

The Kapralova Society Journal

A Journal of Women in Music

An Analysis of Compositional Methods Applied in Kaprálová's Cantata *Ilena*, op. 15

Martin Kostaš



Special points of interest:

- Kaprálová's cantata *Ilena*
- Kaprálová's art songs *Vteřiny*
- Interview with conductor Maria Segura-Thijssen

Inside this issue:

An analysis of compositional methods applied in Kaprálová's cantata *Ilena*, op. 15/ by Martin Kostaš 1

Kaprálová's *Vteřiny*, op. 18 / by Michelle Latour 7

Love to make people cry. An interview with Maria Segura-Thijssen / by Arturo Desimone 11

Recent publications and CD releases 6,10, 12

Ilena, op. 15, a four-part cantata for soli, mixed chorus, orchestra and reciter, composed in Paris and Tři Studně between 1937 and 1939, has survived only as a piano reduction sketch with a partially orchestrated first part (the first 105 measures of the score).

It took Kaprálová almost a year to sketch the work—from December 1937 to September 1938. On the last page of the sketch, however, she also noted another year in brackets—1932. Perhaps it was the year in which she first encountered Ludmila Podjavorinská's ballad *Lesná panna* (Forest Maiden) and began thinking about setting its words to music.¹ This hypothesis may well be viable, for Kaprálová originally intended to graduate with this very work from the Master School of Vítězslav Novák² (—in the end, she graduated with another work—the Military Sinfonietta). She apparently gave the ballad careful thought, searching for the most suitable musical representation of the text. This is evidenced in a preserved sketchbook in which Kaprálová recorded motifs of the cantata's first part. Although they are organized rather loosely and placed next to each other with no particular contextual or tonal relationships, this suggests that she had the composition formally planned. At this point, however, she wrote down only the basic material for several scenes, such as “Eh, co smůtiš” (Oh, why are you so sad), “Smiech” (Laughter), “Kolo stola” (Around the table), “Matka mladá” (Young mother), etc. These few concrete motifs would only require to be transposed to the same key, and she would later use all of them in her composition.³

Kaprálová set to the task of composing the definitive version of *Ilena* in early December 1937,⁴ not too long after her arrival in Paris where she moved in late October 1937 to study conducting with Charles Munch and composition with Nadia Boulanger at the École normale de musique. She finished the first part of the cantata before the end of the year. The creative process was far from smooth, how-

ever, and reflected Kaprálová's growing doubts about the relevance of *Ilena*'s musical language. Yet, the work had been far too long a part of her sub-consciousness for the new environment to influence it in any substantial way. *Ilena* is therefore a transitional work: rooted in the composer's earlier style which matured under Novák's guidance, it also has elements of the new musical language she was to master under the tutelage of Martinů. The composition occupies a unique place in Kaprálová's oeuvre, for it is her only programmatic music and her first and only substantial choral work. It is also her longest composition.

The ballad's story is full of romantic mystique and magic: At midnight, the pale moon shines into the windows of a room. Inside the room, a young woman leans over a cradle in sadness, while her husband, the newborn's father, chases away his unhappiness with singing, drinking and dancing with the neighbors. He did not get the heir he wished for but an unwanted daughter instead (—“Laughter, singing, noise abound, men and women sit around the table. ‘Let's drink, god-father! It's nobody's fault I have a daughter and not a son!’ ”).⁵

In the second part of the ballad, the young mother falls asleep by the cradle. During the night, she hears someone knocking on the door and calling her (“... knock-knock-knock-knock . . . ‘Oh!’ She cries out, bewildered; ‘Come-come-come-come . . .’ ‘What are you—where are you?!’ . . . knock-knock-knock . . . ‘Come-come-come . . .’ ”).⁶ The young woman, fearing for the safety of her child, grabs the infant from the cradle and runs frantically away with her (“... unbound – unblest . . .”), along (“... a wild path, under the bush . . .”), around the foot of the rock, haunted and chased by an alluring voice (“... and the voice is pulling her closer . . . ‘Come-come-come . . .’ ”).⁷ In the morning, they find the woman with the child lying in a bush at the verge of an abyss.

Kaprálová's Ilena

The third part begins with another night scene (“*At midnight, the pale moon sits down quietly in the window . . .*”). The sad young woman, sitting by the cradle again, watches dreamily over her sleeping child. All of a sudden, the door open and a “*pale woman*” (a forest fairy) appears by the cradle.⁸ She picks up the child and embraces her tightly (“*. . . and with great joy shining in her face, she takes the child, pressing it to her bosom . . .*”).⁹ The terrified mother, who stood there “*frozen*,” jumps to the woman and “*sees: a phantom—am I having—a dream perhaps*,” and the specter disappears.¹⁰ The child sleeps quietly but her mother remains wide awake, trying to come to terms with what she thinks she saw, until she also falls asleep, exhausted.

As years go by, the child turns into a beautiful maiden but “*woe betide anyone who looks her in the eyes*,” as those who do, succumb to her charm and beauty.¹¹ The maiden, whose name is Ilena, does not socialize with other youth. In vain lads sing under her window asking her to go to dance with them—Ilena wanders dreamily in the woods, as if she were looking for something. (“*Hey! Ilena! Hey! Ilena! Will you be my wife?! My heart is dying from love—and you [are] made of marble—today like yesterday!*”)¹² A lad is confessing his love when Ilena disappears into the dark forest. The boy follows her as if he were bewitched, gradually losing the ground under his feet, while she lures him deeper and deeper into the dark forest. (“*Though I’m not what I seem to be, join our dance, my dear!—You, lovestruck—I, on fire—come to my arms!*”)¹³ Mesmerized by deceptive love, the lad succumbs to it, danced to his death by forest fairies. (“*A rumor flies around about a forest maiden—No one heard of Ilena again.*”)¹⁴

Like Podjavorinská, Kaprálová divided her composition into four parts. The first and second parts expose new material, while the other two focus primarily on its transformation and variation, introducing only a few new ideas. Kaprálová had selected individual fragments skillfully to achieve a fully meaningful content. Everything is reshaped and modified with careful attention to text.

The first part opens with a rhythmic ostinato, and Kaprálová creates an image of a moonlit night with a typically arched Novakian melody (Ex. 1).¹⁵

Example 1 Vítězslava Kaprálová, *Ilena*, op. 15, cantata for soli, choir, orchestra and reciter. Part I. (Measures numbers not available.) This desktop published score courtesy of © 2007 Martin Kostaš.



Then the choir joins in (Ex. 2), underscoring the mood of the scene with the words: “*At midnight, the pale moon sits down quietly in the window, and a sad young woman is leaning over a cradle.*”

After the choir, the quiet scene becomes more lively, animated with a dance in an ostinato rhythm, while the plaintive

Example 2 Kaprálová, *Ilena*, op. 15, part I

melody transforms into the animated merriment of a village pub: “*Laughter, singing, noise abound, men and women sit around the table . . .*” This exuberant joyfulness is an excellent contrasting idea and also closely related to text (Ex. 3).

Example 3 Kaprálová, *Ilena*, op. 15, part I.

The solo tenor sings: “*Let’s drink, godfather! Nobody’s fault I have a daughter and not a son!*” (Ex. 4), and his line is repeated by the choir.

Example 4 Kaprálová, *Ilena*, op. 15, part I.

The conclusion of the first part leaves the listener in suspense and anticipation of a further action. Formally, the part is organized rather simply: A – B – interlude – return to B. The form is subordinated to the text and its impact, as the composer’s primary aim is to create the mood and atmosphere of the various scenes. The first part is tight in terms of form but unstable in terms of tonality, as modulations are frequent. Periodicity and regularity of the emphasis on the rhythmic side of dances is also reflected in the vocal component, which is rather unusual for Kaprálová. These interesting instances, particularly the stereotypical repetitions of a single rhythmic figure with the same text, can be found in Janáček.¹⁶

Before Kaprálová began composing the second part, she wrote in a letter to her parents that the first part was perhaps too homophonic.¹⁷ This may have been the reason why she decided to construct the second part polyphonically. In contrast to the previous movement, the story is now carried solely

by the choir, and the orchestra's role is merely to underscore the ideas presented by the chorus. The opening of the second part draws us again into the ballad's story (Ex. 5):

Example 5 Kaprálová, *Ilena*, op. 15, part II.

Die - ra spi Die - ra spi

Soprano

Die - ra spi spi spi spi Die - ra spi spi spi spi

Alto

Die - ra spi Die - ra spi

Tenor

Die - ra spi Die - ra spi spi

Bass

Die - ra spi Die - ra spi

The singing of the choir is followed by a short orchestral interlude that leads to the next, fugato section which is developed to eight voices in fifteen measures. The theme is introduced by the orchestra and the choir gradually joins in with the following text: “*She jumped up, took the child in her arms . . .*” (Ex. 6).

Example 6 Kaprálová, *Ilena*, op. 15, part II.

Bass

Sko - kla, vsta - la do na - ru - čia die - fa vza - la, atd.

Orch.

In the second fugato, only slightly modified and immediately following the first, the four-measure theme is first declared by the choir basses and then developed through instruments and choir voices to its climax, again within fifteen measures. The text is different, however: “*Unbound, unblessed, a young woman leaves the house . . .*”

The third fugato is accompanied by an ostinato figure in the orchestra, while the text is sung again by basses—“*On a wild path, behind the bush, ‘Come, come!’ [the voice] allures her, calls her again and again . . .*” (Ex. 7).

Example 7 Kaprálová, *Ilena*, op. 15, part II.

However, this vocal fugato is interrupted by ominous orchestral interjections (Ex. 8), while the choir calls obsessively (“*Come, come, come . . .*”). The section gradually reaches its climax, which is in fact the return to the opening section, only with a different text: “*Next day, near the abyss, they found the woman and the child next to her in a bush, not a single lily petal.*”

Example 8 Kaprálová, *Ilena*, op. 15, part II.

The first system of the musical score for 'The Little Boat' is shown. It consists of a treble and a bass staff, both in 2/4 time. The treble staff has a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and contains a melody of quarter notes: B-flat, A, G, F, E, D, C, B. The bass staff contains a bass line of quarter notes: C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. The melody and bass line are written in a simple, child-friendly style.

The form of this part is A – B (the development is achieved through three fugatos in immediate succession) – A (return, as a climax of the development). The part grows in Kaprálová's fantasy into almost obscure dimensions. The music is agitated, in close relation to the text which foreshadows a tragedy. Polyphony, as opposed to the homophony of the previous movement, does not make a compact impression here, and the part is held together mainly by thematic work. Individual sections A – B – A are connected through a common, rhythmically or melodically distinct shape, with the Janáček-like rhythmical peculiarities all the more frequent.¹⁸

The third part is melodrama. The text of the ballad is recited unabbreviated and is again closely tied to the music. In this part, Kaprálová utilized material from the previous two, especially from the introductory theme of part one (Ex. 9). In such an epically rich plot she must have felt more comfortable in instrumental than vocal music. The third part also proved to be more challenging. As Kaprálová wrote to her parents in January 1938, if it were not for Martinů, she would have likely abandoned the work at this point.¹⁹ However, Martinů was so impressed by the rich creative invention of the composition that he convinced Kaprálová of its quality.

Example 9 Kaprálová, *Ilena*, op. 15, part III.

Rec: O polnoči luna blesta do obloka trišna sada, bladi smutni mladi žena nad koliskou naklonena...

Parts one and three also have similar texts. The first part was introduced with an image of a moonlit night, and the third part begins exactly the same way: “*At midnight, the pale moon sits down quietly in the window . . .*” but then it continues, “*The child is asleep . . .*” (the opening of the second part). Not surprisingly, part three is also a musical reminiscence of parts one and two. The atmosphere of a threat that is imminent and a mother’s fear for the safety of her child, both present in the previous parts, are intensified in the text of this part. For the sake of contrast to the preceding parts, Kaprálová chose the form of melodrama.

The fourth part is a synthesis of all of the elements we have come across so far. In this part, Kaprálová fully exploits the thematic material of the previous parts as well as the cast she has at her disposal. We find here instrumental and choral passages, recitation and solos, the tenor and—for the first time—the soprano.

Kaprálová's Ilena

After a short orchestral prelude, the choir continues the story: “*Years go by . . . The child is growing up—growing up into a maiden—the maiden into a beauty . . .*” This is followed by a brief vocal canonic passage and, after several measures, a return to the homophony of the chorus. With the music closely matching text, the choir moves the plot forward until it reaches a climax with the verse “*a beauty never seen before!*” This section is rooted in romantic idiom, in contrast to part three, the melodrama, in which we sense Martinů’s influence.

The following passage of text, “*Under the window lads are singing,*” is underscored by a folk tune that is to introduce the singing young men who later call Ilena to come out: “*Hey Ilena! Hey Ilena!*” It is evident that Kaprálová thought through the conception of her setting of text in minute detail. Several other places in this composition point to various sources of inspiration, including “prewar” jazz which was at one point also a major inspiration for Martinů. All these influences merge in *Ilena* in an original synthesis.

The scene that was filled with the noise and shouting of youth undergoes a metamorphosis which is again closely tied to text and carried by the choir: “*And Ilena, alone in the woods on a quiet night under the stars . . .*” This is interrupted by a tenor solo (Ex. 10), “*Hey Ilena! Hey Ilena! Will you be my wife?!?*”

Example 10 Kaprálová, *Ilena*, op. 15, part IV.



and continues with the sigh: “*The girls are dancing at the pub—and you are wandering through the woods alone.*” While the female choir carries the scene forward with the text, “*The lad sighs under the window, the maiden walks with a wreath of roses toward the woods,*” the tenor interjects: “*Follow her, lad! Run after her, let no scruple stand in your way any longer!*” At this point, the theme is taken over by the orchestra and once again we hear short ostinato repetitions.²⁰

The choir continues with the story, “*He walks at dusk, following his bride into the darkness of the forest,*” and reaches the climax in: “*He lost his path, he lost his way, following the fairy, following the bride . . .*” The passage that follows is rather descriptive; and, therefore, Kaprálová once again employs her reciter to push the story forward. Music that illustrates the narrative section blends together material from all preceding parts.

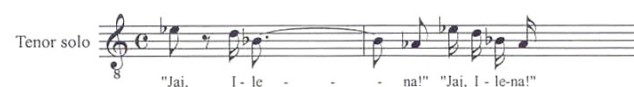
The lad is now lost in the dark woods when he suddenly sees a clearing in front of him: here, in the moonlight, a group of fairies is dancing. Ilena is among them, dressed only in her beautiful long hair. She lures him to dance with her (Ex. 11). The lad reacts anxiously, “*Oh, Ilena, oh, Ilena*” (Ex. 12), and while she continues to call him, he is struck by fear, “*Oh Ilena, evil has changed you, I don’t recognize you! I fear your embrace, your eyes of a werewolf . . .*” (Ex. 13).

The way the two characters act is reflected in their singing style. The tenor’s vocal part is built most dramatically, while Ilena’s seductive luring is the calling of a Siren, expressed

Example 11 Kaprálová, *Ilena*, op. 15, part IV.



Example 12 Kaprálová, *Ilena*, op. 15, part IV.



Example 13 Kaprálová, *Ilena*, op. 15, part IV.



mainly through singing without words. The orchestra works with the material of preceding movements until the choir enters with the following text, “*She takes him in her arms, seduces him with kisses, half a maiden, half a demon . . .*” in simple steps of seconds in parallel seventh chords, mostly diminished major, which may evoke an impression of certain laxness but also of a slowly approaching threat. The drama culminates in a chorale of the tutti choir and orchestra, making the final verdict on the lad’s fate. This short chorale’s text is—“*oh, he was unable to resist . . .!*” (Ex. 14).

Example 14 Kaprálová, *Ilena*, op. 15, part IV, chorale.



Here Kaprálová modified the text slightly, for Podjavorinská’s original says “*oh, he won’t be able to resist . . .!*” This small alteration (by Kaprálová) suggests that the youth has already been damned, while the original still gives him a chance, albeit negligible, to escape his damnation. Kaprálová also omits six

verses from the penultimate strophe so that she can end this section with the lad's merciless fate. This is the climax of not only the final part but of the entire cantata.

In the cantata's finale proper we hear again the motif that opened parts one and three and since then became a unifying element for the entire cantata. The motif is tied to the verse "*At midnight, the pale moon sits quietly . . .*" that we recall from the previous movements. The choir again sings a plaintive Novakian melody that closes the entire composition.²¹ What remains is the final orchestral passage, built from the material of the first movement's opening theme, thus giving the composition integrity through motivic unity.

The original text of Podjavorinská's ballad ends with the verse, "*A rumor flies around about a forest maiden—No one heard of Ilena again,*" but Kaprálová did not use it. This gives Kaprálová's cantata a different meaning, compared to Podjavorinská's ballad. While Kaprálová ends the work with general reconciliation and brightening, Podjavorinská preserves the folk ballad form with its open ending.

The cantata *Ilena* is a remarkable work and not only in the context of Kaprálová's oeuvre. In *Ilena*, Kaprálová managed to unify into an integral whole a complex of several epic movements, while maintaining their appropriate proportions and relations. She also captured successfully the character of Slovak ballad. Kaprálová's sense of form and her ability to balance individual parts within the composition in terms of form is clearly demonstrated, as is her ability to select the best medium and vehicle to carry each part (part one—combination of several elements, part two—choir, part three—melodrama, part four—combination of all elements). The relation between the homophony of part one and the polyphony of part two is exemplary.

Ilena blends into an original synthesis various influences and inspirations that can be traced to the music of Leoš Janáček, Vítězslav Novák, and Bohuslav Martinů. The cantata is the last composition of Kaprálová's romantic period and her only programmatic work. Yet, Kaprálová undoubtedly strived for a new expression in *Ilena*, mainly through her well thought-out conception, in which each movement has a different sound. The question remains about what would have been the definitive character of the composition had the instrumentation been finished by Kaprálová. The sketch is complete, the first 105 measures orchestrated by the composer herself, but the instrumental color is one of the key elements in the maturation of Kaprálová's musical expression, which, unfortunately, cannot be traced here on a full scale. It is evident, however, that in the context of Kaprálová's oeuvre *Ilena* is an exceptional composition that deserves our full attention.

Notes:

¹ "Lesná panna." In Ľudmila Podjavorinská, *Balady* (Prague: L. Mazáč, 1930), 56–65. Ľudmila Riznerová-Podjavorinská was born on April 26, 1872, in Bzince pod Javorinou (Austro-Hungarian Empire) and died on March 2, 1951, in Nové Mesto nad Váhom (Czechoslovakia). She was a poet, writer, publicist, and founder of modern Slovak literature for children. A strong believer in the importance of education and culture for social progress, she wrote essays and articles on the topics of the status of women, educational opportunities for women, and child education. In

Podjavorinská's literary oeuvre, ballads occupy a particular important place. Through this genre, Podjavorinská explores the themes of human fate and human relations and their ethics.

² Jiří Macek, *Vítězslava Kaprálová* (Prague: Svaz čs. skladatelů, 1958), 135.

³ Macek, 143.

⁴ "I began working on the Ballad—or continue working, to be more precise, but only the first choir, up to the polka, was finished." Kaprálová's diary entry from December 1, 1937.

⁵ Podjavorinská, 56.

⁶ Podjavorinská, 57.

⁷ Podjavorinská, 58.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Podjavorinská, 61.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Podjavorinská, 62.

¹³ Podjavorinská, 64.

¹⁴ Podjavorinská, 65.

¹⁵ The same melodic progression is to be found in the introduction to the third part—the melodrama—with the same text recited, as opposed to the use of the choir in the first part.

¹⁶ Macek, 144.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Macek, 145.

¹⁹ Ibid.

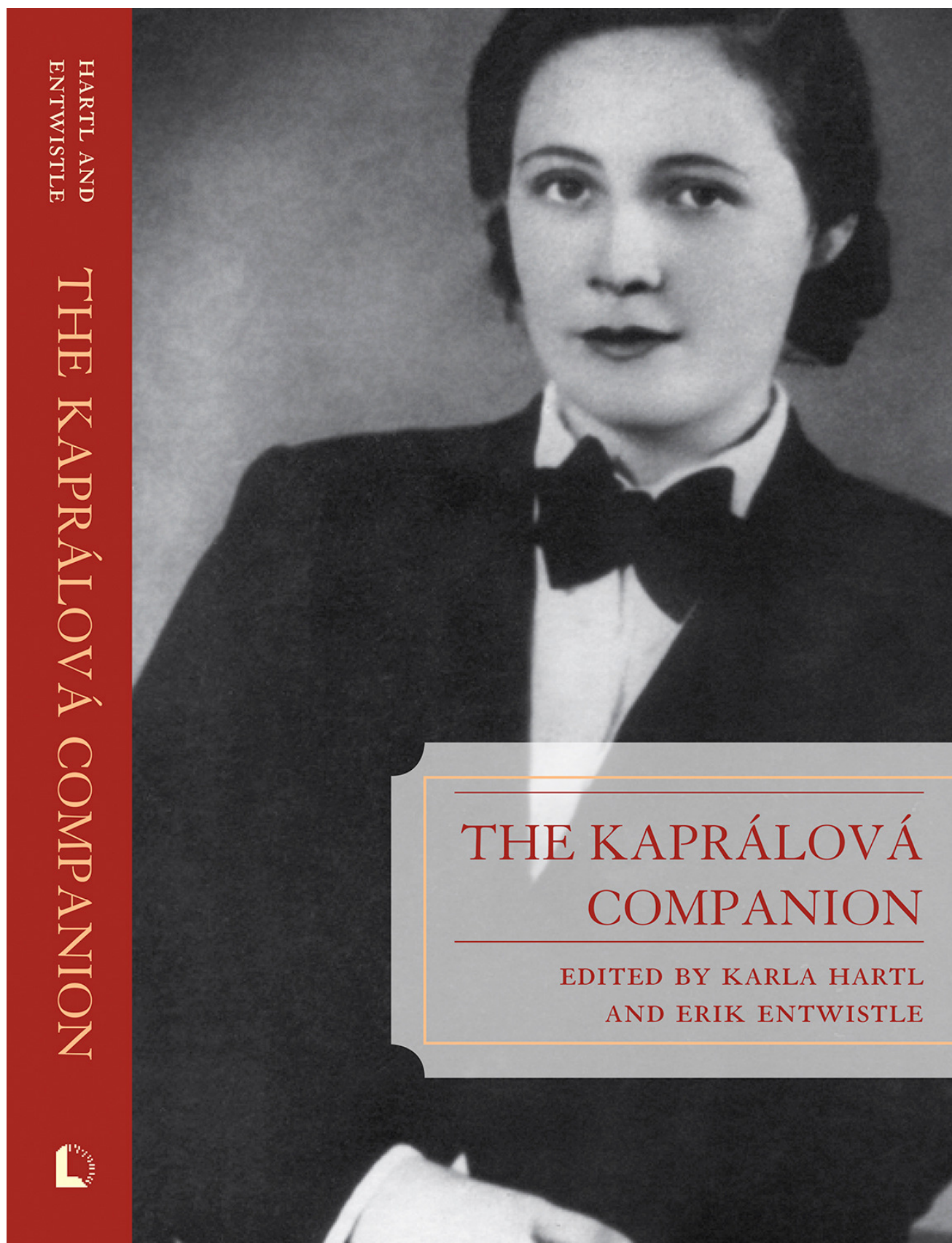
²⁰ Janáček's "sčasovka"—a unique way of developing rhythmic-melodic motives.

²¹ Interestingly, while the passage is motivically repetitive, in terms of harmony there is a brightening in the final measure of the chorus score, which is quite unusual, considering the verse—"the dead lad is lying in the moss of the hillside . . ." In this context, the resulting effect is one of reconciliation.

About the author:

Martin Kostaš studied at the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts School of Music in Brno. He dedicated both his bachelor's thesis (2005) and a part of his master's thesis (2007) to Kaprálová's orchestral cantata *Ilena*. Owing to his successful efforts to finish the cantata's orchestral score, *Ilena* received its world premiere at the Janáček Academy's 60th anniversary gala concert on May 31, 2007, in the Besední dům in Brno. The project, which was recorded for the Czech Radio, was encouraged and financially assisted by the Kapralova Society.





The Kaprálová Companion. Guide to the life and music of Vítězslava Kaprálová. Edited by Karla Hartl and Erik Entwistle. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011. ISBN 978-0-7391-6723-6 (cloth)—ISBN 978-0-7391-6724-3 (electronic).

Kaprálová's *Vteřiny*, op. 18

Michelle Latour

Vteřiny (Seconds), op. 18, is a cycle comprised of seven songs and a piano interlude composed by Vítězslava Kaprálová between 1936 and 1939. It is an interesting collection of works written for special occasions, friends, and family members. Kaprálová wrote these songs while living in Prague, Brno, and Paris. Despite the various geographical locations and the three-year span between the first and last song of the set, *Vteřiny* is a surprisingly cohesive group of pieces. The collection is about ten minutes in length, and was premiered in Prague on November 26, 1945.¹

Before analyzing each song, it is appropriate to first place *Vteřiny* within the context of Kaprálová's development as a composer. By 1936, Kaprálová had already finished her studies at the Brno Conservatory and was continuing her education at the Prague Conservatory, graduating in June 1937. In October, she moved to Paris to further her studies in conducting with Charles Munch at the École normale de musique. Living in Paris broadened Kaprálová's intellectual horizons, and the active musical scene of the city was important to her artistic development. She was able to hear works by such influential composers as Bartók, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Prokofiev, Milhaud, Honegger, and Martinů. She also had the joy of seeing her own works performed.²

Through her studies at the conservatories in Brno, Prague, and Paris, Kaprálová's distinct musical style developed and solidified. As early as 1933, she was already becoming an accomplished composer who—at only eighteen—had nearly arrived at her mature compositional style. Her most impressive compositional trait is the remarkable ability to create mood and atmosphere, often with the piano accompaniment that provides musical elaboration upon the text. Another characteristic feature of Kaprálová's writing is her careful attention to setting the poetic language. This is in part due to her lifelong interest in poetry. She wrote poetry herself and collected poems of her favorite poets throughout her life. In terms of prosody, Kaprálová is incredibly skilled at matching musical and poetic inflection, creating memorable and singable melodies that also remain true to "the natural stress, vowel-lengths, and inflection of the Czech language."³ Overall care with prosody is evidenced through predominantly syllabic settings and 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. Furthermore, 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 noteworthy qualities include a fondness for creating moods that are predominantly melancholy and forlorn, and a preference for brief vocal works, with many songs lasting only minutes.⁴

Kaprálová's hauntingly beautiful music can be best described as simple yet not simplistic, with a typically narrow vocal range, careful treatment of dissonance, and the piano accompaniment often doubling the vocal melody in the right hand. Many of these characteristics are present in *Vteřiny*.

What prompted Kaprálová to organize these eight works that span several years into one cohesive collection? According to Timothy Cheek, sometime in 1939, "probably before she wrote 'Můj milý člověče,' K[aprálová] got the idea of integrating seven [*sic!*] short songs and one piano solo she had written for special occasions and special people in her life between 1936 and 1938 into a collection or pseudo-cycle."⁵ She then modified the order of songs several times, even altering some of the song

titles, until arriving at the order in which they are today published. With her final song order, Kaprálová rewrote all the songs with some minor alterations, and put them into one continuous manuscript booklet.⁶ Her first songs for *Vteřiny*, "Bílým šátkem mává" (With a white kerchief he waves) and "Novoroční" (New Year's), were composed in December of 1936. Between March and December of 1937, Kaprálová composed four more songs for the collection: "Velikonoce" (Easter), "Léta mlčí, léta jdou" (The years are silent, the years go by), "Postmrtná variance" (Posthumous variation), and "Rodný kraj" (Native region). 1938 saw the addition of only one song, "Píseň milostná" (Love song), with the final song, "Můj milý člověče" (My dear man), completed in May of 1939.⁷

The first song, "Bílým šátkem mává" (With a white kerchief he waves), was composed in December 1936 and was originally entitled "K novému roku" (For the New Year). It uses the poetry of Jaroslav Seifert (1901–1986), a 1984 Nobel Prize winning Czech poet. He is considered by many to be one of the greatest poets of the twentieth century. In 1920, he was a founding member of the avant-garde artistic group *Devětsil* (Butterbur). This pre-surrealist movement also included as members the poet Vítězslav Nezval (1900–1958), the playwright Emil František Burian (1904–1959), and the composer Jaroslav Ježek (1906–1942). Seifert's works encompassed many themes, including national subjects, memories of childhood, feelings of longing, and ruminations about death. He is also known for his poetry for children.⁸

Kaprálová was drawn to Seifert's poetry and used it in her op. 10 cycle *Jablko s klína* (An apple from the lap, from 1934–36), and in the final song, "Ruce," (Hands) from her op. 12 cycle *Navždy* (Forever, from 1936–37). Seifert's poem for "Bílým šátkem mává" is from his 1929 collection *Poštovní holub* (Carrier pigeon).⁹ Kaprálová dedicated this song to a classmate from the Brno Conservatory, Otto Wach, with the inscription, "Best wishes from Vít. Kaprálová to Dr. O. Wach for the New Year."¹⁰ She had previously dedicated another work to Wach as well, the four-song cycle *Jiskry z popele* (Sparks from ashes), op. 5, written between 1932 and 1933. Kaprálová and Wach remained lifelong friends, and it is worth noting that Wach was responsible for bringing Kaprálová's ashes home from France in 1946.¹¹

Seifert's original poem consists of three stanzas. In Kaprálová's first setting of the text, she only used two stanzas, the first and the last. However, by the time she re-wrote the song into her final manuscript booklet, she must have taken another look at the poem, as the final version incorporates all three stanzas of Seifert's poem. In the existing manuscript, Kaprálová marked in repeat signs for measures 6 through 9 using different ink, and added the words from the second half of the second stanza of poetry.¹²

This particular song is one of my favorites, especially remarkable for its masterful blend of text and music. The syncopated vocal line demonstrates Kaprálová's careful attention to prosody, and the tempo indication, *Mírně* (Moderato), fits the bittersweet text. Interestingly, songs one through three utilize

Kaprálová's Vteřiny, op. 18

Czech tempo indications, while songs four through seven use Italian terms. The final song includes a metronome marking only.

"Bílým šátkem mává" opens with a sparse texture, as the piano accompaniment in measures one through three is played in the right hand only. Typical for her songs, the piano doubles the vocal line in the right hand for nearly the entire song. An interesting augmentation of this pairing occurs in measure twelve, where the piano finishes out the melody. The accompaniment is expressive throughout as evidenced by arching, legato figures in the left hand. The addition of a trill in the left hand in measure eight for "Something exquisite ends" in verse one, for "Who says goodbye" in verse two, and then again repeated in measure fifteen for the repetition of the first verse text, underscores the poetry's melancholy message. The song ends in a cohesive manner with a glimmer of hope, as measures six through nine are repeated with slight variation in measures thirteen through seventeen. Here the repetition is altered in two ways. The first instance is in measures six through nine. The text reads in Czech as "Každého dne se něco *končí*, něco překrásného se *končí*" (Something of each day comes to an *end*, something exquisite comes to an *end*). In the varied repeated material at the end, "Každého dne se něco *počíná*, něco překrásného se *počíná*" (Something of each day *begins*, something exquisite *begins*), one word has changed, from "končí" (end) to "počíná" (begins). This gives the song a hopeful conclusion. The second variation, one that reinforces the change of text, is the melody that is slightly altered to accommodate a higher final note, again reinforcing the thought of optimism.

The second song entitled "Rodný kraj" (Native region), originally called "Letní" (Summer song), was written on December 10, 1937. It was dedicated to Kaprálová's friend, Rudolf Kopecký, and set to a text by Jan Čarek (1898–1966), a Czech poet, essayist, and literary critic who was mostly known during his lifetime for his children's books and folk poetry. This poem was taken from his 1934 collection, *Hvězdy na nebi* (Stars in the sky).¹³ Kaprálová felt a connection to Čarek's poetry, as evidenced in her frequent use of his work. She utilized his texts in "Navždy" (Forever) and "Čím je můj žal" (What is my sorrow), two of the songs of the *Navždy* cycle, op. 12, and then in one of her last works, "V zemi české" (In the Czech land), which she sketched while living as an exile in Paris in 1939 during the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia.

"Rodný kraj" exists in four different versions, with the first draft appearing in pencil on December 10, 1937. This initial version is complete except for dynamic markings and a few discrepancies with accompaniment pitches and articulation markings when compared to her other autographs. With all four versions, however, melody, rhythm, and overall accompaniment are consistent.¹⁴ This multi-sectional song is the longest of the cycle and is more upbeat than the first song, making for an effective contrast. The tempo indication, *Vřele* (Ardently), sets the mood for a processional-like opening in measures one through four, complete with a triumphant vocal line with an uncharacteristically high tessitura and wide intervallic leap. After the brief opening, the music melts into unexpected harmonic twists into measure five. This leads into measures seven through eleven, "The brooks' bird song," aptly described in the right hand of the piano with charming arpeggiated figures. Here the vocal line is not doubled in the piano part, yet we hear another uncharacteristic high note in measure eleven, as the melody soars from a D to an A-natural on the words "Light of the stars." In fact, there are several instances of high notes for the singer, making it different from the rest of the cycle.

Although nearly half of Kaprálová's songs are through-composed,

"Rodný kraj" is neither through-composed nor strophic, yet driven by the text and unified by motivic material.¹⁵ This song can be loosely organized into ABACABAD sections, with the A section functioning like a brief repetitive motive. This motive is heard in measures one through six, then in measures thirteen through sixteen with a slightly altered melody and more florid piano accompaniment. It is reiterated in measures twenty-seven through twenty-eight and again in measures thirty-five through thirty-six, with both final instances appearing as truncated versions of the original motivic statement. The B sections—measures seven through twelve, and measures twenty-nine through thirty-four—utilize recurring sixteenth note figures in the right hand with no doubling of the vocal line. Each time the piano is commenting on the text which is describing nature: the brooks' bird song, the light of the stars, the glow of rye ears, and the wild thyme. The central C section—measures seventeen through twenty-six—is the longest section and contrasts with the rest of the song. The right hand of the piano doubles the melody with the left hand, playing a jaunty staccati repetitive motive that is comprised of eighth and sixteenth notes.

The third song, "Píseň milostná" (Love song), also known as "Koleda milostná" (Love carol), was written on February 17, 1938. This song was dedicated to Kaprálová's friend, Renata ("Renuška") Helfertová-Trtílková, for her wedding.¹⁶ It utilizes Moravian folk poetry from František Sušil (1804–1868), a Roman Catholic priest who is best known for his published collection of traditional Moravian folk music, *Moravské národní písně*, which contained over two thousand songs and texts. Dvořák, Janáček, and Martinů have also used Sušil's melodies.

In this work, there are two different versions in existence, with slight variations. The earlier version, entitled "Koleda milostná" (Love carol), was first published in 1974 along with Martinů's song of the same title. Kaprálová dated the song as "Paris, February 17, 1938," adding the timing of 1'30". The version published as part of *Vteřiny* uses a later version of the song, in which the title has been changed to "Píseň milostná" (Love song). According to Cheek, "the differences between the two versions are minimal, involving some changes in dynamics, slurs, and articulations."¹⁷

The song is marked *Mírně živě* (Moderately lively) and uses a more clear cut, AB form. The A section, in duple meter and encompassing measures one through eighteen, features the piano as the main character, "Three hundred birds chirping in that maple copse," as the noisy birds chirp incessantly. The piano utilizes rhythmic and disjunct brief motives to contrast with the legato and smooth vocal line. This is contrasted with the longer and slower B section which begins in measure nineteen and continues until the song's end in measure forty-five. This section is in triple meter and is more melodic with repetition and variation throughout in both the voice and the piano. The final four-measure postlude cleverly inserts an echo of the birds chirping, this time in the right hand, and even switching back to triple meter for the penultimate measure.

"Píseň milostná" is followed by "Velikonoce" (Easter). The song, written in Prague on March 5, 1937, uses the poetry of Fráňa Šrámek (1877–1952) from his collection *Nové básně*, published in 1928. Kaprálová dedicated it to Professor Gracian Černušák, her music history professor at the Brno Conservatory.¹⁸ This beautiful and joyous song opens with a melismatic "Aleluja" which is also stated in the right hand of the piano in measure two and in the left

hand also in treble clef in measure three, an octave lower (Ex. 1). The opening melody is in triple meter and then changes to duple in measure five. Additionally, tempo indications are now in Italian, as “Velikonoce” is marked *Allegro ma non troppo, Jubiloso*. The text is in four verses and is through-composed, with the exception of measures thirteen through nineteen and measures twenty-eight through thirty-three. In this instance, the melody is repeated with slight variation, and the piano accompaniment is modified.

Example 1 Vítězslava Kaprálová, “Velikonoce,” in *Songs: Voice and Piano, Complete Edition*, ed. Timothy Cheek (Prague: Amos Editio, 2005), p. 89, mm. 1–3. Courtesy of © Amos Editio 2005.



Overall, the song is happy and upbeat until the final bookend approach of the last “Aleluja,” prefaced with the text “The little song is sad.” Here Kaprálová returns to triple meter and the only alteration of the “Aleluja” melody is the modulation of F-sharp in the melisma to F-natural, indeed giving it a melancholy and poignant ending. The echo of the “Aleluja” melisma, restated in the accompaniment in measure thirty-five, also alters the F-sharp to F-natural (Ex. 2).

Example 2 “Velikonoce,” mm. 34–36.



The fifth work of this cycle is a brief piano interlude entitled “Postmrtná variace” (Posthumous variation). It was dedicated to the memory of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937), the first president of Czechoslovakia. Kaprálová composed the piece in Brno on the day of his death, September 14, 1937. It was published in the newspaper *Lidové noviny* four days later. It is based on a folksong *Tatíčku starý náš* (Our dear old dad), which was so closely associated with Masaryk that it had nearly attained the level of an anthem: *Our dear old dad, / you have a gray head of hair, / all is still well with us here, / as long as you are among us, / our dear old dad!*¹⁹ Although a piano interlude appearing in the middle of the collection of songs, it still shares characteristics with Kaprálová’s vocal works in that it is brief, utilizes motivic material, alternates between triple and duple meters, and it largely features chordal writing for the right-hand with arpeggiated figures in the left. However, it is distinct in that it is for solo piano, and exploits the full range of the piano by building to a triple forte ending.

Marked *Andante mesto*, “Postmrtná variace” begins quietly, almost introverted, for the first six measures. The opening material is reminiscent

of a waltz with an appealing, simple chord-like structure, piano dynamic marking, and repetition of a two-measure motive in the right hand. In measures seven through ten, there is a shift in harmonies and a gradual mounting intensity. The left hand accelerates with sixteenth-note figures as opposed to eighth-note patterns in the opening measures. However, the right-hand motivic material is repeated four times, modulating and mounting with each utterance. The next section, found in measures eleven through fourteen, continue to increase in intensity and drama through ever-increasingly thicker chords. The ending, which encompasses measures fifteen through eighteen, culminates with a grandiloquent conclusion, replete with thick and triumphant chords in both the right and left hands. The low tessitura and repetitive motion of the left hand chords is highly reminiscent of bells tolling in the distance. An *Allargando* marking in measure sixteen, coupled with a triple forte dynamic marking in the final measure, makes for a fitting tribute to Masaryk.

This is followed by the forlorn song “Léta mlčí, léta jdou” (The years are silent, the years go by), originally entitled “Píseň nedoznívá” (The song doesn’t die away). The poetry is from Fráňa Velkoborský (1900–1958), and the song was composed on “March 26, 1937 in Brno from 9–10 a.m.,” at the occasion of the birthday of Kaprálová’s father.²⁰

Another personal favorite, this brief and sparse melancholy song indicates a *Sostenuto* tempo marking and is comprised of two verses of poetry. There are multiple meter changes, from cut time to seven-eight, in order to accommodate the poetry, in addition to a multitude of syncopated rhythms for the voice. The first verse, which describes death as “singing beyond the water,” includes measures one through ten. It opens with chant-like processional music. The soprano’s melody sits in a low tessitura, and the piano is especially bare, with measures five through seven employing the left hand only. The second verse, found in measures eleven through twenty-three, now describes “radiant light breaks through the sky.” This verse incorporates melodic material from the first verse, yet builds to a triumphant piano postlude. Most notable here is the repetition of melodic material from measures seven and eight from verse one. In verse two, we hear this melody twice in measures twenty through twenty-three, with the poetry “The song doesn’t die away” recurring twice. The second statement sequences up a minor third, while the piano is already transitioning into the postlude. From the bleak first verse to the celebratory postlude—perhaps Kaprálová is reflecting upon the representation of death flying through the sky, our inability to stop time, or the song’s persistence of not dying away?

The second to last song, “Můj milý člověče” (My dear man), originally entitled “Koleda” (Carol), uses a folk text. The manuscript includes the dedication “To dear Mom for her birthday, her Vitulka,” and bears a note from Kaprálová: “I’ve been owing you, for a long time, a song—so here it is. I think you will like it a lot, as much as I like the words. Tell Dad not to touch it in the least. I wish you all the best and [hope] that we’ll be reunited soon. Paris 31.5.1939.”²¹

Marked *Moderato* and in ABA form, this song is a superb contrast to “Léta mlčí, léta jdou,” as it is full of hope and praise, describing the glory of daybreak, appreciating the beauty of life, and thankful for the blessings from God. The A sections are syl-

Kaprálová's Vteřiny, op. 18

labic with five and six-measure-long phrases. The return to A is an almost exact repetition of the first verse, with a slight change in measures fifty-two to the end. Here the melody is augmented and is written an octave higher, which leads into a brief two-measure piano postlude. The short B section, measures twenty-four through thirty-three, features recitative-like passages. The first four-measure melody, "May the Lord Christ bless you," replicates the intonations of a priest during mass. This is followed with a beautiful outburst in measure twenty-nine of an unexpected leap of a major seventh on the word "eternal."

The final song, "Novoroční" (New Year's), uses a text by Czech poet Josef Hora (1891–1945). It was composed in December of 1936 in Prague and published in the New Year. This song includes a metronome marking of quarter note at 80, with no additional tempo marking. "Novoroční" is the shortest song of the cycle, as the poetry consists of only one sentence. Despite its brevity, this upbeat and fun song is fairly different from the previous seven compositions, featuring jaunty and syncopated rhythms to highlight the prosody. It is a fitting end to *Vteřiny*, as the poetic message is one of hope for the future.

The song opens with both the right and left hands in the accompaniment in bass clef, featuring syncopated rhythms in the right hand. This continues when the voice enters, resulting in an interesting interplay between voice and piano, as the accompaniment does not double the melody. This material occurs from measures one through eight. In measure nine, the tempo slows to quarter note equaling 60 so that voice and piano can begin developing to the triumphant ending. In measures nine through eleven, voice and piano grow together as the text, "May it be good," is reiterated three times. The six-measure piano postlude builds to a final, open-ended chord, perhaps posing the question, "What will the new year bring?"

Kaprálová's *Vteřiny* is a masterful, fascinating, and uniquely personal song cycle. Complete with abundant contrasts and depth of poetic message, *Vteřiny* is an important collection of songs that deserves to be performed more often.

Notes:

¹ Karla Hartl, "Vítězslava Kaprálová: An Annotated Catalog of Works," in *The Kaprálová Companion*, ed. Karla Hartl and Erik Entwistle (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 175.

² Karla Hartl, "Vítězslava Kaprálová: A Biographical Sketch," in *The Kaprálová Companion*, 2–3.

³ Timothy Cheek, "Navždy (Forever) Kaprálová: Reevaluating the Czech Composer through Her Songs," in *The Kaprálová Companion*, 71.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Vítězslava Kaprálová, *Songs: Voice and Piano*, ed. Timothy Cheek (Prague: Amos Editio, 2005), 144.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Karla Hartl, "Vítězslava Kaprálová: An Annotated Life Chronology," in *The Kaprálová Companion*, 128–36.

⁸ Timothy Cheek, *Singing in Czech* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 345.

⁹ Hartl, "Catalog," *The Kaprálová Companion*, 174.

¹⁰ Ibid, 175.

¹¹ Hartl, "Chronology," *The Kaprálová Companion*, 142n17.

¹² Kaprálová, *Songs*, 144.

¹³ Hartl, "Catalog," *The Kaprálová Companion*, 174.

¹⁴ Kaprálová, *Songs*, 144.

¹⁵ Cheek, "Navždy (Forever) Kaprálová," *The Kaprálová Companion*, 72.

¹⁶ Hartl, "Catalog," *The Kaprálová Companion*, 174–75.

¹⁷ Kaprálová, *Songs*, 145.

¹⁸ Hartl, "Catalog," *The Kaprálová Companion*, 174–75.

¹⁹ Kaprálová, *Songs*, 145.

²⁰ Hartl, "Catalog," *The Kaprálová Companion*, 174.

²¹ Ibid.

About the author:

Michelle Latour received her DMA from the University of Southern California. Currently on the faculty of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Latour is also active as a singer and adjudicator. She writes regularly for *Classical Singer*, and has previously published articles and reviews in the *Kapralova Society Journal*.



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

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

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



“LOVE TO MAKE PEOPLE CRY”

Talking about music, salvation, love and power with Maria Segura-Thijssen, concert pianist and conductor

Thijssen studied at the Utrecht Conservatory in the Netherlands and in Canada. She has performed in the Netherlands, Canada, Germany, and France. In this interview she discusses her views and experiences from the world of classical music and performing, on being a woman conductor and combining work with being a single mother. Thijssen was talking to Arturo Desimone.

AD: *Is classical music elitist?*

MS-T: That idea is something very typical to this century. It's nonsense. Music belongs to everyone; it's what is most inherent to mankind. Unmusical people are extremely rare. Music is like breathing and moving, it is everywhere. People who think classical music is incomprehensible to them are uneducated. Some music is more difficult than others, of course. I've heard many people who don't know anything about music say that Bach is a very inaccessible composer to them, even though the *Mattheus Passion* has become a mass entertainment thing.

AD: *Why do many people think classical music is so out of reach?*

MS-T: It must be for economic or political reasons. People are kept stupid and have to watch RTL4 and SPS6 (*Dutch TV stations*), and the radio is monopolized by commercial interests. For example, hardly any Dutch schools have good music education. It's just disappearing. Real music, people who actively participate in and make music, seem to vanish from mainstream society. I think music is accessible to everyone, it is just the fact that they are not familiar with it that they see it as out of reach. This may be hubris, but I believe that I can touch EVERYONE with music. I've experienced this in performing, in teaching, in conducting. After I played somewhere, people were crying. That's what I really like. Love to make people cry. That's going to be the headline, right?

AD: *Has music saved your life?*

MS-T: (*Laughs.*) Yes. Music has saved my life; I still feel music is saving my life. No matter what happens to me, no matter how much bad luck I have, from my love-life or whatever, I always feel really strong and I feel I have a weapon in music. It makes me kind of invincible. Nobody can take that away from me. It is a great strength, a great gift. I feel I am really grateful to Fate for having given me this life, this profession.

AD: *At what moment did you realize that?*

MS-T: The first time I realized that music was something in itself worth living for, I was around 24. At the time I was really low and desperate, and then I heard a Schubert piece and suddenly realized that if human beings were capable of making such a beautiful thing that was extremely valuable, life was worth living, if even for that. But I realized this many times since.

AD: *Why are there so few female conductors? Why is conducting typically a male-dominated field?*

MS-T: You have to assume you have authority. You have to feel this. Of course, it is also a very old fashioned idea that the conductor is authoritarian and uses a whip to flog musicians into performing. Today it's much more about collaborating with musicians. But still you have to be very firm, you have to not want to please all the time, women always want to

please. Or a lot of them do. You need to have the guts to not be charming. You must have a certain kind of freedom and authority, and I guess for men it's easier to achieve that.

AD: *Is it more difficult for a woman conductor to be taken seriously, to exert authority before an orchestra?*

MS-T: Yes. The other day, somebody asked me, "what are you wearing?" I realized that when I play piano I always wear a long skirt but I always wear pants when conducting. I would never wear a skirt. Isn't that awful? But it's true. It gives me a feeling of more power, it's like what they call "power suit." Maybe it would be a good experiment to try conducting in a skirt. But I think being taken seriously is more difficult for women. Or maybe it's just internalized sexism.

AD: *Do the musicians you conduct ever become infatuated with you?*

MS-T: Yes, of course, always. It's an aphrodisiac, music. It's a known thing. I have friends who did, and I have also often fallen in love with conductors. Many musicians often fall in love with conductors.

AD: *Does this help working relations among musicians?*

MS-T: Of course, it helps. It makes you want to give your best. I have experienced this several times. It is quite a common thing.

AD: *I understand you're a single mother. How did this make your career more difficult?*

MS-T: It made it VERY difficult. When my children were small and I was playing, they would come to the piano, take my hands and tear them away from the keys. They wanted me all to themselves, they ate me up. Even Martha Argerich stopped playing for a long time because she was a single mother. You either leave your children or leave the music. My mother is an example of the same thing. My mother was also a single mother and pianist. She was one of the youngest students ever to graduate from the conservatory. She was quite a prodigy. But she had children and a husband who left her. You cannot leave your children. I think also this fact makes my ambitions stronger now that my sons are big. More focused on what I want. Because I've been prevented so long, held back.

AD: *Are men sometimes attracted to you because of your music?*

MS-T: Yes, I think so.

AD: *Is that a good thing?*

MS-T: Yes, because it's a real thing. It's not about my tits. It's real. It's me. And it's a human thing.

AD: *Thank you for this interview.*

Arturo Desimone is an Argentinian poet, playwright, visual artist and freelance journalist with an interest in classical music and jazz. He lives in the Netherlands.

VÍTĚZSLAVA KAPRÁLOVÁ



SMUTNÝ VEČER

PÍSEŇ PRO SOPRÁN NEBO TENOR
A KLAVÍR

SAD EVENING

SONG FOR SOPRANO OR TENOR
AND PIANO

AMOS EDITIO
PRÁHA
AM 0067

This project was initiated and financially assisted by The Kapralova Society.
For information on how to order visit www.kapralova.org/EDITION.htm

The Kapralova Society Journal

Editors: Karla Hartl and Eugene Gates

www.kapralova.org/JOURNAL.htm

editor@kapralova.org

Mailing address:

34 Beacham Crescent
Toronto, Ontario
M1T 1N1 Canada

© 2012 The Kapralova Society, All Rights Reserved.

ISSN 1715 4146