

Vítězslava Kaprálová on the French Music Scene: A Gradual Rediscovery Since 2001

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Abstract

The Czech composer Vítězslava Kaprálová (1915–1940) maintained a profound connection with Paris throughout her career, undertaking studies at the École Normale de Musique. As both a composer and conductor, Kaprálová distinguished herself within domains traditionally dominated by men, and integrated successfully into the artistic milieu of her era. Despite her achievements, however, her legacy in France diminished after her premature death, remaining largely confined to brief and sporadic references until the early 21st century. This article critically assesses Kaprálová's position within French music programming since 2001. Many aspects are explored, such as the evolution of the number of concerts that include opuses of Kaprálová, her most interpreted works according to the musical genre, or her place in the French musical institutions. Finally, a broader critique reveals how these observations fit in the institutional structures within the French musical landscape and the negative impact these structures have for the visibility of women composers.

Keywords

Women composers; Czechoslovakia; Paris; Vítězslava Kaprálová; program; performance; broadcast; masculinity; femininity.

In 1937, the composer Vítězslava Kaprálová (1915–1940) was the first woman to conduct the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra at the premiere of her *Military Sinfonietta* in Prague.¹ The following year, she conducted the BBC Orchestra at the ISCM Festival in London. Fully integrated into the artistic landscape of her

¹ Miriam Blümllová, "Women Composers in the Czech Lands During the 20th Century," in *Composing Women: "Femininity" and Views on Cultures, Gender and Music of Southeastern Europe since 1918* (Hollitzer Verlag, 2022).

time, Kaprálová's success extended beyond the borders of the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938). However, although her talent was recognized during her lifetime, her status as a woman proved to be an obstacle to the remembrance and dissemination of her works after her death. This phenomenon is part of a general process of erasure of the place of women in many spheres of society and periods of history, which has been highlighted by the French historian Michelle Perrot in her book *Les Femmes ou les silences de l'Histoire*:

Yet there are still many silent zones and, as far as the past is concerned, an ocean of silence, linked to the unequal sharing of traces, memory and, even more so, History, the narrative that for so long “forgot” women, as if, doomed to the obscurity of reproduction, they were outside time, or at least outside events.²

In the field of music, for example, works written by women composers exist from all periods, but for a long time they remained in the shadows and did not enjoy the same diffusion as the works of their male counterparts. This observation about the invisibility of woman musical creation applies to most European countries, including the First Czechoslovak Republic. Research into the contribution of women musicians, and women composers in particular, to the history of Western classical music is developing and has been the subject of a growing number of publications.³ Their careers and their works are gradually becoming part of a history of music that until now has maintained the idea of an almost exclusively male artistic genius.

Scientific sources on the Czech women composers contemporary with Kaprálová are still limited, and very little is known about them in France, although the work and life of Julie Reisserová, for instance, has undergone scholarly scrutiny.⁴ The construction of a Czech musical identity within the Western classical music repertoire has, since the rise of the national schools in the 19th century, been achieved exclusively through male figures. Smetana, Dvořák and Janáček remain in the Western collective imagination as the greatest (and only?) representatives of purely Czech music. It is interesting to ask whether this provides an exhaustive representation of the Czech musical landscape abroad and, more specifically, in France, but it is also worthwhile to raise the question of the available sources, greatly less detailed and safeguarded, about women composers.

² Our translation. Michelle Perrot, *Les Femmes ou les silences de l'Histoire* (Flammarion, 2020), 17.

³ One of the most recent works on the subject in French is Guillaume Kosmicki, *Compositrices. L'histoire oubliée de la musique* (Le mot et le reste, 2023).

⁴ Jean-Paul C. Montagnier, *Julie Reisserová (1888–1938): Czech Composer and Feminist* (Cambridge University Press, 2024).

In this context, the (re)discovery of personalities such as Vítězslava Kaprálová is an important field to explore. Research into her work and its dissemination began in the last decade of the 20th century. The major contribution outside her country of origin has been made by the Kaprálová Society,⁵ a foundation set up in Canada in 1998 by the musicologist Karla Hartl. The many resources available through this foundation provide the central support for the analysis proposed in this paper. This advance in research in the English-speaking world, accompanied by the organization of concerts, does not, however, apply in the same way in France. Indeed, few works have mentioned the woman composer as a creator in her own right, with the exception of recent works by musicologist Nicolas Derny in 2015 and 2019.⁶ The composer's enduring connections with France are well documented, however; she studied composition and conducting from 1937 at the École Normale de Musique de Paris and was an active member of the Triton contemporary music society. From this perspective, the dissemination of her works to French audiences represents a central challenge in reestablishing her significance within 20th-century Czech music.

This article examines how French music programming perpetuates a stereotyped image of the woman composer and reflects broader institutional and societal dynamics. The discussion begins with an analysis of the evolution of these programmes over time, followed by an in-depth examination of the content of her musical repertoire categorized by genre. Finally, a broader critique of the institutional structures within the French musical landscape and their implications for the visibility of women composers in public consciousness is developed.

Changes in the Number of Concerts and Broadcasts Since 2001

Since the 1990s, French music programming has increasingly overlooked works by Kaprálová, while her compositions have seen greater visibility in her native Czech Republic as well as in the United States and Canada, largely due to initiatives by the Kaprálová Society. This study examines the situation in France using data from the Kaprálová Society's database, which records all international events, concerts, festivals and radio broadcasts featuring one or more of her works since 1995. Notably, isolated radio broadcasts, conservatoire performances and smaller-scale concerts are excluded from this dataset. The primary objective here is to

⁵ "The Kaprálová Society," <http://www.kapralova.org/index.htm> (accessed August 28, 2024).

⁶ Nicolas Derny, *Vítězslava Kaprálová. Portrait musical et amoureux* (Le Jardin d'Essai, 2015); Nicolas Derny, "Vítězslava Kaprálová and Bohuslav Martinů: Between Emulation and Complementarity (1937–1940)," in *Musiciennes en duo. Mères, filles, sœurs ou compagnes d'artistes*, eds. Caroline Giron-Panet, Sylvie Granger, Raphaëlle Legrand, and Bertrand Porot (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2019).

assess the frequency and context of performances of Kaprálová's compositions in France, focusing specifically on those by professional orchestras and established performers, where documentation is available and publicly accessible.

To carry out this work, it was first necessary to isolate and arrange the concerts and radio broadcasts that had taken place in France chronologically to examine their frequency and how this had changed over the years. The events were then classified according to a number of criteria, including the context in which the works were performed, the format of the concerts and the type of works played. The analysis ultimately enabled us to highlight certain trends and observations concerning the role played by performers and musical institutions.

The earliest known performance of a work by Vítězslava Kaprálová in France did not occur before 2001. Between 1995 and 2000, most documented concerts—including the few recorded prior to 1999—took place primarily in the Czech Republic and North America. Notably, her works were also presented in Japan and Mexico starting in 1999. The inaugural concert in France was held in March 2001 at the Czech Centre in Paris. Although the specific pieces performed are not documented, this concert-reading included passages from *Au seuil de la nuit*, the autobiographical novel by her husband, Jiří Mucha.⁷ The first broadcast of one of Kaprálová's compositions on French radio followed in March 2002 on France Culture. Aside from another concert at the Czech Centre in 2002 featuring Czech contemporary music that included her work, nearly a decade passed before another performance or broadcast occurred in France.

In 2012, three French events or broadcasts featured her music, a notable increase relative to previous years. This rise may be partially attributed to the 2011 publication of *The Kaprálová Companion*, a comprehensive English-language monograph edited by Karla Hartl and Erik Entwistle.⁸ However, the effect of this publication appeared to be limited; there were no performances in 2013 and only one in 2014. Notably, there were no concerts in Kaprálová's honour in 2015, the centenary of her birth.

Since 2016, there has been a modest but steady increase in performances, with at least one concert or broadcast featuring her works each year. This development aligns with growing French academic interest in Kaprálová, particularly following the 2015 publication of Nicolas Dérny's book on the composer. However, the annual number of performances remains relatively low. An exception occurred in 2023, with eight events across several French cities and three unique programmes. Similarly, 2024 saw a higher-than-average number of performances, with four programmes featuring her compositions. In general, there has been a gradual in-

⁷ Jiří Mucha, *Au seuil de la nuit* (Éditions de l'Aube, 1991).

⁸ Karla Hartl and Erik Entwistle, eds. *The Kaprálová Companion* (Lexington Books, 2011).

crease in the presence of Kaprálová's works within the French musical landscape, in terms of both live performances and radio broadcasts.

This initial observation needs to be analysed in a greater depth, considering various parameters such as the context of performance and the type of works played. First, we note that her works have been performed on a recurring and sometimes almost exclusive basis in certain specific venues, notably in Paris. In fact, of the nine concerts recorded in the capital since 2001, six have taken place at the Czech Centre and two have been initiated by Radio France. This group is also the only one that has included Kaprálová's compositions in its programme schedules over the last twenty years, unlike Radio classique, another station mainly dedicated to broadcasting Western classical music in France. Outside the capital, her works were heard at the Luberon international string quartet festival in 2012, as well as at two festivals devoted to women composers—the 2024 edition of *Présence Compositrices* in Toulon and the *Un temps pour Elles* festival in Taverny in 2021. This expansion beyond Paris—and especially the Czech Centre—bears witness to the gradual rediscovery of her music in France, which has been all the more visible in the last two years.

Of the eleven concerts mentioned for 2023 and 2024, eight took place in other cities than Paris. For example, the Orchestre National de Bretagne and pianist Célia Oneto Bensaid performed her *Piano Concerto* for the first time in February 2023 in Rennes. Also in February 2023, the Orchestre National Montpellier Occitanie performed the *Suite en miniature* in five concerts in several towns in the south-east of the country. This greater presence of the composer in these cities can be explained by the fact that she spent the last years of her life in the city of Montpellier, where she died in June 1940. As her health deteriorated and German troops advanced into the capital, her husband Jiří Mucha requested that she be transferred to the Montpellier hospital.⁹ Her link to the Mucha family was mobilized much later. Indeed, in 2009, two of her chamber music pieces were performed at the opening of an exhibition dedicated to the paintings of her father-in-law Alfons Mucha (1860–1939) at the Musée Fabre in Montpellier,¹⁰ although they had obviously never met or even written to each other.

The apparent increase and diversification in the number of artistic events featuring her compositions also raises the question of the content and duration of these events, and the place that Kaprálová's works occupied in them. Broadcasting a musical extract as part of a radio podcast does not have the same implications as performing a work at a symphony concert. A total of thirty-two events are considered in this study, all listed by the Kaprálová Society. The term

⁹ Derny, *Vítězslava Kaprálová. Portrait musical et amoureux*, 165.

¹⁰ *Ritournelle for cello and piano* and *Elegy for violin and piano*.

“event” chosen here therefore covers both concert performances of her compositions and the broadcasting of a work or an excerpt during a radio programme. Taking all these events together, it appears that only a minority of them were devoted to the composer’s music. Indeed, for the time being, no concert in any year or venue featured her works exclusively or even predominantly, which were instead systematically integrated into a wider musical programme. Only on the radio were some programmes devoted to her, although here again we have to wait until 2016 for the first programme in question to be broadcast. The precise date of this initial programme is not insignificant; it took place on March 8th, as part of International Women’s Rights Day, and then continued for the next three days. These four broadcasts have been the exception rather than the rule so far in terms of their length and the number of the composer’s works presented to listeners. Subsequently, two podcasts broadcast between 2018 and 2021 took Kaprálová as their central subject.

From these observations, it appears that Kaprálová’s identity as a woman and as a Czech composer has had a significant impact on the way she is presented and integrated into various musical programmes. On the one hand, several of the musical events cited in this study have the general theme of showcasing Czech musical compositions; however, most were written by men composers. The place of Czech women composers, who, as we have seen, are still the subject of very little scientific research, has been greatly reduced. In this context, the occasional inclusion of Kaprálová’s compositions in such programming seems singular. For example, the concert given by the Orchestre National de Bretagne in Rennes in February 2023 was entitled “Prague,” and featured her *Piano Concerto* as well as four symphonic poems from Smetana’s *Má vlast* cycle and a French premiere of a work by the composer Martin Smolka. On the radio, the “Afternoon Concert” on December 28th, 2012 featured several works by Kaprálová, as well as some by Janáček and Martinů in a single programme schedule.¹¹

Since 2001, the Czech Centre in Paris has included her in six of its concerts highlighting various aspects of Czech musical culture and its dialogues and exchanges with French music in the 20th century. These included a programme combining works by Debussy, Roussel, Novák, Martinů, and Kaprálová in 2012. This figure may seem minimal on the scale of all the cultural events offered by the Centre over this period, especially as Kaprálová is almost systematically the only woman composer featured in the programme,¹² but the Czech Centre is still one of the few concert venues in Paris to have programmed her works.

¹¹ The programme in question also included works by Richter and Brahms, although a “Czech music” sub-theme seems obvious.

¹² The “Czech contemporary music” concert in December 2002 is an exception to this, as it also featured works by Sylvie Bodorová.

Indeed, with the exception of the performance of a movement from her *String Quartet* during a film concert at the Philharmonie de Paris in 2022, the “Czech” programmes offered by several major Parisian concert halls never include her: They focus almost exclusively on composers considered to be the great figures of Czech music, such as Smetana, Dvořák, Janáček, and Martinů. As in the scientific literature, Kaprálová is often considered in association with Martinů; for example, the concert-reading of the novel *Au seuil de la nuit* in 2001 at the Czech Centre included works by Kaprálová and Martinů in its musical interludes.

Martinů is also almost systematically present in the Czech Centre’s programming when Kaprálová is represented. The concert “Tribute to Bohuslav Martinů and his students Vítězslava Kaprálová and Jan Novák” in February 2019 once again puts her to student status and establishes a form of hierarchy. Martinů’s presence can even be observed in radio programming devoted to the composer, making him an apparently important element in understanding and identifying the Kaprálová’s artistic personality. The fact that Kaprálová died prematurely, while she was still studying at the Conservatory, probably plays a part in the way she is frequently represented as a student and not just in relation to Martinů. In fact, in June 2024, the École Normale de Musique de Paris, accompanied by the ensemble Les Apaches, presented a musical programme based around the figure of Nadia Boulanger, a composition teacher whose classes Kaprálová partly attended.¹³ For the occasion, her *Partita for piano and string orchestra* was performed.

Conversely, Kaprálová’s status as a woman composer appears to play a significant role in the programming of her works in France. Beyond a few isolated examples of radio broadcasts solely dedicated to her, her compositions are frequently included within programmes specifically centred on women composers. The program *La Muse Oubliée*, performed on multiple occasions in France by pianist Antonio Oyarzabal, exemplifies the perceived necessity to create musical initiatives that specifically foreground the careers and works of women composers. Likewise, a number of radio podcasts have adopted “women composers” as a central thematic focus. Kaprálová was featured in two broadcasts on France Musique, relatively recently—in 2017 and 2019. Similarly, the organization of festivals dedicated to musical creation by women reflects both a commitment to restoring the visibility and place of women composers within the history of Western classical music and a desire to introduce their work to a broader audience. Paradoxically, however, these efforts also highlight the insufficient presence

¹³ However, Kaprálová’s limited proficiency in French appears to have constituted a partial barrier to her integration.

of women composers in the concert programming of French musical institutions on a national scale.

This observation reflects the broader institutional and societal dynamics surrounding the representation of woman artists in France, a context into which Kaprálová's work seamlessly integrates. According to a study conducted by the association Elles Women Composers, published in 2024, an analysis of nearly 3,365 French concert programmes across diverse venues and concert formats during the 2022/23 season reveals that only 11% included at least one composition by a woman. This figure drops to 6.4% when considering the total number of compositions rather than the number of programmes, which indicates not only that women composers are significantly underrepresented in terms of the quantity of concerts, but also in the repertoire performed within them. These findings align with those presented in the collective work *Compositrices. L'égalité en acte* (2019). In the chapter "Programmer l'égalité," David Verdier underscores that, across all musical institutions and genres, "women remain under-represented in the music sector".¹⁴ This under-representation is especially pronounced in "positions of great responsibility"—such as composition. The music industry thus diverges from other art sectors, as the roles of creator and performer are often separate. While this specific feature of the musical field has historically enabled women to enter certain skilled musical professions since antiquity, it has simultaneously posed an additional barrier to promoting the work of women composers, whose visibility largely depends on the programming decisions of musical institutions. Consequently, even when included in concert programming, women composers frequently occupy a peripheral role. Symphony concerts at the Philharmonie de Paris exemplify this trend, as they seldom feature compositions by women; when they do, these works are typically placed in the opening segment, preceding the traditional concerto and symphony that follow. This observation parallels the earlier point regarding Kaprálová: to date, no concert in France has been entirely dedicated to her work. Furthermore, her compositions tend to represent a minor portion of the overall concert duration. For instance, in the concert presented by the Orchestre National Montpellier Occitanie in February 2023, Kaprálová's *Suite en miniature* constituted only 12% of the total performance time.

Representation Varies According to Musical Genre

These considerations led me to examine another critical aspect of Kaprálová's positioning within 21st-century French music programming. Beyond the sheer

¹⁴ David Verdier, "Programmer l'égalité," in *Compositrices. L'égalité en acte*, ed. Laure Marcel-Berlioz (Éditions MF, 2019), 80.

number of concerts, as well as the venues and contexts in which they occur, a detailed analysis of the programmatic content—specifically, the selection of Kaprálová's works for performance and/or broadcast—reveals further trends. For this phase of the study, each work by Kaprálová featured in one of the thirty-two identified concerts or radio broadcasts was catalogued individually. This approach yielded a corpus of forty-six entries, as multiple works were occasionally included in a single radio programme or event previously considered a single occurrence. The selected compositions were categorized by musical genre and ensemble size, and these attributes were then contextualized according to their frequency of performance or broadcast and the specific venues or platforms through which they reached audiences. It should be noted, however, that each performance of the same composition within a touring programme has been included in the total corpus, under the rationale that the repetition of these performances potentially increased audience exposure to the work, despite identical programming across different locations.

The primary observation that emerged is the pronounced disparity in programming between Kaprálová's symphonic compositions and her works for smaller ensembles, including chamber music, piano pieces, and vocal compositions. Her orchestral works, which require a full symphonic orchestra, are predominantly broadcast via radio rather than performed in concert settings. For instance, a movement from her *Piano Concerto* was broadcast on France Musique in 2012, but it was not until 2023 that her *Suite en miniature* was included in a live performance by the Orchestre National Montpellier Occitanie. Likewise, her *Partita for piano and string orchestra* has been aired six times in France since 2016, but was performed live only once—in June 2024 by pianist Fabrice Vestad and the orchestra Les Apaches—as was her *Piano Concerto*, performed in concert only once by Célia Oneto Bensaid with the Orchestre National de Bretagne in February 2023. Thus, not only are her orchestral works seldom featured in concert settings, but they are also rarely heard in their entirety, as radio broadcasts frequently present single movements or excerpts. This under-representation of Kaprálová's symphonic compositions in concert programming may be attributed to the substantial financial, human, and logistical resources required to stage a large-scale symphonic work, which surpass those necessary for chamber or solo performances. Broadcasting a recording of an orchestral piece on radio platforms is often more cost-effective and logistically simpler than organizing a live orchestral concert. Additionally, the composer's notable presence in smaller-scale festival settings and venues such as the Czech Centre in Paris—where space constraints limit the scale of the performances—may further contribute to the preference for her piano and chamber music pieces in these contexts.

This case study reflects a broader trend affecting many women composers, whose works continue to be underrepresented in concert programming overall and even more so in the symphonic genre. According to a study conducted by Elles Women Composers for the 2022/23 French music season, only around 14.2% of the 952 works by women composers included in the sample of 14,892 programmed works were orchestral compositions. Within symphonic concerts, the proportion of programming time allocated to women composers' works was a mere 3% for the same period. Consequently, women composers remain markedly underrepresented in symphonic programming—typically the most resource-intensive and prestigious productions within music institutions—thereby limiting their inclusion in programmes traditionally reserved for “masterworks” by composers who are more widely recognized among the general public.

Returning to the case of Kaprálová, several of her orchestral works remain absent from French concert programmes and have yet to be featured in radio broadcasts. This is notably the case for her *Concertino for Violin, Clarinet, and Orchestra* and *Prélude de Noël*—two compositions preserved in the archival record and recognized by the scholarly community, as they are catalogued in Nicolas Derny's 2015 publication, *Vítězslava Kaprálová. Portrait musical et amoureux*. Given the limited instances when Kaprálová's works have been performed in France since the beginning of the 21st century, one might assume that programming opportunities have been prioritized for her most prominent pieces. However, her *Military Sinfonietta*, widely considered one of her major works, has yet to be included in a French concert programme and was only partially broadcast on radio in 2016. The same applies to her *Suita rustica*, of which only an excerpt was aired in March 2016. This selective programming pattern reflects the ongoing marginalization of Kaprálová's symphonic repertoire within the French musical landscape.

Nonetheless, Kaprálová's catalogue is not predominantly symphonic; rather, it comprises a substantial body of solo piano compositions, chamber music, and a variety of vocal pieces, including both song cycles and individual *mélodies*—a genre to which Kaprálová was particularly drawn. Considering these smaller-scale works as a distinct ensemble from her symphonic repertoire, an examination of their presence in French programming reveals unique features and certain parallels with the trends observed for her orchestral compositions. Notably, the first of Kaprálová's works to be introduced to a French audience was her *String Quartet*, which appeared both in concert and radio formats in 2002. Despite her absence from French programming for nearly a decade following this event—save for the 2009 concert at the Musée Fabre in Montpellier for the opening of the Alfons Mucha exhibition—the *String Quartet* reappeared in 2012 at the

Luberon International String Quartet Festival and on the radio, accompanied by her *Appassionata Sonata* and a movement from her *Piano Concerto*. Although live performances of her *String Quartet* have remained sporadic in France since 2012, the work was broadcast on the radio in 2016 and remains the most frequently heard of her chamber compositions in the country, enjoying two to six times the frequency of her other works. The sustained presence of Kaprálová's *String Quartet* in French programming is largely attributable to the advocacy of the Kaprálová Quartet, whose members have played an indispensable role in promoting her work. Indeed, it is almost exclusively this ensemble that has performed the *String Quartet* in France, and they are among the few quartets to have recorded it, with notable releases in 2002 and 2006. This indicates the pivotal influence of dedicated interpreters in the circulation of Kaprálová's music, particularly within the chamber music genre.

More generally, the composer's chamber music is clearly the oldest known and performed in France. In fact, apart from the *Quartet*, chamber music is favoured by the Czech Centre in Paris, which has programmed such pieces in four of the six concerts mentioned. However, two pieces are mainly performed in addition to the *String Quartet*—the *Ritournelle for Cello and Piano* and the *Elegy for Violin and Piano*, perhaps because of their instrumentation. Her *Trio for Reed Instruments* and her *Music for the Stage, Radio and Screen*¹⁵ are among the works that have never been performed or broadcast in France. This restricted presentation of the composer's body of work, limited in the various musical genres to one or a few works, is even more striking in the case of the melodies and piano music. In the case of the former, it appears, first of all, that their first appearance in a programme is rather late—only in 2014 at the Czech Centre with excerpts from the cycles *An Apple from the Lap* op. 10 and *Seconds* op. 18. Otherwise, only the melody *Waving Farewell* op. 14 has been performed in concert in its version for voice and piano at the festival *Un Temps pour Elles* in 2021, while the version for voice and orchestra has been broadcast on France Musique three times, in 2016, 2018, and 2020. However, the art song is the most common in Kaprálová's catalogue of works, with eight cycles and more than a dozen isolated melodies, including *Waving Farewell*, composed in 1937. As far as piano music is concerned, the pieces for solo instrument have not enjoyed the same popularity as the *Partita* or *Concerto*, and have been performed less frequently in concert than the chamber music works. Indeed, only the *April Preludes*, the composer's most famous work for piano, have been performed in concert between 2022 and 2024

¹⁵ Composed in 1940, this work comprises four pieces: *Le Cocher* for two violins and cello, *Le Juif* for two violins and double bass, *Fanfare de l'église de Cracovie* for trumpet, and *Le Mendiant* for accordion.

in two different programmes, at the Czech Centre in Paris by Jonathan Powell and on three occasions by pianist Antonio Oyarzabal as part of his programme *La Muse Oubliée*. The work has never been broadcast on radio, but excerpts from the *Variations sur le carillon de l'église Saint-Étienne-du-Mont*, the *Sonata Appassionata* and the *Grotesque Passacaglia* have been heard from time to time.

This inquiry into the representation of Vítězslava Kaprálová's oeuvre within the French musical and radio landscape since the early 21st century is enriched by examining her discography, which has been meticulously documented by the Kaprálová Society. The study of this discography has facilitated the corroboration and re-evaluation of specific observations noted above, offering potential explanations for the patterns identified. It is important to clarify that this is not an exhaustive analysis of the discography itself; rather, it emphasizes a few salient points in light of previously highlighted observations. First, the belated rediscovery of Kaprálová's work in France—already noted in literature and musical programming—is further substantiated. Among the sixty-four albums catalogued, none have been produced by French labels, nor has any French artist recorded her works. Notably, nearly 40% of the recordings were issued by Czech labels, which reflects strong domestic interest. North America represents another significant market, with approximately 20% of all recordings originating there. As indicated, the establishment of the Kaprálová Society in Canada in 1998 has been instrumental in advancing research, unveiling lesser-known compositions through publication, concert programming, and recorded releases. The remaining recordings stem from European labels, including those based in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Spain, as well as from the Chinese label Naxos.

The role of certain performers in recording is also of decisive importance in the possibility of disseminating the works. The recording of the composer's complete piano works by Giorgio Koukl in 2017, as well as the recording of her complete orchestral works conducted by Alena Hron in 2024, have made it easier to discover hitherto unknown works by making it possible to broadcast them. The uneven programming of works in the composer's catalogue, and even the fact that some of them are simply not broadcast on French radio, can thus be partly explained. Indeed, the limited number of recordings available for a large number of compositions has had a direct impact on the possibility of introducing them to a wider audience from more diverse socio-cultural backgrounds through radio broadcasting. As a result, several works have not yet been recorded, even among the opuses in her catalogue such as the cantata *Ilena* op. 15. As we have seen, Kaprálová's works appear on the radio with fairly low frequency, and she is often mentioned only briefly, accompanied by the broadcast of an extract from one of her compositions. In this context, radio producers seem to favour her

most “famous” works, although the use of this term must of course be qualified. As a result, the *Partita for Piano and String Orchestra*, one of the earliest known and recorded, is the one that has been heard most often on French radio, a total of five times. The two most recent radio broadcasts featuring Kaprálová in 2021 and 2023 broadcast only one movement of the *Partita*. Paradoxically, however, the recordings available and therefore used were made in the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, Milan Masa’s interpretation accompanied by the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra in 1963, the oldest, was chosen in four cases out of five, while Jindřich Duras’s version with the Pilsen Radio Orchestra recorded in 1975 was broadcast once; the exclusive use of these two interpretations can be explained in part because they were reissued in 2015 and 2014, respectively. However, the decision to reissue an old performance rather than record a new version reflects the apparent difficulty record companies have had in finding orchestras and soloists with this work in their repertoire. In addition to these first two performances, another was made in 1998 by the Studio Matouš label, but it was not until 2016 that a new disc appeared, and then very recently in 2024 in the complete orchestral works by Kaprálová conducted by Alena Hron. The same is true for most of the composer’s works, particularly her symphonic works, such as the *Suita Rustica*, first recorded in 1975 and only again in 2016 and 2024.

Conversely, certain works have been recorded only recently—some as late as 2020 or after—thus significantly delaying their availability to a broader audience. For instance, *Sad Evening* for voice and orchestra was recorded for the first time by Naxos in 2021, while the *Trio for Reed Instruments* and *Two Choruses for Women’s Voices, Op. 17* were only documented in 2023. Consequently, public awareness and the accessibility of Kaprálová’s repertoire in France have seen notable growth, particularly within the past two years.

Nevertheless, substantial efforts are still required to secure her consistent inclusion within diverse musical programming formats. Achieving this would entail increased concert performances and radio broadcasts, as well as a more diversified and standardized approach to presenting her compositions across a variety of musical contexts and institutions throughout France.

French Music Programming as a Reflection of a Masculine Vision of Music History?

Kaprálová’s musical legacy and its reception in France are shaped by a broader cultural and academic framework. The delayed onset of French-language research on Kaprálová has clearly influenced her limited recognition among 21st-century French audiences, despite her significant connection to Paris during her lifetime. Public awareness and appreciation of her works are closely linked to advances in

scholarly research on her oeuvre. Funding dedicated to research on her musical career would support the discovery and publication of previously unknown works, followed by concert performances that introduce these pieces to varied audiences.

The process of recording a work, making it durable and enabling it to be distributed even more widely, especially on a transnational scale, comes second. France remains in an initial phase of rediscovery of Kaprálová, as evidenced by the relatively infrequent programming of her works in concert and the lack of recordings by French labels and performers. Like many women composers, Kaprálová has faced historical neglect, which has resulted in the obscuration of her contributions and her role in 20th-century Czech music. This marginalization has significantly delayed the inclusion of her works in the established musical canon. Achieving genuine equity in French music programming will require a critical reassessment of the canons traditionally upheld, with the integration of overlooked segments of music history.

This revisiting of a history of music “lying by omission”¹⁶ implies a major commitment on the part of players in the musical world, with a history including women musicians and specifically women composers remaining marginal in the face of a “dominant, almost masculine history”¹⁷ perpetuated and reinforced since the recognition of musicology as a scientific discipline in 1898.¹⁸ Musicologist Florence Launay has highlighted the consequences of this one-sided vision, which “has been assimilated by most of the players and players in musical life, performers, conductors, playwrights, press and radio journalists, record company directors, artistic agents, institutional decision-makers, publishers, etc.”¹⁹ This list highlights the extent of the work that needs to be done to bring about clear and significant changes in the visibility of women composers. Indeed, rehabilitating their real artistic impact is a lengthy process with many issues at stake, and it requires awareness and a desire for lasting change on the part of the various musical institutions rooted in the French artistic landscape, over and above isolated initiatives. However, the idea of including women composers in the same way as men composers in music programming still faces a number of symbolic and commercial obstacles. Indeed, the artistic approach adopted by French music institutions with a national reach often remains fairly traditional. Every year, the musical seasons give pride of place to the “great classics”, performed by internationally renowned ensembles, which attract large audiences who are already won over before the concert even begins. The inclusion of women composers

¹⁶ Florence Launay, “L’occultation des compositrices dans l’histoire de la musique,” in *Compositrices. Légalité en acte*, ed. Laure Marcel-Berlioz (MF, 2019).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁹ Our translation. *Ibid.*, 60–61.

in this type of event is marginal, because their works are still too often considered above all as “women’s compositions,” a decisive characteristic that seems to exclude them from the “masterpieces” already established in the collective imagination, since they have had no place in it until now. The sexist prejudices historically harboured against women’s artistic production still persist today and constitute a significant obstacle to their honest and genuine integration into the country’s various artistic programmes. Socio-musicologist Hyacinthe Ravet highlights the ideas perpetuated by this fundamental distinction between “feminine” and “masculine” in musical creation, which is detrimental to women musicians:

“Feminine” refers to the sphere of the “nice,” the “pretty” and the “cute,” but it devalues production, implying that such and such a work or approach is of little interest, does not revolutionize, will not go down in history; in other words, it is not a masterpiece, the fruit of the expression of a “genius.” On the other hand, the “masculine” is commonly thought of as neutral, universal, original, the result of the singular approach of an exceptional individual.²⁰

This presumed non-existence of musical masterpieces written by women composers—“genius” being considered “masculine” in essence—is reinforced by “the virtual absence of women composers of the past in works on the history of music [...] perceived as proof of this incapacity.”²¹ It also constitutes an argument for a large number of players in French musical life that justifies, in their view, the minimal presence of women composers in musical programming. Their works are frequently played as the first part of a concert, or at dedicated concerts. These concerts illustrate the difficulty of programming them in the same way as their male counterparts but give them a visibility they do not enjoy in other contexts. However, such concerts inevitably attach importance to the gender of women composers as an intrinsic element of the musical work, making gender the main theme of the concert. This raises a complex issue. At one and the same time, it is a question of combating the belief that there is a “feminine” way of composing music, which is inherently inferior to “masculine” musical composition; however, it is clear that without an explicit and assertive desire to programme the works of women composers, they are hardly ever performed in concert.

The fact remains that women composers are still very much in the minority when it comes to French music programming, especially among the symphony concerts offered by renowned musical establishments in the capital such as the Maison de la Radio or the Philharmonie de Paris. The example of Kaprálová fits

²⁰ Our translation. Hyacinthe Ravet, *Musiciennes. Enquête sur les femmes et la musique* (Éditions Autrement, 2011), 250–252.

²¹ Launay, “L’occultation,” 61.

in perfectly, because her works are absent from these two institutions. Indeed, although Radio France has broadcast some of her works from time to time, none of them has been performed at a symphony concert in the auditorium of the Maison de la Radio et de la Musique. As far as the Philharmonie de Paris is concerned, her *Military Sinfonietta* should have been performed in 2020, but the programme was changed in favour of Edward Elgar's *Cello Concerto* and Dvořák's "*New World*" *Symphony*. The performance of a movement from her *String Quartet* during a film concert in 2022 at the Cité de la Musique appears to be anecdotal rather than actual. The programme for the concert in question, offering a short biography of the "composers," simply does not mention her, probably considering it superfluous to present her alongside Dvořák and Janáček. Several concerts at the Czech Centre in Paris also make no mention of it in the programme notes available online, although it is part of the programme.

If we look in detail at the events at which her works have been heard in France, two observations emerge. First, several are repetitions of the same programme in different venues, such as the concert *La Muse Oubliée* by pianist Antonio Oyarzabal, performed in Paris, Strasbourg and Toulon between 2022 and 2024. Second, individual, one-off initiatives are currently playing a decisive role in bringing her career to light, an observation that can be generalized to women composers, who are often overlooked. Radio broadcasts are the most eloquent example of this. Of the eleven we have mentioned, nine were produced by just two different producers, Anne-Charlotte Rémond and Denisa Kerschova on France Musique. The Czech nationality of the latter should also be highlighted. It is important to consider these two dimensions to get a real idea of the degree of knowledge of the composer in France and to characterise her progress.

Finally, diversifying the types of artistic events and the media used to disseminate her work is essential if Kaprálová is to be better known to a more diverse public. In March 2025, a documentary about her directed by Petr Záruba and produced by Alice Tabery will be available in French for the first time.²² Part of an effort to shed light on Kaprálová's career in a format never before available to French audiences, this documentary focuses on her Parisian period, particularly her time at the École Normale de Musique de Paris. Its broadcast will enable the career and works of the composer to be brought to the attention of new audiences, beyond the scientific community. At the same time, the availability of her works on listening platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, and Deezer—an

²² Petr Záruba and Alice Tabery, "Kaprlová," Czech Film Centre, <https://www.filmcenter.cz/en/upcoming-projects/4288-kapralova> (accessed August 28, 2024).

in-depth study of which would be interesting to put into perspective with the other means of dissemination mentioned above—now represents a significant element in raising her profile among the general public. At present, a number of records, particularly those produced since 2016, are available on these platforms, in addition to various professional and amateur interpretations on YouTube. However, even though the presence of her works on these applications makes them more accessible to a wider audience, it should be noted that they are not offered “by default.” In other words, if you want to listen to one of her works, you have to know about it before you can search for it in the available repertoire. They are not included in the playlists of “Czech music” or even “women composers” generated by the platforms.

Conclusion

Kaprálová has benefited from more scholarly attention than many of her Czech women contemporaries. The distinctiveness of her career was initially emphasized within the Czech Republic, but from the late 1990s, her influence began to extend internationally, largely through the publications and initiatives of the Kaprálová Society in Canada. Although her relationship with France was significant during her lifetime, her legacy faded for several decades, only to resurface in the early 21st century, spurred by research efforts in North America and Europe. Her presence in France, evidenced by increased academic and concert programming, has expanded since 2023, which suggests the potential for her works to secure a lasting place within the French musical canon. However, this increase warrants qualification, as her visibility remains minimal compared to that of Czech composers such as Smetana, Dvořák, Janáček, or Martinů. Her identity as a woman initially hindered her acknowledgment as a key figure in 20th-century Czech music and, more broadly, in Western classical music. My future research, particularly archival work, aims to further illuminate her role in the Parisian musical landscape of the late 1930s, adding depth to the understanding of her artistic contributions.

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