



WIRTH INSTITUTE

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The Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences of Alberta (SVU)
The Czech and Slovak Association of Canada (CSSK), Edmonton Branch
The Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies

Present

CZECH SONGS & ARIAS

Including the works of A. Dvořák,
V. Kaprálová and B. Smetana

Featuring:

Sylvia Shadick-Taylor
Pianist

Whitney-Leigh Sloan
Soprano

MONDAY, APRIL 30TH, 2012
7:00 PM

PROGRAM

Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904):

Ciganské melodie op. 55, B. 104

1. *Má píseň zas mi láskou zní* - My song of love rings through the dusk
2. *Aj! Kterak trojhranec můj přerozkošně zvoní* – Hey! Ring out, my triangle
3. *A les je tichý kolem kol* – All is still about the woods
4. *Když mne stará matka zpívat, zpívat učivala* – When my mother taught me
5. *Struna naladěna, hochu, toč se v kole* – Come and join the dancing
6. *Široké rukávy a široké gatě* – Wide the sleeves and trousers
7. *Dejte klec jestřábu ze zlata ryzého* – Give a hawk a fine cage

Bedrich Smetana (1824-1884):

Tri sceny z opery *Hubicka* (three scenes from the opera *The Kiss*)

Hajej muj andilku (Vendulka)/Letela belounka holubicka (Vendulka)

“Go to sleep my angel + As a white dove flew” (Vendulka’s lullabies)

Jasej ptacku.... (Barce)

“Proclaim a good day little bird“ (Aria of Barče)

INTERMISSION

Notes by
Prof P. Jelen
President of the Czech Society of Arts and Sciences of Alberta
(using materials copied freely from Wikipedia and from other sources)
and
Whitney-Leigh Sloan

The cycle *Jiskry z popele* (Sparks from Ashes), is a cycle of songs inspired by the text of Bohdan Jelínek (1851-1874) composed between 1932 – 1933 and dedicated to Ota Vach, her “only love”, a classmate Kapralova met at as a student at the Brno Conservatory. Considering this dedication, the text is intensely intimate, and Kapralova limits the vocal range of these pieces in an effort to maintain the balance of the music and words, thereby maintaining the integrity of emotion that is meant to be a direct result of the text, as opposed to the overwhelming beauty of impressionistic accompaniment.

In the second cycle, “Navzdy” (Forever), we hear a collection of three songs that feature the poetry of Nobel Prize winner Jaroslav Seifert and a contemporary Czech poet, Jan Čarek. The first song in the collection, *Navzdy*, was written during the last half of Kapralova’s final year at the Prague Conservatory. The song centres around her feelings concerning her next step following graduation. One of the most poignant lines of the poem states the following: ‘Someone will leave and will return, someone will leave and will never return.’ Čarek was a great admirer of the settings of his poetry by Kapralova, and Kapralova evidently felt a close kinship with his work, having set four of his poems to music.

The final Kapralova piece, “Sbohem a satecek“ (Waving a farewell), is an extended song, bound motivically by the major second that appears in the first word – sbohem, in effect, filling the entire song with farewells. This piece was written shortly before her departure from Prague to study with Martinu in Paris. The great, extended song, set to the poetry of Nezval, is dedicated to ‘the most beautiful city of Prague’ and was written as a farewell to her city and most importantly her teacher, Vitezslav Novak.

The pieces performed today represent a small sample of Kapralova’s consummate abilities as a composer in the genre of song writing. Hers is a style that is completely unique, highlighting the beauty of Czech language and the marriage of words and music in a contemporary classical medium.

Vitezslava Kapralova (1915-1940):

Jiskry z popele (op 5) Sparks from the Ashes (poetry by **Bohdan Jelínek**)

1. *Ty stare pisne v dusi zni mi* - Those old melodies echo in my soul
2. *Jak na hedvabny mech* - Like on silk moss I laid my head
3. *O zuztan jeste moje divko draha* - Oh, stay yet, my dear girl
4. *A tahnou myslenky teskne* - Melancholy thoughts

Navzdy (op 12) - Forever

1. *Navzdy* – Forever (poetry by **Jan Čarek**)
2. *Cim je muj zal* - What is my sorrow (poetry by **Jan Čarek**)
3. *Ruce* – Hands (poetry by **Jaroslav Seifert**)

Sbohem a satecek op 14 - Waving farewell (Poetry by **Vítězslav Nezval**)

Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904):

Měsíčku na nebi hlubokém (The Song to the Moon) from the opera *Rusalka*

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Whitney-Leigh Sloan



Canadian Full Lyric Soprano **Whitney-Leigh Sloan** is gaining recognition for her expressive singing, vocal power and ability to connect with audience members through the portrayal of some of operas most beloved heroines. She is also becoming known for her keen sense of languages, being able to communicate text with clarity and nuance throughout the entirety of her range.

Currently a resident of Edmonton, Alberta, Whitney completed her Bachelor of Music (2005) and Masters of Music (2007) at the University of British Columbia with Canadian Soprano Heather Thomson-Price. Whitney is a two-time recipient of the Ben Heppner Music Scholarship and has received generous support from the Vancouver Women's Musical Society and Alberta Foundation for the Arts. In 2005, She made her debut in opera singing Tatiana from *Eugene Onegin* by Tchaikovsky. Since then she has performed the Second Lady, from Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, Mahler's *Symphony No. 4*, Scriabin's *Symphony No. 1*, the Countess Almaviva from *Le Nozze di Figaro*, the Widow from Lehàr's *The Merry Widow* and Mimì from Puccini's *La Bohème*. Additionally, Whitney travelled with members of the UBC Opera Ensemble to the Czech Republic, where she had the privilege of performing the roles of Tatiana in *Eugene Onegin* and Arsamene in Handel's *Xerxes*. Both productions were directed by Martin Otavá, director of the Prague State Opera while under the baton of David Agler (*Eugene Onegin*) and Norbert Baxa (*Xerxes*) respectively. As a young artist with Calgary Opera, she performed the role of Mary in the Canadian Premiere of *The Ballad of Baby Doe* by Douglas Moore and Hanna in the children's opera *Hannaraptor*. Most recently, as a participant of Opera NUOVA, Whitney performed the title role in Dvořak's *Rusalka*. This summer, Whitney-Leigh will be featured in the role of Mrs. Medlock at the Banff Centre for the Arts in the newly composed opera *The Secret Garden*. The opera, written by Nolan Gasser, will be premiered with San Francisco opera in March of 2013.

Bedřich Smetana (1824 – 1884) is widely regarded in his homeland as the father of Czech music. A teacher of Dvorak, he pioneered the development of a musical style which became closely identified with his land's aspirations to independent statehood. Internationally he is best known for his opera *The Bartered Bride*, for the symphonic cycle *Má vlast* ("My Homeland") which portrays the history, legends and landscape of the composer's native land, and for his First String Quartet *From My Life*. In the early 1860s, after returning permanently to Prague from his sojourn in Sweden, he threw himself into the musical life of the city, primarily as a champion of the new genre of Czech opera. In 1866 his first two operas, *The Brandenburgers in Bohemia* and *The Bartered Bride*, were premiered at Prague's new Provisional Theatre. In total, Smetana composed eight operas that are all dearly loved by the Czechs and it could be said that they acquired a status of a "national treasure". His 6th opera *Hubicka* (*The Kiss*), composed shortly after the premiere of the original form of the *My Homeland* (*Ma Vlast*) is based on a story by Karolina Svetla with modification by the librettist Eliska Krasnohorska (both very prominent female poets of the Czech revival movement). The opera, continuing in the genre of *The Bartered Bride*, premiered in the 1876 (with the Crown Prince Rudolf in attendance). The first two arias to be heard tonight are lullabies that the protagonist Vendulka (who refuses to kiss her lover Lukas until they are married... hence the plot) sings to the baby of the widower Lukas. The third aria, sung in the opera by the maid Barce in the early morning on a meadow brightly lit in the sun, is welcoming the lark as the bearer of the good news for the lovers.

Sylvia Shaddick-Taylor



Antonin Dvorak (1841 – 1904), undoubtedly the internationally best known Czech composer of all time, owes his fame to the extraordinary melodic richness of all his music. Although inspired by his deep love for the Czech countryside and its musical sounds, the music has a broad international appeal. His first international success as a composer came with the publication of the first row of Slavonic Dances, combining the folk song and dance approach (but not the tunes, as all the dances are musical creations of the composer) with the “popular” or “light classic” musical form. Many of his chamber works (as well as some of his symphonic and operatic output) contain the folk dance elements; some (e.g. the piano trio *Dumky*, op. 90) show such inspiration openly. Dvorak composed nine operas, including the most famous *Rusalka*, his last work *Armida*, and his arguably best opera *Jakobin* (unfortunately not known beyond the Czech borders); other major vocal works include the *Stabat Mater*, the Requiem and the Te Deum, as well as several major song cycles and many more individual songs. The list of the song cycles is long and includes not only the best known Biblical songs, *Ciganske Melodie* (*Gypsy Songs*... performed tonight) or the several sets of the Moravian Duets, but a great number of other lesser known compositions and free standing songs. The *Gypsy Songs* (op. 55) were composed on commission from a Gustav Walter, a star tenor of the Viennese Court Opera who was of Czech background. Dvorak selected seven poems from the collection “Ciganske melodie” of his friend, the poet Adolf Heyduk, who translated the poems into German. The songs were selected to alternate between jolly and melancholic moods, epitomizing the main principles of the gypsy life, freedom and carefree attitude. The most popular piece is undoubtedly the fourth “Kdyz me stara matka” (When my old mother...)

Pianist **Sylvia Shadick-Taylor** is an acclaimed Canadian soloist and chamber musician whose interpretations reflect an intense examination of a composer’s music and identity. She has performed as soloist with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra and the Winspear Chamber Orchestra as well as in recital. As an Ambassador of the Canadian Music Centre, these recitals frequently feature contemporary Canadian music. She has toured in Japan, Thailand, Germany, Canada and USA, including two performances at Carnegie Hall’s Weill Recital Hall: in 1998 with Hungarian/Canadian violinist, Nándor Szederkényi; and in 2011 with Canadian cellist, Tanya Prochazka.

As a chamber musician she has performed with many ensembles including SPECTRUM, the Clarion Trio and Ivory Winds. As an accompanist she spans opera classics to demanding contemporary concert repertoire, her work often being heard on CBC Radio.

Ms. Shadick-Taylor holds a B.Mus. cum laude from the University of Alberta, Licentiate and Associate Diplomas, and has studied in Banff, Aspen, New York and Salzburg, Austria. Sylvia works as a private teacher, vocal coach, adjudicator and clinician, and has worked for the University of Alberta, Edmonton Opera, the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, Alberta College and Pro Coro Canada.

Sylvia has released three CDs on the Arktos label: *Caprice; Intimate Impressions* (winner of the 2000 Alberta Recording Industry Award for Best Classical Artist); and *At Your Service*, which focuses on the art of accompanying. She can also be heard on several other CDs, including *Northern Arch*, *Soundland Alberta* and *Lucidae*.

Vitezslava Kapralova (1915-1940) represents one of the most unusual cases in the history of Czech music. This extraordinarily talented musician was born in Brno (now Czech Republic) in 1915 as the only child of composer Vaclav Kapral and singer Viktorie Kapralova. Guided by her father, she began to compose at the age of nine. At the age of fifteen she entered the Brno Conservatory where she studied composition and conducting – from the viewpoint of female musicians of that time, the two “forbidden music zones”. She graduated with an award-winning Piano Concerto op 5 that she conducted herself. In 1935, she moved to Prague and continued her musical education at the Prague Conservatory, studying composition with Vitezslav Novak (a pupil of A. Dvorak) and conducting with Vaclav Talich. Her graduating composition Military Sinfonietta was performed in Prague in 1937 by the Czech Philharmonic under her baton in the Lucerna Hall in the presence of President Edvard Benes to whom the piece is dedicated. A year later, the piece was chosen to open the ISCM Festival in London, with Kapralova conducting the BBC Orchestra. In 1937, she was offered a French government scholarship to study in France, at the Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris, and became a student of Charles Munch (1937-1939) and briefly also of Nadia Boulanger (spring 1940). She also studied composition privately with Bohuslav Martinu (October 1937-February 1939), whose Harpsichord Concerto she conducted in 1938 in Paris. Following the German occupation of Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939, Kapralova decided to stay in exile in France. In April 1940, she married the writer Jiri Mucha, the son of the internationally famous Art Nouveau painter Alfons Mucha. Only two months later, on June 16, 1940, her marriage and musical career were cut short by her tragic death in Montpellier, allegedly from military tuberculosis. Kapralova’s music was critically acclaimed during her lifetime and has continued to be praised by music critics and historians after her death.

Today the legacy of this most extraordinary Czech female musician is kept alive by the activities of the Kapralova Society in Toronto, and one of the leading internationally acclaimed Czech quartets based in Prague bears the Kapralova name (in Edmonton we had the opportunity to hear this all-female quartet on two separate occasions). The selection of the songs by Kapralova, to be heard tonight, represents a large portion of the song repertoire written in the years 1932 – 1937. These pieces highlight the text of celebrated Czech poets Bohdan Jelínek, Jaroslav Seifert, Vítězslav Nezval and Jan Čarek. It can be said that of all the genres of composition explored by Kapralova, the genre of song writing was her most treasured. From an early age, Kapralova displayed a special talent for writing and love of poetry, collecting excerpts of poems which appealed to her sensitivity as a woman and a musician, relating directly to the experiences of her life. That she chose only Czech poetry speaks volumes about her artistry and devotion to the language and culture of her naissance, following in the footsteps of Janacek in naturalistic setting of Czech inflection, stress and vowel length, composing lines that are ‘a heightened expression of natural declamation’ (Cheek). Always with Kapralova, the music is inspired by the text and it is because of this we turn to the text of the poets whom we will hear this evening.