

The Kapralova Society Journal

A Journal of Women in Music

Kaprálová's song *Leden*

Michelle Latour

Vítězslava Kaprálová's composition *Leden* (January) is a unique work among her musical output. Composed in March of 1933, scored for soprano, piano, flute, two violins, and cello, and set to the poem of Vítězslav Nezval (1900–1958), *Leden* is representative of her characteristic vocal writing, yet highly individual in terms of instrumentation, treatment of melody, and interweaving of textures.

By 1933, Kaprálová was already on her way toward becoming an accomplished composer. She was attending Brno Conservatory where she studied composition under Vilém Petrželka and conducting with Vilém Steinman and Zdeněk Chalabala. Although only eighteen years old, she had already composed a number of works, including several compositions for piano, in addition to song cycles *Dvě písně*, op. 4 (Two songs, from 1932), and *Jiskry z popele*, op. 5 (Sparks from ashes, from 1932–33).

For *Leden*, Kaprálová chose the poetry of the highly prolific and avant-garde writer Vítězslav Nezval (1900–1958). Kaprálová's source of inspiration for the composition was Nezval's surrealist poem from his poetry collection *Zpáteční lístek* (Return ticket), also written in 1933. (She turned to his poetry again in her composition *Sbohem a šáteček*, op. 14 [Waving farewell, from 1937], setting his namesake poem, published in 1934.) The choice seems to be a natural one for Kaprálová, and it may have helped that Nezval had studied piano and composition in his youth. In addition, his father was a school teacher and a musician who had studied under Janáček. Perhaps these early musical influences contributed to the musicality of his poetry?

Nezval was an important figure in the Czech literature, predominantly active during the first half of the twentieth-century. In addition to numerous poetry collections, his output also includes experimental plays and novels, memoirs, essays, and translations. Along with Jaroslav Seifert, another poet Kaprálová favored, Nezval was an original member of the

1920s avant-garde artist group *Devětsil* (Butterbur), a collective of poets and artists. He was also a founding member of the Poetist Movement in 1924 and a co-founder of the Czech surrealist movement a decade later.

The *Devětsil*, a pre-surrealist movement, took inspiration from French and Russian sources. The *Devětsil* was attracted to the avant-garde literature of the former and inspired by political ideology (and specifically, Marxism,) of the latter. This seems logical, if considered within a historical context. As with much of Europe, political revolution had an artistic counterpart in the early twentieth-century. Czechoslovakia was emerging from a post-World War One culture, which meant a newly formed state, and their president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, gave the Czech people their first taste of socially minded democracy. However, for many of the younger generation, which included the *Devětsil*, this did not go far enough. Many felt that a radical solution was appropriate in order to establish true liberal ideals. Some intellectuals even professed allegiance to Lenin. The writings of the *Devětsil* expressed a predilection for the Marxist ideology of class solidarity and urged young artists to use ordinary and contemporary objects for poetic inspiration. Thus, many of Nezval's writings from this period are influenced by this ideology.

The 1924 Poetist Movement continued in a similar vein to the *Devětsil* in that Poetists blended a rejection of art with a commitment to political and social struggle. In the same year, Nezval joined the Communist Party. The Poetist movement was later renamed Realism and was eventually aligned with the surrealist movement in Paris. In 1934, Nezval had the distinction of being a co-founder of the surrealist movement in Czechoslovakia, even traveling to Paris to meet with French surrealist leaders.¹

The brief poetic excerpt used for *Leden* is typical of surrealist poetry. It is evocative of an other-worldly, dream-filled state, and it



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juxtaposes unlikely comparisons, such as “icy virgins.” By merging Nezval’s dreamy and stark poetry with Kaprálová’s haunting and tranquil music, the result is a brief glimpse of cold, bleak and desolate winter.

Before delving into the specifics of *Leden*, it may be fruitful to briefly mention some of the qualities that make Kaprálová’s vocal music distinct. As previously mentioned, by 1933 she was already becoming an accomplished composer and at only eighteen years old had nearly arrived at her mature compositional style. Her arguably most impressive compositional trait is her remarkable ability to create mood and atmosphere. With five instruments at her disposal in *Leden*, as opposed to solo piano, this quality is heightened all the more. Part of the reason Kaprálová is able to create her own world is because the accompaniment often provides musical elaboration upon the text, and this is certainly the case in *Leden*.

Another characteristic feature of Kaprálová’s writing is her careful and accurate attention to setting the poetic language. This is in part due to her lifelong interest in poetry. As a youth she wrote her own poetry, and she collected favorite poems throughout her life. In terms of prosody, Kaprálová is incredibly skilled at matching musical and poetic inflection, creating memorable melodies that singers love to sing and that also remain true to “the natural stress, vowel-lengths, and inflection of the Czech language.”² In *Leden*, overall care with prosody is evidenced through the use of rhythmic figures, triplets, syncopation and repeated notes.

The other component of her ability to create mood stems from her treatment of harmonies. Kaprálová shows a fondness for unexpected modulations and shifts in sonorities, sometimes even writing in an impressionistic vein. Additionally, her predilection for motivic writing in her accompaniments is often derived from the natural inflection of important words in the text. In this way, the accompaniment and melody are truly intertwined. Other qualities worth mentioning include a preference for brief vocal works, with many songs lasting only a few minutes, and a fondness for creating moods that are predominantly melancholy and forlorn.

Many of these characteristics are present in *Leden*, including the brevity of the composition. It lasts less than five minutes and is a mere fifty-three measures in length. Perhaps the most distinguishing trait is how Kaprálová takes each instrumental line and weaves them together to create an indescribable mood. In addition, she often treats the melody as another line of interwoven texture rather than a prominent line, resulting in a piece of music that is constantly changing and evolving. Overall, the sparse texture exhibits an economy of means with only two brief instances of *tutti* playing and a unique interplay of voices throughout.

Despite the fact that much of this piece exhibits qualities typical of Kaprálová’s vocal works, there are also a few noticeable differences that make *Leden* unique. The first exceptional element is the interesting combination of piano, flute, two violins and cello, with the voice. At the behest of her teachers, Kaprálová was encouraged to pursue purely instrumental works over songs, so perhaps this was an attempt to merge the two? Regardless, the result is a wonderfully melancholy picture of a

cold and lonely January winter. Related to this interesting combination of forces is the way Kaprálová chooses to interweave them. In many of her songs, the melodies are soaring, memorable, and highly melodic. In *Leden* some of these qualities emerge but, frequently, Kaprálová treats the voice as another line of texture, expertly interwoven into the instrumental fabric with brief soloistic outbursts. One of the final specifics of *Leden* is that Kaprálová scores it for soprano. This does not correspond to her usual tendency not to specify voice type in songs. The only other exception would be her 1940 composition *Dopis* (Letter) which was specifically written for baritone Otto Kraus. *Leden* could be feasibly sung by a mezzo-soprano or tenor, however, as the overall vocal range, color and character are not so narrowly defined for soprano only. One cannot but wonder why it was written specifically for soprano yet never performed during Kaprálová’s lifetime.

In terms of Kaprálová’s compositional style, the overall form chosen for *Leden* offers a curious dilemma. The overriding structure is not readily identifiable as one could pose valid arguments for through-composed or ternary form. Nearly half of her song compositions utilize a through-composed format, demonstrating a desire to serve the words and unify motives. She also frequently uses ABA form.³ Although *Leden* is definitely crafted to serve the text and meld the motives throughout, there is some use of ternary form. *Leden* can be divided roughly into three sections, grouped by measures one through nineteen, measures nineteen through forty-one, and ending with measures forty-two through fifty-three. This correlates with the three stanzas of text. However, *Leden* does not strictly adhere to ternary form, as the final portion only exhibits some repetition from the first nineteen measures. There are some significant changes, most notably in the vocal line. The melody is fairly different, with one instance of exact repetition, i.e., the line sung in measures forty-five and forty-six being an exact replica of the melody from measures eleven and twelve. In addition, some accompaniment figure repetition does occur through the changing of instrumentation in between sections.

Whether or not Kaprálová intended utilizing through-composed or ternary form, a detailed analysis of the entire work will be beneficial in order to better understand this interesting piece. The first section encompasses measures one through nineteen and opens with a brief instrumental introduction in measures one through seven (Ex. 1). Here is the initial statement of the primary motif which is expertly woven throughout, reappearing in varying guises. Listeners are introduced to the motive in the flute part with a haunting and simple *a cappella* melody comprised of a largely descending line. The motif is restated by the violin with slight alteration. The cello then responds in measure five, repeating the flute’s melody verbatim. All three instruments come together in measures five through seven.

This is followed by a four-measure statement, by soprano and piano only, with the first two lines of poetry, “Today in the night the frost painted on my window a delicate vase.” An interesting characteristic of this composition is Kaprálová’s unusual pairings of instruments, and typically, soprano and

piano are paired together without instrumental accompaniment. In this short section, the piano has an undulating descending eighth note pattern in the right hand which portrays a static winter vision. This two-measure figure is repeated three times in measures eight through thirteen and is coupled with a sweeping upward gesture in the left hand. The voice enters in measure nine, entering on an upbeat and comprised of eighth notes in order to effectively accommodate the text. The brief vocal expression sensually leans into the piano part and demonstrates varying melodic characteristics. The initial melody, although fairly straightforward, is highly gratifying to sing because of the way it melds into the accompaniment.

Example 1 *Leden* (Prague: Amos Editio, 2005), mm. 1–7. Courtesy of © Amos Editio 2005

The first section comes to a close with measures thirteen through nineteen, beginning with a one-measure truncated primary motivic statement in the cello line. The motif is continued in the following measure but is expressed by the violin (Ex. 2). This immediately segues into a slightly denser texture with motifs coming together and the first instance of full ensemble playing in measures sixteen through eighteen. This dramatically builds to measures seventeen and eighteen with *sforzando* and *forte* markings for all lines. Even the vocal line which expresses the text, “I am horrified of winter days and vases, I am horrified of their boxwoods,” is heightened dramatically with an extremely wide range from a B-natural below middle-C to a G-sharp above the staff, all within the context of three measures. The vocal line is subordinate to the gestalt, as it builds to a climax in measure seventeen with the piano and violin lines. However, upon arriving at measure seventeen, the melody soars all the while being embedded within the complete texture.

Example 2 *Leden*, mm. 13–14

Example 3 *Leden*, mm. 19–22

This semi-climactic moment dissolves into the middle portion which includes measures nineteen through forty-one. It begins with a short transitional instrumental section in measures nineteen through twenty-three. Here we see a recurrence of opening motifs that are slightly varied, and no presence of soprano or piano. The primary motif is heard in variation first in the cello part in measures nineteen and twenty and is answered by even more variety in measures twenty-one and twenty-two by the violin (Ex. 3). This is expertly woven together with the first statement of a secondary motif in measure twenty scored for flute (Ex. 4). It serves as a foreshadowing of what is to occur in the following measures.

Example 4 *Leden*, m. 20 (flute part only)

In measures twenty-three through twenty-six, a new pairing becomes evident with flute and piano in dialogue by sharing this secondary motif, which is comprised of sixteenth note triplet figures. Their conversation reaches an almost frenetic level in measures twenty-five and twenty-six and then dissipates into calmness in measure twenty-seven. This leads into the next section in measures

Kaprálková's song for voice and quintet

twenty-eight through thirty-six.

Here the music returns to a more subdued tone, and new melodic and harmonic material is presented. Worth mentioning is the violin part in measures twenty-eight through thirty-one, which has high, sustained notes, as if representing the poetry, "One hundred candles above the organ glitter in the matin twilight." Measures thirty-two through thirty-six end this section with the text, "The house with icy virgins is boarded up just like it was yesterday." The melody is of secondary importance. Although the poetry refers to glittering candles and twilight, the musical atmosphere is heavy and plodding. The vocal line is comprised of some intervallic leaps and repeated notes, the result being a static line of recitative-like quality. The main musical content lies in the violin part with the voice, piano and cello pitted against the violin. The piano part is especially distinct in that it is predominantly widely-spaced chordal figures, first as quarter notes and then augmented into half notes and ultimately whole notes in measures thirty-four through thirty-six. Voice and piano function together in an uneasy partnership, the piano heavily plodding along and the voice gliding over it, speaking more about the boarded up house with icy virgins while the violin comments on the candles and twilight. As the voice sings "yesterday" in measure thirty-six, Kaprálková cleverly inserts a brief and altered primary motivic statement in the violin line, only to be answered with another varied, one-measure statement in the following measure by the flute (Ex. 5). It is this skillful blending and juxtaposition of opening motifs in the middle section that makes Kaprálková's music so rich and striking.

Example 5 *Leden*, mm. 36–37

We return to a brief instrumental interlude in measures thirty-seven through forty before transitioning to the final section, which begins with measure forty-two to the end. This starts with the violin echoing the opening piano figuration from measures forty-two through forty-nine (Ex. 6).

Example 6 *Leden*, mm. 42–43 (violin line only)

The vocal line is paired with strings only for measures forty-three through forty-nine and encompasses the last verse of poetry with four lines, "Well, is that cathedral toppling down? I am shattering the vase, the ceiling is collapsing. And it seems to me that I am dying already while looking at the courtyard." Here the melody demonstrates repetition from the opening melodic material, yet it is also varied. The only exact restatement of melody occurs in measures forty-five and forty-six, "I am shattering the vase, the ceiling is collapsing." This is repeated from measures eleven and twelve. The final vocal line in measures forty-nine through fifty-two is similar to the music previously stated in measures seventeen and eighteen. However, the initial melody has a slightly wider vocal range than this last utterance, but only by a half-step. This is coupled with the second brief instance of tutti playing in measure fifty to the end.

The composition ends with the flute and piano, again in question and answer with triplet sixteenth note figures in the final two measures, an echo of the secondary motif heard in the middle section (Ex. 7). This neatly ties motivic and emotional expression together in a hauntingly and beautiful manner. The listener is left with a yearning for the re-birth of spring as opposed to the dead of winter.

Example 7 *Leden*, mm. 52–53

By blending Kaprálková's characteristic compositional traits of mastery at setting prosody and creating melancholy atmosphere with the compelling choice of instrumentation of soprano, piano, flute, two violins and cello, one can easily contend that *Leden* is a special and unique piece among her body of work. By effectively weaving motivic material and constantly evolving pairings of voices, *Leden* is a highly worthy and evocative piece of music that deserves to be heard on concert stages more often.

Notes:

¹ Rothenberg, Jerome and Miloš Sovák, trans., *Antilyrik and Other Poems: Vítězslav Nezval* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2001), 144–45.

² Cheek, Timothy, "Navždy (Forever) Kaprálková: Reevaluating Czech composer Vítězslava Kaprálková through her thirty songs," *Kapralova Society Journal* 3, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 2.

³ Ibid.

Nezval's text translated by Timothy Cheek, excerpts published by permission © Amos Editio.

Kaprálová's Trio for oboe, clarinet and bassoon

Stéphane Egeling

During the period of December 18, 1937 through February 1938, Vítězslava Kaprálová worked on a trio for oboe, clarinet and bassoon. The trio remained a fragment, however, as Kaprálová left behind only a fair copy of the two-page autograph score. In 2011, the work was reconstructed by Stéphane Egeling and given its world premiere by Trio Lézard on June 22, 2011 at the *Mitte Europa* (Central Europe) Festival at the Děčín Castle in the Czech Republic. The reconstructed score was published in October 2011 by Egge-Verlag in Coblenz am Rhein, Germany.

Paris 1937

From May 25 to November 25, 1937, a world fair was held in Paris whose theme was quite special: the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne*. The message of the fair was clear: art and modern technology, beauty and function, do not oppose but rather complement each other. The exposition, with its threateningly counterbalanced pavilions of the Soviet Union and the Nazi Germany, and with Picasso's painting 'Guernica' (Spain had been immersed in civil war since 1936), dominated the city on the Seine in 1937. Modern technology was taking an ever larger place also in classical music. The introduction of new condenser microphones allowed more precision in recording which could be heard worldwide over the radio (the transatlantic broadcasts were a true sensation) or on shellac 78s in the living room at home where one could listen to it as often as one wished. While today we take the omnipresence of music recording for granted, in the 1930s the improved standard was an unprecedented revelation.

Fernand Oubradous (1903–1986)

The 1937 Paris also saw an unusual artistic personality receive a 'Grand Prix du Disque': Fernand Oubradous was awarded the prize for his benchmark recording of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Bassoon Concerto in B-flat Major; not as a conductor, however, as a bassoonist. This was remarkable in many respects: for one, the prize was awarded to a wind player; and, furthermore, not to a flautist but a bassoon player! *The bassoon*—hardly a prima donna of the woodwind family.

Yet, Fernand Oubradous was also a child of his time. He realized that he could utilize the new media of radio and condenser microphone for himself, and in 1937 alone he recorded over eighty shellac 78s. Thus, the 'Grand Prix du Disque' for the Mozart Bassoon Concerto was given to him also in recognition of this absolutely extraordinary achievement of the 34-year-old.

Most of Oubradous's 1937 recordings were made with his "Trio d'anches de Paris" (Paris Reed Trio) that he formed in 1927. Here Oubradous again set new standards. Virtually out of nowhere, he created a new genre of chamber music: a trio of reed instruments comprising oboe, clarinet, and bassoon. Before 1927 works for such an ensemble did exist but it was entirely Oubradous's accomplish-

ment to turn an *ad hoc* genre, in which musicians would group together for a single piece, into a standard instrumental formation, something Haydn did before him with the string quartet and Reicha with the wind quintet.

Two reed trios before 1927

Fernand Oubradous was the son (and successor) of the principal bassoonist of the Paris Opera, and was raised in the milieu of the *Société des Instruments à Vent*, founded by flutist Paul Taffanel in 1879. The *Société* was dedicated to two goals: the advancement of French music and a re-birth of wind chamber music after the example of the 18th century *Harmoniemusik*. The most prominent woodwind players of Parisian orchestras as well as professors from the Paris Conservatory played in the *Société des Instruments à Vent*. It was still quite active in the 1920s and encouraged many composers to compose works for woodwind instruments. Such was also the origin of the most important work for reed trio, (although this term did not exist until it was first coined by Oubradous), by Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887–1959) who composed Trio for oboe, clarinet and bassoon in 1921 in Rio de Janeiro. This work, heavily influenced by the music of Stravinsky and making enormous demands on technical ability, had its world premiere at a concert organized by Jean Wiéner at the *Salle des Agriculteurs* in Paris on April 9, 1924. The musicians were nobody less than Louis Gaudard (oboe), Gaston Hamelin (clarinet), and Gustave Dhérin, the famous bassoonist of the premiere of *Le Sacre du Printemps* (and a colleague of Oubradous Sr.). All were members of the *Société*. Certainly, Fernand Oubradous would attend the concert. A further work, which inspired Oubradous to establish his own genre of the reed trio, was the *Divertissement* for oboe, clarinet and bassoon, by Erwin Schulhoff. Schulhoff was so impressed by the abilities of the members of the *Société* after his visit to Paris that he composed a number of works for woodwinds, including his 'Divertissement' of 1927. Today this trio is—just as the trio of Heitor Villa-Lobos—a standard work of the reed trio literature (the French title *Divertissement* can be understood as an homage to the *Société*).

Trio d'anches de Paris

From 1927 until 1944, Oubradous (who after the Second World War rarely played bassoon, instead becoming a well-known conductor and important pedagogue) formed many reed trios in the chamber music classes, especially established for him at the Conservatory, thus contributing to the rapid dissemination of the genre across Europe. His own 'Trio d'anches de Paris,' which he founded with oboist

Kaprálová's reed trio

Myrtil Morel and clarinetist Pierre Lefebvre, made history in music: nearly all of the works composed for reed trio in the 1930s and 1940s appeared under the direct or at least indirect influence of the Trio d'anches de Paris, regardless who composed them.

How did Oubradous achieve this? For a composer it has always been very important to know that his work is given wide exposure. The worldwide financial crisis of 1929 caught up with France at the beginning of the 1930s and had an impact also on composers. Large, expensive works had little chance of success, but a trio, especially in this novel instrumental arrangement, showed much more promise. Those who would compose for Oubradous could expect a publisher (L'Oiseau Lyre, Éditions Selmer), numerous and highest quality performances of the work in many countries, radio concerts, and, to top it all, the prospect of shellac recording!

Pierre-Octave Ferroud (1900–1936)

The Trio d'anches de Paris performed at concerts of all chamber music societies in Paris of the 1930s: La Sérénade, Triton, La Spirale, the Société Nationale de Musique, and the Société de Musique Indépendante. It also performed throughout Europe at conferences on contemporary music and played live on the radio. Especially important for the Trio d'anches de Paris was making the acquaintance of composer and music critic Pierre-Octave Ferroud who in 1933 composed a trio ("Trio en Mi") for Oubradous and his ensemble and made every effort to give it wide exposure. In 1932, Ferroud founded the chamber music society "Triton" which quickly became one of the most modern and most important music organizations of its kind in Europe. He fostered close ties with other European chamber music societies; and, in contrast to other Parisian organizations, he promoted new French chamber music by programming also music from other countries, especially Eastern Europe. In return, befriended European music societies and radio stations discovered, performed, and broadcast the newest works from Paris.

In 1933, representing Triton and with music for reed trio in his luggage, Ferroud travelled to Florence's *Maggio Musicale*, the ISCM Festival held in Amsterdam, Salzburg Festival (Oubradous made an arrangement for reed trio of five Divertimenti for three basset horns by W.A. Mozart and published and recorded it—a full sixty minutes of music—on shellac 78s), Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Zagreb, Ljubljana and Bratislava. In 1934, he traveled to Prague, Vienna, Salzburg, and Winterthur; in 1935, his itinerary included Prague, Budapest, Zagreb, Cannes, Monte Carlo, Florence, Salzburg, Prague again (ISCM Festival), Vienna, and Budapest. In 1936, Ferroud went on another trip as a representative of Triton but it was to be his last: on August 17, he died tragically in a car accident in Debrecen, Hungary.

Ferroud's activities were a blessing for the spread of the new genre of reed trio, as its repertoire grew and was performed by newly established ensembles throughout Europe.

Bohuslav Martinů and Vítězslava Kaprálová in 1937–1938

In 1923, the same year as Václav Kaprál, Vítězslava Kaprálová's father, Bohuslav Martinů came to Paris to complete his studies. He took lessons with Albert Roussel and eventually settled in the capital which he would leave for the United States only with the invasion of German troops in 1940. Back in 1937, he was already a well-regarded composer when, at the initiative of Fernand Oubradous, he composed his reed trio *Quatre Madrigaux* (Four Madrigals). Martinů's teacher Albert Roussel began composing a reed trio at about the same time but could only complete the first movement (Andante) before his death. The premiere of *Quatre Madrigaux*, performed by the Trio d'anches de Paris, took place in 1938 in Paris.

Following the five years of study at the Brno Conservatory, Vítězslava Kaprálová enrolled at the Prague Conservatory in 1935 to study composition with Vítězslav Novák, a pupil of Antonín Dvořák, and conducting with Václav Talich. Soon after her arrival in Prague, she became a member of the local society for new music "Přítomnost" (Presence). Alois Hába, Karel Reiner, and Karel Ančerl were also members. There she made first contacts with the culture of Paris (and might have met Pierre-Octave Ferroud who arrived to Prague for the ISCM Festival).

In 1937, Martinů travelled to Prague to begin the preparations for the premiere of his opera *Julietta* (Prague, 1938) with Václav Talich (the conducting teacher of Kaprálová). On this occasion he met Kaprálová and encouraged her to move to Paris to study composition with him. With the help of Otakar Šourek, she received a one-year scholarship to study at the École normale. By the end of October 1938 she was in Paris and began her studies with Charles Munch (conducting) and with Bohuslav Martinů. Within a few weeks she had already been introduced to all major Parisian composers.

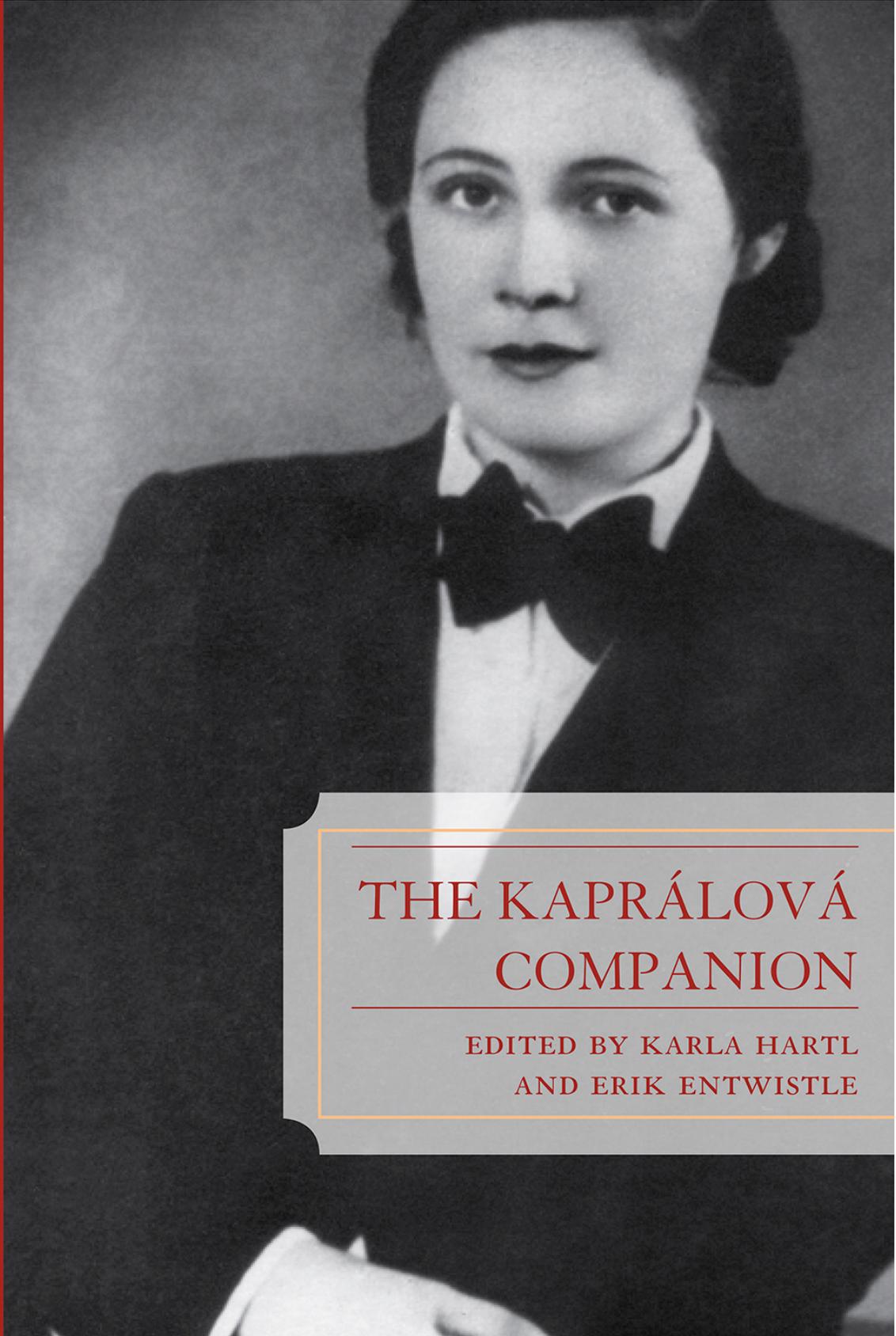
***Trio pro dechové nástroje* by Vítězslava Kaprálová**

In December 1937, Kaprálová began composing her *Trio pro dechové nástroje* (reed trio). What led her to this combination is unknown, although it can be presumed that Ferroud promoted the genre heavily in Prague. Two other Prague composers followed his lead: Iša Krejčí composed his reed trio in 1935, Klement Slavický in 1937, and both trios were also broadcast. Iša Krejčí even paid a musical tribute to Ferroud's Triton chamber music society: his trio, based on a motif of a fourth, opens its first movement with a tritone, presented unison.

When Kaprálová and Martinů met in Prague, he might have told her of his latest compositions, including the *Quatre Madrigaux*. We can assume that Kaprálová began her own

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Trio pro dechové nástroje
(1937 - 38)

Vítězslava Kaprálová
(1915 - 1940)
Rekonstruktion nach
dem autographen Fragment und opus 18:
Stéphane Egeling

Allegro

Hautbois

Clarinete en si bémol

Basson

EGGE-Verlag Coblentz am Rhein

Fig. 1 First page of Kaprálová's reed trio. Reprinted by permission © Egge-Verlag Coblentz am Rhein.

reed trio in the hope it would get performed by the famous Trio d'anches de Paris. Perhaps, it would be also broadcast on the radio or even recorded on shellac 78s—the brightest prospects for a young composer! Why she ceased working on her trio after February 1938, we can only guess. One likely explanation is that she was so busy with her move to Paris, the renewal of her scholarship, performances of *Military Sinfonietta* (she conducted performances in Prague and London) that she just did not have any time left for the trio.

Reconstruction of the fragment score

In principle, Kaprálová made the construction of her trio clear: she composed it in a rondo form. Sections A (measures 1–18), B (19–33), and C (34–40) were all finished in her autograph score. At the top of the second page of the autograph, (located in the Music Department of the Moravian Museum in Brno under the shelf

number A 29 758a), Kaprálová sketched a further motif. In my reconstruction I have used this fourth motif, beginning in the measure 74, for the closing rondo section D. From measure 41 (the end of the autograph score) to measure 73 I extended Kaprálová's section C by 10 measures and, after a rhythmic bridge, repeated and combined sections A and B. Thus the following construction has been created: A, B, C, B', A', D.

In order to develop the trio to a full-fledged composition, I have also added two more movements to this completed first movement. I took the last two preludes of the four *April Preludes* for piano, composed in Prague in 1937, and arranged them for reed trio. The two movements are similar to the original trio movement both in terms of style and motifs, and together they become a homogeneous, novel, and independent work which will surely find inclusion in the reed trio literature and on the concert circuit.

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Stéphane Egeling studied musicology at the University of Metz (Lorraine), and performance (oboe) at the Conservatoire National de Région in Metz and the Saarbrücken Conservatory. Since 1996 he has been principal oboist with the Aachen Symphony Orchestra. He is also Artistic Director of the Egge-Verlag-Coblentz am Rhein, founded in 1998, and a member of the Trio Léopard, a reed trio founded in 1990.

Piano Concerto in D Minor, op. 7 is Kaprálová's first assured orchestral work of large scale. Full of youthful exuberance and brilliance, combined with exoticism and romantic sentiments, it displays Kaprálová's remarkably precocious aptitude as a composer: at only 20, she already shows an impressive command of the orchestra's resources and the traditional concerto form. The piano concerto is well balanced in structure and rich in harmonies, anchored in a post-romantic idiom, and rooted in the modernist tendencies of Czech music during the first half of the 20th century, where folk music holds a strong effect on a unique harmonic language. Centered in the key of d-minor, it is an unpretentious work where nostalgia alternates with frequent hints of late-19th century virtuoso writing, as typified by Saint-Saëns or Anton Rubinstein. Its gestures are bold and simple, with striking melodies and rhythmic clarity, conveying all sides of Kaprálová's well-rounded musical personality: passion, humor, energy, lyricism, discipline, and spontaneity.

The first movement, marked *Allegro entusiastico*, deviates from the traditional concerto pattern where the initial movements are often written in a modified sonata form. The main theme in d-minor is first briefly introduced by the orchestra, then the piano solo presents the complete melody. The music is distinguished by its long lyrical lines, alternating between the tutti and the soloist undergoing modulations. The second movement begins with a folk song in Bb-minor with strings and piano solo, treated in canonic form. Dominated by this bitter-sweet and melancholic folk melody, the entire movement is relatively short and precedes without break the third and final movement. With its exotic character and high-spirited rhythm, the use of folk music is most evident in the third movement. It follows a rondo form, typical of a traditional concerto. Contrary to the previous movement, the theme is joyful, decorated with virtuosic passages for the soloist. Colored by the use of pentatonic scales, the recurrent section is a dance in contrast with the folk songs of the intermediate sections. The coda recalls the opening dance melody, leading to the ending in D-major. *Jenny Lin*



Alice Rajnohová's concert career includes appearances as a soloist with both chamber ensembles and large orchestras. She regularly collaborates with the Czech Radio for which she has made numerous recordings, particularly of the music by the twentieth-century Czech composers. She combines her artistic career with teaching piano at the conservatories in Brno and Olomouc and also at the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno where she currently studies towards a doctoral degree, focusing her postgraduate research on the piano oeuvre of Vítězslava Kaprálová.

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

Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic Orchestra was formed in 1946 (it received its current name, the Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic, in 1989). The orchestra's artistic profile was shaped by a succession of outstanding chief conductors, working alongside an impressive roster of both permanent and guest conductors, including Richard Týnský, Rostislav Hališka, Petr Altrichter, Tomáš Hanus, and others.

VÍTEZSLAVA KAPRÁLOVÁ

PIANO CONCERTO
IN D MINOR, OP. 7

THREE PIANO PIECES,
OP. 9

VARIATIONS
SUR LE CARILLON DE L'ÉGLISE
ST-ÉTIENNE DU MONT, OP. 16

SONATA
APPASSIONATA, OP. 6

ALICE RAJNOHOVÁ, PIANO
BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
TOMÁŠ HANUS, CONDUCTOR

The Kapralova Society



Vítězslava Kaprálová Songs: Forever Kaprálová. Dana Burešová, Timothy Cheek, Magda Čáslavová, Petr Zdvihal, Jan Valta, David Havelík. Supraphon SU 3752-2 231 (2003).

Vítězslava Kaprálová Songs, featuring soprano Dana Burešová and pianist Timothy Cheek, is a wonderful and thorough recording of Kaprálová's songs. I was first introduced to this CD in 2007 when attending the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) Winter Workshop in San Diego entitled "Around the World—Art Song from the Four Corners." It was there that I began my love affair with the vocal works of Vítězslava Kaprálová. I had listened to this CD in part over the years but had not listened to it in its entirety since 2007. After discovering more about Kaprálová and having the honor of frequently performing her vocal works, this recording took on a whole new meaning. Burešová's and Cheek's interpretation of Kaprálová's songs is to be enjoyed on many levels, as it is full of subtle nuance, supreme artistry, and sheer beauty.

The CD presents Kaprálová's songs in chronological order of composition. This is an extremely helpful tactic as one can hear her facile development as a composer. It is also an encyclopedic approach as nearly all her vocal works are represented. The CD liner notes, written by Cheek, are thorough, detailed, and interesting and include extensive information about Kaprálová, the compositional background for each song, the original poems in Czech accompanied by translations into English, German and French, and the artists' biographies.

Those familiar with the vocal works of Vítězslava Kaprálová know that she displayed an early affinity for composing songs. In fact, she revealed to her friend and soprano, Jarmila Vavrdová, "I would like to write just songs—they are my biggest love." Many consider her songs to be among some of Kaprálová's best works. She might have composed more in this genre, but her teachers, Novák and Martinů, encouraged her to focus on instrumental compositions so that she would be taken more seriously as a woman composer.

Kaprálová's songs, most of which are brief emotional utterances, exhibit an innate ability to create evocative moods full of interesting harmonies and unexpected modulations. Her vocal music also demonstrates sensitivity to text, as she showed an interest in poetry at a very young age. The result is careful and masterful attention to setting Czech inflection all the while writing lovely and soaring melodies. As she was also an accomplished pianist, Kaprálová's accompaniments are interesting, frequently adding commentary to the text.

The first two tracks feature *Dvě písně*, op. 4 (Two songs, from 1932), utilizing the poetry of R. Bojko (pseudonym of Alois Horák, 1877–1952). Although considered early works (Kaprálová was a mere seventeen years old), the hallmarks of her mature style are already beginning to emerge, particularly her remarkable ability to create mood and atmosphere in her piano accompaniments. Also evident is her capacity for matching musical and linguistic prosody. She shows a unique gift for setting the natural inflection of the Czech language which is, of course, enhanced by Burešová's consummate ability to shape phrases.

"Jitro" (Morning), the first song, is one of Kaprálová's few songs that is upbeat throughout. It is more exuberant and virtuosic for both voice and piano than many of her later works. It begins with a joyous arpeggio figure in the piano, reminiscent of the sun rising,

followed soon thereafter by Kaprálová's characteristic use of unexpected harmonic turns. As evidenced throughout the CD, Burešová and Cheek work extremely well together. Burešová's ability to change her vocal timbre to match the mood of each song, coupled with her ease of negotiating dynamic contrasts and consistent tone quality throughout all her registers, is to be commended. Kaprálová exhibits a predilection for wide intervallic leaps in her vocal melodies, and Burešová soars through registration shifts with ease. The brilliant and cheerful quality Cheek elicits from the piano contrasts expertly with Burešová's creamy tone quality.

The second song, "Osířelý" (Orphaned), in complete contrast to "Jitro," is more introverted, with brief emotional outbursts and a constant yearning quality through recurring descending figures. As outlined in Cheek's liner notes, it is perhaps autobiographical, as it was composed during a 1932 summer stay at a spa, reminding her of "extended visits to a sanatorium following her parents' separation." This forlorn work contrasts to "Jitro's" sunny and bright disposition through a sparse and haunting opening, a piano accompaniment scored lower, and ending with a brief and moving piano postlude that slowly unwinds and fades away.

This is followed with the four-song cycle *Jiskry z popele*, op. 5 (Sparks from ashes, from 1932–1933). These songs display her mature compositional style through utilization of an impressionistic approach, intricate motivic writing, and piano figurations based on intervals derived from the natural inflection of the poetry. These songs were dedicated to her Brno Conservatory classmate and lifelong friend, Ota Vach, with the inscription, "my only love." He was responsible for introducing Kaprálová to the poetry of Bohdan Jelínek (1851–1874). With the exception of several folk texts, Jelínek was the only non-living Czech poet whose texts she set to music, and is the poetry used for this cycle.

Although the entire set is stunningly rendered and interpreted by Burešová and Cheek, a special mention must be made of tracks four and five, "Jak na hedvábný mech jsem hlavu kladl na bílá ňadra tvá" (Like on silk moss I laid my head on your white bosom) and "Ó zůstaň ještě, moje dívko drahá" (Oh, stay yet, my dear girl).

The fourth track begins with a highly effective and atmospheric eight-measure opening section featuring a brief descending piano arpeggio in the right hand, immediately followed by a simple triad in the left hand. This is answered in the vocal line with a static, chant-like melody with a passing *a cappella* moment. This is repeated with slight variation in measures six through eight. The splendor here is in its simplicity, made even more impactful through Burešová's exquisite shaping of Kaprálová's inert vocal line.

The song "Ó zůstaň ještě, moje dívko drahá" (Oh, stay yet, my dear girl), opens with a jubilant trill in the piano introduction, providing an effective contrast to the previous song. The trill figure ties the piece together, like a recurring motif throughout. Additionally, this song is more virtuosic for the voice and the piano, with the vocal line displaying a wide melodic range with much of the melody scored above and below the staff and the piano accompaniment featuring a swirling figure that comments on the poetry. The triplet figure in the piano is often pitted against a duple figure in the melody throughout much of the song, yet Burešová and Cheek make this difficult song seem effortless.

The set is followed by *Leden* (January), composed in 1933 and

scored for soprano, piano, flute, two violins and cello. Utilizing sparse textures and constantly evolving sonorities, this atmospheric miniature is expertly played by all. Again, Burešová displays her flair for successfully negotiating vocal register shifts. Her vocal quality is consistent throughout, even when pitted against instruments while singing in a low range.

Tracks eight through eleven include the cycle *Jablko s klína*, op. 10 (Apple from the lap, from 1934–1936). This masterful set was composed when Kaprálová was only twenty years old and uses the poetry of Jaroslav Seifert (1901–1986), from a poetry collection of the same name. As revealed in Cheek’s liner notes, with the exception of the last song, “the cycle portrays a sense of impending doom,” yet each song remains distinct.

The cycle opens with “Píseň na vrbovou pšišťalku” (Song on the willow fife), beginning the set with a burst of energy complete with sweeping descending lines in the piano and mostly descending figures in the vocal line. It features a constant ebb and flow of sounds and emotional outbursts from soprano and pianist. This is followed with “Ukolébavka” (Lullaby), a strophic song full of bitterness and distrust. Burešová convincingly sings with a sweet and soothing tone befitting of a lullaby despite the angry tone of the poetry. One of my favorite tracks is “Bezvěťř” (Calm), the third song from the cycle. It begins with the highly effective use of contrary motion between voice and piano, setting the stage with simple and gloomy beauty. This is one of Kaprálová’s darkest songs, and it is a haunting and disturbing journey for the listener. Although Burešová and Cheek use completely different colors and timbres, they perfectly match each other’s emotional intent in this fascinating juxtaposition.

This is followed with *Navždy*, op. 12 (Forever), on tracks twelve through fourteen. Composed between 1936–1937, this cycle uses the poetry of Jan Čarek (1898–1966) for the first two songs and of Seifert for the final song. The first piece of the set, also entitled “Navždy,” is in ABA form and opens with a slow and sustained vocal line that requires excellent breath control. This is followed with “Čím je můj žal” (What is my grief), which contrasts between beautiful lyricism and parlando passages for the singer and is expertly negotiated by Burešová. The final song of the set, “Ruce” (Hands), illustrates the ecstasy of a wedding night. The accompaniment highlights an almost impressionistic quality that is interwoven with a syllabic vocal melody. It ends dramatically with a substantial and virtuosic postlude by Cheek and a diva-worthy melismatic phrase expressed joyously by Burešová.

The next three tracks are stand-alone songs, beginning with *Sbohem a šáteček*, op. 14 (Waving farewell, from 1937). At over six minutes in length, this is Kaprálová’s longest song, befitting for her farewell to Prague before embarking on her journey to Paris to study at the École normale de musique and with Martinů. According to Cheek, “the entire song is based on a falling major second that appears in the first word, ‘sbohem’ (farewell). This motif, then, fills the entire song with farewells.” The beautiful and exquisite poetry, by Vítězslav Nezval (1900–1958), matched in splendor of music, results in a complicated and bittersweet farewell, both strikingly performed by Cheek and Burešová.

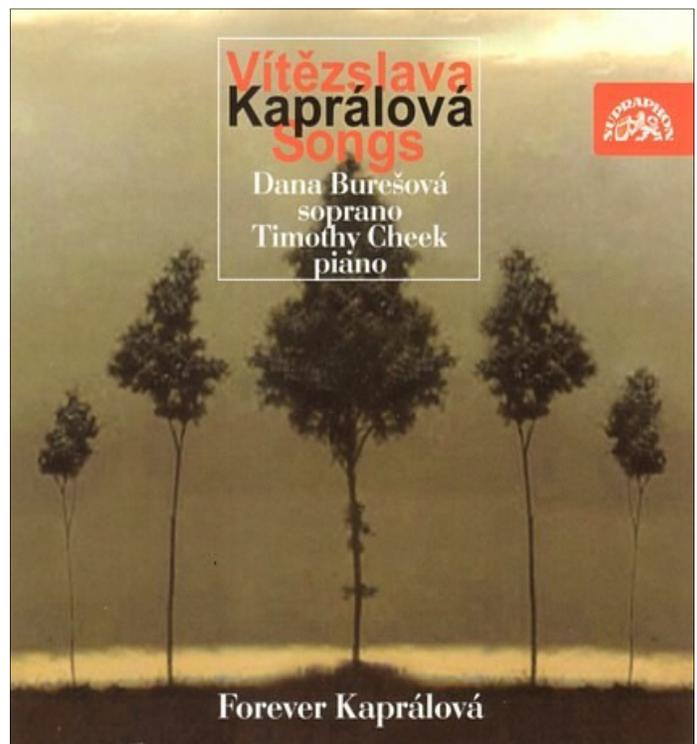
Koleda (Carol), also from 1937, is a concise and entertaining song dedicated to “my feathered friends.” Most memorable is Burešová’s facility with mimicking the many animal noises Kaprálová ingeniously employs.

Between 1936–1939, Kaprálová composed the song collection *Vteřiny*, op. 18 (Seconds), which on the CD includes tracks eighteen through twenty-five. This interesting compilation of songs was written in Paris, Brno and Prague for friends, family members, or special occasions. One of my favorite recordings on this CD is the first song of the collection, “Bílým šátkem mává kdo se loučf” (With a white kerchief he waves). It displays an exquisite marriage between language and melodic rhythm. Burešová’s last note is extraordinary, and she is to be commended in her ability to sustain a pianissimo note so effortlessly in a problematic part of the voice. Another highlight of this set is the third song, track eighteen, entitled “Píseň milostná” (Love song). In this 1938 composition, dedicated to a friend on her wedding, Cheek adeptly portrays the three-hundred chirping birds with exuberant chaos as described in František Sušil’s (1804–1868) Moravian folk poem.

This is followed with the three-song cycle, *Zpíváno do dálky*, op. 22 (Sung into the distance, from 1939). The poetry is by Viktor Kripner (1906–1956), and the songs are also dedicated to him. This magnificent and highly contrasting set exemplifies Kaprálová’s natural gift with prosody and her innate ability to write piano accompaniments that provide observations on the text. Burešová and Cheek present a superb collaboration throughout the entire set, displaying lovely interplay between voice and piano and exquisitely interweaving textures.

Dana Burešová and Timothy Cheek provide flawless performances in this important addition to the recordings of Vítězslava Kaprálová. Both Burešová and Cheek display expertise in portraying the many intricate and complicated facets of this hauntingly beautiful vocal music, and their CD is a must-have for anyone interested in the music of Kaprálová. The CD tracks (in mp3 format) are offered through iTunes and *amazon.com*.

Michelle Latour





VÍTĚZSLAVA KAPRÁLOVÁ
PĚT KLAVÍRNÍCH SKLADEB
FIVE PIANO COMPOSITIONS

AMOS EDITIO
PRAHA
AM 0064

Critical edition. Amos Editio, 2011

This project was initiated and financially assisted by The Kapralova Society.

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The Kapralova Society Journal
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ISSN 1715 4146