

# The Kapralova Society Journal

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## Seaside Lullabies, Erotic Nocturnes, and Flamenco Flourishes: the Art Song of Poldowski

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### Special points of interest:

Poldowski

Kitt

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Regine Poldowski is a little-known name today. Born in Brussels, she became a naturalized British citizen through her mother (she never met her father, the Polish violin virtuoso Henryk Wieniawski [1835–1880] who died on concert tour in Moscow when his daughter was 10 months old.) The details of Poldowski's life—and childhood in particular—are regrettably thin on the ground. Daniella Theresa notes that she was “kind of an elusive figure . . . Poldowski seems to have preferred enjoying life, rather than keeping track of it for future reference.”<sup>1</sup> Myra Brand, who wrote perhaps the seminal work thus far on this composer, describes a life story which has been “pieced together from various sources, including public documents, contemporary periodicals, books, and newspaper articles,” going on to note that her biography, while “sketchy,” discloses “sufficient incidents to characterize her personality and reveal various influences that affected her style of musical composition.”<sup>2</sup>

Like other women pursuing careers in music in her time, Poldowski was gifted, ambitious, and resourceful. Perhaps less commonly, she enjoyed significant success as a composer during her lifetime, seeing works performed across Europe and North America; yet she met many frustrations presenting particularly larger, more “serious” works to a wider public. Her pen name “Poldowski” points this up—lacking a Christian first name, the moniker was likely created with “the gender bias against female composers during her lifetime”<sup>3</sup> in mind; even then, the seeming randomness of this name (bringing to mind other women like Olga Samaroff, a.k.a. Lucy Hickenlooper) may have been a fabrication of two other *male* names—those of her husband, Sir A. E. H. Dean Paul, and her father.<sup>4</sup>

Since Poldowski's death in 1932, her music has more or less completely disappeared from the concert stage, with much of it falling into complete obscurity. Most of what we have

of Poldowski's oeuvre comprises works written in genres deemed “appropriate” for women, such as song and chamber music, although “she also composed for orchestra, wind octet and (wrote) at least two stage works,”<sup>5</sup> as well as a substantial work for piano and orchestra, *Pat Malone's Wake*. Significant performances are scattered throughout her career; in England, conductor Sir Henry Wood (in recognition of what he called Poldowski's “exceptional talent”<sup>6</sup>), gave the première of her Nocturne for orchestra at the 1912 Proms, and later supported the premiere of *Pat Malone's Wake*, with the composer at the piano.

But, for better or worse, it is perhaps in her song repertoire that she has made the most lasting impact as a composer. Looking at this body of work, one sees immediately that her relationship with French poetry is notably conspicuous (save for some early [1900] songs written in English, which are “essentially drawing room ballads that reveal a youthful composer still in search of her compositional voice”<sup>7</sup>). This predilection for the Gallic can be traced to broad strokes in her biography; born a Belgian, Poldowski returned to the continent from England after the birth of her first child, Aubrey Donald, to study in Paris at the Schola Cantorum with Vincent d'Indy. The death of this same son at the age of two would precipitate her return to England; and it is perhaps as a result of this turn of events that she wrote one of her greatest masterpieces for voice and piano: the *Berceuse d'Armorique* (Ex. 1). Not unlike the famous Brahms lullaby for piano solo (op. 117, No. 1), in *Berceuse d'Armorique*, the idea of the cradle song is deceptive; this “berceuse” quickly reveals itself as a haunting elegy, complicated by—as in the Brahms lullaby—unspoken textual inferences. One of Poldowski's rare examples of a strophic song, it is filled with references to the sea (Armorica being a coastal region in Brittany), and opens with “glassy-sounding, high octaves—almost like the tolling of distant bells, and then paral-

lel sequences which sound strangely dissonant . . . it doesn't feel very comforting . . . there's a hint of danger, or death."<sup>8</sup>

Example 1. Poldowski, *Berceuse d'Armorique*, mm. 1–5.

Example 2. Poldowski, *Berceuse d'Armorique*, mm. 12–16.

The parallel sequences represent a classically “Impressionistic” technique: chordal planning, and they occur in the piano at the text “La lune se lève et/la mer s’éveille./Au pays du froid, la houle/des fjords/Chante sa berceuse en/berçant les morts.” Here as well, the vocal part is marked “without expression,” perhaps suggesting “the numbness of grief or inexorability of fate.”<sup>9</sup> The piece’s distinctive planned chords recur, an ominous reminder of death, and the song ends in the same timeless way it began, with icy tolling “bells.” The lasting expressive power of this berceuse is unusually memorable, and perhaps biographical context is partly responsible. David Mooney notes the song “discloses an especially poignant personal note, as it is a lullaby for a dead baby: no doubt sorrowfully inspired by the loss of Poldowski’s own firstborn.”<sup>10</sup>

The text of *Berceuse d'Armorique*, by Anatole Le Braz, elicited from Poldowski a masterpiece, but it is her creative relationship with the texts of another poet which has most helped her name to endure. Graham Johnson notes that “The most important of (Poldowski’s) thirty or so songs were sixteen Verlaine settings (composed between 1915 and 1920). . . . [T]hese songs are always written with an awareness of what her more distinguished predecessors had done with a lyric, and a firm determination to have her own say. . . . [T]here is a mannered fin-de-siècle decadence about these songs, that atmosphere of wilting exquisiteness which English-speaking audiences, and those who have come to love Paris at a distance, take to be the very essence of French culture.”<sup>11</sup>

This “wilting exquisiteness” would be more difficult to find so exquisitely displayed than in Poldowski’s setting of *En Sourdine* (Ex. 3 and 4). The song’s hypnotic opening perfectly mirrors the languor suggested by the text; while Hahn’s setting tends toward the gentle and cradle-song-like, Poldowski’s is decidedly more sensual, indulging sybaritically in harmonies Debussy would have been proud of. No less hypnotic is the vocal contour which seems simultaneously somnambulant and erotic in its stillness. This opening suddenly and overwhelmingly gives way to the rapturous (“Fondons nos âmes, nos cœurs/Et nos sens extasiés”)—the pas-

sion of this moment reflecting the climax of Debussy’s *C’est l’extase*, both in expressive swell and musical vocabulary.

Example 3. Poldowski, *En Sourdine*, mm. 1–5.

Example 4. Poldowski, *En Sourdine*, mm. 8–11.

Later, the piano’s undulating, voluptuous canvas (“Ferre tes yeux à demi/Croise tes bras sur ton sein/Et de ton cœur endormi/Chasse à jamais tout dessein”) gives way to a celestial, intimate colour change (“Les ondes de gazon roux”)—a sleight-of-hand no less perfectly-measured than captivating.

As well as representing some of her best creative work, Poldowski’s Verlaine settings display a fascinating cross-section of her whole output in the genre. Echoing Johnson, David Mooney notes that “[t]hese settings reveal the clear inspiration Poldowski derived from the verses of this great symbolist. Verlaine’s art never failed to draw highly sympathetic responses from her, replete with music of great beauty, intense feeling, vivid color, and palpable sensuality.”<sup>12</sup>

“Vividly colorful” certainly describes the song *Columbine* (Ex. 5 and 6), an energetic romp in the commedia dell’arte tradition, in which the titular character is never mentioned by name, but is clearly the central figure (Verlaine’s text suggests

this circus-like ecosystem as an unexpected mirror to the celestial spheres). Poldowski immediately creates a foot-tapping sense of rhythmic propulsion in the piano; the consistent chordal alternation then making room for gleefully cheeky chromatic contours (almost a mischievous cousin of Carmen's sultry habanera chromaticism). Poldowski doesn't miss any opportunities to exploit the implicit humour in her text—for instance, the irresistible charm of “do mi sol mi fa!” (which she later transforms into intentional chortling with the text “L'implacable enfant”). The rhythmic persistence of this song leads to some infectious moments in the piano—for instance the passage from m. 26, where Poldowski double-times the accents (pianists will also note the moment is not without its difficulty), and later, at m. 38, where the syncopated effect must be combined with a sharp-toothed “fff.”

Example 5. Poldowski, *Columbine*, mm. 1–7.

Example 6. Poldowski, *Columbine*, mm. 36–39.

The *Columbine* song shares much with another example of the “vividly colorful”: the infectious *Dansons la gigue* (Ex. 7), in which Poldowski's musical voice takes on an almost Iberian flavour, particularly in the zapateado-like footwork of the piano accompaniment and in its sweeping gestures (bringing to mind evocatively the flourishes of a flamenco dancer)—perhaps ironic, given that the text was inspired by Verlaine's time in London, while observing the quintessential English dance, the “jig.”

Example 7. Poldowski, *Dansons la Gigue*, mm. 1–3.

Unusually dramatic in range and tessitura, the impulsiveness of *Dansons la gigue*'s expressive journey easily conveys a whole spectrum of character and spirit in 90 seconds; the dramatic (“Dansons la gigue!”), the lovelorn (“J’aimais surtout ses jolis yeux/Plus clairs que l’étoile des cieux/J’aimais ses yeux malicieux”), sorrowfully regretful (“Je me souviens, je me souviens/Des heures et des entretiens/Et c’est le meilleur de mes biens”), and the fun-loving (“Dansons la gigue!”). But perhaps most striking about this little gem is the way it is so lucidly inflected with the power of memory. While the piano seems generally more intent on dancing (peeling off somewhat hilariously in m. 18 with foot-tapping impatience), it remains sensitive to the text's sudden shifts, never superseding the vocalist, even when its tempting suggestion of dance in m. 28 is met with momentary indifference (but at this point in the song, it is evident that one final reflection on old memories is all that is needed to return to the *joie de vivre* so characteristic of Poldowski's own life).

Given what Poldowski does so successfully in the more extroverted of Verlaine's texts, seeing a “Mandoline” (Ex. 8) in her output would naturally spark curiosity, and in the most important ways, this popular text remains just as attractive in her hands as in those of her predecessors. Brand notes the ways in which it contrasts with Fauré and Debussy: “(it contains) a tempo change in each stanza . . . She uses neither repetition of text nor additional syllables, and her melodic line contains fewer leaps and no melismas. These characteristics might be deemed evidence of Poldowski's respect for the poem and her limitation of musical expression in deference to it.”<sup>13</sup> Such a description might give the impression of a relatively conservative effort, but there is virtuosity and flare here to burn. Poldowski immediately exploits the biting pluck of piano strings by insistent repeated-note patterning (which later funnels into a toccata-like cascade in m. 27), and crafts above that an instantly ingratiating melody, with a memorable Dactylic prefix.

Example 8. Poldowski, *Mandoline*, mm. 4–9.

This repeated-note idea has been harnessed to colourful effect both in the accompaniment and in the very cellular detail of the melody, such that the beautiful simplicity of mode shift at “C'est Tircis et c'est Aminte” works magically—the listener is



made to “feel” the harmony, as the melody is made a constant variable. In this episode, the athletic footwork of the piano’s left hand coalesces into a broader, richer canvas, hinting at the final *Presto* flourishes with which the song closes in exciting fashion.

Example 9. Poldowski, *L'heure exquise*, mm. 1–3.

It is perhaps not unusual that Poldowski’s most famous song is again on a text by Verlaine, or that that text is much more familiar in other settings: *L'heure exquise*. A perfect distillation of a generously poetic text, Poldowski’s atmospheric and passionate music unveils a beautiful nocturne. The expressive ecosystem is at first warmly consonant, with an intimately entwined duet between the piano and voice. A small climax on the words “Ô bien-aimée” closes the opening area of the song, followed by the sudden, Neapolitan “frisson” (at first, only suggested). The middle episode is surely one of the most incredible moments of the song; its slow burn to a truly passionate climax at “c’est l’heure” perfectly illuminates the subtle eroticism of the text, as does the gentle calm of the ensuing deliquesce.

Example 10. Poldowski, *L'heure exquise*, mm. 25–27.

Mooney notes of Poldowski and Verlaine that both “had strong artistic temperaments, the inability to learn from life’s mistakes,

failed marriages, experimentation with drugs, dalliances with same-sex relationships, conversion to Catholicism, severe financial problems, and long-term illness—all of which bind these two remarkable talents. It seems inevitable that Poldowski would create so many Verlaine settings.”<sup>14</sup> These settings are all remarkable in their own ways, and the above discussion only scratches the surface of a rich, rewarding, and perennially-neglected repertoire. But beyond this vista, the landscape enfolding Poldowski’s other songs is just as deserving of exploration; take, for instance the hauntingly modernist *Narcisse*, for voice and string quartet: its gossamer textures of quivering chiaroscuro bring to mind Barber’s *Dover Beach*, yet it is truly from a different world, one in which we observe the almost sinfully beautiful fin-de-siècle decadence noted by Johnson. We hope this, and many more of these remarkable settings will be explored in coming years.

#### Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> Daniella Theresia and Suzanne Yeo, Episode 2: Poldowski (Régine Wieniawski), Art Song Podcast, The Eternal Feminine Podcast Series, podcast audio, [soundcloud.com/artsong-podcast/poldowski](https://soundcloud.com/artsong-podcast/poldowski).
- <sup>2</sup> Myra Friesen Brand, *Poldowski (Lady Dean Paul): Her Life and Her Song Settings of French and English Poetry* (DMA. diss., University of Oregon, 1979), 13.
- <sup>3</sup> Karen Kness, *An Analytical Comparison of the Art Song Style of Poldowski with the Styles of Debussy and Fauré* (DMA diss., Indiana University, 2012), 4.
- <sup>4</sup> Theresia and Yeo.
- <sup>5</sup> David Mooney, “Poldowski,” *Grove Music Online*, 2001, [oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusicview/10.1093gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000045481](https://oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusicview/10.1093gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000045481).
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> David Mooney, liner notes for *Poldowski: Art Songs*, Angelique Zuluaga, Gwendolyn Mok, Alexander String Quartet, Ryan Zwahlen, recorded 2016, DE 3538, 2017, CD, 5.
- <sup>8</sup> Theresia and Yeo.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Mooney, *Poldowski: Art Songs*, 6.
- <sup>11</sup> Graham Johnson, *A French Song Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 348.
- <sup>12</sup> Mooney, *Poldowski: Art Songs*, 6.
- <sup>13</sup> Brand, 41.
- <sup>14</sup> Mooney, *Poldowski: Art Songs*, 6.



## Eartha Kitt—The Early Years: A Young Performer Finds Her Voice

Erin Hauger

*In the winter of 1949, Eartha Kitt walked carefully out to the stage through a crowded Parisian nightclub, holding her hastily sewn dress together at the high side split. She glanced at the bandleader who was vamping the introduction to a popular dance tune and staring at her, waiting for her to begin singing. Eartha looked out over the packed club, the lights dazzling her eyes, and let the vamp circle back around to the start again, unable to utter a sound. Finally, almost paralyzed by stage fright, she started to sing softly into the microphone.*

Eartha Kitt was born on January 17, 1927, in the lowlands of South Carolina, between swamplands and cottonfields.<sup>1</sup> Her mother, a maid and a sharecropper, had passed Eartha off to a series of relatives and died before Eartha turned seven. Her father, a White man, was unknown to her. Eartha's own autobiographies chase gothic, scattered memories that speak of abandonment, punishment, and fear. One point remains clear: life for young Eartha Kitt was hard. Conditions for Black Americans in the South had not improved much from enslavement; perhaps the only substantial difference was that they now could walk away from their ancestor's former cotton fields straight into poverty and starvation.<sup>2</sup>

Childhood was not a place of love for Eartha; she simply did not have a family member who was able to give her any. Eartha writes vividly of that time in her autobiographies, with imagery full of bleak landscapes, beatings, hunger, superstition, and hard labor:

As soon as the elders left the house, the children began. The boy would get a peach-tree switch and begin to whip me around the legs in order to make me do his chores as well as mine. The girls would sit and laugh. I remember once the two grand-children tied me in a croaker sack, covering me to the waist. My hands were tied into the sack above my head . . . They proceeded to whip me for what must have been hours, until I cried for the earth to open and swallow me. . . . I was in fear of everything and everyone. I didn't want to make a false move, so everything I did was carefully done to get a smile from someone, anyone. I never said anything unless it was absolutely important or unless I was spoken to.<sup>3</sup>

By age eight, Eartha's life took a dramatic turn. A trunk of clothing and a train ticket to New York City mysteriously arrived, and with it the news that she would be moving in with her Aunt Mamie in Harlem. The benefactor was unknown, though it is certain that none of her relatives could have afforded this expense. Some speculate that Eartha's father, most likely the local White physician who had hired her sixteen-year-old mother as a maid, was persuaded to sponsor this gift by Eartha's own impoverished family. Eartha boarded the train North with a box of catfish sandwiches on white bread, a sweet potato pie, and a bag of wild plums. In many ways, she never looked back.<sup>4</sup>

### Harlem, 1935

*The profound urgency of Black women's culture work cannot be overstated.*<sup>5</sup>

Harlem in the thirties was a hotspot of Black music, having already seen the rise of Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, and Ma Rainey in the previous decade. It was now the center of the swing movement, with Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington holding court at the Cotton Club. White audiences tended to stop there, while speakeasies like the Nest and the Clam House on 133<sup>rd</sup> street catered to Black and Queer audiences, and a young Billie Holiday was starting to make her name in small, local venues.<sup>6</sup>

Eartha was moving in her Aunt Mamie's somewhat tumultuous orbit now; she didn't feel particularly loved or well cared for, but she was right in the center of it all, which suited her fine. At one point, she and Mamie moved into a rooming house where the landlord gave dance lessons to the likes of the Nicholas brothers. Eartha herself had started to take piano lessons and work on her singing, and shown promise in both. It was here that she gave herself the nickname "Kitty Charles," after one of Mamie's boyfriends; "Kitty" would remain her nickname for years to come.<sup>7</sup>

At school, she was becoming well known for her singing ability and for her oration; she was encouraged by a teacher to audition for Metropolitan High School, the forerunner of the now famous New York School for the Performing Arts. She got in. Teaching there was Edith Bank, who insisted that all her charges learn excellent elocution, poise, manners, and the elements of bodily freedom. Defying the Jim Crow laws at the time, Ms. Bank took all her students, regardless of race, to Schlaffly's restaurant on Broadway to develop the proper skills needed to order food and dine with the correct decorum.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, Aunt Mamie and Eartha had moved into a Cuban neighborhood where Eartha discovered Latin street music and the lure of the local teenage boys. Soon, she was out until curfew every night, becoming fluent in Spanish and fluent in the Afro-Cuban rhythms that punctuated the dance halls every weekend. She was popular; she moved well and easily fit into the local, raucous Cuban teenage crowd where she quickly became a favored dance partner. She was in trouble all the time with her Aunt Mamie, but Eartha was beginning to form a performing personality that would stay with her for her lifetime: sophisticated but sensual; aloof but daring.

### The Katherine Dunham Dance Company, 1944–1945

*Black folks' very proximity to racial terror . . . informs their ability to produce unique modes of expression.*<sup>9</sup>

One of the first Black women to attend the University of Chicago and earn a doctoral degree in anthropology, Katherine Dunham was a master choreographer, dancer, ethnologist, and anthropologist. She created the Dunham technique, a movement style that synthesized traditional ballet technique with African American and Afro-Cuban dance elements. This was the basis of

a Caribbean-Afro fusion dance company called the Katherine Dunham Dance Company that toured the world performing many of her original, highly theatrical works. It was a groundbreaking and visionary accomplishment by a Black woman.<sup>10</sup>

Eartha had seen the Katherine Dunham Dance Company perform in a movie called *Stormy Weather* with Lena Horne and Bill “Bojangles” Robinson. By Eartha’s own account, she met a young woman by chance who was on her way to audition for the company, and managed to talk her way into tagging along. When she arrived, she borrowed some audition clothes, and danced her way into a scholarship. This dance company was a huge part of Eartha’s performance upbringing. Here she would learn performance practice and hierarchies, and as a scholarship student, she was expected to put in extra work and do chores to help keep the studio running. The company itself was a part of the African American renaissance: a rejection many of the stereotypes that had been placed upon Black people by the White majority.<sup>11</sup>

Now 18 years old, Eartha was a full-time member of the company, but chaffing at her junior status. She was already starting to stand out as being valuable beyond just her dancing. Vanoye Aikens was the male dance lead at the time, and Katherine Dunham’s dance partner; he remembered: “Kitty was one of the most valuable ones because not only could she dance fairly well, but she had a lovely voice. Miss D. was in love with her voice. We had a thing once or twice a year called the Boule Blanche, the White Ball, and Kitty would always sing at that ball.”<sup>12</sup>

She was also gifted with languages: *Carib Song*, one of Dunham’s large-scale productions, needed a character who could speak fluently in French, and Eartha auditioned for the part. She was sent to a language school where she quickly picked up the accent and was well on her way to language fluency. She was not, however, universally well liked amongst her peers, and was already showing signs of her famous, haughty persona. One of her dance colleagues, Gloria Mitchell remembers:

She had a special part in the show because she sang. But she was very unfriendly at that point. I think the problem was she just hadn’t found herself, you know. She wasn’t important within the company, she was a lesser member because she was new, and her talent hadn’t yet manifested itself beyond the company. She could really be quite an unpleasant person to be around at that time.<sup>13</sup>

### London and Paris 1948-1950

*[Black women remind] us through the brilliant innovation of their work that, though Man’s cruel steamroll of domination, annihilation, industrial expansion, and material consumption has hinged on the long historical exploitation of their bodies as reproductive vessels in bondage and beyond, this was not the end of their embodied will to selfhood. Rather, their musicking is the massive rejoinder to being defined as “the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality” and “reduced” to “being for the captor.”*<sup>14</sup>

Black performers from America had been travelling through European spaces since the end of the Civil War. In almost all cases, playing on the racialized fantasies of White audiences was

the only possible bill of sale, especially for Black women. They negotiated with this currency fluently, always under surveillance, always in fluctuating degrees of danger, and with whatever value their talent, grace, beauty, comedy, and voices would command. If a Black woman performed for a rural, African American audience she would have to subtly change her performance to acknowledge that the entire construct of the performance was made for a White audience. These nuanced changes in performance were unique to Black performers, and in many cases were crucial to their survival of racial violence.

By 1925, Josephine Baker had arrived and seemingly conquered Paris in the Folies Bergère. But Black women, especially Black women performers, were regularly depicted as hypersexual, even bestial in their insatiable and uncontrollably sexual natures.<sup>15</sup> Baker was not immune to this, walking on the streets of Paris with her pet cheetah in its diamond collar; she was the star of many French colonialist movies, where she represented the savage in Southeast Asia and North Africa. She was the epitome of White desire on the big screen: the female primitive turning, bending, and writhing as French modern society bequeathed democracy on its colonies.<sup>16</sup>

Even so, Europe was considered a haven by most African Americans compared to the United States, both before and after World War II. Touring and performing in America meant careful and diligent information gathering about racial tensions in cities and towns where deadly violence could be set off at any moment. By comparison, Europe, though certainly far from free from racial aggression, was a downright peaceful prospect. For many Black Americans, the United States was a place they were happy to have the opportunity to leave.<sup>17</sup>

The Katherine Dunham Dance Company, with Eartha, arrived in London to perform at the Prince of Wales Theater in the Spring of 1948 to perform *Caribbean Rhapsody*, the first African American dance show ever performed in the United Kingdom. Rationing was still in effect, the rooms were freezing, but there was no segregation. Eartha, her roommate Julie, and Julie’s boyfriend, a young Marlon Brando, soon found the best nightlife in town at the Caribbean Club in Soho.

*Caribbean Rhapsody*, meanwhile, was a hit, and Eartha was emerging as one of its more popular performers. As such, she was clashing with Katherine Dunham, who was not pleased with Eartha’s boundary pushing:

Next came Eartha’s own spot in the limelight, and she was determined to outdo her mentor. In a clear act of defiance to the queenly Miss D. she began by customizing her outfit. Instead of having a bandanna covering her hair, as usual, she pinned it to one side. When Miss D. didn’t complain about this small liberty, Eartha was emboldened to try out a scene-stealing move at the end of the Shango routine. She stood on the shoulders of two of the male dancers, then dived to the floor and slithered from one end of the stage to the other.<sup>18</sup>

When the company moved onto Paris, Eartha was certainly hitting her stride; she had men lining up to gift her with cham-



*Eartha Kitt*

pagne, flowers, and offers of dinner and lunches. Her autobiographies show a conflicting picture: one, a girl who couldn't be more bored with these incredibly dull offers, and another, a young woman who couldn't turn down any of them, thrilled to experience everything the world had to offer. The world was also starting to offer the opportunity for a potential solo career.

A local nightclub owner had taken notice of Eartha's singing and offered her a late-night solo spot at a very popular club called Carroll's. There was no problem with the existing Dunham contract as far as they were concerned; she could do that show earlier in the evening, then come to the nightclub for the midnight show. Katherine Dunham, however, did not see it that way; to her mind, you were a full-time, loyal member of the company or you were out. She wrote to her lawyer in New York: "Due to another casualty in the company – Eartha Kitt has abandoned us for Paris night life . . . For a long time I have tried to put the company on an honour system and test their confidence in me. In the case of Eartha Kitt it did not work out."<sup>19</sup>

Eartha was cut off from her Dunham contract immediately. In one of her later autobiographies, Eartha is less restrained in her views about Katherine Dunham's treatment of her: "I could never understand why she cut us down in what seemed to be jealousy and selfishness. 'I am the Queen of this beehive. You will never be anything without me.' Those words haunt me to this day."<sup>20</sup>

On her own now, Eartha's nightclub debut came with a set of Cuban songs rehearsed with the house band, and a hand-sewn white dress with a large, pink silk rose. The club owner decided at the last moment that it was far too modest a dress, and ripped one of the side seams up to the thigh before she took the stage. Eartha was gripped with unaccustomed stage fright; she was now alone in Paris and her success at this gig would decide so much: was her decision to leave the safety of the Dunham Company the right one? Was she good enough to be a solo act? Part of her final number can be seen in the 1951 French-Italian film called *Parigi e sempre Parigi*. It's easy to see her appeal here and her budding star power. A layman might not notice the intense dance training behind what look like improvisatory dance movements. The singing is confident, and in a high, mixed belt, easily formed; it has the fast vibrato that was commonly heard during the mid-twentieth century. The overall effect is compelling, mesmerizing even. At Carroll's that night, the spotlight pinpointed her as she ended the song with smaller and smaller shoulder movements, finally blacking out completely. She was an immediate hit.<sup>21</sup>

Eartha was also in the recording studio for the first time in 1950, cutting four jazz standards with local musicians. Produced by Charles Delaunay, these were not released, perhaps for good reason. The ones you can find to listen to show a timid and youthful jazz singer, unsure of what to do with her voice in the genre.

With these solo musical forays, Eartha was starting to move into the cultural and artistic circles of Paris. She was spending time with the existentialists at Les Deux magots and Café des Fleurs discussing poetry and literature; she had a keen desire to learn and be seen as cultured. She was also becoming well known to fashion designers; Balmain and Schiaparelli would give her anything left over from their couture shows, and she started gathering a large collection of designer dresses.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, she was

also rehearsing for a theatrical extravaganza conceived of by Orson Welles called *Helen of Troy*. A contemporary named Micheál MacLiammóir's published diary describes her: "[She was] discovered by Hilton and Orson in some nightclub in the rue du Colisée, a tiny, curious, bitterly-smiling fascinating creature, who at given moments flashes an electric torch on the audience as she sings in a husky amber voice about Satan, Hell and Eternal Damnation."<sup>23</sup>

The play was a moderate success, with Eartha's rendition of an original Billy Strayhorn song making the most impact. The most important thing it did for her was to give her time and access to people with privilege; Orson Welles would call her "the most exciting woman in the world," and the cast would discuss philosophers and recite Shakespeare into the small hours of the morning. Eartha loved every minute of it, even though relations between her and Welles grew strained as she emerged as the star of the show. Eventually, she claimed he would station his large body directly in front of her on stage, so her lines appeared to emanate from him, as if by magic.<sup>24</sup>

### **Finding Eartha, 1951–1952**

*As women who listen, who record and bear witness as distinct and often "noisy" records of racial, gender, class, and sexual specificity in the margins, they trouble the unspoken antitechnological romance of the "aura," that Benjaminian concept of aesthetic essence and presumptive inviolability so often attached to white masculine art in our cultural imaginary. That which is "authentic" and "original" is made by white men. That which is mimetic and lacks innovation is made by everyone else.*<sup>25</sup>

Back in Paris, that nuanced jazz sound that had eluded her in the recording studio had found firm footing in a song that would become one of her signatures: "C'est si bon." Its whimsy has an origin story in forgotten lyrics: apparently Eartha had to improvise the first time she sang it, leading to an impromptu creation of a character who switched between French and English, lazily demanding the best things in life with extended rolled "r's." A character was forged that would carry her throughout her career: a sophisticated sex kitten.

After the passing of her Aunt Mamie, Eartha found herself back in London, this time as front-page news on *The Daily Mirror* with the caption "Eartha: Star of the Savage Songs:"

Coloured Cabaret star Eartha Kitt, 22, who arrived in London yesterday, has come here to sing "some of the world's most barbaric songs." Eartha will put on her brand of barbarity at a London nightclub. To soften the blow she says she will wear the very latest in sophisticated Paris gowns. Eartha was 'discovered' by Orson Welles, who said she "was his 'feminine ideal'." He took her on a tour of Continental night clubs and everywhere they went she stopped the show with her savage songs.<sup>26</sup>

Eartha Kitt

Once again, the currency that Black women had to offer White audiences becomes excruciatingly clear. Here was a young woman, highly trained and talented enough to book international gigs, whom promoters had reduced to “savage barbarity,” all to entice and simultaneously placate White audiences. Eartha knew from watching the Black women performers go before her that she would be accepted as hypersexual and bestial; indeed, she cultivated the image of “feline” throughout her career. But she was already weaving in the idea of the sophisticate: the untouchable, unbothered, haute couture wearing, educated, cultured woman. Perhaps even a piece of who she had become. Her daughter, Kitt, describes her mother like this:

My mother may have been known as an international sex symbol—an image she carefully cultivated to her dying day—but here’s the first big secret that I’ll share with you: Behind the scenes, my mother was far from risqué, in the sense of being lewd or the least bit crude. She was quite proper. She shunned profanity. Shied away from almost any mention of sex. You might even say she was a prude . . . She was also very much a stickler for manners. She demanded good behavior . . . She expected me to act like a lady.<sup>27</sup>

Eartha accepted a series of gigs in Istanbul, where she discovered another important piece to add to her repertoire: *Uska Dara*. Her ability to pick up other languages quickly was becoming a hallmark. While in Istanbul, the wife of an admiral dared her to learn a Turkish folk song and add it to her repertoire at the following evening’s show. A 1953 performance of the song shows her singing this relatively simple folk song, rather low in her range and with some small spoken asides to add character to the performance.<sup>28</sup> A 1967 performance of the same song shows a seasoned performer who understands the power of silence in comedic timing, knows her camera angles, and how to turn a simple song into a standout.<sup>29</sup>

Finally feeling that it might be time to return stateside, Eartha secured a contract with a William Morris agent, Monte Proser, to sing at La Vie En Rose in New York City. Her European successes both energized publicity and terrified the still young Eartha who knew that 1950s’ America was a very different place than Europe. Unsure of herself and trusting her management, she listened to Proser and his team who encouraged her to sing in all seven of her learned languages and lean even harder into the sexual innuendo in her songs.<sup>30</sup>

Eartha wrote about the experience of singing the debut in her first autobiography:

I remember a blonde sitting at the ringside. Her reaction pinched my senses as each song started. Her expression changed as my songs changed. She leaned back in her chair with an expressionless face. As another language came up, she slumped. Still another, she folded her arms. Another, she looked at the man who sat with her. When I started my Turkish song, she shrugged her shoulders. My English song took her by surprise, and the German one made her exclaim, “Now really!”<sup>31</sup>

Eartha’s later autobiography records the rest of this phrase, omitted in her earlier book: “Now really, what is that, an educated n\*\*\*\*\*?”<sup>32</sup> As always, she refrains from commenting on how racism affected her, but she does tell us that above all, she wanted to be accepted at home, and to prove to everyone “who had abused and rejected” her that she had talent.<sup>33</sup> This stage-side, blatantly racist rejection of everything she had worked for and who she had become must have been a massive blow to Eartha. Although the reviews of the show were not bad, she felt she was a complete flop and failure.

The show only ran for two weeks and was canceled. For two soul-searching and rather desperate months, Eartha was without work, until Max Gordon from the Village Vanguard approached her about replacing a young Harry Belafonte as their headliner. She opened there in full control of her repertoire, choosing to use a mixture of her successful songs from London and Paris. She was an immediate hit, with her contract quickly extending from two to fourteen weeks.

From this point on, Eartha Kitt was on her way to stardom. She continued to hone the persona of the sophisticated yet jaded woman in complete control of her sexuality with repertoire such as “Monotonous” and “Santa Baby,” and enjoyed a long and successful career in television and film based on this work.

In a 1969 interview with Dick Cavett on *The Dick Cavett Show*, it is extraordinary to watch this intelligent, small, strong woman. Her accent shows no traces of her birthplace, or of Harlem, rather of someone highly trained in elocution and diction. She listens intently, and it is clear she isn’t there to provide a soundbite or a plug for her book. At one point, Cavett says: “The theater is the refuge of the unhappy child. The people that make you laugh on the screen owe it all to a rotten childhood.”<sup>34</sup> Eartha responds:

I think that one of the main reasons that I am in show business is because I have this tremendous desire to be loved. But I didn’t want to be loved just because I exist. I wanted to earn that love and affection. And I think that you have a greater way emotionally and also much more satisfyingly in many ways, when you are in front of an audience and you can feel the vibrations of people, loving you back. You get an immediate response. Whereby from a guardian, or a mother and a father, it takes a long time before it really starts coming back to you that your mother and father really do love you.<sup>35</sup>

An audience might have replaced parental love for Eartha Kitt, but her skill, talent, grit, intelligence, and tenacity in achieving that love is remarkable. As a Black female performer moving through a dangerous world, she may never have revealed her true self to that audience. From the poor sharecropper’s daughter to the teenager dancing the night away on the streets of Harlem. From the young modern dancer to the sophisticated young woman in Paris. From the nightclub siren, blazing her way across Europe, to the vulnerable young woman rejected for her race in America, then finally emerging as the



sexy, purring feline creation we saw on television and film. She was all these people and yet the sum of none. Eartha Kitt lived and performed on her own terms, a remarkable singer, musician, dancer, actress and performer.

#### Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> John Williams, *America's Mistress* (London: Quercus Editions, 2013), 23.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid, 33–36.
- <sup>3</sup> Eartha Kitt, *Thursday's Child* (London: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1956), 14–15.
- <sup>4</sup> Eartha Kitt, *Thursday's Child*, 31.
- <sup>5</sup> Daphne A. Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021), 14.
- <sup>6</sup> Williams, *America's Mistress*, 49.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid, 52–53.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid, 59.
- <sup>9</sup> Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution*, 21.
- <sup>10</sup> "Katherine Dunham Biography (1909–2006)," The Katherine Dunham Centers for the Arts and Humanities, 2024, [kdcah.org/about-miss-dunham](https://kdcah.org/about-miss-dunham).
- <sup>11</sup> Williams, *America's Mistress*, 71–72.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid, 86–87.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid, 90.
- <sup>14</sup> Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution*, 22.
- <sup>15</sup> Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Duke University Press, 2008), 239.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid, 254.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid, 242.
- <sup>18</sup> Williams, *America's Mistress*, 134–35.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid, 155–56.
- <sup>20</sup> Eartha Kitt, *Confessions of a Sex Kitten* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1989), 66.
- <sup>21</sup> "Eartha Kitt 1951 in *Parigi E Sempre Parigi*," *Don Dan Music Channel*, YouTube, [youtube.com/watch?v=fvI5QcUswSA](https://youtube.com/watch?v=fvI5QcUswSA).
- <sup>22</sup> Kitt, *Confessions of a Sex Kitten*, 68.
- <sup>23</sup> Williams, *America's Mistress*, 172.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid, 178.
- <sup>25</sup> Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution*, 30.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid, 196–97.
- <sup>27</sup> Kit Shapiro, *Eartha & Kitt* (New York: Penguin Books, 2021), 11.
- <sup>28</sup> "A Turkish Tale in Turkish (Uskudara Giderken) 1953," *Vintage Video Clips*, YouTube, [youtube.com/watch?v=knRnnTpxl-w](https://youtube.com/watch?v=knRnnTpxl-w).
- <sup>29</sup> "Eartha Kitt 'Uska Dara' (From 'Something Special,' 1967)," VideoOverload, YouTube, [youtube.com/watch?v=bYQLB-fnZT8](https://youtube.com/watch?v=bYQLB-fnZT8).
- <sup>30</sup> Williams, *America's Mistress*, 212.
- <sup>31</sup> Kitt, *Thursday's Child*, 234–35.
- <sup>32</sup> Kitt, *Confessions of a Sex Kitten*, 105.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> "I've Had This Tremendous Desire to Be Loved – Eartha Kitt," *The Dick Cavett Show*, YouTube, [youtube.com/watch?v=buqL-1ft-s4](https://youtube.com/watch?v=buqL-1ft-s4).
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.



New arrangements of Kaprálová's works released on record:

**Forever, op. 12 No. 1** arr. for violoncello and piano by Laura van der Heijden. *Pohádka – Tales from Prague to Budapest*. Laura van der Heijden, Jâms Coleman. Chandos Chan 20227 (2021). Recorded 24–27 July 2021 at Potton Hall, Dunwich, Suffolk.

**Tales of a Small Flute**, played on piccolo by Haika Lübcke. *Piccolo Legends*. Haika Lübcke, Pamela Stahel, Sarah Verrue, Hendrik Heilmann. Prospero PROSP0053 (2023). Recorded 20–22 December 2021 at Radiostudio Zürich.

**Elegy**, adapted for saxophone by Kathrin von Kieseritzky. *Komponistinnen im Exil*. Kathrin von Kieseritzky, Luisa Serina Splett. PrimTON pT-1263 (2023). Recorded 2022 at Tonstudio Ölberg-Kirche Berlin.



## Kaprálová at the Proms: The Bachtrack Interview

On August 28, 2024, Kaprálová's *Military Sinfonietta* will be performed at the BBC Proms by the Czech Philharmonic under the baton of Jakub Hrůša, the first time in the festival's history. In anticipation of the event, *Bachtrack* conducted the following interview, printed here in the original, unabridged version.

*Bachtrack:* Before her early death at the age of 25, Vítězslava Kaprálová (1915–1940) demonstrated extraordinary gifts as a composer, writing music in almost every genre. Could you give a brief introduction to the origins of her music?

*Karla Hartl:* Kaprálová's musical development was first shaped by her parents, both musicians: her mother Vítězslava was a voice teacher, her father Václav Kaprál, Janáček's pupil, was a composer, pianist, and a college professor. Kaprálová received her musical education at conservatories in Brno, Prague, and Paris. In Brno, she studied composition under Vilém Petrželka; in Prague, she was a student of Vítězslav Novák. She was also tutored in instrumentation by her friend, composer Theodor Schaefer; later in Paris, she had the opportunity to consult Bohuslav Martinů about her orchestral compositions. Kaprálová's studies of conducting also helped to enhance her skills in orchestration. She received a solid foundation at the Brno Conservatory from Zdeněk Chalabala, who later became an opera dramaturg and conductor at the Prague National Theatre, and advanced her studies under conductors Václav Talich, at the Prague Conservatory's Master School, and Charles Munch, at the École normale de musique in Paris.

The music of her father, Václav Kaprál, made a particularly deep impression on the young composer. It is evident in the melancholic lyricism inspired by Moravian folk melodies that can be found in a number of her compositions. Kaprálová's love of folk music was further fostered by Bohuslav Martinů who also helped to direct her creative development toward modern, rational tectonics. She was more attracted to Igor Stravinsky's music, however; she studied his ballet *Petrushka* extensively, and its influence can be found in several of her orchestral compositions.

*Bachtrack:* Vítězslava's father, Václav Kaprál, was himself a composer, and one of Janáček's few composition students. What impact did this musical background have on his daughter?

*Karla Hartl:* One would expect that Kaprálová would not have been able to escape Janáček's influence, since she was growing up in the family of one of his students, during Janáček's lifetime and the period of the greatest successes of his music. In a way she would not – Janáček's influence was already present in the music of her father, and his music was in turn influencing hers. Nevertheless, while she undoubtedly understood Janáček's importance and was intrigued by some of his ideas, she was not tempted to follow them.

*Bachtrack:* Kaprálová joined the Brno Conservatory at the age of 15, already composing for some time before then. Her graduation piece was a well-received Piano Concerto. Can you talk about this piece and others from her period at Brno?

*Karla Hartl:* There are quite a few works from this period that could be mentioned: the piano suite, later orchestrated under the title *Suite en miniature*, op. 1; two violin pieces of op. 3; Two Songs on poems of R. Bojko, op. 4, in which we can hear for the first time the composer's masterly piano accompaniment which she used so effectively to underline the vocal lines of her songs; the song cycle *Sparks from Ashes*, op. 5; and the song *January* for voice and instrumental quintet. But it is the Sonata *Apasionata* that represented an enormous leap in Kaprálová's musical development. Although it was written by an eighteen-year-old student of the third-year composition class, the stylistic sophistication and inventiveness of this work place it far above the level of a mere student creation. Indeed, the sonata ranks high not only among Kaprálová's piano oeuvre but also in the Czech piano sonata literature of the twentieth century. The first movement is in traditional sonata form, whereas the second is conceived as a theme with six variations. With each new variation the dependence on the theme loosens and the texture becomes more complex, posing increasing technical demands on the performer.

The sonata prepared Kaprálová well for another large-scale work, the three-movement Piano Concerto in D Minor which she composed during the last year of her studies at the Brno Conservatory. The first movement in sonata form is still grounded in the romantic idiom; the second movement, unusually short and dominated by a dark melody, is in contrapuntal style; however, the last movement in rondo form already anticipates a new creative period that was to blossom during Kaprálová's studies at the Prague Conservatory. Kaprálová officially graduated from the Brno Conservatory by conducting the first movement (*Allegro entusiastico*) of her concerto which more than amply demonstrated that she was able to meet the highest formal and technical requirements placed on a conservatory graduate. The concerto was very well received by the audience and critics alike, and continues to be her most popular orchestral work.

*Bachtrack:* Kaprálová then spent a few years at the Prague Conservatory – studying both composition and conducting, and continuing to compose prolifically. Can you talk about her music of this period, and her ambitions for the future?

*Karla Hartl:* During her studies at the Prague Conservatory Kaprálová composed some of her best-known music, such as the song cycle *For Ever*, op. 12 and the art song *Waving Farewell*, op. 14. Other noteworthy creations of the composer's 'Prague period' include her maliciously witty *Grotesque Passacaglia*, the splendid String Quartet, op. 8, and her most popular work for piano solo, *April Preludes*, op. 13, which she dedicated to Czech piano virtuoso Rudolf Firkušný. The art song *Waving Farewell* (*Sbohem a šáteček* in Czech) in particular deserves at least a bit of an introduction. Kaprálová composed the song during the last days of her graduate studies at the Prague Conservatory, inspired by the verses of Vítězslav Nezval, which also conveyed her feelings about saying goodbye to her studies, to "the most beautiful city of Prague" (as the dedication on the score reads), and to her beloved teacher at the Conservatory's Master School, Vítězslav Novák. When she showed him the song during their penultimate class, he praised it as having an operatic quality, much to her delight. The motif of a falling major second on the word "sbohem" (goodbye) permeates the music and emerges again and again as the basic structural element as well as the message of this great song. It is even more magnificent

in the orchestral version which Kaprálová finished a year later in Paris. The inclusion of this song in the international art-song repertoire is long overdue.

It was the composer's graduation work, the *Military Sinfonietta*, however, which brought Kaprálová her first international recognition. It was premiered by the Czech Philharmonic under the baton of the composer on 26 November 1937 in Prague; and the next year, on 17 June 1938, it opened the 16th ISCM Festival in London, where Kaprálová had the honour to represent new Czech music. The British premiere of the *sinfonietta*, in which Kaprálová conducted the BBC Orchestra, was transmitted across the ocean to the United States, where it was broadcast by CBS. According to a review in *Time* magazine, the twenty-three-year-old Kaprálová not only fared well in the international competition at the festival, but she also became the star of the opening orchestral concert. Martinů's review of the concert and the festival, which was published in the Czech daily *Lidové noviny* on 28 June 1938, describes Kaprálová's international debut as follows:

[H]er performance was awaited with interest as well as some curiosity—a young woman with a baton is quite an unusual phenomenon—and when our "little girl conductor" (as the English newspapers called her) appeared before the orchestra, she was welcomed by a supportive audience. She stood before the orchestra with great courage, and both her composition and performance earned her respect and applause from the excellent BBC Orchestra, the audience, and the critics. . . . Vítězslava Kaprálová's international debut is a success, promising and encouraging.

*Bachtrack:* Kaprálová's *Military Sinfonietta* capped off her period in Prague, proving a great success under her own baton. This year it will be performed for the first time at the BBC Proms – what can new listeners expect from this piece?

*Karla Hartl:* The *Military Sinfonietta* is a stirring, lushly orchestrated composition, about 15 minutes long. Kaprálová composed it in reaction to the military threat to her beloved homeland and dedicated it to Edvard Beneš, then president and supreme commander of the Czechoslovak Republic. She opens her *sinfonietta* with a



brass fanfare which immediately evokes the rousing spirit of the composition. Written in sonata form, the work is built on three themes. The military call of the trumpet in the opening measures foreshadows the first theme of *Tempo di marcia*, introduced a few measures later in violins (m. 13). The theme is contrasted by a peaceful, singing theme *Andante e cantabile*, carried by the oboes (introduced in m. 69). The third theme, *Allegro con brio*, built on the interval of a fourth, (the theme first appears in violins in m. 109), marks a return to the highly energetic character of the composition.

We are lucky to have Kaprálová's own description of the work in the 16<sup>th</sup> ISCM Festival Guide. She explains that in her *sinfonietta* she used "the language of music to express [*my*] emotional relationship toward the questions of national existence, a subject permeating the consciousness of the nation at the time." She continues:

The composition does not represent a battle cry, but it depicts the psychological need to defend that which is most sacred to the nation. The mood is set at the very beginning by the sound of the small drum which precedes a short trumpet fanfare. The aggressive main theme, in the Aeolian mode, is sounded in several repeated variations and reaches a climax which breaks into a tender singing theme gently accented by soft rhythms. The closing theme emphasizes even more forcefully the combative character of the composition, building on the brittle quartal harmonies. As the exposition ends, the deep singing voices of the basses and cellos slowly emerge representing the slow movement whose progress is interrupted at intervals by a dance rhythm. In the middle part of the composition the execution of the theme built from the previous thematic material of the exposition culminates in the singing of the trumpets in the joyful six-four chord over the root in F major. The recapitulation continues in the same emotional tone, molding even the song motif into the character of the main theme. The concluding theme retains only the interval of the fourth which is used in the broadly based coda, culminating in the explosive climax of the whole orchestra and the majestic and victorious exultation of the last notes.

*Bachtrack:* Kaprálová spent the later 1930s in Paris, and grew particularly close to Bohuslav Martinů. Can you talk a little about their musical – and personal – relationship?

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*Karla Hartl:* The musical connection came first but the personal one inevitably followed. Kaprálová brought passion to Martinů's life – she was full of life, charismatic, intelligent, incredibly talented and passionate about music. They would spend hours discussing and arguing over the tenets of composition. Furthermore, she was his compatriot, i.e., someone who could grasp and relate immediately to all cultural references in their conversation. And, with the war imminent and their homeland in danger, they soon had yet another deep connection. Kaprálová's charisma and immense passion for life inspired the aging Martinů. His *Tre ricercari*, the intimate String Quartet No. 5, and the powerful Double Concerto, all composed in 1938, reflect some of the strong emotions she stirred in him. He, on the other hand, helped direct her music, as already mentioned, toward more modern, rational tectonics. Except for the neobaroque *Partita* for strings and piano, however, we do not find much of his influence in Kaprálová's music.

Martinů truly admired his young colleague's music and did not hesitate to open important doors for her. The following are just a few examples: he introduced Kaprálová to composers associated with Triton, an important Parisian society for contemporary music, and recommended her *Variations sur le carillon de l'église St-Étienne-du-*

*Mont*, op. 16 to one of his publishers, La Sirène éditions musicales, whose catalogue was later bought by Eschig. He also had her conduct his Harpsichord Concerto in Paris, on 2 June 1938, with Marcelle de Lacour as soloist.

In 1947, Martinů was asked to contribute to a collective monograph on Kaprálová (edited by Přemysl Pražák). He wrote:

The loss to our music is greater than we might think. I know it, because I was there when she was transforming into an artist. . . . I was not her teacher, just a mentor . . . and I can say that only rarely have I had the opportunity to encounter such a genuine talent and such confidence in the task she wanted to and was to accomplish. It was a pleasure to argue about musical problems with her. Actually, I was learning along with her, and it was a joy as well as an experience to see the fight between the soul and the material again. Only rarely have I met someone with such a sharp sense of envisioning a work before it was written down . . . [who] actually understands how the parts of the whole relate to each other, whose primary interest is in the whole. [Only] then can you say that you have encountered a first-class artist, and that was the very case with Vitulka [Kaprálová].

*Bachtrack*: Despite only 9 years of active work, Kaprálová wrote prolifically and with great maturity. How would you sum up the music she left us? What other favourite works of hers would you like to mention?

*Karla Hartl*: Yes, despite the brevity of her creative life, which spanned barely a decade, Kaprálová managed to leave behind a substantial and relatively sizeable and diverse catalogue of works, including piano, chamber, orchestral and vocal compositions – forty-six in all, if we exclude the juvenilia, torsos and missing pieces. They display the versatility of the composer's musical talent, with its typical high energy, passion, lyricism, intelligent humour, spontaneity but also discipline. Moreover, her music offers such an abundance of ideas that it never becomes boring, and you will always find something new in it with each repeated listening.


Among the most valuable works by Kaprálová are her highly sophisticated compositions for piano. She enriched Czech piano literature significantly not only with her sonata, preludes, variations, and passacaglias for solo piano, but also with a late romantic piano concerto and a neo-

baroque partita for strings and piano. Her songs occupy a similarly important position. They represent one of the late climaxes of Czech art song and are also notable for the exceptional quality of the poetry she chose to set. Among Kaprálová's chamber works, the string quartet and the ritornel for violoncello and piano stand out; of her orchestral oeuvre, it is the avant-garde compositions of her Parisian period – the aforementioned partita and the double concertino – but also the early piano concerto and, of course, the sinfonietta which will be presented at this year's BBC Proms, performed by the Czech Philharmonic under the baton of Jakub Hrůša.

You will find many more details about Kaprálová's music on her official website [kapralova.org](http://kapralova.org). If you are also interested in her life, I recommend this digest from the *Composer of the Week*, produced by BBC Radio 3 on the occasion of Kaprálová's centenary in 2015: [bbc.co.uk/programmes/p035d3gh](http://bbc.co.uk/programmes/p035d3gh).

28  
AUG

**LONDON, UK - BBC PROMS - CZECH PHILHARMONIC - KAPRÁLOVÁ, DVOŘÁK, JANÁČEK**  
7:30 pm ROYAL ALBERT HALL - LONDON



**EVENT DETAILS**  
Performing with,  
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**Corinne Winters** soprano  
**Bella Adamova** alto  
**David Butt Philip** tenor  
**Brindley Sherratt** bass
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**TIME**  
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## Women of the 19th-Century Salon: Jeannette Boutibonne

Tom Moore

While Parisian painter Charles-Édouard Boutibonne (1816–1897) is still well known to art connoisseurs, his paintings hanging on the walls of international art museums, his younger sister, a certain Jeannette Boutibonne, who had a brilliant career as a pianist and contralto during her life, is entirely forgotten today.

The two siblings were born to Louis (Ludwig) Boutibonne and Wilhelmina Boutibonne (née Vietoris), émigrés living in Pest (today's Budapest), Hungary. To my knowledge, there is no documentary evidence linking Louis and Wilhelmina to Paris specifically or France more generally. An encyclopedia states that Charles-Édouard was “born in Pesth on July 8, 1816, as the son of Louis Boutibonne and Wilhelmine Vietoris [sic].”<sup>1</sup> We have no reliable documentation for Jeannette's date of birth; the earliest reference to her age dates from May 1836, when she is said to have been fifteen. That would make 1821 her year of birth. Somewhat later, in February 1838, she is said to have been fourteen years of age, which would mean she was born in 1823 or 1824.

The earliest evidence I have found for Louis in Pest dates from 1822: an address book describes his profession as “Sprachmeister” (language instructor) and tells us that he also gave instruction in drawing, and gives his address as “neu Markplatz” no. 287.<sup>2</sup> He also appears as Sprachmeister in a directory to the city of Pest from 1827, with his address now at no. 328 of the new Markplatz.<sup>3</sup> We can also see that his artistic skills were not inconsiderable, judging from a set of his lithographs depicting nature scenes of the Gömör County in Hungary, published in 1825.<sup>4</sup>

Wilhelmine Boutibonne, née Vietoris bears a Latinate surname that was not uncommon in Central Europe at the time. The name in the vernacular would be “cooper.” The most frequent occurrence of the surname in Germany is close to the Danish border, in locales such as Flensburg, Kiel, and Emden, all port cities.<sup>5</sup> It is thus not unreasonable to surmise that the Danish nationality ascribed to Jeannette Boutibonne comes from her mother. Wilhelmine Boutibonne née Vietoris is listed in two different documents produced by the Women's Association in Pest, dating from 1830 and 1834, indicating both her maiden and her married names.<sup>6</sup>

### A Chronology

#### 1829

The first reference to Jeannette Boutibonne in concert dates from June 30, 1829, when she would have been eight years old or younger but certainly very young for a concert at the municipal theater in Pest. She is listed as playing the Clavier (piano) and the physharmonica, a reed organ invented barely ten years earlier by Anton Haeckl in Vienna.<sup>7</sup>

#### 1831

A rave review of a benefit concert in the Pest Theater mentions “Miss Boutibonne” among the performers.<sup>8</sup>

#### 1833

Jeannette is mentioned in the Viennese musical chronicle *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* as one of the performers of a septet by Johann N. Hummel<sup>9</sup> and the Concert Variations by Henri Herz.<sup>10</sup> She also sang a duet by Donizetti with “the beloved dilettante Mr. Klein.”<sup>11</sup>

#### 1834

Jeannette is mentioned as performing in the septet by Hummel at the National Casino in Pest on April 27: “The final movement of the grand Septet by Hummel was performed with great fervor and feeling by Miss Boutibonne, along with violin, viola, bass, and two oboes.”<sup>12</sup>

#### 1835

A period review mentions that “Miss Boutibonne, whom we had previously known only as a pianist but who also developed a beautiful alto voice, sang a lied by Lachner.”<sup>13</sup>

#### 1836

A very busy year for Jeannette Boutibonne. On April 9 she gave a concert at Vienna's Musikverein, performing the first movement from Hummel's septet along with the fellow musicians Lewy,<sup>14</sup> Khayll,<sup>15</sup> Sellner,<sup>16</sup> Borzaga,<sup>17</sup> and others. The program also included a duet from an opera by Rossini, which she sang with Arcadius Klein. *Der Wanderer* reported:

On Saturday, April 9, the concert of the young musician, Jeannette Boutibonne from Pesth, took place in the hall of the Musikverein, which was honored with a large audience. The young concert-giver first appeared as a pianist in the Septet by Hummel, and showed a significant talent . . . Then she sang a duet from Semiramide with Mr. Klein and impressed everyone with a good voice, correct method, and pleasing performance. Finally she played variations with considerable fluency and powerful expression; after all her appearances she was greeted with much applause, and called back for bows several times.<sup>18</sup>

Another review of the same performance appeared in the *Blaetter für geistige Thätigkeit*:

Miss Jeanette Boutibonne gave a concert on the 9<sup>th</sup> of the month before a select and numerous audience in the hall of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde . . . one of the most successful we have had the opportunity to hear in a long time. The concert-giver played the first movement of the grand Hummel Septet and the Variations by Herz on a theme from William Tell with great fluency and the most soulful performance. She proved that she, still at a tender age, has reached a high level of artistic training. As a singer, she delighted us with a duet from Semiramide performed with Mr. Klein, and although she still needs further training in singing, her performance deserves all the more praise



because something similar at such a young age can certainly be counted as extremely rare.<sup>19</sup>

The *Wiener Zeitschrift* reported on April 21, 1836, that “Miss Boutibonne unfolded, in her duet from Rossini’s *Semiramide* performed with Mr. Klein, a voice that was very powerful for her age and rich in its cantabile, sounding especially well in the middle register.” On May 15, Jeannette participated in a musical event presented by the Philharmonic Society in Munich and apparently “drove her listeners, through her splendid playing, to stormy applause.”<sup>20</sup> A review of another concert, which took place on May 28, 1836, is the only one in which we learn about Jeannette Boutibonne’s younger sister, Auguste Boutibonne. Since Jeannette was certainly no older than fifteen at this date, Auguste must have been younger only by a year or two. It cannot be ruled out that some of the later reviews mentioning a “Miss Boutibonne” may refer to her rather than to Jeannette.

On May 28, Miss Boutibonne from Pesth gave a great vocal and instrumental concert at the grand Odeon Hall. One will not soon find a more satisfied audience than the one that gathered that evening in our magnificent music-hall, because the young concert-giver was really surprisingly exceptional in her playing; she electrified the audience. . . The conclusion of the concert was Hummel’s Notturmo for Physharmonica with piano accompaniment, played by the concert-giver and her younger sister, Auguste.<sup>21</sup>

The *Münchener Tagblatt* agreed with the previous reviewer:

On Sunday, May 28, the concert by Miss Jeannette Boutibonne, already announced in the Tagblatt, took place. Without any partiality, it must be counted among the most exquisite musical pleasures that have been offered for a long time. . . Miss Boutibonne displayed a virtuosity of the first magnitude on the piano, combining fluency, purity, and expression with an immense sensitivity.<sup>22</sup>

In June, Jeannette gave a concert in Stuttgart to another rave review from which we learn that she “is on her way to Paris to [receive] the best training, in accordance with great models.”<sup>23</sup> Finally in August, a reviewer for the *Allgemeine Theaterzeitung* reported:

The young pianist Jeanette Boutibonne from Pesth, who passed through our city on her way to France, and, as is well known, gave a concert on the fortepiano at which she enjoyed undivided applause, has now also visited the capitals of the most distinguished German states, and the public papers are making the most favorable comments about her achievements. In addition, she was accepted as a member of the Philharmonic Society in Munich, and in several other cities.<sup>24</sup>

### 1837

Jeannette continued to charm audiences with her playing in Paris, where she gave concerts in June and July:

A very remarkable literary and musical evening has just been held there, featuring, among others, Mademoiselle Boutibonne, a distinguished pianist whose brilliant and lively playing was applauded in *several improvisations* [emphasis added—ed.].<sup>25</sup>

An audience both numerous and distinguished gathered [at] the Prytanée . . . for one of the most beautiful concerts given this year, a concert that will leave lasting memories. First, we saw the appearance of Miss Netti [sic] Boutibonne, both an excellent singer and a distinguished pianist; her beautiful contralto voice was accompanied by that of Miss Z.<sup>26</sup>

### 1838

We are fortunate to have a source for the address for Miss Boutibonne who is listed at 28, rue Cadet, at an address which still exists today. The conclusion of the review published in the *Journal des Demoiselles* provides a glimpse into the culture and lives of the many women pianists/composers active in Parisian musical life, and the girls and young women who were their students at that time. The focus of music historians has often been only on concert life, but we know from reports of this period that simply judging by the numbers, there were frequently more women active as pianists, even at the conservatory.

Instrumental music is full of high thoughts, of noble and sweet sentiments, which are understood by every heart; vocal music is associated with poetry, drama, morality, spirit grace, gaiety; all this belongs to our country. These are the reflections suggested to me by the concert by Miss Boutibonne, French through her father, Hungarian by birth, who already has a very great talent for the piano. In seeing her perform, from memory, the elegant variations by Bertini, or the brilliant waltzes of Chopin, one would say that she is playing with her dear instrument, that they are chatting together, that she is telling him her sorrows and her joys, questioning him, listening to him, answering him. One does not see work, but rather a young woman, a piano, a soul seeking an echo for her soul. Oh! I would like to possess music thus and thus be possessed by it; how I would like for mother to give to me as my piano teacher the gracious Jeannette Boutibonne; with what impatience I would wait for the hour of her lesson; I have seen the sun once more, I have felt its rays, I dream of spring, and I hasten to send you one of the first flowers that it will make blossom.<sup>27</sup>

### 1839

On February 20, *Le Menestrel* published a review of a concert in which Jeannette participated.

**1840**

Jeannette gave a recital or possibly two in the spring. They were reviewed in the *Journal des Demoiselles* and *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, more critically in the latter:

A few days ago I was at the concert given by Miss Boutibonne, a very young Danish woman about whom I have already spoken to you, and whose fine talent for the piano seems that it cannot increase further – feeling, strength, lightness, all is admirable in her playing; and then she also sings; her voice is a contralto that gives you the shivers, and it is a great advantage to have your piano teacher also be your voice teacher.<sup>28</sup>

It remains for me to speak of the concert-giver, Miss Boutibonne. She is a pianist, and a pianist of merit, not of the first rank, although she does very well in the more arduous passages. But it is not enough to triumph over difficulties, they must be executed with ease, a sort of abandon which does not even allow their difficulty to be suspected, and which does not inspire either defiance or concern in the listener. From this point of view, Miss Boutibonne would perhaps have done better not to measure herself against the finale of Thalberg's *Moise*, this eternal finale that every pianist wants to play; it would show originality, certainly, to not tackle it. It requires so much vigour and colossal power in the fingers that the natural forces of a woman (unless they are exceptional, and I would not compliment her in this regard) cannot achieve this. Miss Boutibonne, whose touch, full of grace and sweetness, appeared in a very advantageous light in the variations in A-flat by Beethoven, performed with much expression, would not have needed to aspire to any other success than this . . . the qualities of her playing leave no doubt that she is a skilled teacher, and this quality is worth another, when one combines it with a good style of interpretation, and an unusual intelligence for elevated music.<sup>29</sup>

**1842**

Several reviews appeared in various journals commenting on Jeannette Boutibonne's playing. One reviewer praised her "distinctive sense of phrasing,"<sup>30</sup> another offered his impression of the pianist: "Miss Boutibonne is a small person, so cute, so gracious, touching the piano less with her fingers than with her soul . . ." <sup>31</sup> One of Jeannette's last concert was given on August 27, "chez Mme. Souleillon. Among the artists who were heard there, one must mention Miss Boutibonne, a young and distinguished artist, whose talent does marvelous things in the delicious etudes by Ravina."<sup>32</sup>

However, after 1842 there are no more concert notices in the Parisian press for Miss Boutibonne.

**1846**

According to a period address book Jeannette Boutibonne was still active as a piano and voice teacher, residing at 10, rue Blanche where she shared a flat with her brother Charle-Édouard.<sup>33</sup>

**1852**

Jeannette Boutibonne's name appears in a brief note published in *Gazette musicale de Paris* which states that "[t]he musical art has just suffered a serious and premature loss in the person of Miss Boutibonne, a young pianist with much talent."<sup>34</sup> It would seem that the "Miss Boutibonne" who had seen so much success in the years 1829–1842 had died. Yet, it can be argued that the "serious and premature loss" could have simply meant her early retirement from the concert scene, for she may have had the financial resources to be able to do so. This latter hypothesis seems to be supported by evidence from 1878 (when Jeannette Boutibonne would have been in her fifties) and from 1889 (when she would have been in her late sixties). In 1878, she is listed among the donors providing charity for orphans in Interlaken (Switzerland).<sup>35</sup> In 1889, Miss Boutibonne is mentioned as a vocal soloist (performing the famous *Erkönig*) in an amateur event with performers from Montreux.<sup>36</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Schweizerisches Künstler-Lexikon*, Vol. 1 (Frauenfeld, 1902), 187.

<sup>2</sup> *Adressbuch der königlichen Frey-Stadt Pesth*, 1822, 117.

<sup>3</sup> *Wegweiser durch die Stadt Pesth*, 1827, 373.

<sup>4</sup> *Gemeinnützige Blätter zur Belehrung und Unterhaltung*, no. 90 (10 November 1825): 721.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.namenforschung.net/dfd/woerterbuch/liste/>

<sup>6</sup> *Előadása az utóbb eltelt négy esztendőken 1826 diki Apriltól fogva 1830 diki Majus végéig*, 5; *Ausweis über die in der königlichen Freistadt Pesth vom Frauen-Vereine*, 1834, 66.

<sup>7</sup> *Almanack des königlich städtischen Theaters in Pesth* (1 December 1829–30 November 1830), 32.

<sup>8</sup> *Allgemeine Theaterzeitung* 24, no. 48 (21 April 1831): 195.

<sup>9</sup> *Piano Septet* no. 1 in D Minor, op. 74, for Pf, Fl., Ob., Cor, Vla, Vlc, Cb, from 1816, later arranged for Pf, Vn, Vla, Vcl, Cb.

<sup>10</sup> Probably op. 57, published in 1833.

<sup>11</sup> *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 38, no. 33 (17 August 1833): 549–50.—Mr. Klein must be the bass Arcadius Klein (d. 1848) to whom Heinrich Proch dedicated his song *Im Thule*, op. 16.

<sup>12</sup> *Honnművész* 2 no. 35 (1 May 1834).—Certainly not the original instrumentation, see note 9.

<sup>13</sup> *Allgemeine Theaterzeitung* 38, no. 79 (22 April 1835): 316.

<sup>14</sup> Probably the hornist Eduard Constantin Lewy (1796–1846).

<sup>15</sup> Alois Khayll (1791–1866), a flutist based in Vienna.

<sup>16</sup> Probably the oboist Joseph Sellner (1787–1843).

<sup>17</sup> Probably the violoncellist Egidius Borzaga (1802–1858).

<sup>18</sup> *Der Wanderer*, no. 104 (April 13, 1836).

<sup>19</sup> *Blaetter für geistige Thätigkeit*, no. 16 (18 April 1836): 472.

<sup>20</sup> *Panorama* (Munich), no. 34 (18 May 1836): 112.

<sup>21</sup> *Museum der eleganten Welt*, no. 44 (1 June 1836): 698–99.

<sup>22</sup> *Münchner Tagblatt*, 1 June 1836, 672–673.

<sup>23</sup> *Europa: Chronik der gebildeten Welt*, no. 3 (1836): 44.

<sup>24</sup> *Allgemeine Theaterzeitung*, no. 154 (2 August 1836).

<sup>25</sup> *Journal des Beaux-Arts*, 11 June 1837, 383.

<sup>26</sup> *Psyche: journal de modes*, 13 July 1837, 225.

<sup>27</sup> *Journal des Demoiselles* 6, no. 3 (March 1838): 95.

<sup>28</sup> *Journal des Demoiselles* 8 (1840): 161.

<sup>29</sup> *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris* 7, no. 36 (17 May 1840): 306.

<sup>30</sup> *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris* 9, no. 17 (24 April 1842): 182.

<sup>31</sup> *Psyché: journal de modes*, 28 April 1842.

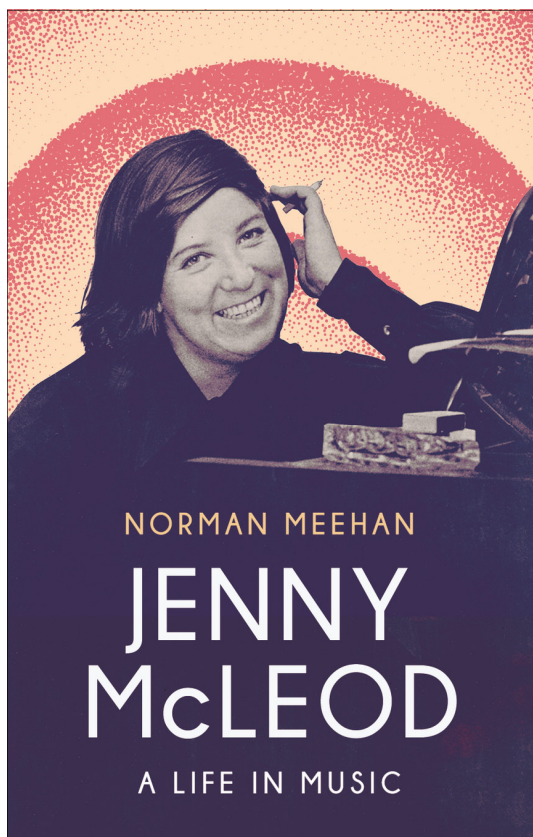
<sup>32</sup> *Le Ménestrel*, 18 September 1842.

<sup>33</sup> *Almanach des 25000 adresses de Paris: Année 1846*, 80.

<sup>34</sup> *Gazette musicale de Paris* 19, no. 19 (9 May 1852): 151.

<sup>35</sup> *Figaro*, 18 July 1878.

<sup>36</sup> *Galvani's messenger*, 25 March 1889, 3.



**Norman Meehan: *Jenny McLeod: A Life in Music*. Te Herenga Waka University Press, 2023.**

If you asked the average New Zealander to name a New Zealand composer, most able to answer would name Douglas Lilburn or his most famous student, Jenny McLeod. Norman Meehan's biography of McLeod (1941–2022) gives us an intimate portrait of the life, work, and thought of this fascinating, influential and much-loved woman, whose music and teaching promoted the inclusion of European *avant-garde* ideas, rock and pop music, and *Māoritanga* (the culture and language of the indigenous people of Aotearoa /New Zealand), most notably through the creation of some large works for community singers and musicians, “happenings” which enlivened New Zealand’s civic life in a period of social change, from the end of the 1960s to the 1980s.

A New Zealand-born descendant of Scots and English settlers, McLeod learned musical notation almost immediately at the age of 5, after seeing a score on her first day of

school—an anecdote typical of her robust and self-directed personality, open to every idea and experience that could connect her to the wide world of music, the *zeitgeist*, the communities of Aotearoa, and herself.

Jenny McLeod’s taste in music was always eclectic, and one of the mysteries that Meehan’s book goes some way towards explaining is how her voice can be found across such a multitude of styles, including serial works, civic orchestral works, art songs, and pop songs for children’s TV, none of which sounds out of place once the listener is familiar with a portion of her oeuvre.

McLeod was initially inspired in the direction of classical study by hearing Igor Stravinsky’s *The Rites of Spring*, and a photograph of her in a group of young women greeting the composer with “I dig Ig” signs on his arrival in New Zealand in 1961 is included in the book. At Victoria University in Wellington, she was taught by Douglas Lilburn, David Farquhar and Frederick Page, and her early orchestral works *The Little Symphony* and *Cambridge Suite*, which among its classical influences gives a first hint at McLeod’s respect for the sound of pop music, were applauded.

These works were written to be performed at the annual Cambridge Music School, where McLeod first heard Olivier Messiaen’s *Quartet for the End of Time* which inspired her to make her way to Europe by boat to study in Paris with the composer who became a life-long friend and admirer of her work. There she encountered (and again befriended) Pierre Boulez, who inspired her anew, and Karlheinz Stockhausen, and followed them to study at Darmstadt and Cologne respectively. During her European studies, McLeod wrote an elegant serial composition, *Piano Piece 1965*, recorded for album release in New Zealand by Tessa Birnie in 1968, and *For Seven*, a textural work inspired by meeting the Polish composers Krzysztof Penderecki and Witold Lutosławski.

On her return to New Zealand McLeod took up lecturing at Victoria and revised the curriculum to include ethnomusicology and encourage the serious study of popular music, among other innovations. Unsure if she was “really a composer” (she had studied analysis rather than composition with Messiaen), McLeod found herself attracted to the idea of writing works for community performance, the first of which was *Earth and Sky*, a work for 300 performers, mostly children, including four choirs and a 40-piece orchestra. At high school, she had been invited onto the marae by her Māori friends, and had felt at home with the Māori way of life; in composing *Earth and Sky* she chose the Māori creation stories, which she had taken with her to Europe and which had provided an emotional link to her homeland, as her text.

The novelty and success of *Earth and Sky* made Jenny McLeod a household name, and her pronouncements on pop and rock music (she was an expert witness in an obscenity trial involving the visiting musical *Hair*), and on cannabis and psychedelic drug use, showed her solidarity with New Zealand’s burgeoning counterculture.<sup>1</sup>

New Zealanders are a modest people, easily shamed, and I have read rock histories less open abo

ut sex and drugs than Meehan’s work, composed with the full collaboration of his subject in the last years of her life. In 1971 Victoria appointed Jenny McLeod to replace Fred Page as its first female professor of music, at 29 the youngest appointee in the University’s history.

Brilliantly hardworking in composition, McLeod rarely composed for the sake of composing, and her works often followed long fallow periods, then careful planning of an idea, and the collection or production of texts, before



any music was created. For *Under the Sun*, a “happening” for the community of Palmerston North (then population, 52,700) to celebrate their city’s centenary in 1971, McLeod planned out a five-act, two-hour theatre work, for hundreds of local, and largely amateur, players, including four orchestras, four massed children’s choirs, two adult choirs, and a rock group, then wrote a lively text, extending from the big bang to the heat death of the universe, somewhat in the style of H. G. Wells’ *Outline of History* and *The Shape of Things to Come*, but centering on the representation of modern life in a hectic montage of advertising slogans and newspaper headlines in Act 4, which also featured the rock song *Shadow People*, performed by local rock trio *The Forgiving*. Once the plan was completed and the text recorded, McLeod sat down to write the score from scratch, producing a book of orchestration weighing eight kilograms in four weeks. Though she would express doubts about the work, and, from a later spiritual perspective, the pessimistic scientism of her text, its recording was a favourite of Messiaen’s.

McLeod’s lifestyle and public profile eventually caused controversy over her work within the (surprisingly tolerant) university establishment, but when she finally quit her professorship it would be at her behest and for a different reason. McLeod, whose interest in psychedelics had culminated in a raid on her house by the Wellington drug squad, had begun to explore the teachings of Hinduism, with an enthusiasm which led her to join the Divine Light Mission of Guru Maharaj Ji, the cult which attracted other New Zealand counterculture figures of the time. Devotion to Divine Light Mission led to her departure from Victoria and, indirectly, to the loss of all her unpublished works up to that time. In these, her ‘walkabout’ years, which ended in her inevitable disillusionment with the organisation, McLeod took the opportunity to become more familiar with rock music—an idiom which her training hadn’t given her much aptitude for—by improvising, performing covers of popular songs, and writing many devotional songs of her own.

When she returned to composing in the early 1980s, McLeod would compose two lively *Rock Sonatas*, and later a *Rock Concerto* for pianist Eugene Albulescu. Exhausting the potential of rock by then, McLeod would enthusiastically develop the “tone clock” serial system of Dutch composer Peter Schat, her last major musical influence. She also began composing on commission for film and television, most notably a 1984 score for *The Silent One*, a film set in the Cook Islands and directed by Yvonne Mackay, the first woman to solely direct a New Zealand feature film. *The Silent One* score uses a gentle, persistent rock idiom, which reminds me of *The Beach Boys* circa 1970, with colouring reminiscent of their legendary *Smile*, incorporates the traditional Cook Island Māori drumming recorded during the making of the film, and deploys McLeod’s classical language effectively and unobtrusively. In this period, she also began composing a series of art songs and song cycles, her first collection setting the poems of William Blake, followed in suc-

ceeding decades by settings of Janet Frame, Edward Lear, Virginia Woolf, Walt Whitman, and her own poetry, in English and in *te reo*, the Māori language.

Jenny McLeod was one of very few *Pākehā* of her time to cross over into the Māori world and represent Māori stories and values in work for all New Zealanders, something she did, in an age before wide knowledge of *tikanga*, with an intuitive and receptive respect, respect that was gratefully reciprocated. Norman Meehan has carefully detailed the evolution of his subject’s deepening relationship with the Māori people and their culture throughout his biography, making it a valuable text for anyone interested in the ways in which European composers approach indigenous material.

Jenny McLeod’s last major work was the 2012 opera *Hōhepa*, based on the friendship between the unjustly imprisoned Māori chieftain Hōhepa Te Umuroa and Pākehā politician Thomas Mason during the New Zealand Wars. Its orchestral score includes traditional Māori instruments, and moves nimbly among several of the styles McLeod developed in her lifetime, tone clock serialism rubbing shoulders with pop classicism, her orchestration and bilingual text alike displaying the fruits of her lifetime of open-minded searching.

Early in her career, McLeod resented being called a woman composer—growing up in an egalitarian society, and of a generation in which she was one among several female composers-of-note, she did not consider it an issue. Much later in life, she proposed (with all the necessary qualifications) that female composers were less likely to be inspired by the competitive ‘masterpiece syndrome’ and more likely to regard music as communication, making fewer distinctions between high and low art, which in part explained the invisibility of female composers in the historical record, because “[T]hey haven’t been mad keen to write the world’s greatest masterpiece, they’ve often been happy to spend their lives writing maybe music for children or for teaching purposes or for the kinds of things that women see as important, or just as important.”<sup>2,3</sup>

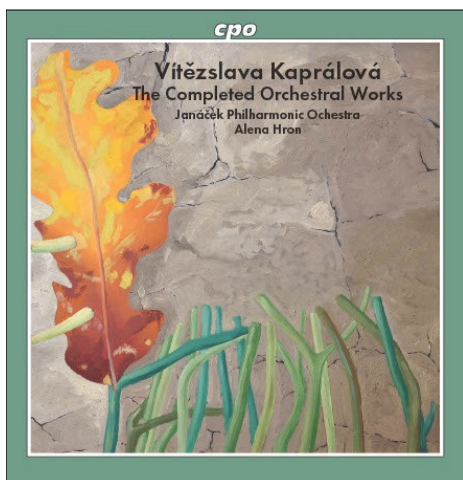
George Henderson

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> See Nick Bollinger, *Jumping Sundays: The Rise and Fall of the Counterculture in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Norman Meehan, *Jenny McLeod: A Life in Music* (Wellington: The Herenga Waka University Press, 2023), 287–291.

<sup>3</sup> Meehan (2023, 185) mentions the works of Carl Jung as some of Jenny McLeod’s favourite reading in the 1970’s, and these distinctions correspond to the properties of Logos and Eros, which Jung associated respectively with the animus and anima, the mind’s masculine and feminine aspects.



*Vítězslava Kaprálová: The Completed Orchestral Works*. 2-CD 555 568-2 CPO (2024). Recorded May-June 2022 in Ostrava. TT 103:17. Tomáš Vrána, Veronika Rovná, Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava, Alena Hron. CD1: Suite en miniature, Military Sinfonietta, Suita rustica, Waving Farewell, Prélude de Noël, Fanfare. CD2: Partita, Piano Concerto, Suita.

The double album of Kaprálová's orchestral works (plus a piano suite as a bonus track) maps a barely decade-long musical career that was tragically cut short at the dawn of WWII. The CPO editors made an executive decision to include only those orchestral compositions by Kaprálová that were completed and orchestrated by the composer herself. CD1 concludes with the premiere recording of *Fanfare*, an uplifting, half-minute-long miniature for brass instruments and timpani, composed by Kaprálová in 1939 for her father's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. The final track of CD2 is a piano suite which may be of some interest to musicologists, as it served as a blueprint for the orchestral *Suite en miniature* presented on CD1.

Performances by the Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava under the baton of the up-and-coming conductor Alena Hron are consistently solid throughout this 103-minute orchestral program, even offering a few new insights into the presented works. The

neo-baroque *Partita for strings and piano*, the orchestral miniature *Prélude de Noël*, and the orchestral song *Waving Farewell* are the cases in point. The soloist in Kaprálová's outstanding art song has a pristine voice, clear articulation, and good diction. She and the orchestra in a supportive role succeed in building up the momentum that this quasi-operatic song requires, placing their rendition among the best to date. The double album also includes the composer's two orchestral suites, *Suite en miniature* and *Suita rustica*; the latter pays tribute to Stravinsky's early ballets and has become immensely popular with audiences in recent years. The best known composition by Kaprálová, the lushly orchestrated *Military Sinfonietta*, also receives a good reading from the Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava, if not quite the energy of the University of Michigan Symphony conducted by Kenneth Kiesler whose recording was released by Naxos in 2021. The final classic presented on the album, *Piano Concerto in D Minor*, is a truly exciting work, somewhat evocative of Rachmaninov's writing. At first listening I was a bit put off by the slow tempi chosen for the first movement, but this ceased to be an issue with repeated hearings.

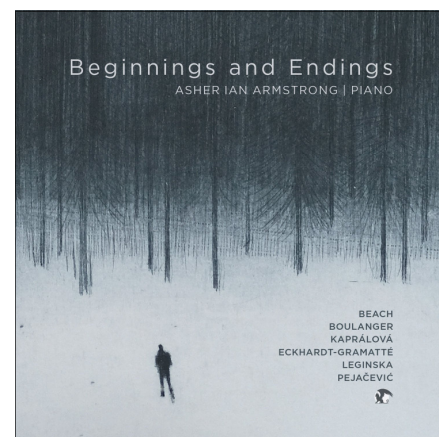
The cover of the CD booklet is adorned with a painting by Jindřich Štýrský. The text featured in the booklet, signed with the initials *EH*, is for the most part a compilation of original research previously published elsewhere yet unacknowledged and uncredited by the incognito writer.

The booklet's plagiarism issue aside, there's no doubt that the *cpo* double album is well positioned to take its place among the most important releases of the composer's music—certainly a desirable recording to have in one's collection, and a must for the lovers of her music. *Karla Hartl*

This recording has been financially assisted by the Kapralova Society.



This album features works by Karel Kovařovic (1862-1920), Vítězslava Kaprálová (1915-1940), and Pavel Borkovec (1894-1972), brought to life by pianist Marek Kozák and the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Robert Jindra. They offer a glimpse into a world of musical brilliance that has remained largely unexplored. Kaprálová's Piano Concerto in D Minor, op. 7 is a forward-looking piece, a brilliant showcase of Kaprálová's talent, with its vibrant instrumentation and captivating solo part. The concerto's modernity and freshness make it stand out in the album. (From a review by Tal Agam for *theclassicreview.com*).



Asher Ian Armstrong, piano. Blue Griffin Recording BGR653 (2023). The album includes Kaprálová's Sonata Appassionata. Available only in hi-res.

The KS Journal Reader



# THE WOMEN IN MUSIC ANTHOLOGY

Eugene Gates & Karla Hartl

## **Kapralova Society Journal**

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