WOMEN and WAR and PEACE

KATELYN BOUSKA piano

YARLUNG RECORDS
BOB ATTIYEH, PRODUCER

EVAN FLASCHEN & PATRICK TROSTLE executive producers

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1	**Caroline Shaw**	*Gustave Le Gray*	14:04
2	**Maria Szymanowska**	*Mazurkas**	2:30
3	**Maria Szymanowska**	*Fantaisie* in F Major	11:53
4	**Ruth Schönthal**	*Fragments from a Woman's Diary*	27:04
5	**Ivana Loudová**	*Prague Imaginations: Five Pieces for Piano*	11:58
6	**Vítězslava Kaprálová**	*Dubnová preludia*	9:11
7	**Ludmila Yurina**	*Shadows and Ghosts*	6:43

* Katelyn Bouska's arrangement of Mazurkas 3, 12, 8 and 17

PRODUCER'S NOTES

Yarlung executive producer Patrick Trostle heard pianist **Katelyn Bouska** perform in Bohemian National Concert Hall at the Czech Center in New York City. This was 2021, as the pandemic was beginning to lessen, after live concerts again became possible. Patrick called me a few days later, saying he had just heard this magnificent concert pianist performing works by women composers displaced or destroyed by 200 years of European wars.

"You need to meet Kate," Patrick said, "and I think you should record her. Kate not only performs in concert halls around the world, but she's a lightning-smart academic at Curtis Institute researching and lecturing regularly on Central and Eastern European composers close to her heart." Katelyn Bouska is both American and Czech. She was born in the United States, but spends many months a year performing and lecturing in Prague. In fact, she is concluding a concert and lecture tour in the Czech Republic as I write these notes. As Kate explained during our first phone call, the project took shape during her darkest days of isolation during the coronavirus pandemic. She missed her family, her students and friends and her live performances in front of living breathing audiences. To use the time productively, Kate revisited composers she wanted to explore and realized many of them shared a common theme.[1] They were refugees, or they barely survived, or didn't survive, and the fact that they were women at the cutting edge of the contemporary music scenes in their various environments made their situations even more difficult. Our earliest composer, **Maria Szymanowska**, died in the 1830 cholera outbreak instigated by Russia's invasion of Poland under Tsar Nicholas I. One of our younger composers, **Ludmila Yurina**, fled her home in Ukraine and found refuge first in the United Kingdom and then Germany after Russia's invasion in February of 2022 by President Vladimir Putin.

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[1] To see Kate talking about these composers please visit YouTube's Yarlung Channel and search under "Katelyn."

Katelyn Bouska photo on prior page courtesy of Margo Reed

Caroline Shaw

We open our album with ***Gustave Le Gray***, by **Caroline Shaw**, the one composer not directly affected by European wars. *Gustave Le Gray* takes inspiration from the darkroom exposure of a photograph, hinting at depths before they are actually visible. The work sounds like Caroline Shaw at the beginning and end, but slowly evolves in the middle section into Chopin's famous *Mazurka* in A Minor before concluding with more keyboard writing that is completely Caroline's. Chopin took powerful inspiration from Maria Szymanowska as Kate describes later in these notes, and *Gustave Le Gray* therefore offers us handsome bookends for this album, and in the process demonstrates how current all of these women composers remain. One of Kate's students at Curtis brought *Gustave Le Gray* to study with Kate shortly after the work was published ten years ago. Katelyn writes "My student described it to me as musical photography, slowly evolving, taking shape and emerging from the musical shadows before dissolving again at the end.

photo: Kait Murphy

“This is the magic of our art form – its suspension of time and texture and place, giving the listener and performer alike each their unique experience. For me, when I began to prepare *Gustave Le Gray* for concert myself, I was captivated with how it distorted and played with time. My own time on stage, Caroline’s time in the frame of the piece, and the Chopinesque tension between his exquisite rubato and the strict dance rhythms of the *Mazurka*.

“Hypnotic, repeating gestures of the opening push time to a standstill as simple shapes arise around the acoustic space, and then begin to inch forward. Raw and primitive gestures stand in stark relief to the gilded beauty of Chopin’s phrases. In the opening, Caroline writes to the performer in the score: ‘like a photograph slowly developing on wax paper.’ A few lines later, a new gesture like ‘an expensive Hermés silk cravat’ gradually ‘becomes a bit maniacal, freely-spinning off into their own time and world.’

“Chopin’s *Mazurka* develops and decays in the center of the work, a simple melody emerging deeply in the bass register of the piano. Caroline’s introduction proceeds slowly and firmly anchored, with rich openly-spaced harmony, ‘solid and simple like the Appalachian foothills.’ This solemn stability marks the end’s beginning as well. Soon follow more musical fragments including a simple chorale, ‘a linen hymn.’ The opening hypnotic theme returns, ‘like the fragmented hem of a song from a long time ago.’ *Gustave Le Gray* ends with a handful of final repeated chords, ‘dry, as if spoken,’ and Caroline’s piece, all fourteen minutes, departs as simply as it began. But in the process of playing it, I realize that I have changed. Seated at the piano, my center of gravity has somehow shifted slightly and I face a new direction, grounded and ready for more.”

Maria Szymanowska

On our second track, Kate plays her own arrangement of several ***Mazurkas*** (numbers 3, 12, 8 and 17) by **Maria Szymanowska** (1789-1831). Kate feels special affection for Szymanowska as the first professional female piano virtuoso. Kate expands that Szymanowska "was a pianist who rose to the highest level of virtuosity, fame and influence. Critics praised the strength of sound, her singing tone, and her delicate balance between lyricism and virtuosity. She described herself as largely self-taught. As a child of eight, her parents engaged a few private tutors for her. But regular music instruction, such as any man with her talent would have received, was refused her. Szymanowska combined extraordinary natural talent, determination and an astute understanding of audiences to make a living as a traveling virtuoso performer, decades before Franz Liszt and Clara Schumann would popularize the phenomenon.

Photograph of the painting 'Portrait of Maria Szymanowska'
photo: Jacques Nicolas Bellin / National Museum in Warsaw

“In addition to her concertizing and composing, Maria served as an important link in the development of 19th-century Polish music at a time when her country had all but disappeared. Her entire life was overshadowed by the partitioning of her country by neighboring Russia, Prussia and Austria. The third and final partition, in which Poland disappeared from the map, occurred in 1795. Szymanowska was six.

“She and others would keep the country’s rhythms alive in their music, in the vibrant rhythms of her mazurkas, the lyrical sensitivity of fantasy with its dramatic burst of fire and polonaise rhythms. She wrote in both the traditional ‘feminine’ genres for the salon (as in the mazurkas), and full-blown stage concert works full of musical weight and bravura as in evidenced by her *Fantaisie* in F Major on track 3.

“After returning to Poland from a series of concerts in London, Maria expanded upon the iconic genre of nocturnes later made ubiquitous by Chopin, and imported a Broadwood piano (a name later dear to the hearts of Beethoven lovers as well), which offered an increased palette of color and resonance. She set the stage for many of Chopin’s innovations a few decades later. The final months of Maria’s life were overshadowed by the November Uprising in Warsaw, crushed by the Russian invasion which enabled the sweeping cholera outbreak that killed her in 1831.”

Ruth Schönthal

Next we come to the heart of our project, **Ruth Schönthal's *Fragments from a Woman's Diary***. Ruth was born in Hamburg to Jewish Austrian parents in 1924, studied composing at the conservatory in Berlin when she was five, escaped Nazi Germany before the war, and died in New York in 2006. Ruth wrote this musical diary, an unpretentious memoire, during the last decade of her life. She captures public events in her life, children at play, her wedding, even a telephone call shattering the silence, as well as her inner world of passion, anger and finally peace as her final movement envisions her death while reliving important memories from her life.

Schönthal wrote of her compositional style: "there's a lot of variation and metamorphosis in the way my things are developed so that nothing ever comes back the same. Everything gets influenced and transformed, like in life itself. No recapitulation comes back as it was. My music is very volatile in its emotions. It always comes in different shapes. I like to juxtapose contrasting things as if they were the other end of the same thing. A conversion from the beautiful to the ugly or vice versa. That kind of aesthetic philosophy for which I have chosen my vocabulary to express these things. Dissonance, consonance, metric-time, sense-time, expressive, melodic, romantic, lyric, sometimes anger. As far as emotions are concerned, they always go through the whole gamut. It's not placid."

photo: Paul Seckel

Kate writes “Five-year-old Schönthal entered the Stern'sches Konservatorium in Berlin studying piano and composition, their youngest student. This auspicious beginning deteriorated swiftly in Nazi Germany. Ruth remembered hearing people in the streets singing the *Horst-Wessel-Lied* which became a Nazi national anthem including the words ‘Already millions are looking to the swastika full of hope.... Soon Hitler flags will fly over every street.... When Jewish blood will spurt from our knives, then things will be twice as good!’ In 1935, Ruth was expelled from the conservatory because she was Jewish. She survived the ensuing years because her family escaped to Sweden until the family was forced out in 1941 as part of new restrictions on Jewish refugees. Never safe and never settled, Ruth’s family moved first to Japan, then the USSR and Mexico. Finally, Ruth received a visa which enabled her to study at Yale University in 1946. She remained as a self-proclaimed ‘composer in exile’ in the United States for the rest of her life.”

Ruth used a gruesome parody of the melody of the Nazi Wessel song for a commission in 1996 to celebrate the fall of the Berlin Wall. About her commission she wrote of the “contrasting elements—the beautiful-ugly, tension-release, good-evil... opposite ends of one and the same thing. They have a magnetic attraction towards each other; they are never static. I deliberately combine the good old with the good new, because of my background and because I believe that every revolution throws out the baby with the bathwater.”

Ivana Loudová

We follow Ruth's memoire with **Ivana Loudová's *Pražské imaginace* (*Prague Imaginations): Five Pieces for Piano***. Ivana was born in 1941 and died in 2017. Loudová's mother was a piano teacher, and Ivana began playing as an young child. She later wrote that she found it difficult not to experiment with the sound world of the composers she was studying and used to make many changes to the pieces she played, some subtle and some not so subtle. Fortunately, her mother encouraged her to experiment with her own compositions while remaining more faithful to other composers' wishes. Ivana's sensitivity to timbre and keen sense of musical exploration remained paramount in her life and influenced her unique personality. Loudová's legacy is still keenly felt in Prague and abroad. At seventeen, Loudová entered a piano competition in Bratislava with her own composition. The jury was favorably impressed by her playing but even more enthusiastic about her composition. Ivana soon dedicated her life to composition. By the late 1950s and early 60s, however, the Soviet bloc restricted access to outside ideas. Fortunately in the 70s, she received a government scholarship to study in Paris with Olivier Messiaen. But the Ministry of Education at home cancelled her scholarship and recalled her from France. "It was a bad time," as she expressed, but she did not allow these setbacks to curtail her vision. Over the next twenty years Ivana collected a massive library of Western scores despite difficulties under Communist censorship. Loudová remained committed to the interchange of musical

ideas in her country, just as she followed musical developments and techniques in musical notation in other countries. In the early 90s, the Academy of Music in Prague hired Ivana as a professor, and she was thereby able to foster increasing connections abroad. As Kate points out, one of these successful connections, Studio N, is still actively running and continues today lead by Ivana's husband, composer Miloš Haase.

Kate describes how Loudová's music "illustrates a sensitivity to musical space and refined textures. In none of her compositions is this sensitivity and musical evocations more clear than in her musical snapshots of her beloved Prague. *Pražské imaginace* (Prague Imaginations) is an auditory stroll through the city, capturing both the immediacy of its present but also the city's complex past. She embeds the sounds, images and history of the city into this music, the city's tolling bells and iconic towers, the mysterious carillon strains of Loreta Monastery and even the folklore of Charles Bridge.

"Prague stands as a living monument to Czech people. One sees symbols of Czech national survival everywhere. A ten minute walk takes one past the New Town Tower, site of the first Prague defenestration in 1419 during the Hussite wars, to the Church of Cyril and Methodius where one can still see bullet holes where Czech resistance fighters held their last stand against the Nazis. And just around the corner, Charles Bridge and Castle Hill towering above it. One can just make out the side tower, site of the third Prague defenestration starting the 30-Years War in 1630s, and also the quiet 'fourth' defenestration where Jan Masaryk died from a mysterious fall out of a window during the Communist era. Ivana Loudová loved and gave her life to this city and nation, and her memory and music remain one of the Czech Republic's greatest monuments."

Kate and the Yarlung team give special thanks to the generous people who underwrote this recording.

Thank you!

Patrick Trostle
Evan Flaschen
Raulee Marcus
Skip Victor

Vítězslava Kaprálová

Following *Prague Imaginations*, Kate plays **Vítězslava Kaprálová's *Dubnová preludia*** or "April Preludes."[2] Kaprálová died in 1940 at age 25 from lung disease after her evacuation from Paris during the Nazi advance.

Kate writes: "1937 looked bright for the 22-year old prodigy finishing her studies in Prague and preparing for a move to Paris. She had already been the first woman composition student to graduate from the Brno Conservatory and the first woman to conduct the Czech Philharmonic. Kaprálová was ready to take her place on the world's stage. Her trajectory continued during her time in Paris. She worked closely with Bohuslav Martinů, knew Nadia Boulanger, and joined the ranks of a handful of woman to conduct the BBC Symphony Orchestra in London.

"It was during this time of bright optimism in 1937 that Kaprálová poured her energy into a new composition for solo piano. Begun in the same month as their name, her *Dubnová preludia* (April Preludes) illustrate her unique and vibrant musical language, strong mastery of form and her sensitive lyricism. The work's dedicatee, celebrated

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[2] Kate plays Dubnová preludia 1 and 2 on the physical CD. For more of this great music, please listen to the digital streams or downloads of this album, on which Kate plays all four preludes: yarlungrecords.com/kapralova

pianist Ruldolf Firkušný, wrote later 'Vitka's personality was unpredictable, like the weather at home in the month of April. We never knew how she would be: sometimes very happy, funny, and full of life, and sometimes, on the contrary, quite serious. She was well aware of the world situation around her.' Kaprálová's mercurial elements – vivacity, passion, optimism, strength and sensitivity – all combined to create vivid musical imagery belying her youth. Her awareness of what was happening in the wider world, including the war that would kill her at 25, remained a dark thread tugging at the brightness of her promise. She revealed this thread in one of her earliest compositions, simply titled *Válka* (War). She was nine.

Kaprálová titled the work that would garner her first international attention *Vojenská symfonieta* (Military Sinfonietta) also from 1937. In her program notes the composer wrote she had "used the language of music to express her emotional relationship toward the questions of national existence, a subject permeating the consciousness of the nation at the time. The composition does not represent a battle cry, but it depicts the psychological need to defend that which is most sacred to the nation."

Kate observed that just two years later, "that psychological need would be fatally tested." Writing from Paris, yet keeping close tabs on the Nazi annexation of her country in March of 1939, Kaprálová wrote to her family "it is cold here like in Siberia but not colder than in my heart... there have always been and always will be extremes that sometimes allow evil to win, for a while at least.... What remains to be done is to look for the good with an open mind and eyes and to become stronger through our struggle with evil. To enjoy simple, little things, to keep singing and smiling as long as we can." Kaprálová would be dead fifteen months later.

Ludmila Yurina

We conclude this album with **Ludmila Yurina's *Shadows and Ghosts***. Kate and Ludmila remain in close contact. I remember when Kate told me Ludmila made it safely to the UK, escaping the war in Ukraine, and again when Ludmila moved to Germany. I lived in Germany for several years while I was at university and I love the country. It gives me pleasure to realize that Yurina feels safe in Germany, the same country that forced Ruth Schönthal and her family to flee eight decades ago but more recently recognized Schönthal's enormous contribution with a 1996 concert in Berlin celebrating her music. (Ruth won the Heidelberg International Composition Prize for Women Composers in 1994 as well.)

Yurina uses *Shadows and Ghosts* to play with sounds normally generated by electronic instruments. Ludmila originally improvised this piece during a live concert and transcribed her performance later. *Shadows* stretches an acoustic piano's abilities in challenging ways, incorporating avant-garde jazz elements and keyboard techniques including the natural decay of sustained notes that sound like extended techniques but aren't. Kate enjoyed diving into this work and writes "Yurina remains deeply interested in resonance and filling the sound space of the concert hall in unique ways. When she is not using electronics or extended techniques, she is experimenting with acoustic instruments to generate similar sounds. In addition to her music, Ludmila is close to my heart as

a powerful advocate for Ukrainian music and music created by women in particular. In 2002 she founded and chairs the association "Women in Music" in Ukraine, and serves as a member of the Honorable Committee of the *Donne in Musica* festival in Italy.

"I love how *Shadows and Ghosts* builds 'acoustical walls' from specifically-chosen dissonances that create a thick vertical texture. Yurina combines these textures with subtle pedal techniques and dampening in the instrument to enhance these unique acoustic phenomena. It feels to me as if acoustic shadows begin to emerge 'in front of the walls,' some so delicate they are felt rather than seen or heard, while others leap out in stark relief. Ghosts gradually emerge in the musical space around the performer and listener, cocooning us in greyness. Which are the shadows and which are the ghosts? You the listener can decide. Please let me know what you think."
katelynbouska.com

Kate flew to Southern California to record with us on August 8th and 9th, 2022 in **Samueli Theater** at **Segerstrom Center for the Arts** in Costa Mesa. She performs on New York Steinway 549654, kindly given to Segerstrom Center by my friend and Yarlung patron **Michelle Rohe**, and tuned for us by **Kathy Smith** and her wonderful team. Fellow recording engineer and equipment designer **Arian Jansen** and I used the SonoruS ATR12 to record analog tape, the Merging Technologies HAPI to record 256fs DSD in stereo and surround sound and the SonoruS ADC to record PCM. We used our friend **Ted Ancona**'s AKG C24 microphone previously owned by Frank Sinatra, and vacuum tube microphone amplification by Yarlung executive producer and designer **Elliot Midwood**.

Our hearty thanks to Yarlung board president **Aaron Egigian** and his remarkable Segerstrom Center staff in Costa Mesa for making us feel so welcome, and to executive producers **Evan Flaschen** and **Patrick Trostle** for underwriting this album. Evan and Patrick were joined by **Raulee Marcus** and **Skip Victor** with important additional support. Thanks most of all to Katelyn Bouska and her six wonderful composers for taking us on this journey contemplating the perils of war and human aggression while celebrating our survival and creative response.

—Bob Attiyeh, producer

Executive Producers: Evan Flaschen and Patrick Trostle

Recording Engineers: Bob Attiyeh and Arian Jansen

Mastering Engineers: Steve Hoffman, Arian Jansen and Bob Attiyeh

Microphone Preamplification: Elliot Midwood

AKG C24 microphone: Ancona Audio

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RIGHT
VU
PEAK
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