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Navzdy (Forever) Kapralova: Reevaluating Czech composer Vitezslava Kapralova through her thirty songs

By Timothy Cheek

Vitezslava Kapralova was one of the youngest of a distinguished generation of Czech composers active between the world wars. This post-Janacek group included Gideon Klein (1919-1945), Pavel Haas (1899-1944), and Hans Krasa (1899-1944). These composers were major twentieth-century talents whose developing, unique styles were cut short--in the case of the latter three by extermination in a concentration camp, in the case of Kapralova apparently by tuberculosis miliaris. She died in France on June 16, 1940, two days after the Nazis entered Paris.

Lost in the midst of World War II, and behind the label of "decadence" during the communist regime, the works of these composers have only recently enjoyed a resurgence of interest and appreciation. Kapralova has held a special fascination because of the quality of her work, her gender, her age, and the intimate relationship between her and her teacher Bohuslav Martinu while in Paris. Published research has centered mainly on either the affair with Martinu, a general overview of her life and works, or study of her piano pieces and other instrumental works. This paper proposes a look at Kapralova's songs as a way to delve more deeply into the achievements of this remarkable figure.

American composer Robert Ward (b. 1917) wrote of his songs: "Indeed, if I were robbed of all other means of communicating my beliefs, my philosophy and my innermost feelings to the world, I should still stand wholly revealed by the texts I have chosen to set."[1] For almost all the great composers, their songs are a key to understanding their aesthetic. This is true both musically, in their approach to melody and the relationship between words and music; and even culturally, in their choice of poetry and the way they communicate the essence of the poem. Vitezslava Kapralova wrote several outstanding works for orchestra, piano, and chamber ensembles in her short life, but her songs and her choice of poetry reveal a side to her artistry, her time, and her culture, that the works for instruments alone cannot do. She collected clippings of poems that appealed to her, wrote poetry herself, and set to music the works of leading Czech writers such as Vitezslav Nezval and Jaroslav Seifert. Almost all her songs are of very high quality, with a subtle, intricate marriage of words and music. The concrete quality of words not only reveals the composer but also adds to our knowledge of Czech cultural history, music history, and women's studies. Her songs are also arguably her best works.

Some questions to be asked--saving some answers for future scholars--include: does Kapralova favor expressing the general mood of a poem, or does she underscore specific words throughout? Can the music be separated from the words, or are they intrinsically bound together? Do the chosen texts reveal something about the events current in her life or in Czechoslovakia? How do the songs relate to songs by other songwriters of the time--in Czechoslovakia, in Paris, and elsewhere? Comparing the original poems to her songs, does she ever repeat words, change words, or delete words, and why? Is her approach, her style, different depending on the chosen poet? What do the sketches and other versions reveal about her? How much did her general approach change from her first songs, op. 4, written in 1932, to her last, in 1940? Does she favor a certain formal scheme (strophic, through-composed, ABA, etc.)? Is the piano writing in the songs different than in the other works with piano? Other Czech composers of the time, such as Pavel Haas and Gideon Klein, had written songs to German words as well as Czech, and Martinu has several songs in French--why did Kapralova choose only Czech poetry? Does she favor a particular voice type? Did she have certain singers in mind? Is the vocal writing idiomatic--is it "singable" or is the writing "forced?"

Let us remind ourselves of the world Kapralova inherited. She was born into the Austro-Hungarian Empire, enjoyed the fruits of a democratic Czechoslovakia with a thriving economy and a rich artistic climate, and died a refugee. Her musical education came first from her father Vaclav Kapral, a formidable composer and pianist who had studied with Leos Janacek and Alfred Cortot. Despite Kapralova's enormous talent as a composer, conductor, and pianist, she entered the Brno Conservatory against the will of her father.[2] He was soon to become a life-long supporter of her career and achievements, but his initial feelings are understandable. In 1930,

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the prospects for a woman composer and conductor were extremely limited. Kapralova had to prove herself in countless areas. The writing of songs by women was considered to be not much more than a charming hobby for them. Any leanings toward songwriting would have to be managed with care in this society, and Kapralova had strong inclinations. Jarmila Vavrdova, a friend and colleague of Kapralova who had a long, successful career as a soprano and voice teacher, discloses Kapralova's passion for composing songs: ". . . and so she told me one day: You know, Jarabacek, I would like to write just songs--they are my biggest love."[3] Kapralova was in good hands with some of the leading Czech song composers and teachers of the day--Kapral, Petrzelka, Novak, and Martinu--but they seemed to be least interested in her songs. In 1958, Jiri Macek wrote: "Novak recognized another danger that could cost her--her natural inclination for song writing. . . . This is why Kapralova, on Novak's recommendation, stopped writing songs and decided to give him instead her String Quartet, composed in the summer of 1935."[4] Kapralova wrote on a postcard to her parents in January of 1936: "Too bad I have not been able to finish the songs. I stopped working on them when Novak told me he did not want them."[5] These probably refer to the three outstanding *Navzdy* (Forever) songs. Macek thinks that the reason why Novak did not want Kapralova to focus on song writing was that "the simplicity of the form" would have resulted in superficiality of her work as a composer and to a "developmental stagnation."[6] These comments may reveal more about Macek than about Novak, for Novak--an outstanding and prolific song composer--did admire Kapralova's song *Sbohem a satecek* (Waving Farewell) which Kapralova later orchestrated under Martinu's tutelage, and Novak worked with her on the *Jablko s klina* (Apple from the Lap) cycle. Even so, Macek's comments, written in 1958, reveal an attitude that is not uncommon. Fortunately for Kapralova, she was outstanding in both instrumental and vocal genres, as well as in conducting. These other avenues were the ones that brought her the respect, admiration, and attention she needed to support her career, something that "mere" songwriting could not have done.

It is also worth noting that the great Czech composers are known mostly for their large-scale symphonic works. The one-hour Czech television documentary on Kapralova from 2001, *Posledni concertino* (Last Concertino) did not feature one song.

Kapralova showed talents as an artist and as a poet at a very young age. She chose to develop her musical talent instead, but her sensitivity for poetry served her well in her songs. We see a natural development beginning with her childhood attempts at writing poetry to her first attempt at songwriting around the age of fifteen. Unfinished sketches remain of three songs set to probably Kapralova's own words. These are followed by two songs, op. 4, written at the age of seventeen in 1932 to the words of R. Bojko while she was a student at the Brno Conservatory. Kapralova decided they were worthy enough for an opus number, and although they are certainly not of the calibre of her later songs, many hallmarks of her writing are already obvious.

One characteristic is idiomatic, colorful piano writing that is descriptive of the text and well crafted in its interplay with the voice. It is no mere "accompaniment." We see time and again in Kapralova's songs that she is a master at creating an indescribable "atmosphere" in the piano part. At this point in her life she was an accomplished pianist, and had experience in writing piano pieces and the two duos of op. 3 for violin and piano. In a sense Kapralova follows the path of Robert Schumann, a promising pianist who first composed piano pieces and then applied this strength to his songwriting.

Other features are an exemplary setting of Czech inflection, along with a vocal line that compliments the singing voice. Kapralova is always true to the natural stress, vowel-lengths, and inflection of the Czech language, and writes lines that are a heightened expression of natural declamation. After all, the fruits of Janacek's work lay in full view of Kapralova's generation. Both her father, a student of Janacek, and her teacher at this time, Vilem Petrzelka, were impeccable in their settings of Czech declamation. But Kapralova accomplished this while also writing lines that singers love to sing, that suit the instrument as much as her piano parts suit the piano. Soprano Jarmila Vavrdova, who premiered the *Navzdy* cycle and *Sbohem a satecek*, wrote how Kapralova "had an understanding for bel canto even in modern music."[7] The "modern music" of these op. 4 songs is in an impressionistic style, with some bitonality and only rudimentary motivic organization. These are all traits that Kapralova was soon to refine and develop.

With the next opus, *Jiskry z popele* (Sparks from Ashes), written no more than one year later, we find Kapralova an accomplished composer, and we find many of the hallmarks of her style. The impressionistic writing has developed into a distinctive voice that is Kapralova's own; and motivic work is given full rein, with piano figurations that are often based on intervals derived from the natural inflection of particular words. This is writing that creates a true marriage of words and music. Kapralova is already following in the tradition of Wolf and Debussy, composing intricate piano parts that are wedded to beautifully sung and declaimed words.

About half of Kapralova's songs are through-composed--driven by the words and unified by motives. The next favored form is ABA'. In the op. 5 songs, we see both these forms utilized masterfully. The first song is through-composed, and while the second and third songs are also through-composed, the piano accompaniment provides features of ABA'. The last song is ABA'. Each song is also unified motivically. This approach is to reach its formal mastery in the extended song *Sbohem a satecek*. Kapralova bases that entire song on the motive of a major second that appears in the first word, *sbohem* (farewell), in effect, then, filling the entire song with farewells. The motivic writing in this song gives a feeling of an inexorable, organic flow from beginning to end, while the overall form of ABA'CDEB'A" (which can be further reduced to ABA') solidifies its structure. The hallmark of Kapralova's style is the rare balance of inspired passion and superb craftsmanship. One way she accomplishes this in her songs is through this wonderful mixture of the free through-composed form unified by motivic writing, along with ingenious variations on the basic ABA structure.

The writing in *Jiskry z popele*, op. 5 is such that the songs can be performed by a soprano, tenor, or mezzo. Here, too, we see a tendency in Kapralova's writing--the only songs to mention a specific voice type are the *Navzdy* songs, where the indication *pro vyssi hlas* (for higher voice) is given, and the single song "Ukolebavka" (Lullaby) from *Jablko s klina*, with its marking *pro strední hlas* (for medium voice). Even here, however, the *Navzdy* songs suit most mezzos, and the "Ukolebavka" is beautiful with sopranos. Limiting the range maintains the balance between music and words--the words are always understandable. Most of Kapralova's output is slightly too high for baritones, however, and in her last five songs she wrote in a slightly lower range that makes up for this apparent slight. Her final song, *Dopis* (Letter), is her lowest, and is dedicated to

the baritone who premiered it, Otto Kraus.

While every song except *Dopis* was premiered by a female singer, the only poem that is specifically from the point of view of a woman is "Ukolebavka" in *Jablko s klina*. Since Czech grammar makes gender clear in the past tense or when adjectives are used, the sex of a character is often obvious. Nine poems are specifically from the male point of view, and one of them, "Jarni pout (Spring Fair)," is in the same cycle as "Ukolebavka." The rest of the poems are non-specific. Clearly, Kapralova is not insistent on the gender of her singers, and it is still quite common for female singers to sing many songs written from a male point of view. Also, all but one poet that Kapralova chose to set were male. Female poet Pavla Krickova, sister of poet Petr Kricka and composer Jaroslav Kricka--all friends of the family--, wrote the words to the "Hymn of the volunteer nurses of the Czechoslovak Red Cross."[8]

Kapralova decided to call the group of four songs comprising op. 5 *Jiskry z popele* (Sparks from Ashes). For every group of songs she applies a descriptive title, usually her own. The only exception is in the early *Dve pisne* (Two songs), op. 4. However, only the songs *Jablko s klina*, op. 10, *Navzdy*, op. 12, and *Zpivano do dalky* (Sung into the Distance), op. 22 have the designation cycle. What constitutes a cycle versus a group of songs is the subject of much discussion. By the twentieth century it was often simply a matter of what the composer chose to call his or her collection. Kapralova's "groups," along with the three "cycles," are unified by virtue of their having a common poet, in almost every instance. Motivic unification occurs only within songs, not between songs. They are also well-ordered, obviously meant to be performed as a complete group. The *Vteriny* (Seconds) songs, on the other hand, are a loose collection of songs written over a three-year span, using various poets and folk texts, as well as a short piano solo.

It is interesting to note that the four mature songs of op. 5 were never performed until 2002. All the other songs with opus numbers were publicly performed in Kapralova's lifetime. What prompted Kapralova to abandon them? We can really only speculate. The songs are dedicated to Ota Vach, "my only love," a classmate she met at the Brno Conservatory. Vach remained a lifelong friend, and it was he who had her remains brought from France to Czechoslovakia. Vach introduced Kapralova to the poetry of Bohdan Jelinek (1851-1874), the poet for these songs.[9] Except for several folk texts, Jelinek was the only non-living poet Kapralova chose for her songs. Did she perhaps feel that the choice of nineteenth-century words was not the best selection for an aspiring Czech composer living among great modern Czech writers? Or were the songs too private, having been written to her only love? The song *Leden* (January) written shortly afterwards, was also never performed. Did she perhaps feel the pressure to compose purely instrumental works and make her mark with these before returning to songs?

In the op. 5 songs, Kapralova slightly alters the original texts. Occasionally she deletes a line, changes a word, reconstructs a phrase, or repeats a word. The changes are subtle and ingenious, and she knows how to accomplish the occasional adaptation of a poem even with a great poet such as Jaroslav Seifert (1901-1986), as in the song "Ruce" (Hands), set to his words. Seifert was the only Czech writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize in literature (in 1984), and Kapralova wrote six songs to his poetry-more than any other poet. This is followed by four for the nineteenth-century poet Jelinek, as mentioned, as well as four for poet Jan Carek (1898-1966), who greatly admired her settings of his poetry. Another admirer was Viktor Kripner (1906-1956), to whom Kapralova dedicated the three songs of *Zpivano do dálky*, set to his words. She also chose three poems from the great Czech poet Vitezslav Nezval (1900-1958). The two songs of op. 4 are to texts by her contemporary R. Bojko, while six contemporary Czech poets account for six other songs. This leaves about four remaining songs that are based on Moravian folk texts. Clearly, Kapralova had a discerning eye for great poetry of her day, and had the skill to occasionally alter it when it made for a better song. Her bow to folk texts also placed her in a rich tradition of Czech composers.

The autobiographical element of some of Kapralova's songs is interesting. The song "Navzdy" was written during the last half of Kapralova's final year at the Prague Conservatory. The next step in her life following graduation must have been in her mind when she composed this, one of her greatest songs. Carek's poem says that "someone will leave and will return, someone will leave and will never return."[10] More obvious in this regard is the song *Sbohem a satecek*, composed less than two months after Martinu advised Kapralova to study with him in Paris, and just days before her final lesson with Novak. The great, extended song on a poem by Nezval is dedicated to "the most beautiful city of Prague," and was clearly written as a farewell to her country as she embarked on her studies. Ludvik Kundera, writing in 1949, considered it one of the best Czech songs of the times.[11] All the elements of Kapralova's unique style and best songwriting are apparent here.

Other songs were written for special occasions, such as the "Hymn of the volunteer nurses of the Czechoslovak Red Cross" (arranged as a duet, probably for chorus); a Christmas carol; songs for her parents' birthdays; and "Novorocni," written for the 1937 New Year's Day. All of these elicit varying styles from Kapralova, depending on the occasion, performers, audience, and recipient. A piano interlude in the middle of *Vteriny* serves as a memorial to Czech president Tomas Garrigue Masaryk. She composed the piece the day he died, September 14, 1937, and titled it "Posthumous variation." It is based on the popular song "Taticku stary nas," a song that had attained the status of an anthem associated with Masaryk.

Kapralova's last song *Dopis* (Letter), set to words by poet Petr Kricka, concerns a man's response to his former lover as she decides to call off their relationship. Apparently, Kapralova began studies with Nadia Boulanger in early 1940, before Boulanger left for the United States, and *Dopis* was one of her assignments. It is curious, however, that Kapralova would choose such a text and compose this song only five days after her wedding to Jiri Mucha, son of the famous Art-Nouveau artist Alphonse Mucha. The song was written almost exactly one year after she first met Jiri Mucha, a time when she was writing her parents about plans to live together with Martinu and to leave with him for America. These letters had been preceded by thirty-four intense love letters from Martinu to Kapralova in which he was contemplating divorcing his wife Charlotte. According to Mucha, Kapralova spent the morning before her wedding with Martinu.[12] The text of Dopis was no accident.

In summary, we can examine one of Kapralova's best songs to see what it reveals about her and her time. The song "Navzdy," from the group of three songs of the same name, shows many of her traits. The poet is Jan Carek (1898-1966). Like most of Kapralova's poets, he was a living Czech writer with whom Kapralova was in communication, and he admired her settings of his poems.[13] Kapralova made the following changes in the poem, condensing some of Carek's words into more succinct phrases that flow and soar more easily:

Carek (*Kapralova*): zase se vrati *(zas se vrati);* Nevim, jestli muze

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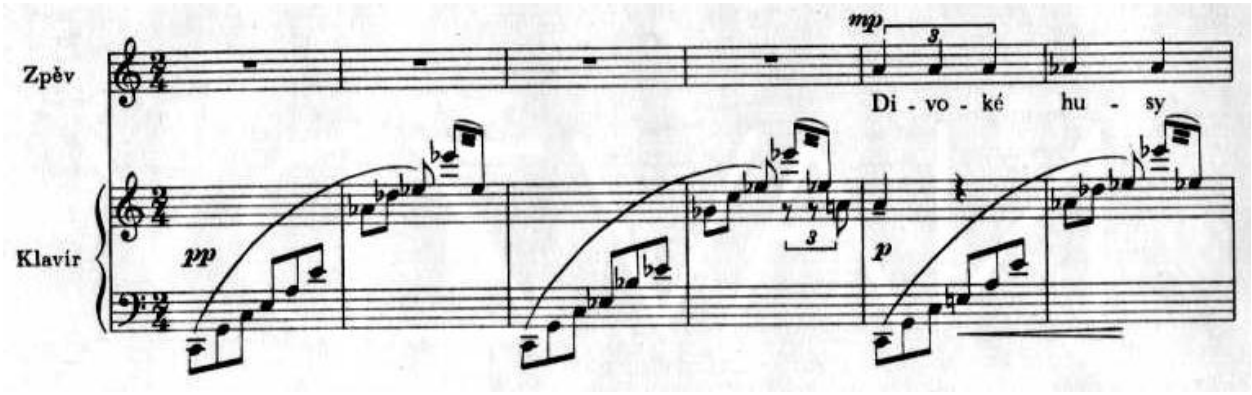


Example 1: Song "Navzdy" (Forever) from the song cycle of the same title. Published in Prague in 1949 by HMUB.

byt jinde krasnejsi nebe nez u nas *(Nevim, je-li nekde nebe krasnejsi nez u nas);* jasna *(jasna, jasna).* A translation of Kapralova's version of the poem follows:

A section:

Wild geese are flying south,
someone will leave and again will return,
someone will leave and will never return.

B section:

I don't know if somewhere the sky is more beautiful than here,
but you would not count anywhere more stars
when the night is clear, clear.

A section:

Wild geese are flying south,
someone will leave and again will return,
someone will leave and will never return.

The autobiographical content of the poem has already been mentioned--Kapralova was contemplating leaving her home for further study, and the song is about someone leaving her native land. The form is ABA', Kapralova's second most favored structure, after through-composed writing. There is less motivic writing than in some of her songs, but not much is necessary in such a clear-cut ABA form, and in such a short song.[14] The falling major second occurs often, however, highlighting the words *odejde* (will leave), *vrati* (will return), *nevrati* (will not return), *u nas* (here/with us), and especially *jasna* (clear), the latter describing the beauty of one's home. These words are all interconnected, then.

The piano writing is idiomatic, as important as the voice, and from the very beginning creates one of Kapralova's distinctive atmospheres in a unique impressionistic style. The vocal writing is true to natural Czech declamation while also flattering the singer's voice. Typical of Kapralova, too, is that she keeps the practical considerations of singing in mind--notice the introduction of the A-natural in the fourth measure of the piano part just before the singer has to find that pitch after a tonally obscure introduction (example 1).[15] The song stays within a range that keeps the words clear, and can be sung by a soprano, mezzo, or tenor.

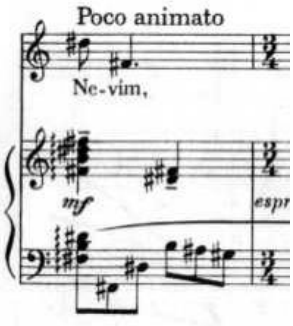
A frequent characteristic of Kapralova's writing is to open up into a clear, tonal section after a more tonally vague beginning. The B section sweeps into a passionate outpouring in a clear tonality as she describes the beauty and clarity of her home's sky, coming after the tonally vague and melancholy A section (example 2).

Note, too, how the surprising ending, with its seemingly out-of-place E-flat, really does make perfect sense (example 3). It was first introduced in the piano in measures two, three, and four (see example 1), and revealed itself fully as a D-sharp at the beginning of the B section (example 2). Its final resting place in the low bass is but an echo of the beautiful home Kapralova is to leave, and helps to express the instability of her feelings.

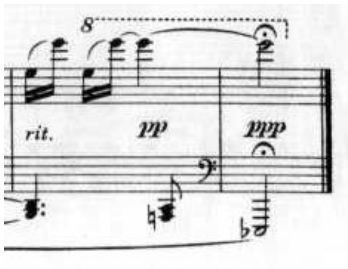
Vitezslava Kapralova was a consummate song writer--certainly one of the greatest of the Czech song composers--whose songs deserve performances and study by performers, musicologists, and theorists alike. The fruits of this study are enormous, as her ability to wed music and words creates art of great beauty and substance while revealing her character, her culture, and her times.

Notes:

This article is based on papers presented by the author on April 7, 2002 at the annual convention of the British Association of Slavonic and East European Studies at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge University, UK; and on September 27, 2002 at the national conference of the College Music Society in Kansas City, Missouri, USA. The paper has been modified through research in April, 2002 at the Department of Music History at the Moravian Museum in Brno, Czech Republic, where most of Kapralova's manuscripts are housed. This research was supported by a grant from the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) with funds provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the United States Department of State, which administers the Title VIII Program. None of these organizations is re-



Example 2



Example 3

Fig. 1: Kapralova with friends in Tri Studne in July 1938. From left to right: Bohuslav Martinu, Vitezslava Kapralova, Petr Kricka, and Jaroslav Kricka. Photo courtesy of the Kapralova Estate.

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sponsible for the views expressed.

1. Robert Ward, foreword to *Sacred Songs for Pantheists, for Soprano with Orchestra or Piano* (Boston: Highgate Press, 1965).
2 Karla Hartl, *Chronology of Events*, August 1998, <http://www.kapralova.org/CHRONOLOGY.htm> (22 March 2002).
3. ". . . a tak mi jednou rekla: "Vis, Jarabacku, chtela bych psat jen a jen pisne, to je ma nejvetsi laska." "Jarmila Vavrdova" in *Vitezslava Kapralova: Studie a vzpominky* (Vitezslava Kapralova: studies and remembrances), ed. Premysl Prazak (Prague: HMUB, 1949), 99.
4. "Novak take poznal jine uskali, na kterem mohla ztroskotat. Jeji sklon k pisnove tvorbe. Proto take Kapralova na Novakovo doporuceni prestala psat pisne a rozhodla se mu dat jako dalsi praci svuj Smyccovy kvartet psany o prazdninach 1935." Jiri Macek, *Vitezslava Kapralova*, Kniznice Hudebnich rozhledu casopisu Svazu cs. skladatelu, roc. IV, svazek 10-11 (Prague: Svaz cs. skladatelu, 1958), 79.
5. "Skoda, ze nemam uz ty pisnicky hotove. Prestala jsem je delat, kdyz Novak rekl, ze je nechce." Postcard to parents, January 1936.
6. Macek, 79.
7. ". . mela pochopeni pro bel canto i v soudobe hudbe." Prazak, 99.
8. See the photo of the Kricka brothers with Kapralova and Martinu on p. 5.
9. Karla Hartl, *Chronology of Events*, August 1998, <http://www.kapralova.org/CHRONOLOGY.htm> (22 March 2002).
10. ". . . nekdo odejde a zas se vrati, nekdo odejde a uz se nevrati."
11. "Ludvik Kundera" in Prazak, 69. Kundera also cites the influences of Novak and Kapral, but says there is decidedly something new in its atmosphere (". . . v tomto ovzdusi a osvetlení je to vsak neco zcela noveho.")
12. Karla Hartl, *Chronology of Events*, August 1998, <http://www.kapralova.org/CHRONOLOGY.htm> (22 March 2002).
13. "Jan Carek" in Prazak, 101-103.
14. The longest of Kapralova's songs, *Sbohem a satecek*, contains the most motivic writing.
15. See also *Jablko s klina*: in the second song, "Ukolebavka," Kapralova gives the piano a lone F to open the song, greatly facilitating the singer's entrance after the tonally unstable ending of the previous song. When "Ukolebavka" had been published separately, however, in 1936, two years before the entire cycle was published, the song did not begin with its eighth-note introduction. Also see the first song of the cycle, "Pisen na vrbovou pistalku" in the measure before "zpod kridel" Kapralova writes a G-natural in the right hand of the piano part, gliding smoothly to the next harmony and making the singer's entrance much easier.

MUSICAL EXAMPLES CITED:
Kapralova, Vitezslava. *Navzdy.* Prague: HMUB, 1949.

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Dr. Timothy Cheek, a member of the voice faculty of the University of Michigan, served opera internships at the Teatro Comunale in Florence and at the National Theater in Prague. His performances as a collaborative pianist have taken him to 12 countries and have been heard on worldwide broadcasts. His books, *Singing in Czech: A Guide to Czech Lyric Diction and Vocal Repertoire* and a continuing series devoted to Janacek opera librettos, have been recognized as authoritative guides for singers, coaches, and conductors. His recent recording of Kapralova's art songs for Supraphon has received accolades from critics worldwide. He is currently working on a critical edition of the songs for Amos Editio, to be published later this year in Prague. The project is funded by the Kapralova Society.

Women composers: A critical review of the psychological literature[1]

By Eugene Gates

The New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers (Sadie and Samuel, 1994) includes articles on no fewer than 875 women composers. However, very little of this information has found its way into the textbooks used in our schools, conservatories, and universities. The historical silence surrounding women composers has led psychologists, both past and present, to conclude that women have not excelled at musical composition because of certain defects in the female nature. This article examines critically the psychological literature on women composers, and, in a brief coda, addresses the challenge that such theories present to music education. But first it will be necessary to discuss briefly two key issues: biological determinism and sex-role socialization.

The Nature-Nurture Debate

The notion that women had not excelled as composers because they lacked the power of abstract reasoning runs like a leitmotif throughout nineteenth-century philosophy (Gates, 1992; Lloyd, 1984; Schopenhauer, 1981) and music criticism (Gates, 1992; Gates, 1997; Upton, 1899). Having demonstrated, at least to their own satisfaction, the existence of this deficiency in the female mind, philosophers and critics relegated the task of explaining its supposed biological basis to men of science.

During the early development of experimental psychology, in the latter years of the nineteenth century, the topic of female behaviour was apparently of little concern. The task of this new science was the description of the "generalized adult mind," and it is not entirely clear whether "adult" was meant to include women as well as men. Around 1900, however, the incorporation of evolutionary theory (with its focus on the evolutionary superiority of the Caucasian male) into psychology gave rise to studies of the supposed biological determinants of sex differences in sensory, motor, and intellectual abilities (Shields, 1975).

Informed by the assumptions that woman's relative lack of creative achievement--not only in music, but in other spheres as well--and her subordinate social position were part of the natural order of things, turn-of-the-century research on sex differences was not much of an advertisement for the objectivity of science. Nevertheless, wearing the mantle of science, such research was able to pass as "objective truth." Reviewing the literature in 1910, psychologist Helen Thompson Woolley fumed:

> There is perhaps no field aspiring to be scientific where flagrant personal bias, logic martyred in the cause of supporting a prejudice, unfounded assertions, and even sentimental rot and drivel, have run riot to such an extent as here. (in Shields, 1975, p. 739)

Regrettably, the search for biological determinants of female inadequacy continues today. Psychologist Carol Jacklin (1981) has noted ten ubiquitous methodological problems contained in recent studies of sex-related differences. Among them is the "striking logical error [of] assuming [that] the cause of a sex-related difference is genetic once the existence of a sex-related difference is established." (p. 260)

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But biological explanations for observed social and psychological differences between the sexes are grounded on a false concept of biology, since it is impossible to determine--even theoretically--what proportion of human behaviour might be biologically based (Fausto-Sterling, 1985). Moreover, it is well documented in anthropological research that definitions of gender-appropriate behaviour and conceptions of masculine and feminine personality traits vary from culture to culture. A case in point is Margaret Mead's now-classic study of three New Guinea tribes--the Arapesh, the Mundugumor, and the Tchambuli. Reporting her findings, Mead (1950) wrote:

> We found the Arapesh--both men and women--displaying a personality that . . . we would call maternal in its parental aspects, and feminine in its sexual aspects. . . . We found among the Mundugumor that both men and women . . . approximated a personality type that we in our culture would find only in an undisciplined and very violent male. . . . In the third tribe, the Tchambuli, we found a genuine reversal of the sex attitudes of our own culture, with the woman the dominant, impersonal, managing partner, the man the less responsible and the emotionally dependent person. . . . The material suggests that . . . many, if not all of the personality traits which we have called masculine or feminine are as lightly linked to sex as are the clothing, the manners, and the form of head-dress that a society at a given period assigns to either sex. (pp. 205-206)

Anthropologist Ralph Linton (1964) points out that the types of occupations assigned to the sexes also vary widely from culture to culture. An activity that is considered men's work in one society is often perceived as women's work in another. Linton further notes that

> [m]ost [societies] try to rationalize these prescriptions in terms of physiological differences between the sexes or their different roles in reproduction. However, a comparative study of the statuses ascribed to women and men in different cultures seems to show that while such factors may have served as a starting point for the development of a division the actual ascriptions are almost entirely determined by culture. (p. 118)

Cross-cultural data such as those collected by Mead and Linton demonstrate the malleability of "human nature" and alert us to the power of socialization--the process through which the behaviours and personalities of the sexes are shaped to conform to their prescribed societal roles.

Sex-role socialization is a major part of the complex process of learning to live in a given society. Depending on the learner's interaction with various forces in the social environment, personality can be shaped to develop in any one of several directions (Greenglass, 1982). Most societies differentiate between the sexes through the assignment of different roles. Through the various institutions, forces, and groups that make up the social system (i.e., the family, school, church and state, adult friends and neighbours, peer groups, and the mass media), and in accordance with prevailing beliefs about the desirability of certain personality traits in males and others in females, societies also promote different patterns of behaviour for boys and girls.

Now, as in the past, females in Western industrial societies are expected to be unassertive, friendly, expressive, attentive to their appearance, and nurturant and caring toward others. Males, on the other hand, are supposed to be physically and sexually aggressive, emotionally tough, independent, and competent. Thus, through socialization, girls are taught to make themselves pleasing so that they can attract a husband and enter into a domestic and nurturing role while boys are encouraged to prepare themselves for careers appropriate to their own individual abilities (Williams, 1977).

And, socialization does not stop with childhood; it is a lifelong process. Adults are constantly made aware of the sanctions associated with gender deviance and the rewards of gender-appropriate behaviour. Consequently, many women, fearing that they may be considered "unfeminine," avoid occupations customarily assigned to men (Sayers, 1986). In the past, the sanctions against women taking up "masculine" pursuits were also clearly conveyed to them. Any woman who attempted to make a career in art-music composition, a field traditionally dominated by men, was everywhere reminded of the "inappropriateness" of such behaviour. German writer Johannes Scherr, for instance, penned the following in 1875 about women who strove for professional status in the creative arts: "The contingent of females, who force themselves on the public without being asked, consists of either ugly old maids . . . or of slovenly housewives and undutiful mothers." (in Herminghouse, 1986, p. 84) The sexologist Krafft-Ebing was even more uncharitable. Writing in 1886, he declared that women who thought, felt, or acted like men exhibited an "extreme grade of degenerative homosexuality." (in Sayers, 1986, p. 28) Clearly, any theory that purports to explain social and psychological differences between the sexes--and by inference, sex differences in creative achievement--without due attention to the effects of socialization is grossly misleading.

Sex Differences in Musical Creativity: "Scientific" Theories, 1894-1983

Havelock Ellis was the first psychologist to attempt a "scientific" explanation for the dearth of important female composers. In *Man and Woman*, first published in 1894, he wrote:

> Unless we include two or three women of our own day whose reputation has perhaps been enhanced by the fact that they are women, it is difficult to find the names of women even in the list of third-rank composers. . . .Music is at once the most emotional and the most severely abstract of the arts. There is no art to which women have been more widely attracted and there is no art in which they have shown themselves more helpless. (Ellis, 1934, p. 353)

According to Ellis, genius was less often manifested in females than in males, and this accounted for woman's relative lack of success in composition. Ellis further claimed that the unequal distribution of genius between the sexes was biologically based. He explained:

> Genius is more common among men by virtue of the same general tendency by which idiocy is more common among men. The two facts are but two aspects of a larger zoological fact--the larger varia-

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> tional range of the male. . . . It thus comes about that women . . . possess less spontaneous originality [than men] in the intellectual sphere. This is an organic tendency which no higher education can eradicate. (pp. 433-35)

He also stressed that woman's innate tendency toward average intellectual ability did not imply inferiority; it merely limited her vocational aptitude to the sphere of practical life, i.e., matrimony, motherhood, and the helping professions.

Although Ellis and his followers called their theory the variability hypothesis, it is hardly surprising that some writers have dubbed it "the mediocrity of women hypothesis." Recent evaluations of the relevant data have yielded little support for the hypothesis. Nonetheless, the idea that males are both more clever and more stupid than females persists (Archer and Lloyd, 1985; Nicholson, 1986).

Carl E. Seashore (1947) examined a variety of factors--native talent, intelligence, musical precocity, education, endurance, creative imagination, the late emancipation of women, and marriage--as possible explanations for the relative scarcity of successful women composers. While Seashore conceded that marriage might be a contributing factor, he maintained that

> [i]t need not be, and should offer no true alibi. The bearing of one or more children should add to normal development of a woman, and marriage under favourable circumstances occasionally brings to the wife more freedom for self-expression in achievement than the husband--the breadwinner--enjoys. (p. 366)

However, this view of marriage and motherhood bears little resemblance to the reality of most women's lives, either historically or in the present.

Having decided that none of the above factors could account for the small number of women composers listed in standard music reference books, Seashore concluded that the full explanation lay in his "theory of urges." According to Seashore,

> [w]oman's fundamental urge is to be beautiful, loved, and adored as a person, man's urge is to provide and achieve in a career. . . These two distinctive male and female urges . . . make the eternal feminine and persistent masculine types. (p. 367)

Grace Rubin-Rabson (1974) later formulated a more sophisticated version of the same theory. Like Seashore, Rubin-Rabson asserted that women have not attained lasting eminence as composers because they are not strongly motivated to put forth the effort essential for sustained creativity. This lack of achievement motivation, she explains, is due to innate sex differences; consequently, "with or without liberation, men will remain actively penetrating, women receptive." (p. 49)

By way of proof that sex-related differences in achievement motivation are innate and not culturally conditioned, Rubin-Rabson cites a laboratory study of baby monkeys who were kept together from birth, isolated from external influences. The male monkeys ran, fought and explored, while the females sat and watched. But many social scientists now recognize the error in attempting to explain human behaviour from animal studies. Among them is Miriam Rosenberg (1973), who writes:

> The idea behind animal studies is that one might be able to observe 'natural' behavior untainted by the effects of socialization. . . . [The belief] that animals are unsocialized is naive ignorant humanism . . .Animals are socialized according to the needs of their own species' life style . . . they are just not socialized to be humans! (p. 376)

For further "proof" that innate sex differences are responsible for differing interests and motivations, and hence the dearth of important female composers, Rubin-Rabson turns to the work of humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow. She writes:

> Maslow reported profound male-female differences bearing on the feminine lack of will to high-level creation. All really serious men, he said, are messianic; women are not messianic. Such males have no intrinsic interest in . . . any thing but their mission. . . . A male will neglect his health, risk his life, subordinate all else to his messianic mission. Man's duty is to the three books he must write before he dies. . . .And, he observes, women often do not bother to publish even a good work. (Rubin-Rabson, p. 49)

Building on Maslow's observations, Rubin-Rabson claims that because of the feminine nurturant and social proclivities, musically gifted women have always preferred to invest their time and talents in teaching and performance where there is social contact and the rewards are tangible, rather than in the solitary intellectual endeavour that is composition, which too often yields little more than the satisfaction of creation.

The empirical research on achievement motivation does not prove that women are less motivated to achieve than are men. Early studies of achievement motivation in women were both ambiguous and inconclusive, but recent investigators have found that the structures of men's and women's motivational systems are not qualitatively different, and that both sexes seem highly motivated to achieve similar goals (Nicholson; Spence and Helmreich, 1985).

The most recent theory stems from research dealing with the physiology of the brain. According to the proponents of this view, females' cerebral hemispheres are less specialized than those of males, and this accounts for the paucity of women in the ranks of the eminent composers. Before examining this theory in detail, it will be necessary to discuss briefly the psychological literature on visual-spatial and verbal abilities, and to outline the concept of hemispheric specialization. Psychologists call this specialization cerebral lateralization or hemispheric asymmetry.

The best starting point for such a discussion is probably Eleanor Maccoby and Carol Jacklin's pioneering critical evaluation of the literature on sex differences. Two of the sex differences that Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) describe as "fairly well established" are (1) that females have greater verbal ability than males, and (2) that males' visual-spatial abilities--sometimes (though not always) defined as the ability to manipulate visually or to make judgements about the relationships of objects located in two- or three-dimensional space--are superior to those of females. It has been suggested by Lauren Harris (1978) that "the ability to recognize and to execute, and above all, to create a me-

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lodic pattern is a spatial ability" (p. 425)--hence the association of visual-spatial skills with the composition of music. However, if such a relationship exists, it has yet to be demonstrated.

The research on visual-spatial and verbal abilities has come under close scrutiny since the publication of Maccoby and Jacklin's book, and there now appears to be little strong support for the existence of sex differences in these two areas of intellectual function. Reviewing the literature on visual-spatial abilities, psychologists Caplan, MacPherson, and Tobin (1985) write:

> In view of the number and seriousness of concerns about the inconsistency and magnitude of findings, the problems within individual studies and in both the more and the less theoretically based reviews, the answer [to the question, "Do sex-related differences in spatial abilities exist?"] is "No," . . .or at least "It is by no means clear as yet." (p. 797)

Other scientists have demonstrated that the claim for sex-related differences in verbal ability is at best highly questionable (Fausto-Sterling).

Having dealt with the research on sex differences in visual-spatial and verbal abilities, we now direct our attention to the topic of cerebral lateralization. One of the most important discoveries of the past thirty years or so has been that the left and right cerebral hemispheres play different roles in the processing of information. Based on research carried out on split-brain patients,[2] and on studies of patients who have suffered brain damage through stroke, cancer, or accident, psychologists now make the following generalizations about the brains of normal, healthy, right-handed people: the left cerebral hemisphere is the seat of verbal, mathematical, and analytical skills, and sequential information processing; and the right hemisphere specializes in spatial skills, musical abilities, and holistic, nonverbal, Gestalt processing[3] (Fausto-Sterling).

These generalizations about hemispheric specialization have in turn formed the basis of at least four biological theories to support the claims for both the female advantage in verbal ability and the superiority of males in spatial visualization. According to the most widely accepted of these theories--the Levy-Sperry hypothesis--women's brains have the capacity to process verbal information in both hemispheres, and this bilateral representation of verbal functioning interferes with the right hemisphere's ability to perform spatial tasks. Men's brains, on the other hand (according to this hypothesis), are highly specialized--the left hemisphere confines its activities exclusively to verbal tasks, while the right hemisphere deals only with spatial problems (Fausto-Sterling).

The Levy-Sperry hypothesis is very dear to the hearts of those psychologists who believe that there is a biological basis for the dearth of important women composers. Among them is Pierre Flor-Henry (1983), who writes:

> The complete absence of great composers, the relative scarcity of great painters but the very large number of outstanding writers in women cannot be attributed to social pressures alone. It reflects the differential cerebral organization of men and women, a differential organization which hinges on different solutions to problems of cerebral laterality. The paradox is that in women the more bilateral cognitive system, for both verbal and spatial processes, is translated in verbal--linguistic superiority (compared to males) but more precarious visuo-spatial and affective modes. (p. 162)

Lauren Harris holds a similar view. He speculates that "composition involves cognitive skills subserved predominantly by the right cerebral hemisphere and, therefore, like visuo-spatial skills, [they are] stronger in males than [in] females." (Harris, p. 421) Although Harris admits that "there is no direct evidence of right hemisphere specialization for compositional skill," he maintains that "there is evidence of right hemisphere specialization for certain elements of musical perception probably critical for composition." (p. 421)

To illustrate this point, Harris cites several studies from the neuropsychological literature. One such study reports that performance on the Timbre and Tonal Memory subtests of the Seashore Measures of Musical Talents is depressed by right but not by left temporal lobectomy. However, as Harold Gordon (1983) reminds us:

> There is no . . . reason to suppose that comparing pitch qualities, tone strengths or even three- to five-note melodies is the same as processing music. Whereas mental processes required by these tasks may be the same [as] or similar to those required for music, it is a fallacy to consider these elements to be synonymous with music. Music is an entity far greater than the sum of its parts. (p. 68)

Harris also neglects to mention that musicians tend to process the elements of music differently than non-musicians; non-musicians usually exhibit a right hemisphere specialization for the performance of musical tasks, while musicians show the reverse, or no hemisphere specialization at all (Damasio and Damasio, 1977; Sloboda, 1985). The probable explanation for this paradox is that musicians are trained to approach music analytically, and thus call upon processes generally associated with the left hemisphere (Gordon). But whatever the reason, the fact that such a paradox exists casts a large shadow of doubt on Harris's thesis.

This theory comes unstuck at several other points as well. Both Harris and Flor-Henry base their assumptions on studies of patients with brain damage, but no one has yet been able to prove that damaged brains function in the same way as those of healthy individuals (Gardner, 1982; Star, 1979). Secondly, there is no evidence that musical skills are localized in any specific area of the brain (Gordon; Sloboda; Wertheim, 1977; Wycke, 1977). Thirdly, as I pointed out earlier, there is no support for the idea that compositional skills and visual-spatial abilities are related. Finally, all that can be said with certainty about the notion that male and female brains are lateralized differently is that the jury is still out on the matter (Kinsbourne, 1980; Nicholson). The literature is riddled with contradictions.

Coda

The preceding examination of the various attempts of psychologists to explain the historical absence of eminent female creators of art music makes clear that biological theories cannot provide an answer to the persistent question, "Why have there been no great women composers?" The answer lies not in biology, but in the circumstances surrounding women's lives--circumstances

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largely incompatible with the exacting needs of musical creation. During most of the historic past, most musically gifted women of creative ability were denied access to the theoretical education that would have equipped them for a professional career. It was not until the final decades of the nineteenth century that the great European conservatories finally began to admit female students into advanced theory and composition classes, and then only grudgingly. Moreover, most women did not enjoy the freedom from household responsibilities and child-rearing nor the financial independence that would have enabled them to undertake sustained creative work. And even the few who were more fortunately placed encountered a wall of discrimination and prejudice that threatened to silence them (Gates, 1992). Faced with such obstacles, the wonder is that women composed at all. But compose they did, often producing works of lasting significance.

There can be no doubt that both the social myth of woman's creative inferiority in music and the biological argument that seeks to validate this myth are fuelled by the exclusion of female composers' achievements from most standard music textbooks. As music educators, there is much we can do to improve this lamentable situation. Those of us who teach music history and music appreciation must ensure that we include material on women composers from all historical periods in our courses.[4] Further, we must exert pressure on the authors, editors, and publishers of music textbooks to produce better, more inclusive works. It is not enough merely to point out how good the many historically neglected women composers were; we must also insist that the authors of textbooks draw attention to the social factors that prevented creatively gifted women in music from competing with their male colleagues on an equal footing. Only then can we hope to dispel the persistent and damaging myth of woman's innate creative inferiority in music.

Notes

1. This article was originally published in *Canadian Music Educator* 39 (Winter 1998): 37-39. It is reprinted here with permission of the author and the journal's editor - Ed.]
2. In cases of severe epilepsy, the corpus callosum--the mass of nerve fibres that connects the right and left cerebral hemispheres--is severed to control the seizures. After surgery, split-brain patients have two separately functioning brain systems.
3. The situation with left-handed individuals is thought to be somewhat more complex.
4. Fortunately, this is not as daunting a project as it might appear, since many recordings and scores of women's music, and books on their lives and works have become available in recent years. See, for example, the following: Bowers and Tick, (1985); Briscoe (1987); Cohen (1987); Fuller (1994); Jezic (1986); Neuls-Bates (1996); Pendel ((1991); Sadie and Samuel (1994).

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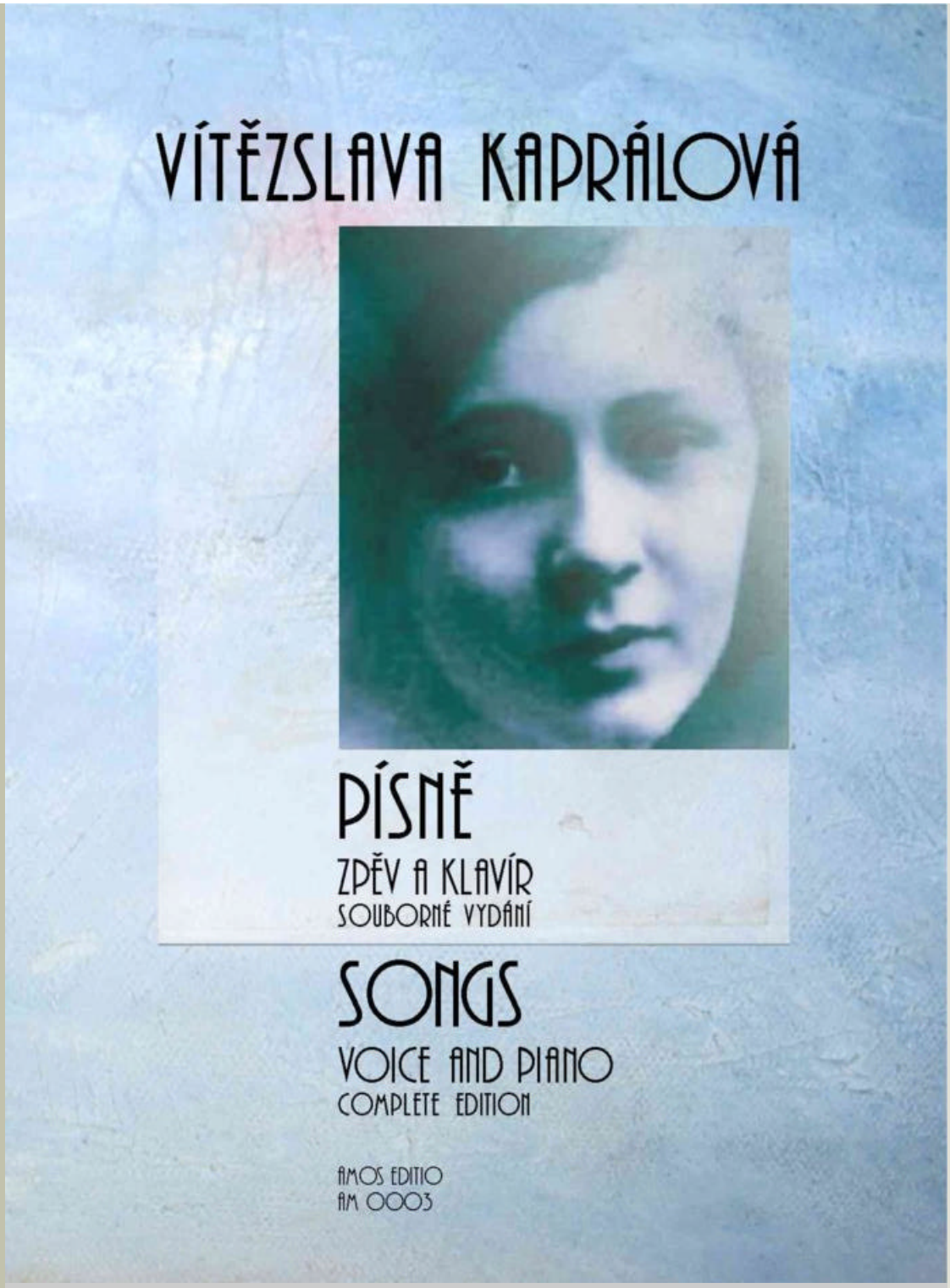

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