experimented in both smaller and larger forms. It is therefore not surprising that the most original and most sophisticated works in her catalog are those for piano: from the *Sonata Appassionata* and piano concerto to *April Preludes* and *Variations sur le Carillon* (and the Martinů-influenced neoclassical Partita in which the piano also plays an important percussive role).

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in D Minor is Kaprálová's first orchestral composition and a final fruit of her studies at the Brno Conservatory where she enrolled in 1930 as a girl barely fifteen years old. She was the first female student in the history of the Conservatory to be accepted into a double major program of composition and conducting. During her initial year at the Conservatory she composed an accomplished first opus—a cycle of five impressionistic pieces for solo piano. The following year she wrote two works for violin and piano; and in her third year she composed *January*, a remarkable song for soprano / tenor, flute, two violins, cello and piano, and *Sonata Appassionata*, the first of her four major works for solo piano. The sonata prepared her well for the

work on the concerto, particularly its first movement, whose musical ideas Kaprálová formulated at the beginning of the fourth year of her studies in Brno.

While the solo piano part did not present any problem for Kaprálová, the orchestral writing was an entirely new challenge, although she did have some experience with orchestra as a student of conducting. It is also possible that, in addition to consulting with her teachers at the Conservatory, she discussed the concerto's instrumentation with Theodor Schaefer, a friend and mentor who was known to have a great deal of expertise in this area. (She could not turn to her father, since Kaprál had about the same experience with orchestration as his daughter. He was, after all, primarily a composer of piano music and songs, and composed only one work for large orchestra—a small scale wedding march).

The first movement of the three-movement concerto (*Allegro entusiastico – Largo – Allegro*) is still grounded in the romantic idiom. The second movement, unusually short and dominated by a simple melancholy melody, is in contrapuntal style. The last, rondo movement, however, already anticipates a new creative period which was to blossom under the guidance of Novák. The composition convincingly displays the versatility of Kaprálová's musical talent, with its typical energy and passion, lyricism, intelligent humor, spontaneity, but also discipline.

Kaprálová officially graduated from the Brno Conservatory with her performance of the concerto's first (and longest) movement, which more than amply demonstrated that she was able to meet the formal and technical requirements posed on a conservatory graduate. The performance, at which Kaprálová also appeared for the first time before the public as conductor, took place at the 3rd graduation concert of the Brno Conservatory on June 17, 1935. The soloist was one of her teachers and close family friends, Ludvík Kundera, who, according to a contemporary critic, “advocated for the work with the full weight of his mature art and refined aesthetics.”³ The reviewer for *Lidové noviny*, Gracian Černušák, was also impressed by the composer's “confidence and surety with which she controlled such a complex orchestral apparatus, as well as with her wonderful sense of orchestral color and the technical mastery of the solo part and orchestral tutti in their interactions. The work's fluent diction serves the elegant

Kaprálová: *Piano Concerto in D Minor*

invention with such ease that the piece rises considerably above the average level of works of this kind.”⁴ In *Moravské noviny* another reviewer praised the young conductor’s performance: “Her piano concerto emanates youthful energy and enthusiasm, and is, judging from the first movement that was performed at the concert, a well-constructed and skillfully orchestrated composition. Also as a conductor, V. Kaprálová guided the orchestra in this work, which is in all respects demanding, with admirable composure, energy, and strong sense of purpose, and contributed with a nice gesture to an overall positive impression of her composition.”⁵ A review of the performance was also published by *Prager Tagblatt*, a German language newspaper based in Prague, in which the reviewer underscored as particularly regrettable that the presenter showcased only the first movement of the work; however, even its fragment revealed a remarkable musical talent: “Es ist zu bedauern, dass die Veranstalter nur den ersten Satz des Werkes aufführen liessen, doch auch diese kleine Probe zeigt eine erstaunlich temperamentvolle musikalische Begabung.”⁶

The success of the premiere of her first important orchestral work must have been particularly gratifying for Kaprálová, especially after the rather taxing preparations taking place only four days before the concert, that she had described to her close friend Otto Wach: “Please think of me on Monday and keep your fingers crossed. I have a concert and must now spend hours every day at rehearsals which were delayed till the last minute.”⁷ And a letter she received on the very day of the graduation evening must have also meant much to her. It was from a close family friend, the musicologist Vladimír Helfert, who was the first to recognize in Kaprálová a talent to be reckoned with and who did not hesitate to have her name represent the most promising youngest composer generation in his influential study of modern Czech music, published a year later.⁸ Helfert opens his letter (Fig. 1) with this wonderful encouragement: “Today is a day particularly significant for your entire life. You are meeting the public as a mature, accomplished artist, as well as a professional interpreter. I will be with you in my thoughts,”⁹ and he continues, “I recall how it all began. I still have one of your childhood compositions—your waltz. I was already intrigued then by the freshness and wealth of your ideas. And so I began to watch you to see, at least from the distance, what fills your soul, how it lights up with the divine spark of music—that wonderful blessing that is given only to people as the greatest gift. And again and again I saw a new expression of your so young yet already delightful talent. And now—you are graduating! Just think about it: from a waltz to a concerto! How much life, how much of an inner, beautiful development is in it. How much your soul grew in those years, how rich it has become!”¹⁰

The full concerto was premiered by the Brno Radio Orchestra about a year later, on October 15, 1936, in a broadcast of the Brno Radiojournal. Ludvík Kundera played again

the solo piano part, and the orchestra was again conducted by Kaprálová. Several more performances of the work followed, and after the war it was even recorded for the Czech Radio (featuring Berta Rixová-Kabeláčová and the conductor Karel Ančerl, the future music director of the Toronto Symphony), but the recording did not survive, and a few years later the work disappeared altogether from the orchestral repertoire.

By then Kaprálová’s life, the mere twenty-five years of it, was over for more than a decade. Yet even in the short time allotted to her she was able to fulfill the mission that Helfert once prompted her to follow: “And you must always pursue the ideal of truth and artistic profundity. To be honest in your art! These are the very internal struggles, without which one cannot live a rich inner life ... to soldier on, not to give in to temptation, to be faithful to the ideals of beauty and truth. This often requires sacrifice and great courage. Without them, however, there is not great art. For this journey, I wish you, on this day, a lot of mental strength for the rest of your life!”¹¹

Notes:

This article is an English translation of my text “Unikátní Vítězslava Kaprálová,” published in *Týdeník Rozhlas* 50 (December 2011): 16–17.

1. *Vítězslava Kaprálová*. Alice Rajnohová, Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic Orchestra, Tomáš Hanus. Recorded November 2010 and June 2011. Radioservis CRO577-2 (2011). Includes *Piano Concerto in D Minor*, op. 7, *Three Piano Pieces*, op. 9, *Variations sur le Carillon de l’église St-Étienne du Mont*, op. 16, and *Sonata Appassionata*, op. 6.
2. Founded in 1918, the republic ceased to exist in 1938, with the annexation of the Sudetenlands by Hitler.
3. Gracian Černušák, “Brněnská konservatoř,” *Lidové noviny*, June 20, 1935, 9.
4. *Ibid.*
5. “Absolventský koncert konservatoře,” signed by initials *-mf-*, *Moravské noviny*, June 18, 1935, 4.
6. “Konzerte,” *Prager Tagblatt*, signed by initials W.H., June 20, 1935, 6.
7. Vítězslava Kaprálová to Otto Wach, 13 June 1935. The Kapralova Society Archive.
8. Vladimír Helfert, *Česká moderní hudba* (Olomouc: nakl. Index, 1936).
9. Vladimír Helfert to Vítězslava Kaprálová. Brno, 17 June 1935. The Kapralova Society Archive.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*

About the author:

Karla Hartl is Chair of the Kapralova Society, editor of *Kapralova Society Journal*, and co-author of *The Kapralova Companion*, published in 2011 by Lexington Books.

Brno, 17. VI. 35.

Milá slečno Vítězko,

dvacátý den připroběl Váš život slobit vřavou. Předstoupíte před veřejnost jako hovor, vyprávění umělec, se svým dělem a jeho interpretací. Chci být u vás a Vás umřít a budu v umřevání přibít. It tak mi to takhle líbivo: jak jste začala. Mám písmo z proudu Vašich zleobit, Váš vdu. Uvěřte, že mě zraje svou měřiti a bolestivě neřada. It pad jsem Váš formě zleobit, vidět, aspoň zformoval, co naplňuje Váš dnu, jak se v m' proudu se neřka zleobit více ta bořda přeruča ludy, to dže mě proudu, které přeruča jin a jin lidem jako neřka dnu, který ozuben by dnu lidstvu. It vidět jsem vidět umř' a umř' proudu Vášho ulacitěho a přeruča tak sympatického kalenta. Byla jste mi vidět tak milá - já, zamy' dnu, to Vám přeč ulacitě ho ulacitě, se z toto, "budu nea". It text - Vy absolvujte! Jak se kta letě! Od toho naláda se pro zleobit dnu. Poveritě jin: od vlláhu se přeruča! Uo v tom přeruča, vnitřního, zleobit vřavou. Jednotě letěch vřava a bořba Váš dnu! Uo v m' nabornadilo!

It tak Vám - dvacátý den přeruča, aby to se dže, co jste si dnu v zleobit

Fig. 1 Vladimír Helfert to Vítězslava Kaprálová. Brno, 17 June 1935 (page 1 of 4). The Kapralova Society Archive.



Alice Rajnohová's concert career includes appearances as a soloist with both chamber ensembles and large orchestras. She regularly collaborates with Czech Radio for which she has made numerous recordings, particularly of music by the twentieth-century Czech composers.

Tomáš Hanus works regularly with the best Czech orchestras, including the Czech Philharmonic and the Prague Symphony. He has made guest appearances with the Nagoya Philharmonic, the Deutsches Symphonieorchester Berlin, the Dresdner Philharmonie, the orchestra of Stuttgart Opera, and the BBC Symphony.

Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic Orchestra was formed in 1946. The orchestra's artistic profile was shaped by a succession of outstanding chief conductors, working alongside an impressive roster of both permanent and guest conductors, including Richard Tůnský, Rostislav Hališka, Petr Altrichter, Tomáš Hanus, and others.



Vítězslava Kaprálová: *Piano Concerto in D Minor, Sonata Appassionata, Three Piano Pieces, Variations sur le carillon de l'église St-Étienne du Mont.* Alice Rajnohová, piano; Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic Orchestra; Tomáš Hanus, conductor. Radioservis CR0577-2 (2011).

The 2011 compact disc recording featuring four of Vítězslava Kaprálová's piano works—one for piano with orchestra and three for solo piano—is an important addition to the growing oeuvre of CDs showcasing Kaprálová's compositions. Not only does this recording contains representative works from the span of her career, but it also marks the first recording of her Piano Concerto in D Minor. The entire CD is expertly played by pianist Alice Rajnohová and matched in passion and precision by the Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Tomáš Hanus.

The CD opens with *Piano Concerto in D Minor*, op. 7, which has three movements and was composed in 1935 when Kaprálová was a mere twenty years old and a student at Brno Conservatory. Additionally, it was her first orchestral score, and the premiere marked her debut as a conductor. It is also worth noting that her conducting debut was the first time a woman had conducted an orchestra in Brno. Movement I, *Allegro entusiastico*, (track one), earns its enthusiastic title by being a dramatic and bold movement with a highly virtuosic piano part, practically utilizing the entire keyboard. Ms. Rajnohová is simply wonderful in this movement, and the orchestra displays a tight ensemble full of lush and beautiful moments. Here the listener is taken on an emotional roller coaster with musical highs and lows, running the gamut from sweeping, bold gestures to haunting, melancholy utterances. Piano and orchestra swirl continuously with a seamless interweaving of textures. I especially loved how Kaprálová ended the movement, beginning with bombastic, octave chordal passages, coupled with unexpected harmonic shifts in the piano, and then rushing into a trill in the piano, which in turn is answered by the orchestra. It then builds in drama and intensity to a forceful and triumphant conclusion.

The second movement, *Largo*, (track two), completely shifts gears with a dark and menacing melody heard in the low strings. At only three minutes long and thirty-five measures in length, this solemn and pensive movement is incredibly interesting and well executed by both piano and orchestra. This movement primarily features polyphonic development, yet the overall texture remains sparse with moments of dissonance. The piano solo remains reserved yet is still highly emotional. The end of the *Largo* is a processional-like dance that splinters off, only to drive right into the final movement without stopping. Track three, *Allegro*, begins with an almost frenzied feeling which soon melts into more subdued music. This movement is full of humor, contrasting sharply with the preceding two movements. From the late romantic yearning of movement I, to the sparse contrapuntal development of movement II, movement III showcases neo-classical elements and lush instrumentation.

The next composition featured (tracks four through six) is Kaprálová's 1935 work for solo piano, *Three Piano Pieces*, op. 9. This was the first piano cycle she composed while continuing her studies at Prague Conservatory. Unfortunately, it was not published during her lifetime, and, until recently, was only available in manuscript. Hopefully its inclusion on this recording will aid in dis-

seminating more information about this work, as it certainly deserves its place in the canon of compositions for solo piano. *Three Piano Pieces* begins with a *Prelude* which features contrasting thematic material that alternates numerous times throughout. Frequent modulations, pungent dissonances, and constantly evolving textures best describe this piece.

Prelude is followed by *Crab Canon*, a brief and somber piece that begins and ends sparsely, and hearkens back to the Renaissance with the melodic line performed simultaneously forward and backward. Here Rajnohová's prowess at the keyboard is demonstrated through the wide dynamic variety. The final movement, *Scherzo Passacaglia*, is derived from another old form, but in Kaprálová's hands becomes an original, eclectic, and plodding dance with a light-hearted mood. It also features virtuosic piano writing with unexpected melodic and harmonic turns.

Track seven, *Variations sur le carillon de l'église St-Étienne du Mont*, op. 16 (1938), is by far my favorite number of the entire CD, not only because Rajnohová expertly captures the myriad of exquisite moods, but also because this work captures Kaprálová's evolving and diverse compositional style at her finest. This one movement work, comprising of a theme and six variations, was written while Kaprálová was furthering her studies in Paris and was inspired in general by the culturally cosmopolitan city itself, and specifically, by the church bells she could hear ringing from her apartment window. As Erik Entwistle states in *The Kaprálová Companion*, "based on a repetitive melodic pattern sounded by the carillon of the church named in the work's title, it is hardly a theme in the traditional sense of the word and consists of only eight notes" (p. 57).

Despite the brevity of the theme, the piece is full of delightful surprises, abrupt contrasts, and highly dramatic intensity. Again Rajnohová is to be commended for her ability to master this piece as Kaprálová adeptly exploits the possibilities of the keyboard, predominantly through the juxtaposition of unexpected elements such as melodic and percussive sections, consonant and dissonant harmonies, introverted and extroverted moods, and bell-like sparse and densely polyphonic textures.

The CD ends with the 1933, two-movement work, *Sonata Appassionata*, op. 6 (tracks eight and nine). Composed when she was only eighteen years old, it is full of originality and, as in many of her piano works, is highly virtuosic. Most notable here is the cohesive binding of the two movements in the finale of the second movement, *Tema con variazioni*. Kaprálová connects the theme from the introduction of the *Maestoso*, *Appassionato* first movement with that of the second movement.

In addition to the artful mastery of both Alice Rajnohová and the Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic Orchestra, the liner notes are insightful and well written. They include a brief background on Vítězslava Kaprálová, biographical information on Ms. Rajnohová, the orchestra, and its conductor, Tomáš Hanus, and analyses of all works featured on the compact disc. For admirers and enthusiasts of Vítězslava Kaprálová's music, this is a recording not to miss.

Michelle Latour

COMING SOON

Kaprál, Kaprálová, Martinů. *String Quartets*. Škampa Quartet. Radioservis CR0618-2 (2012).



The Škampa Quartet is among the very finest of an outstanding group of current Czech string quartets. Through its mentors, the legendary Smetana Quartet, the ensemble traces its roots to the earliest quartets, such as the Bohemian Quartet, in a land described in the 18th century as the Conservatoire of Europe and the very cradle of European chamber music. The ensemble has enhanced this heritage with its own well-informed research of the folk song, rhythms, and dances from which Czech national music grew—to the extent that their recordings of the quartets by Smetana and Janáček are considered the benchmarks against which other performances are being measured.

Prizes at international competitions, awards from the Royal Philharmonic Society, and an appointment as the first-ever resident artists at Wigmore Hall attested to the competence of the ensemble's early years and provided recognition which led to invitations to perform at major festivals worldwide, including Prague, Edinburgh, Schwetzingen, Schleswig-Holstein and Melbourne. From the start, the ensemble established close relationship with the BBC Radio 3, resulting in regular broadcasts from Wigmore Hall, St John's Smith Square, LSO St. Luke's and the Chamber Music Proms. Teaching has also been an important part of the ensemble's work, and one that they find particularly rewarding. The members of the Škampa Quartet have taught in many places around the world but most importantly at the Royal Academy of Music in London where in 2001 they were appointed Visiting Professors of Chamber Music.

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