

Suita Rustica

Vítězslava Kaprálová (1915–1940)

Written: 1938

Movements: Three

Style: Contemporary

Duration: Fifteen minutes

In Season Three of Amazon's series *Mozart in the Jungle*, at the grand opening of her cabaret called "Rustica," Lizzie introduces a composer:

Vítězslava Kaprálová died when she was 25, but before she did, she wrote and conducted more than 50 pieces, at a time when women were supposed to be muses, not artists.

Vítězslava Kaprálová is not a made-up composer for a far-from-realistic television show about classical musicians. She was a real composer, and what "Lizzie" said about her is true.

She was born in Brno in what is now the Czech Republic. Her father was a composer and her mother was a singer. A prodigious child, she started composition lessons with her father. She entered the Brno conservatory when she was fifteen, and made her conducting debut when she was 20, the year she graduated from Brno. She then went to Prague to study composition and conducting at the conservatory there. While there, she completed what would be her most important work, the *Military Sinfonietta*. She graduated with high distinction from the Prague Conservatory in 1937 and then moved to Paris to study with Bohuslav Martinů—perhaps the most famous living Czech composer—and conducting with Charles Munch. In 1938 she conducted her *Military Sinfonietta* for the International Society for Contemporary Music. That performance received praise in *Time* magazine: "In its 16 years of existence, the society has now and then turned up a really golden egg . . . [the] Military Symphonietta in one movement by 22-year-old Vítězslava Kaprálová, a good-looking Czechoslovakian girl. To

composer Kaprálová, who conducted her own lusty, sprawling composition, went the afternoon's biggest hand.”

In 1940, Kaprálová married Jiří Mucha. Two short months later, Kaprálová died from typhoid fever. She was soon forgotten except for the occasional footnote in studies of Martinů—her relationship with him deepened beyond that of teacher/student. Only in the last decade has there been a resurgence in interest in Vítězslava Kaprálová.

She wrote her delightful *Suita Rustica*, on commission from Universal Edition, in less than a month. Conservative in style and based on Czech folk songs (she uses some of the same material that Bedřich Smetana uses in his *Bartered Bride*), it is one of her most popular works.

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Concerto in A minor for Violin, Cello, and Orchestra, Op. 102
Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Written: 1887

Movements: Three

Style: Romantic

Duration: 32 minutes

In the summer of 1887, Johannes Brahms wrote a letter to the great violinist Josef Joachim:

Be prepared for a little shock. The idea of writing a Concerto for Violin and Violoncello has been too strong for me, much as I have tried to resist it. But I am quite indifferent on the subject until I hear what is your attitude towards it. In all friendliness of spirit however, I beg you to be quite frank. If you send me a card which simply says: I disown it, that will be quite sufficient for me, and I shall know what to do.

Brahms was being circumspect for a reason. A lifelong friendship had ended and Brahms was trying to patch things up. The two men met in 1853. Joachim was twenty-two and was already one of the most celebrated violinists in the world. Brahms was two years younger and an unknown composer, but when Joachim heard his music, he was astounded. Fifty years later he remembered that first hearing: "Never in the course of my artist's life have I been more completely overwhelmed." Brahms wrote his great *Violin Concerto* for Joachim.

Nevertheless, Brahms made the mistake of taking the wrong side in Joachim's messy divorce. Now, with his *Double Concerto*, Brahms was taking hesitant steps towards reconciliation. Joachim responded favorably to Brahms' invitation, and Brahms leapt into action. At the premiere, Brahms remarked, "Now I know what it is that's been missing in my life for the past few years . . . it was the sound of Joachim's violin."

An unusual aspect of the first movement of the *Double Concerto* is the way it begins. The orchestra begins with a forceful statement, and then the cello immediately plays an extended solo. The woodwinds play a short quiet interlude, and then the violin enters alone, soon to be joined by the cello. It's as if the cadenza is at the *beginning* of the movement rather than at the end. What follows then is the standard concerto with a full orchestra exposition of the main themes, the soloist's exposition of those themes, a development area, and a recapitulation. The second movement is a beautiful ballade and the third a fiery rondo full of gypsy themes that were so dear to both Joachim and Brahms.

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Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95 "From the New World"

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Written: 1893

Movements: Four

Style: Romantic

Duration: 40 minutes

When Mrs. Jeannette Thurber, founder of the National Conservatory of Music in America (later known as the Juilliard School) needed a director for her new school, she went straight to the top. She wanted a figurehead rather than an administrator for her conservatory, and the world famous Czech composer Antonin Dvořák would do very nicely. She offered the position to him at a salary of \$15,000 a year. (Wow!) Dvořák picked his family up and plopped them into the heart of New York City for three years, from 1892–1895.

The first work that Dvořák wrote while in America was his *Ninth Symphony*. He claimed that the title simply signified "Impressions and greetings from the New World." However, he also claimed that he based the symphony on plantation, Creole, or southern tunes, and that Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha* and even Native American music inspired the second and third movements.

A common theme or "motto" connects the four movements of the symphony. The violas and cellos play it first in the slow introduction of the first movement. Later the horns play it in the faster section. It is the primary theme of the first movement, contrasted with a more dance-like tune played by oboes and flutes. Somber brass chords start and end the second movement. The English horn plays the justifiably famous melody, and then the strings take over. The orchestra plays a more lively middle section before the return of the English horn melody. The third movement has three main themes. The first melody, played by the woodwinds, always seems to come after the beat. The second melody is more sustained and flowing, and the third

is a rollicking dance tune with its emphasis on the strong beat of each measure. Then comes the robust finale, full of martial flare that dissolves into a tender melody played by the clarinet. The final moments bring back the motto theme, played by the horns at the same time the trumpets play the fourth movement's main theme.

One hundred years after the premiere, scholars still debate the "American-ness" of this symphony written by a Czech. Dvořák's explanation was "I should never have written the symphony like I have, if I hadn't seen America."

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