

The Kapralova Society Journal

A Journal of Women in Music

Vítězslava Kaprálová's *Sonata Appassionata*: A Pianist's Perspective

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Special points of interest:

Kaprálová's *opp.* 6 and 16

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One of the great joys of being a professional musician is discovering something completely unfamiliar, which you recognize immediately to be a masterpiece. This perfectly describes my first encounter with Kaprálová's *Sonata Appassionata*. The music, piped through my stereo via laptop audio jack, was unlike anything I had ever heard—armloads of personality burst from the speakers as well as something else: an *irresistibly* compelling quality—there was something in the music which reminded me of, say, a close friend whose enthusiastic exuberance could lead you, if only by charisma, into the most unlikely situations, against all better judgment. In this case, however, it was the best judgment that spurred me towards researching this composer named Vítězslava Kaprálová and her music, eventually learning the *Sonata Appassionata*, recording it, and becoming, in the process, a fully-fledged convert—I now make a point of teaching at least one of her works every year.

What Karla Hartl describes in Kaprálová's music as “bold and fresh, tough in fibre, both passionate and tender, emanating youthful energy, abundant with ideas and humor”¹ is something I can immediately identify. Additionally, this is a composer whose communicative powers seem to synthesize *with* the forms her music lives in; and any struggles with such forms are surmounted with compositional virtuosity. Just as the Beethovenian “con brio” vim and vigor can be recognized anywhere, so this music's distinctive flavor is instantly recognizable, a compositional voice unselfconsciously lucid, fearless, and inimitable.

The first bars of the *Sonata Appassionata*'s exposition show us a composer with a formidable “knowledge of the literature”² (**ex. 1**). Alice Rajnohová³ and Erik Entwistle⁴ have noted the organic connection of the melodic contour with its canvassing vortex of accompaniment—something that occurs all over the repertoire. Something similar appears in, for instance, the opening of one of the most famous pieces of piano music ever written (**ex. 2**). Yet what seems more striking is the way Kaprálová channels this very pianistic figuration into a trellising cascade—the effect becomes one of soaring, sweeping flight (compare the more troublesome staggered rhythms which follow Schumann's famous opening).

Speaking of the Schumanns, allusions and playful references are something Kaprálová seems to share with these special composers; this time, the fellow composer is her father, Václav Kaprál. See, for instance, the bars of introduction, just prior to the commencement of the movement proper (**ex. 3**). Many have noted Kaprálová seems here to be giving a compositional nod to her father in his Third Piano Sonata (**ex. 4**). Rajnohová notes that father and daughter played these games frequently in their compositions: “[T]he connections between the music of father and daughter are also made clear through quotations . . . The compositional technique sometimes seems like a game in which the two partners throw a ball back-and-forth to each other.”⁵ This is a not a composer unsure of herself, or even needing a “template,” but one who is thoroughly enjoying herself, using the sonata form as her own personal playground.

Vítězslava Kaprálová's *Sonata Appassionata*Example 1. Kaprálová: *Sonata Appassionata*, I. Maestoso, mm. 8–15. Amos Editio, 2006.Example 2. R. Schumann, *Phantasie*, op. 17, I: *Durchaus phantastisch und leidenschaftlich vorzutragen*, mm. 1–7.Example 3. Kaprálová: *Sonata Appassionata*, I. Maestoso, mm. 1–7.Example 4. Václav Kaprál, *Sonata No. 3*, mm. 1–5. Ol. Pazdírek, 1932.

Speaking from the perspective of a professional pianist, there is much to enjoy in this playground and many challenges to relish, one of the first being that same “trellising cascade” mentioned earlier (ex. 5). Rajnohová notes that pianists may have trouble with this helix (“these waves will easily show us the upper tempo limit [of the performer]”⁶), but in fact this writing is immanently pianistic, and some clever redistribution of the topmost notes—the third can be taken in the right hand, freeing the left hand to negotiate its enormous leap—renders the passage less-than-horrendous. What might strike one as much more hazardous are such moments as in ex. 6. The bravura quality of these *triple*-notes lies not too far from the more quicksilver right hand double-note cascades in Scriabin’s Seventh and Eighth sonatas. These moments are, as one of my colleagues observed, examples of “raw” technique—there is really no way around them. In the variations of the second movement, there are many more such moments.

The second movement opens, deceptively, with a docile, folksong-like theme (ex. 7). But even by a few variations in, Kaprálová is already putting the pianist through her punches. Take, for instance, Variation 3 (ex. 8). On the surface, it seems less-than-daunting (especially when contrasted with the following variation). Yet, there is a delightful expressive “frisson” in this variation, seeming ready at any moment to take sudden flight; to convincingly convey this effect, one must fully embrace the “con moto” Kaprálová indicates, taking into consideration as well that this tempo is accelerated from the “scherzando” of Var. 2. If this propulsive undertow is achieved, the “stringendo” into Kaprálová’s hemiola in m. 13 will be appropriately thrilling—the effect is of an emotion of pure joy barely (not really quite!) held in check. But the

greatest technical challenge still lies just beyond, in beautifully placing each trill (from m. 14); if this were chamber or orchestral music one can imagine a coloristic vibration to be fitting on these notes, perhaps fluting quivers nestled in the corolla of chordal blossoms.

This is gossamer, spiderweb-delicate technique; yet perhaps it again pales in comparison to what Kaprálová asks of the pianist in the following variation, perhaps the most challenging of the movement—before, of course, the fugue (ex. 9). Variation 4's leap-frogging is an impulsive delight; Kaprálová is clearly having fun, with the way the melody is cheekily placed on syncopations (at the wrong end of the seesaw!) the least of this variation's hijinks. Consider the way Kaprálová has presented the initial piano figuration: many a pianist would instantly try to be clever and find a way to redistribute the notes to make this easier. Yet, Kaprálová, as if sensing this entropic tendency, isn't having any of that—those who seek to be clever here will find that any redistribution will destroy the provocative athleticism of this music (those who have gained acquaintance with much of Scarlatti will have learned this lesson already well: that sometimes the music is as much “for the eyes” as the ears—a famous example comes immediately to mind in Scarlatti's K. 120). The simplest—yet not simple—way is to play it just as written.

Something else that makes this variation a bit of a “briar-patch” is certainly the way Kaprálová insists on certain patterns, even when they sit less-than-comfortably on the keyboard; take, for instance, this descending cluster of chords from m. 37's left hand (ex. 10). While she does this same sort of thing in a beautifully pianistic way in the first of the *April Preludes*, it remains a bristly challenge in the *Sonata*. Approaching this kind of writing as a



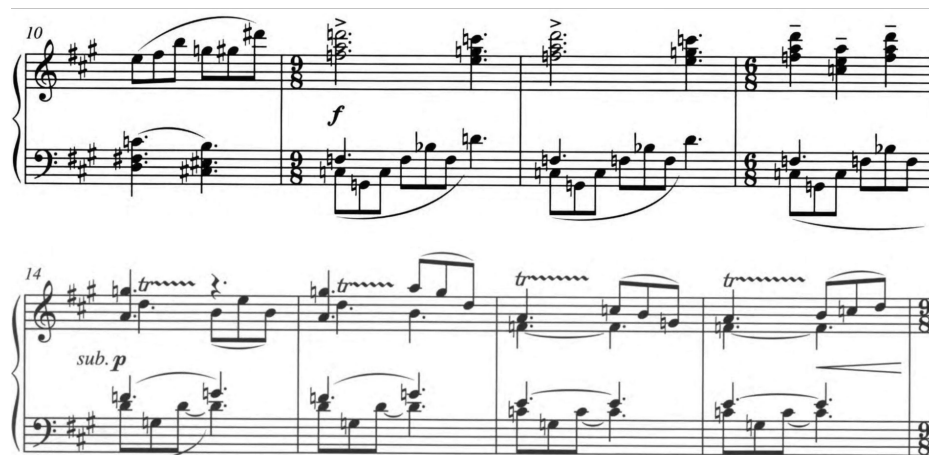
Example 5. Kaprálová: *Sonata Appassionata*, I. Maestoso, mm. 16–19.



Example 6. Kaprálová: *Sonata Appassionata*, I. Maestoso, mm. 159–162.



Example 7. Kaprálová: *Sonata Appassionata*, II. Theme and Variations, Theme, mm. 1–4.



Example 8. Kaprálová: *Sonata Appassionata*, II. Theme and Variations, Var. 3, mm. 10–17.

Vítězslava Kaprálová's *Sonata Appassionata*Example 9. Kaprálová: *Sonata Appassionata*, II. Theme and Variations, Var. 4, mm. 1–4.

Example 10. Kaprálová: *Sonata Appassionata*, II. Theme and Variations, Var. 4, mm. 34–42.

Example 11. Kaprálová: *Sonata Appassionata*, II. Theme and Variations, Var. 5, mm. 9–13.

pianist, and knowing the composer's other music, one admires her integrity of thought—there is something of “you must come to me, not I to you” in this, which only makes it all the more irresistible. I am reminded immediately of Chopin who frequently does exactly the same thing: “a change of harmony that makes the original figuration exceedingly awkward does not lead (Chopin) to change the figuration, and he always refuses to adapt his musical thought to

the convenience of the hand.”⁷ While rightly held in Olympian stature as a piano god, even Liszt often overrides his musical ideas to accommodate the needs of the pianist. Kaprálová seems to be in Chopin's camp.

It is in the next variation which Kaprálová's *Sonata Appassionata* does something that I have never seen before—beautifully illustrating what Macek describes as “new ideas which eventually completely change the form”⁸ (ex. 11). As one can see, Kaprálová unexpectedly reintroduces a musical character in her “thematic cast” we haven't seen for some time—the only thing in the literature that comes close is surely Beethoven's breathtakingly poetic example in the third movement of his Op. 101 Sonata. While those familiar with the work will instantly know to what I refer, it deserves a bit of context: the sonata's first movement (*Etwas lebhaft und mit der innigsten Empfindung*) opens with a disarmingly lyrical theme (a distant cousin of Kaprálová's own folk-like variation theme), while the second movement (*Lebhaft. Marschmäßig*) is a relative of those from Op. 109 and Op. 110—a bristly, fairly compact march which provides the “scherzo-like” foil to the predominantly lyrical first movement. The third movement (*Langsam und sehnsuchtsvoll*) then opens in a grave, serious manner, only to stumble upon the lyrical theme from Beethoven's first movement—a moment Rosen describes beautifully as being “like a memory difficult to recall with confidence. The . . . intention is purely poetic.”⁹ (ex. 12) One wonders how familiar Kaprálová might have been with this particular sonata, because she does something similar here, yet harnessed to ends, some might find, even more compelling. Whereas Beethoven seems to use this cyclical device as a “purely poetic” touch,

Kaprálová uses it to show us, in real time, her growth as a composer.

More on Kaprálová's variation theme with which this movement opens: it happens to bear a strong resemblance to a lullaby written by Kaprálová's father while he was away from home "at war, at the time of the birth of his daughter"¹⁰; one expects this was a tune Kaprálová heard her father sing to her as a baby. As we have seen, throughout the movement the music gradually becomes more and more adventurous, shaking off the innocence of its origins as a cradle song; this journey seems to chart the development of a precocious child as she spreads her wings, enclosing the fulsome joy of playground athletics (Var. 2), some slightly more "teenage" hijinks in Var. 4; until, we seem to reach a moment of repose and reflection in Var. 5—a much more "adult" revision of the opening lullaby. Its harmonies alone take it far afield from the innocent opening environs, and the wide chordal spreads seem not to belong in the ecosystem of a berceuse; it is in this milieu that we see Kaprálová reintroduce the lullaby, in a different key (see ex. 11). It is as if the young woman is looking back on herself, as she was as a young girl. In addition to Beethoven, there is perhaps a spiritual connection to Robert Schumann—the heartbreaking closing movement of *Kinderszenen*, in which the author reveals that what preceded was not the innocent experiences of childhood, but the remembrance of an adult; the knowledge of the present thus changes everything we have heard.

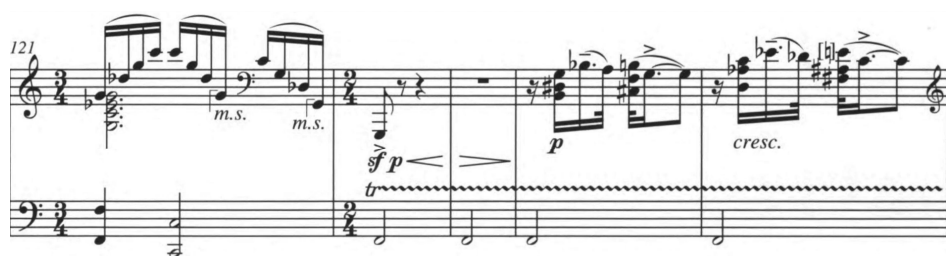
Kaprálová continues past this Rückblick into a fugue (there is also a fugue in Beethoven's Op. 101!); yet, this is no Beethovenian fugue—while he carefully preserves the DNA of his themes and subjects (even while "spring-loading" them and the like), Kaprálová presents us with a subject which is a "grotesque distortion of the main theme,"¹¹ and

Example 12. Beethoven, Piano Sonata in A Major, op. 101, III. *Langsam und sehnsuchtsvoll*, mm. 19–26.

Example 13. Kaprálová: *Sonata Appassionata*, II. Theme and Variations, Var. 6, mm. 5-7.

Example 14. Kaprálová: *Sonata Appassionata*, II. Theme and Variations, Var. 6, mm. 23-29.

her music "becomes contemporary . . . [she] works atonally, with many chromatic turns and dissonances."¹² It is a sardonic "little shop of horrors": this is a fugue which seems to have cut its teeth on the rudest *Aphorisms* of Shostakovich, or the most diabolical of Prokofiev's concert pieces, yet it remains much more than a caricature or a synthesis of those examples, with the biting energy of moments like m. 7 (ex. 13), gestating into something more scarily mature in m. 25 (ex. 14). Kaprálová pushes her pianist to the limit, both technically and physically, as this idea is pushed into a slaty splintering

Vítězslava Kaprálová's *Sonata Appassionata*Example 15. Kaprálová: *Sonata Appassionata*, II. Theme and Variations, Var. 6, mm. 93–96.Example 16. Kaprálová: *Sonata Appassionata*, II. Theme and Variations, Var. 6, mm. 97–104.Example 17. Kaprálová: *Sonata Appassionata*, II. Theme and Variations, Var. 6, mm. 121–125.

in contrary double-notes in m. 31—just following this moment, she wisely provides a momentary relief in the form of lyrical gesture. M. 41's “meno mosso” has something of the nocturne genre, but little of its somnambulance; never slackening, its rhythmic drive still yet takes on a voluptuous flexibility which beautifully accommodates the romantically-charged duet above as it sheds harmonies restlessly, becoming each time more expressively unbuttoned. The conclusion of this passionate duetting episode sees the fugue return; one is again reminded of Beethoven, in his Op. 110 Sonata, in which the renewal of

the fugue subject in its inverted appearance might be meant to transcend human suffering. That template may bear a passing resemblance, but Kaprálová's reintroduction of fugue is the more live-wire, with its wild tendrils of chromaticism crawling faster than kudzu in high summer—the one chromatic cell in m. 7 now appears everywhere, tightened into an unsprung coil (**ex. 15**). The wildness of this area of the score eclipses anything seen before—fissions of chromatic atonality run (almost) amok; again, Kaprálová pushes her pianist to the limit which is, in this case, the crest of C major seen in m. 98 (**ex. 16**). From here, the Sonata powers forth heroically to its monumental, epic conclusion; one particularly satisfying moment comes in mm. 121–122, where the right hand's “solar flares” suddenly funnel into one smoldering trill (**ex. 17**). The final combination of themes is as beautiful as it is exhilarating; the themes retain their diatonic DNA, yet, their fusion points up the adventurous journey this piece has taken and the change which has been wrought on these musical characters. They've “grown up” in one of the most compelling musical “coming-of-age” novels one could hope to read.

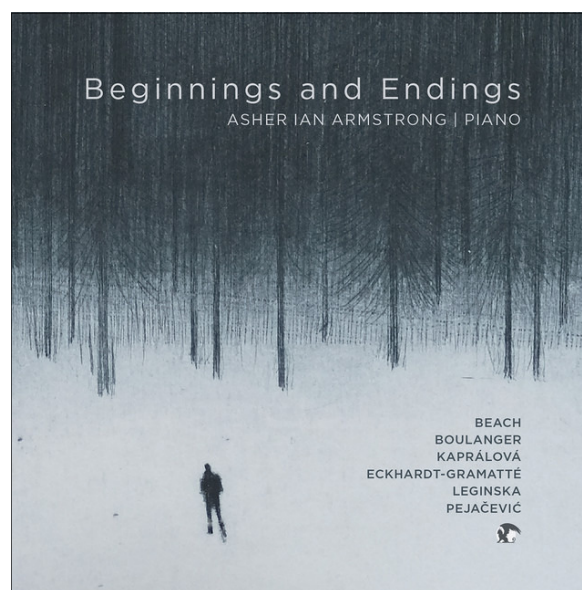
Looking at this piece as a whole, I might note that we often expect much less of the composers of the canon at the same juncture in their careers. Many such composers come to mind who, while their ultimate contributions to the piano repertoire are enormous, couldn't possibly have mastered conventions of sonata-allegro form and put their inimitable stamp on the genre by the tender age of 18. Martinů's famous description of Kaprálová as a “first-class talent”¹³ is certainly accurate—and he would have known best—but it is hard to know if hers would not have been, in fact, an *incandescent*, once-in-a-century talent;

that her premature death left us poorer as a species. This is a question to which we will never know the answer, but the *Sonata Appassionata* is a strong piece of evidence to make that case; in many years of studying, performing, and teaching the piano repertoire, this piece is one of the most compelling, convincing, irresistible works I have ever encountered. Certainly, my world was much poorer before knowing it. It is true, “the time is long overdue”¹⁴ that we get to know this composer.

Notes

- ¹ Karla Hartl, “The Centenary of Vítězslava Kaprálová: Looking Back, Looking Forward,” in *Vítězslava Kaprálová (1915-1940): Zeitbilder, Lebensbilder, Klangbilder*, ed. Christine Fischer (Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2017), 29.
- ² Jiří Macek, *Vítězslava Kaprálová*, 2nd edn. (Prague: Litera Proxima, 2014), 61.
- ³ Alice Rajnohová, *Klavírní dílo Vítězslavy Kaprálové* (PhD diss., Janáček Academy of Performing Arts, 2013), 24.
- ⁴ Erik Entwistle, “Kaprálová’s Piano Works,” in *The Kaprálová Companion*, ed. Karla Hartl and Erik Entwistle (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 37.
- ⁵ Alice Rajnohová, “Vítězslava Kaprálová’s *Sonata appassionata* für Klavier (1933) in ihrem Kontext,” in *Vítězslava Kaprálová (1915-1940): Zeitbilder, Lebensbilder, Klangbilder*, ed. Christine Fischer (Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2017), 174.
- ⁶ Rajnohová, *Klavírní dílo Vítězslavy Kaprálové*, 25.
- ⁷ Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 364.
- ⁸ Macek, 61.
- ⁹ Charles Rosen, *Beethoven’s Piano Sonatas: A Short Companion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 216.
- ¹⁰ Rajnohová, “Vítězslava Kaprálová’s *Sonata appassionata* für Klavier (1933) in ihrem Kontext,” 177. [Rajnohová is mistaken here: while Kaprál did compose his “Ukolébavka” (*Berceuses de Printemps*) while serving in the army (during 1916–1917, when he was stationed in Elbasan in Albania), he did not leave for war until June 1915. Thus he was still at home when Kaprálová was born, and was even able to enjoy at least some, albeit limited, time with his infant daughter.—Ed.]
- ¹¹ Entwistle, 43.
- ¹² Rajnohová, “Vítězslava Kaprálová’s *Sonata appassionata* für Klavier (1933) in ihrem Kontext,” 178.
- ¹³ “Rarely have I met . . . [such] a first-class talent.” Martinů quoted in Eugene Gates and Karla Hartl, “Vítězslava Kaprálová: A Remarkable Voice in 20th-Century Czech Music,” *Tempo* 213 (July 2000): 30.
- ¹⁴ Karla Hartl, “The Voice of an Artist: The Life and Music of Vítězslava Kaprálová,” *Czech Music Quarterly* 3 (2008): 19.

Vítězslava Kaprálová: *Sonata Appassionata*, op. 6 (Prague: Amos Editio, 2006). Critical Edition. Editor Věroslav Němec. With Foreword by Karla Hartl and Věroslav Němec. 35 pages. The publication was financially assisted by the Kapralova Society.



Critically acclaimed pianist Asher Ian Armstrong presents an album of music by women composers of the 20th century, beautiful and profound works of: Amy Beach (Largo maestoso from *5 Improvisations*, op. 148), Lili Boulanger (*Thème et variations*), Vítězslava Kaprálová (*Sonata Appassionata*, op. 6), Sophie-Carmen Eckhardt-Gramatté (Nocturne), Ethel Leginska (*Three Victorian Portraits*), and Dora Pejačević (Piano Sonata No. 2 in A-flat, op. 57 and Nocturne No. 2 in F-sharp, op. 50).

Perhaps for the reason that the composers in this album occupy a kind of “liminal space” in music history, approaching them from the vantage point of their artistic beginnings and endings constellates a fascinating mosaic. The attention lavished on their forebears and contemporaries has been almost anatomical in its fine grain of detail, such that entire albums have been devoted exclusively to the beginnings or endings of such composers as Brahms, Scriabin, Berg, and others. Yet the composers on this disc remain on the whole largely unexplored (save for some intrepid expeditions into the music of Eckhardt-Gramatté and Amy Beach). In an act of “awful daring,” these artists left behind beautiful, profound works, surrendering their thoughts and their deepest impulses to us. It is up to us to honor this gift, as by this act of performance, they continue to exist.

~Asher Ian Armstrong

Blue Griffin Recording CD BGR653 (2023)

Kaprálová's Bell Tower

Erik Entwistle

"Líba— there's a theme!"

"What?"

"Those bells — those bells —"

Líba had also heard them every day.

"I know."

"Wait — I already thought about it several times, but now, suddenly!" Kaprálová searched her handbag. "Here, pay on my behalf — I must hurry!" And like a toy soldier bundled in scarves, she marched out in the direction of rue de Médicis.

As soon as she was at the piano, she worked out the first two measures.¹

The time is January 1938, the place is the Latin Quarter of Paris. In this anecdote excerpted from Jiří Mucha's autobiographical novel *Au seuil de la nuit* (titled *Podivné lásky* in the original Czech-language edition²), the author (and Kaprálová's widower— Mucha married Kaprálová in 1940, shortly before her death) describes the moment that Kaprálová became determined to begin a new piano composition, her *Variations sur le carillon de l'église St-Étienne-du-Mont*. It would end up being the 23-year-old composer's final extant work for piano solo. Kaprálová resided at the time in a flat on the rue de Médicis. According to Mucha, Kaprálová was at a café at the corner of rue Soufflot and boulevard St. Michel with her friend Líba Houžvičková. While there, the two friends heard the familiar chime of the bells of the *Tour Clovis* clock tower, just a few blocks away, behind the Panthéon and adjacent to the St-Étienne-du-Mont Catholic church. Kaprálová apparently had a flash of inspiration and, seizing the moment, left the café to hurry back to her apartment and notate the theme at the piano. In the end, this is how the theme turned out:



Example 1: Kaprálová, *Carillon Variations*, Theme, mm. 1–2. La Sirène éditions musicales, 1938.

Mucha admits with a sense of humor that the whole scenario sounds much like something that happens in a bad film, and despite being contrary to good taste.³ His assessment seems to be confirmed by the composer's own uncertainty about basing an entire composition on such a short, mundane and repetitive musical idea.⁴ Notwithstanding her initial excitement, Kaprálová wasn't sure if the new composition would pan out. She had been working closely with Martinů at that time, and their relationship was deepening.⁵ She also corresponded regularly with her parents, keeping them abreast of all of her compositional activities. Yet she worked on the variations for several weeks in secret, independently of Martinů, and only informed her parents when the work was nearly completed. On February 7, 1938, in a letter home

she informed them that she would not be able to send them the work quite yet because she had discarded the fourth and a part of the sixth variation, and so had to recompose both. She finalized the composition in mid-February, sending it home on February 21, 1938, to be premiered in Brno at the end of March.⁶ In the end, the variations became one of Kaprálová's most successful works, receiving favorable reviews after its premiere and published later that year by La Sirène éditions musicales.

There is some confusion surrounding the title of the work which contains a misnomer. As mentioned above, the clock chime emanates not from the St-Étienne church, but from the adjacent clock tower across the street, known as the Tour Clovis. It is probable that Kaprálová was not aware that the tower was not part of the St-Étienne-du-Mont church grounds, as it stands right next to the church separated only by a narrow street. The tower was named after King Clovis I who ruled the Franks at the turn of the sixth century. At one time it used to be part of the Abbey of Saint Geneviève, the patron saint of Paris. During the French Revolution the abbey was largely destroyed, but the Tour Clovis itself was preserved. The bells also escaped destruction; although up to eighty percent of all bells in France were melted down for cannons and coinage during the revolutionary period, the four bells in the tower were spared thanks to a decree allowing towers with clock mechanisms to keep their bells.⁷

This particular set of bells was cast in 1684 by the Parisian founder Florentin le Guay, who also was responsible for other historic bells still in use in France, most notably the "Emmanuel" bell of Notre-Dame, one of the most beautiful bells in all of Europe.⁸ The lowest-pitched of the four bells is A-flat3, and is used to chime the hour. The other three, F4, E-flat4 and D-flat4, are used to chime the melody. Kaprálová quotes the pitches of the chime as she must have heard them at the time, and as Mucha's anecdote implies. The eight notes of the chime consist of D-flat/F/E-flat/D-flat/F/E-flat/D-flat/E-flat, or DO-MI-RE-DO-MI-RE-DO-RE. Curiously, Kaprálová transposes the pitches down a half-step from D-flat major to C major (see Example 1). The reason Kaprálová chose to do this is not evident—perhaps it was to show the simplicity of the chime itself by presenting it in C major in octaves in the right hand, in relief against the coloristic, tonally ambiguous left-hand that accompanies the chime in the opening statement of the theme.

Kaprálová's French title of the work uses the term *carillon* to refer to the chime melody, while in the manuscript she also designates a separate Czech title, using the word *zvony* (bells) which is less specific.⁹ The chime heard in the tower today, however, differs from that which Kaprálová heard in 1938, so at some point or points since then the chime has been altered. The current chime of the clock tower is divided into two 4-note groups, separated by a pause. It seems unlikely that there was a pause at the time Kaprálová heard the chimes, since she treats the theme as eight continuous notes. Furthermore, nowhere in the score is there any instance where the eight-note chime is divided in two parts; it is therefore reasonable to assume that the chime in 1938 consisted of eight continuous notes. Another difference between Kaprálová's chime and the current one in



Fig.1: St-Étienne-du-Mont and St-Geneviève Abbey (on the right), 17th century engraving. Carnegie Library of Reims. Wikimedia commons.

use is the pitch order of the final four notes. In Kaprálová's variations, the order is MI-RE-DO-RE, while the current chime has switched MI and RE to give the result RE-MI-DO-RE. Without a history of the bell-ringing practices of the Tour Clovis in the 20th and 21st centuries, we have no way of knowing when, how and why these changes to the chime came about.

Kaprálová's decision to use a chime as a basis for a privately composed set of variations at this time invites contemplation, especially in light of the resulting work. She was determined to experiment artistically and pursue her own ideas as she continued to develop her own compositional voice. The chimes were a part of her every day life in the *Quartier Latin*, and as she confessed to her friend Líba, she had thought about using the carillon as a theme in the past. And despite working on the composition without consulting Martinů, her relationship with him at that precise time was becoming more intimate, and there are traces of this connection in the music of the variations.¹⁰ In the end, Kaprálová astonished Martinů with one of her most compelling and sophisticated works, and he helped her to get it published right away. Martinů had spent much of his childhood in the tower of Saint James church in Polička, accompanied by the pealing of the tower bells, and one can imagine that Kaprálová must have been particularly pleased to have found inspiration in a bell tower of her own.

Notes:

¹ Jiří Mucha, *Au seuil de la nuit* (La Tour d'Aigues: Éditions de l'Aube, 1991), 117.

² Jiří Mucha, *Podivné lásky* (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1988).

³ Mucha, *Au seuil de la nuit*, 118.

⁴ It is worth mentioning that the Tour de Clovis chime also served as a ground bass for Marin Marais' *Sonnerie de St-Geneviève du Mont de Paris* (1723).

⁵ Erik Entwistle, "Kaprálová's Piano Works," in *The Kaprálová Companion*, ed. Karla Hartl and Erik Entwistle (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 62.

⁶ Karla Hartl, *Vítězslava Kaprálová: Tematický katalog skladeb a korespondence s nakladateli* (Prague: Czech Radio, 2020), 134. English translation Karla Hartl.

⁷ A decree of July 1793 specified that "each commune has the right to keep a bell which serves as a gong for its clock." Régis Singer, "Le Patrimoine campanaire de la tour Clovis," *L'Emoi de l'Histoire* 14 (Autumn 1997): 173–174.

⁸ The Emmanuel bell is rung at moments of special historical significance, and was most recently featured prominently in the December 7, 2024 reopening ceremony of Notre-Dame cathedral. French campanologist Régis Singer describes the bells of the Tour Clovis as a "beautiful, homogeneous and well-tuned ensemble" and ranks them among the most important surviving in Paris. *Ibid.*, 174.

⁹ The original Czech title was *Šest malých variací na zvony kostela St. Étienne du Mont*. Hartl, 130.

¹⁰ Entwistle, "Kaprálová's Piano Works," 56–66.

Lento ma non troppo. III.

fp pp

espressivo

cresce

ppp

molto

molto

molto

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attaca

Kaprálová, *Variations sur le carillon de l'église St-Étienne-du-Mont*, op. 16 (1938). Var. III—Lento ma non troppo. Period copyist copy. Additional dynamics and articulation in pencil by Kaprálová. The Kapralova Society Archive.

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Kaprálová, *Variations sur le carillon de l'église St-Étienne-du-Mont*, op. 16 (1938). Var. IV—Quasi etude vivo. Period copyist copy. Additional dynamics and articulation in pencil by Kaprálová. The Kapralova Society Archive.

Women of the 19th-Century Salon: M^{me} Esther Becquié, composer and pianist

Tom Moore

Women composers from the early nineteenth century are rare enough in the historical record that none of them should be forgotten. An 1824 report in *Le Corsaire* that mentions a concert by a certain Mlle Croisilles, at which, in addition to a rondeau by Field, she performed a set of *Grand Variations for piano* that she herself had composed, caught my eye. The bibliographical situation for Mlle Croisilles (no first name given) proved to be rather complicated. There is a significant number of reports in the Parisian press during the years from 1819 mentioning a “Mlle Croisille” (or Croisilles) in the context of awards for music theory, harmony, and piano. In none of these is a first name or even a first initial provided for the recipient.

Fortunately, one can correlate these reports with the three bearers of this surname listed in the volume of documents relating to the Conservatoire that was published by Constant Pierre in 1900.¹ Here we learn that there were three students, probably siblings: Esther-Louise-Antoinette Croisilles, b. April 7, 1805; Adèle Croisilles, b. November 11, 1813 (she later moved to America where she died); and Louis-Jules Croisilles, b. June 20, 1816 (who became solo violin at the Opéra Comique, having retired in 1886). Given the relative ages, and the awards noted for each, it is evident that the Mlle Croisilles who performed in the concert publicized in 1824 must be Esther:

Mlle Croisilles, student at the Royal School of Music, in the classes of Messieurs Adam and Daussoigne,² will give, next Sunday, February 8, at 1:30 PM, in the little hall of the Intendance of the Royal Theaters, faubourg Poissonnière, n°11, a concert in which she will be heard, along with several celebrated artists of the capital. On Sunday we will publish the program of this concert which promises to be very brilliant.³

The aforementioned concert program featured both chamber and orchestral works, and also included *Grand Variations for piano* by Mlle Croisilles.

In January of the following year, Mlle Croisilles (no first name or initial) presents another concert (though unfortunately the program does not seem to have sur-

vived). By this date she has married, and now uses the surname of Becquié. Nevertheless, we can be certain that the performer is, once more, Esther. In addition, we know the identity of her husband, who is the notable violinist Jean-Marie Becquié de Peyreville (b. 1798), since a few years later they would publish a joint composition under both their names. Esther would also publish her own compositions as Mme E. Becquié.

A musical matinée, given by Mme Becquié, née Croisilles, will take place on Sunday, 23 January 1825, at precisely 1 PM, at the salons of Mme Cresp-Bereytter, rue Louis-le-Grand, n°15. Ticket prices, 6 fr. They may be had in advance from Mme Becquié, rue Bourbon-Villeneuve, n° 23; chez Mme Cresp-Bereytter, and from the principal merchants of music.⁴

Another soirée was presented by Mme Becquié in 1829:

A musical soirée, given by Mme Becquié, pianist, Thursday, April 2, at the salon of Mr. Berlot, 2 rue St.-Lazare, n° 59, at which one will hear several leading artists.⁵

Two compositions by Mme Becquié are listed as new from Pleyel in *Le Figaro* in November of 1829:

—*Fantaisie et variations pour le piano et le violon*, op. 16 de M. et Mme Becquié, 9 fr.; and
—*Rondoletto pour le piano*, op. 17 de Mme Becquié, 5 fr.⁶

Neither of these pieces seems to have survived. Opus 16 fits in with the contemporary practice of collaborative composition, in which a soloist on some treble instrument (flute, violin, etc.) would be responsible for composing the solo part, and the specialist in piano would compose the piano part. In this case, Mr. Becquié would have composed the violin part, and Mme Becquié the piano.

Two works (possibly the same work?) for solo piano which are specifically attributed to “Mme E. Becquié” survive in the National Library of France (BNF). These

are: *Grande Fantaisie brillante pour le piano-forte sur des thèmes de "Paul et Virginie" (de Lesueur)*⁷. . . , composée par Mme E. Becquie, Op. 2, published by J. Frey; and a work with an almost identical title cataloged by the BNF as op. 11.

It is reasonable, given the above, to surmise that Esther Becquie (née Croisilles) produced and possibly published as many as seventeen numbered opuses. In addition, an *Oratorio de Noël, français et latin*, for four-part choir and solo voice, published by Richault, survives in the National Library of France (a substantial work with a score of 137 pages). At the BNF, this is attributed to Jean-Marie, but in the *Bibliographie de la France* for 1840 it is attributed to E. Becquie de Peyreville.⁸ A libretto for another (?) *Noël* dated 1848 also survives, but this one is clearly attributed to M. Becquie de Peyreville, professeur au Conservatoire.⁹

Jean-Marie Becquie de Peyreville (1798–1876), Esther's husband, is credited with about two dozen surviving works in the holdings of the National Library of France, dating from 1836 to 1869, and with opus numbers as high as op. 76. It is at least conceivable that some of these works, most simply attributed to "Becquie de Peyreville," might stem from Esther's pen.

Notes

¹ Constant Pierre, *Le Conservatoire national de musique et de déclamation: documents historiques et administratifs / recueillis ou reconstitués* (Paris 1900), 728.

² Joseph Daussoigne-Méhul (1790–1875), a nephew of Étienne Méhul, was teaching at the Conservatory between 1814 and 1825.

³ *Le Corsaire : journal des spectacles, de la littérature, des arts, moeurs et modes*, 6 February 1824.

⁴ *Journal général d'annonce des oeuvres de musique, gravures, lithographies, etc.*, : publiés en France et à l'étranger, 1825.

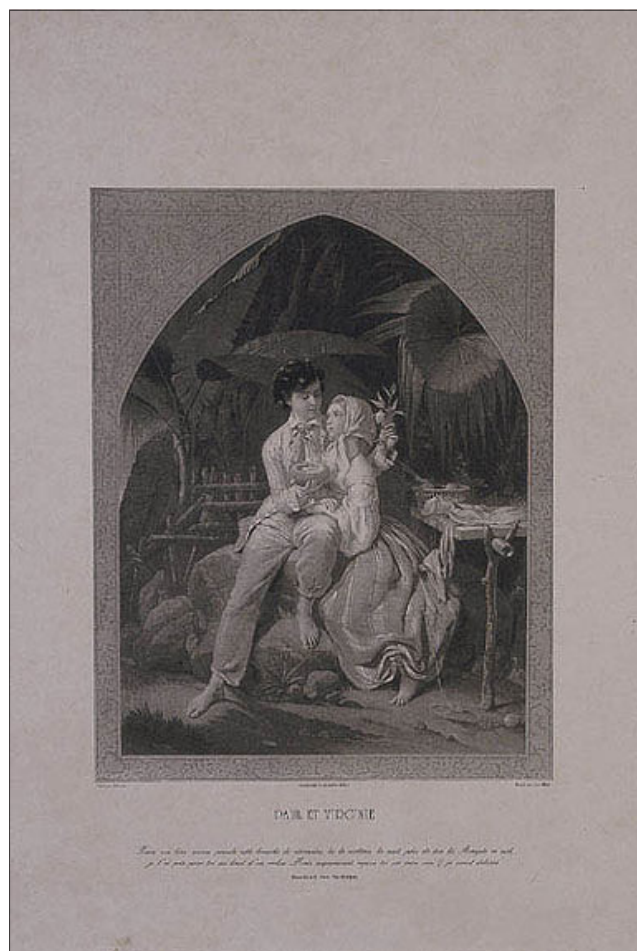
⁵ *Le Corsaire*, 21 March 1829.

⁶ *Le Figaro*, 19 November 1829, 3.

⁷ *Paul et Virginie ou Le Triomphe de la vertu* is a 1794 opera by Jean-François Lesueur on a libretto by Alphonse du Congé Dubreuil, after the novel by Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre.

⁸ *Bibliographie de la France*, vol. 29 (1840): 412.

⁹ gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6430042b/f1.image



Paul et Virginie, a lithograph by Pierre-Auguste Lamy after a line engraving by Jean-Alexandre Allais. Wikimedia commons.

Paul et Virginie is a novel by Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, published in 1788 in the fourth volume of his *Études de la nature*, then in a separate volume in 1789. An example of a novel from the end of the 18th century, it describes feelings of love and nostalgia for a lost paradise, and it enjoyed immense success that transcended borders. Beyond the exotic setting and the description of an idyllic society, in this novel Bernardin de Saint-Pierre expresses his pessimistic vision of existence. (Source: fr.wikipedia.org.)

Reports

Salute to Three Outstanding Women in the Music Profession

Godwin Sadoh

It is a great pleasure to celebrate three exceptional women in professional music careers, all of whom have received doctoral degrees from various academic institutions. These trailblazers have already distinguished themselves worldwide in their various areas of specialization. Among them are performers, musicologists, teachers, recording artists, and a prolific composer.

Carlotta Ferrari (b. 1975) is an Italian organist-composer with a DMA degree in organ performance and composition from the Conservatory of Music in Milan, Italy (2004), and a PhD in Music Composition from Selinus University of Sciences and Literature in Dominica, Italy (2021). Ferrari served as Chair of Music Composition at Hebei Normal University in Shijiazhuang, China. She was also an Adjunct Professor of Music composition at the Department of Arts and Music of ESE, Firenze, Italy.¹

Ferrari has composed in many genres, developing a personal language concerned with the blend of past and present. Her compositions have been performed in venues such as Westminster Choir College, New York University, Melbourne Cathedral, Steinway Haus in Hamburg and München, National Centre for Performing Arts in Beijing, Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, St. Gallen Cathedral, Basilica della Salute in Venezia, St. George's Hanover Square in London, Manhattan Central Synagogue in NYC, and Oliwa Cathedral in Gdansk. A lecture-recital featuring one of her organ works was presented during the Women in Music Festival by the Boston Chapter of the American Guild of Organists in May 2017 at Harvard University. In 2018, Ferrari was commissioned by Harvard University to write a new Carol for the 109th edition of the annual Christmas Carol Service. In 2020, a paper on her symphonic poem for organ, *Edith Stein*, appeared in the *Scientific Herald* of Tchaikovsky National Music Academy of Ukraine as a modern example of the genre.²

Ferrari won the 2nd place at the 2013 Sisi-Frezza competition for women composers, organized under the auspices of the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, and the 2nd place at the 2018 *Opus ignotum* Choral Composition Competition, supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic. In 2022, she shared 1st place at the ISCM-Musika Bulegoa Choral Composition Competition in Spain. Her music appears on several CD recordings, such as the monographic *Women of History: Music for Organ by Carlotta Ferrari*, performed by Carson Cooman (Divine Arts Recordings, 2018). Her music has also been featured on WPRB Princeton, and RTVE Radio Clásica.

Active as an electroacoustic and multimedia composer, Ferrari has taken part in numerous festivals, including Vu Symposium (USA 2017), Diffrazioni Multimedia Festival (Italy 2019), Tehran International Electronic Music Festival (Iran 2021), and Vigevano Soundscapes (Italy 2022), where her composition

Madrigale del Mezzodì was broadcast through Eraldo Bocca's and Dante Tanzi's Audior Acusmonium. She is a member of the collective of electroacoustic female composers *Domina Acusmatica*, and has lectured at La Sorbonne, Bangor University, and Newcastle University. Her compositions are available on her IMSLP page.³

Uchenna Ngwe (b. 1979) is a Nigerian-British oboist, curator, educator and researcher, born in North London, England. She completed her PhD in Musicology from Trinity Laban Conservatory of Music and Dance, London, in 2022, with her dissertation *Re-Sounding the African Diaspora: Uncovering Afro-British Histories in British Classical Music through Curatorial Activism*. Ngwe studied oboe and Cor Anglais at Trinity College of Music, from the Junior Department through to undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Following the completion of her doctorate, her continued exploration into expanding repertoire through creative practice investigates and highlights the lives and works of historical Black classical musicians in Britain from the perspective of a performer-curator-activist.⁴

The main areas of research that Ngwe is involved in focus on marginalized identities in Western classical music and digital pedagogy. Drawing on years of experience in digital learning, she founded *PlainsightSound*, an online research project highlighting the under-recognized work of historical Black African diasporic classical musicians in Britain.⁵ Ngwe is also the founder and artistic director of Decus Ensemble, a chamber group specializing in underperformed music for wind and strings. Much of their repertoire emerges from her research into Black classical music and repertoire and is regularly presented through concerts and workshops. Ngwe collaborated as a presenter and guest contributor on several BBC Radio programs, including *Sounds Connected* and *Inside Music*. She also presented the BBC Radio 3 Sunday Feature documentary *Frank Johnson, Queen Victoria and the Black Brass Band*, which followed her research into the life of the innovative 19th-century African American performer and composer.⁶

Ngwe's solo performances have included recitals at Sutton House, Charlton House, Lauderdale House, and St. Alfege Church in Greenwich, while her concerto performances have included the rarely heard Oboe Concerto No. 1 by Gordon Jacob with St. Paul's Sinfonia. As an orchestral player, she has performed with the Bournemouth Symphony, the Belmont Ensemble of London, the Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, and *Les Misérables* UK tours. She also spent a season as Guest Principal Oboe with the KwaZulu-Natal Philharmonic Orchestra in Durban, South Africa. Her keen interest in music education has resulted in recording music

for educational purposes, including *Abracadabra Oboe* (A & C Black Publishers) and *Ready, Steady, Blow* (Oboe Classics). Ngwe performs regularly in orchestra and theatre across the United Kingdom and has been featured with various ensembles on live television, radio, and internet broadcasts and recording sessions.⁷ Since she completed her PhD, Ngwe has been an Academic Lecturer at Trinity Laban and the Royal Academy of Music, London.⁸

Silvia Belfiore (b. 1967) is an Italian pianist and musicologist who completed her PhD in Musicology from Paris 8 University, France, in 2022. Born in Alessandria, Italy, Belfiore received a degree in piano performance and musicology from the renowned Vivaldi Conservatory in 1989. In 1991, she graduated *magna cum laude* in musicology from the University of Bologna.⁹

Belfiore received a scholarship to pursue postgraduate work at Darmstadt's Summer Courses for New Music in 1986, 1990, and 1992, respectively. She participated in various workshops and masterclasses with Sergiu Celibidache, Massimiliano Damerini, Aloys Kontarsky, Jean Micault, Piero Rattalino, Marianne Schroeder, and Roberto Szidon. In the musicological field, she was responsible for the provinces of Alessandria and Asti for the research, retrieval, and census of musical assets on behalf of the Istituto per I Beni Musicali in Piemonte. Thus, she had the opportunity to survey, catalog, discover, and transcribe numerous manuscripts. Among other projects, she edited the revision and critical edition of Luigi Perrachio's *Seconda sonata popolare*, published by Rugginenti-Polyhymnia. Silvia also edited an unpublished 19th-century song *Cantata* for voice and orchestra, by Melchiorre Devincenti.¹⁰

As a performer, Belfiore focuses on areas of new research. She is interested in the most varied forms of expression and artistic collaboration, always looking for the innovative and unusual. Part of her activity aims to blend different musical genres, such as classical, jazz, and world music. For example, she has concentrated her attention on contemporary music and collaboration with living composers, with a particular emphasis on the research on the art music of sub-Saharan Africa, which she has been carrying out since 2008. Within this purview, Belfiore has embarked on a massive campaign to promote piano works by modern African composers from various regions of the continent at numerous concerts worldwide. In 2021, Silvia released her debut CD of African piano masterpieces, *Yokuwela: Contemporary Piano Music from the African Continent*, under the Da Vinci Classics record label. The composers featured in this novel recording are Joshua Uzoigwe (Nigeria, 1946-2005), Godwin Sadoh (Nigeria, b. 1965), Stefan Grove (South Africa, 1922-2014), Girma Yiffrashewa (Ghana, b. 1967), Michael Blake (South Africa, b. 1951), and Fred Onovwerosuoke (Ghana, b. 1960).

As a teacher, Belfiore has taught piano and music history in several conservatories in Italy and Portugal. She is currently a faculty member of the Cagliari Conservatory of Music in Italy. She has held workshops and masterclasses at various music

schools and universities in Italy, Portugal, Brazil, California, Ivory Coast, Spain, Tanzania, and Togo.

Belfiore maintains a busy performance and recording schedule. She has given more than 550 concerts as a soloist and chamber performer in Brazil, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Italy, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Malta, Mexico, Moldavia, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Tanzania, Togo, United Kingdom, United States, and Vietnam.¹¹ Owing to her passion for contemporary music and collaborations, several composers have dedicated compositions to her, including Helmut Bieler, Mauro Bortolotti, Aldo Brizzi, Nicola Cisternino, Aldo Clementi, Gianvincenzo Cresta, Giorgio Ghisetti, Federico Gozzelino, Stefan Grové, Horst Lohse, Martin Kürshner, Fred Onovwerosuoke, Biagio Putignano, Godwin Sadoh, Diego Macías Steiner, Gerardo Tristano, Anatol Vieru, and others. Belfiore's discography is varied, spanning diverse periods of music. She has recorded for radio and television in Brazil, Germany, Italy, Moldavia, and the Vatican, and to date has recorded twenty-four CDs of piano solos and chamber works.¹²

These three trailblazing women continue to build a lasting legacy of their professional careers in teaching, research, performance, and composition at various academic institutions and other forums worldwide. International accolades awarded to them attest to the outstanding quality of their work and achievements. Carlotta Ferrari is currently working on some ballads for organ featuring different styles, to explore the contamination of formal Romantic elements and contemporary grammar in the ballads. Uchenna Ngwe recently contributed a chapter to a new book, *Higher Music Education and Employability in a Neoliberal World*.¹³ Silvia Belfiore (pianoforte and toy piano) presented a spectacular chamber concert with Alessandra Giura Longo (flute and voice) tagged, "Toy for Piano," on the 27th of June, 2024, at the prestigious Cagliari Conservatory in Sardinia.

Notes:

¹ carlottaferri.altervista.org

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ trinitylaban.ac.uk/study/teaching-staff/dr-uchenna-ngwe-phd-fhea/

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ music.crackedreed.com/

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ina Van Rooyen, "Italian Pianist Silvia Belfiore Focuses on African Composers," litnet.co.za/italian-pianist-silvia-belfiore-focuses-on-african-composers/

¹⁰ silviabelfiore.it

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Uchenna Ngwe, "History, Narrative and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Music Conservatoire," in *Higher Music Education and Employability in a Neoliberal World*, ed. Rainer Maria Prokop and Rosa Reitsamer (London: Bloomsbury, 2024).

Reports

The Kapralova Society: Year in Review 2024

One of the highlights of the year was Kaprálová's debut at the 2024 BBC Proms. This largest world festival featured the composer's *Military Sinfonietta* in a performance by the Czech Philharmonic conducted by Jakub Hrůša. The year also saw another impressive number of new releases of Kaprálová's music—five in all—by both established and independent Czech, German, British, and US labels. Kaprálová's music was again performed widely across the globe—in as many as sixteen countries—with the US, UK, and the Czech Republic leading the way in the number and frequency of performances and broadcasts throughout the year. Finally, at the end of the year EuroArts released a 52-minute television documentary *Life in the Bugatti Step: The Czech Avant-Garde between the World Wars* that included a segment on Vítězslava Kaprálová.

Performances

Besides Kaprálová's songs that remain immensely popular with international singers, it was her compositions *Suita Rustica*, *Military Sinfonietta*, *April Preludes*, and the string quartet that were most frequently performed worldwide last year. Among the most anticipated performances of the year was Kaprálová's debut at the 2024 BBC Proms, which took place at the Royal Albert Hall on August 28: on this occasion, the composer's *Military Sinfonietta* was played by the Czech Philharmonic under the baton of Jakub Hrůša. Another highlight of the year was the performance of *Suita Rustica* by the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Petr Popelka, at the Nobel Prize Concert in Stockholm on December 8. As well as the BBC Proms, Kaprálová's music was also presented at as many as twelve other international festivals and a music competition, including the *Fremde Erde* Festival, Dvořák Festival, Mahler Jihlava Festival, Janáček Brno Festival 2024, *Concentus Moraviae*, Festival Krumlov 2024, Islington Festival, Leamington Music, Mänttä Music Festival, Royal College of Music Keyboard Festival, Otakar Ševčík Festival, University of Leeds International Concert Summer Festival, and American International Czech and Slovak Voice Competition at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. The latter presented rarely performed art songs *Smutný večer* and *V zemi české* (with Julia Johnson winning the Kaprálová Prize for her rendition of the latter song). In addition, the 2024 MTNA Conference in Atlanta included a lecture-recital titled *Alternative History: Three Epic Piano Sonatas by Women*, in which Asher Ian Armstrong performed Kaprálová's *Sonata Appassionata*.

Broadcasts

Kaprálová's music was frequently broadcast in 2024, with the BBC, Czech Radio, and Radio France among the participating broadcasters. Radio Prague International produced two programs solely dedicated to Kaprálová and her music: a 30-minute radio feature, broadcast during the station's Sunday Music Show, and a 6-minute vignette, a part of the 12-part miniseries

Czech Music Greats, featuring the music of Jan Dismas Zelenka, Jan Václav Hugo Voříšek, Josef Mysliveček, Bedřich Smetana, Antonín Dvořák, Josef Suk, Bohuslav Martinů, Leoš Janáček, and Vítězslava Kaprálová (—her official inauguration into the greatest Czech classical music canon!).

Recordings

Last year again saw an impressive number of new releases featuring some of Kaprálová's music. In January, the German classical label ARS Production released Florence Millett's album of piano music titled *Piano Parlando I* that included Kaprálová's piano miniatures *Two Posies*. In March, the largest Czech label Supraphon released a recording titled *Forgotten Czech Piano Concertos*, featuring concertos by Kaprálová, Bořkovec, and Kovařovic, performed by Marek Kozák and Prague Radio Symphony conducted by Robert Jindra. In April, the largest classical German label CPO released a long-awaited double album which is solely dedicated to Kaprálová's music. The recording, titled *Vítězslava Kaprálová: The Completed Orchestral Works*, was produced in collaboration with the Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava, and financially assisted by the Kapralova Society. The Met's tenor Ian Koziara's and Bradley Moore's remarkable recording *Silenced: Unsung Voices of the 20th Century*, was released in a digital version in August by the Chicago label Cedille Records (the disc will be available in 2025). Their album featured Kaprálová's song cycles op. 4, 10, and 12, and *Waving Farewell*, op. 14. In September, the British independent label Meridian Records released a digital recording *Brief Encounters*, featuring Peter Mallinson's and Lynn Arnold's arrangement of Kaprálová's *Deux ritournelles* (arr. for viola and piano). Finally in December, La Boite à Pépites, a French record label and music producer, released a video vignette on Kaprálová as part of their series *Calendrier d'Avent 2024*, featuring her *Elegy* for violin and piano.

Reviews and articles

In anticipation of Kaprálová's debut at the 2024 BBC Proms, *Bachtrack* published an interview about Kaprálová and her *Military Sinfonietta* on July 19 (Karla Hartl was interviewed by Lawrence Dunn). As expected, the debut generated a lot of interest from reviewers whose critical reviews were published in *Bachtrack* (Alexander Hall), *Opera Today* (David Truslove), *Seen And Heard International* (Chris Kettle), *Music OMH* (Keith McDonnell), *Planet Hugill* (Robert Hugill), *The Telegraph* (Ivan Hewett), *The Spectator* (Richard Bratby), *Financial Times* (Alastair Macaulay), *Arts Desk* (David Nice), *Dvořák Society Newsletter* (Patrick Lambert), *Colin's Column* (Colin Anderson), *Susan's Column* (Susan Elkin), *Arcana.fm*

(Richard Whitehouse), *John's musical journey*, and The Brazen Head (Richard Dove). Several other concerts featuring Kaprálová's music were reviewed in *Bachtrack* (Nick Boston's review of a performance of Kaprálová's string quartet by Pavel Haas Quartet), *Klasika Plus* (a performance of *Suita Rustica* by the Prague Philharmonia and of Kaprálová's string quartet by the Janáček Quartet), and *Opera Plus* (a performance of Kaprálová's violin pieces at the Festival Krumlov 2024). The Kaprálová recordings released last year also garnered much attention. Supraphon's *Forgotten Czech Piano Concertos* recording was reviewed in the *Classic Review* (Tal Agam), *Pianist Magazine*, *BBC Music Magazine*, *The Sunday Times*, *musicwebinternational* (Jonathan Woolf), and the *Dvořák Society Newsletter* (Alan Rosenfelder). The Cedille recording *Silenced: Unsung Voices of the 20th-Century* was reviewed in *Classical Voice of America* (Mark T. Ketterson), *musicwebinternational* (Jonathan Woolf), and *Textura*. Meridian Records' two-disc release was reviewed in *The Strad* (Joanne Talbot) and *musicwebinternational* (Jonathan Woolf). The CPO double album *Vítězslava Kaprálová: The Completed Orchestral Works* received the most reviews, in the end earning the Diapason d'Or (a review for *Diapason* by Anne Ibos-Auge). The album was also reviewed in *Gramophone* (Andrew Farach-Colton), *BBC Music Magazine* (Jeremy Pound), *Klassik Heute* (Martin Blaumeiser), *Pizzicato* (Remy Franck), *Kapralova Society Journal* (Karla Hartl), *musicwebinternational* (Jonathan Woolf), and *Magazin Patriot* (Milan Bator).

Television

In 2024, EuroArts, a German producer and distributor of audio-visual music programs for television, produced a 52-minute music documentary *Life in the Bugatti Step: The Czech Avant-Garde between the World Wars*. The film depicts the colorful, playful and experimental music scene between the two world wars in the former Czechoslovakia, highlighting careers of composers Jaroslav Ježek, Erwin Schulhoff, Victor Ullmann, Pavel Haas, Alois Hába, E.F. Burian, Bohuslav Martinů, and Vítězslava Kaprálová. A film by Anne-Kathrin Peitz, this television documentary has been produced by EuroArts in partnership with Czech Television and the German public broadcaster Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk.

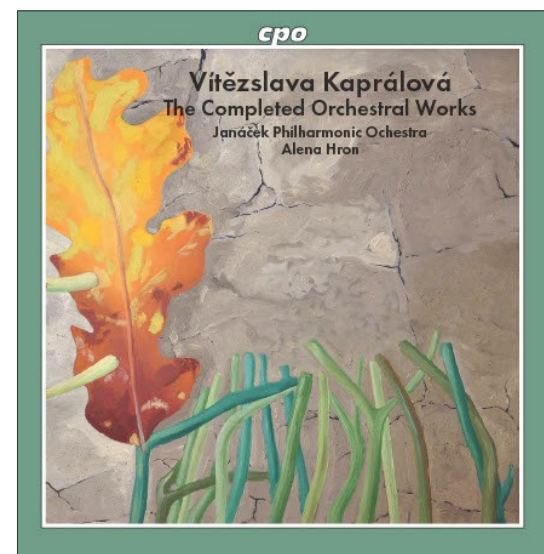
Women in Music

In 2024, we published the twenty-second volume of *Kapralova Society Journal*. The winter issue opened with Kheng K. Koay's article *Inner Mind Narrative of Stacy Garrop in Inner Demons*. Tom Moore's series *Women of the 19th-Century Salon* continued with a vignette on M^{lle} E. Mailly, and the issue was rounded off with the usual *In Review* section that included a review by Erik Entwistle of Leonie Karatas's recording of Kaprálová's piano music, released in 2022 by EuroArts. The summer issue featured the articles *Seaside Lullabies*, *Erotic Nocturnes*, and *Flamenco Flourishes: The Art Song of Poldowski*, by Asher Ian Armstrong, and *Eartha Kitt—The Early Years: A Young Performer Finds Her Voice*, by Erin Hauger. The issue also included *Kaprálová at the Proms*, an interview whose abridged version was first published by *Bachtrack* in anticipation of Kaprálová's debut at the 2024 BBC Proms. Tom Moore's series *Women of the 19th-Century Salon* continued with a vignette on the pianist Jeannette Boutibonne, and the *In Review* section included a book review by George Henderson of Norman Meehan's biography of Jenny McLeod.

Karla Hartl



For many listeners, the meltingly beautiful vocal writing of Kaprálová will be the disc's most treasurable discovery, particularly in Koziara's responsive handling of her Opus 2 songs, and the Op. 14 *Sbohem a šáteček* (Waving farewell), which concludes the disc. "Kaprálová was the most important line item for me," Koziara says. "Something wonderful about her is a unique harmonic language that yet resides in a fairly conventional aesthetic. One who has never heard any Czech composer can listen to her and enjoy themselves. 'Jitro' will forever be a starting piece in my recitals. It is gorgeously written for piano, and for someone who died at 25, she had an unbelievably intuitive understanding of how voices work." Read the full review of the album in *Classical Voice North America* classicalvoiceamerica.org/2024/11/06/singer-sees-the-light-in-dark-world-of-music-suppressed-by-nazis



In Review

Year of Czech Music 2024

The 130th Anniversary of Sláva Vorlová

The world premiere recording of art songs and piano pieces by Czech composer Sláva Vorlová (1894–1973), produced in 2024 by the Lieder Society in collaboration with Czech Radio, includes three short piano pieces and five song cycles that reflect on the composer's life:

Stesk, op. 13 for alto and piano on poems of Olga Scheinpflugová

O lásce, op. 17 for soprano and piano

Síla světla, op. 20/1 for piano

Taneční fantazie, op. 20/2 for piano

Parafráze husitských zpěvů, op. 34 for piano

Neučesané myšlenky, op. 70 for baritone and piano on texts of S. J. Lec

Prsten třeboňské Madoně, op. 72 for tenor and piano on poems of Jaroslav Seifert

Stručné úvahy, op. 89 for soprano and alto on texts by Miroslav Holub

Tamara Morozová, soprano; Monika Jägerová, alto; Daniel Matoušek, tenor; Roman Hoza, baritone; Katelyn Bouska and Vojtěch Červenka, piano. Music Director: Sylva Stejskalová; Sound Engineer: Iva Darebná. Booklet art: Hecuba Design. Recorded 2024 in Prague. Radioservis (2024).



Kaprálová's debut at the 2024 BBC Proms

Given the current musical climate of placing emphasis on women composers and conductors, it was a bright idea for the Czech Philharmonic to open their second concert at the Royal Albert Hall on August 28 with the remarkable *Military Sinfonietta* by Vítězslava Kaprálová. She had, in fact, made her debut conducting the Czech Philharmonic in this work, her graduation piece, at the age of twenty-two in the presence of Edvard Beneš, then Czechoslovak President, and she went on to present it at the opening concert of the 1938 ISCM Festival in London, conducting the BBC orchestra. The English critics rather patronisingly described her on that occasion as “the little girl conductor.” Apart from her prowess with the baton, she was an enormously talented composer, as this stirring fifteen-minute piece proves. She studied in Brno with Janáček pupil Vilém Petrželka, then in Prague with Dvořák pupil Vítězslav Novák. The *sinfonietta* stems from the latter period before she went to Paris to study with Martinů, and the Slovak character of some of the themes suggests Novák's influence. From the striking fanfare-like opening to the powerful, striving peroration, the score demonstrates remarkable technical accomplishment. It simply teems with ideas, switches mood from militancy to pastoral musings with ease, and benefits from orchestration that is both imaginative and colourful, especially in the percussion department, which includes piano. Concerning the Janáček-like title, Kaprálová explained that, despite the ominous times (Czechoslovakia threatened by Hitler's expansionist ambitions), her *Military Sinfonietta*, which she dedicated to President Beneš, was conceived not as a “battle-cry,” but in order to depict the psychological need to defend that which is most sacred to the nation. With evident enthusiasm Hrůša and his Czech musicians played the piece for all it was worth, bringing both precision and conviction to their interpretation and driving the music to a compelling and, dare one say it, militant conclusion which brought the house down.

Patrick Lambert

From the review “The Royal Albert Hall reverberates to Czech Music! Patrick Lambert reports on a high point in the Proms season,” written for *Dvořák Society Newsletter* No. 148 (November 2024): 10. Used by permission.

The Czech Philharmonic at the Proms

Enterprisingly, the Czech Philharmonic began their second BBC Prom with Vítězslava Kaprálová's *Military Sinfonietta*: a protégé of Martinů, the tragically short-lived Kaprálová wrote it while she was still a student. It is immediately clear that she could handle large forces (including triple woodwind, six horns, percussion, harp, piano and celeste) with energy and confidence. On a first hearing, alternating fanfares and quieter episodes fall well short of fulfilling the expectations inevitably aroused by the title (Janáček had died less than a decade earlier): but then cellos and double basses introduce a lovely episode, with quiet timpani and muted brass, and I was won over. Like a Czech version of Vaughan Williams's *Cotswold rapture*, the music seemed to open onto a vision of rolling countryside and made sense of Kaprálová's words quoted in the program: 'the composition does not represent a battle cry, but it depicts the psychological need to defend that which is most sacred to the nation.'

The music is a brave and heartfelt response to the threat of imminent Nazi aggression – Hitler's 'Special Military Operation,' we might now say. It becomes faster and more brilliant, using a wide range of orchestral colours: a lovely trumpet solo, xylophone and bells, bass clarinet, stirring use of the horns; even fourfold bass drum strokes, recalling the shattering climax to the first movement of Suk's *Asrael* Symphony the previous evening. Ominous fanfares resurface, but the work ends in an explosion of colour and optimism. I cannot imagine it ever being played with more sensitivity and conviction than it was here: almost as moving as last season's performance of Dora Pejačević's *Symphony* under Sakari Oramo. Pejačević died at 37; Kaprálová at only 25. Thank you, Czech Philharmonic and Jakub Hrůša, for bringing us her music.

From a review by Chris Kettle for *Seen and Heard International*, 30 August 2024

KATELYN BOUSKA
PIANO

Hildegard And Her Sisters

Hildegard von Bingen
Katelyn Bouska
Amy Beach
Ruth Schöenthal
Sláva Vorlová
Maya Miro Johnson

Randy Bellous, executive producer

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BOB ATTIEH, PRODUCER



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The path of the album follows the trajectory of the falling darkness. Amy Beach, in her "A Hermit Thrush at Eve," carries us softly into the darkness with bird song calling clearly from the upper ranges of the piano. Once the night has fallen, the inner spirit emerges. "Bruises, paraphrase," a new work by Maya Miro Johnson, explores the frailty of the human body, and "Canticles of Hieronymus," by Ruth Schöenthal, honors the rambunctious imagination of our medieval counterparts.

But, we are not left in that darkness. Sláva Vorlová's "Síla světla" (The Power of Light) brings back the early rays of sunshine and then suddenly we hear the bird song again, singing to greet the sun. Amy Beach's "The Hermit Thrush at Morn," reminds us of the hope and glory of music, nature, and humanity.

In Kate's words, "The direction of this album follows a more personal path than my previous work. The initial germ was a memory from my early student years and the culminating force, the death of a friend and colleague. I looked for the music that drove inexorably inward – searching for that point deep in the core where we lose our differences. In the timeline of my musical life, Hildegard's voice stands as a solid point of inspiration. As I was recreating her music, I was overcome with an overwhelming mystical nostalgia. The years of teaching and study, of concertizing fell away. All the music I have had in my hands was still and I heard only the pure resonance of the magic and mystery of that memory."

The KS Journal Reader



THE WOMEN IN MUSIC ANTHOLOGY

Eugene Gates & Karla Hartl

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