



A Fulbright Evening of CZECH MUSIC

Bree Nichols, soprano

Isabel Keleti, piano

Friday, April 14, 2023

5:00 pm

Recital Hall

Music Building

PROGRAM

A Lecture Recital Filled with Storytelling and Inspiration from the Homeland of Dvořák and Janáček

Praze (To Prague) (after 1925) Josef Bohuslav Foerster (1859–1951)

- I. Město usíná (The City Falls Asleep)
- II. Láska (Love)
- III. Praze (To Prague)

V mlhách (In the Mists) (1912) Leoš Janáček (1854–1928)

- I. Andante
- II. Molto adagio
- III. Andantino
- IV. Presto

Březen (March) (1931) Julie Reisserová (1888–1938)

- I. Za svítání (At Dawn)
- II. Nostalgie (Nostalgia)
- III. Jaro v ulici (Springtime in the Streets)
- IV. Světlo (Light)

Piano Sonata 1.X.1905, "From the Street" (1905) Leoš Janáček (1854–1928)

- I. Předtucha (Presentiment) – Con moto
- II. Smrt (Death) – Adagio

Melancholické písně o lásce (Melancholy

Songs About Love), Opus 18 (1906) Vítězslav Novák (1870–1949)

- I. V svět přišla láska (Love came into the world)
- II. Je láska jako hvězda (Love is like a star)
- III. Kdy láska přilétá? (When will love fly hither?)
- IV. Ó, lásky moře bezdné (O, the fathomless sea of love)

Seven hundred thirty-second program of the 2022–2023 season
Photography and videography are prohibited

TEXT/TRANSLATIONS

Praze

Město usíná

Miluji tvoje stříbrné usínání,
když za večera v bílém pelu hvězd

pomalů tichneš v přelud snů a zdání,

ty líbezná, ty která ze všech měst
usínáš nejkrásněji.

V zahradách ležiš křídově ojíněná,
jak na tě měsíc mží svůj chladný
třpyt,
tvůj křehký smutek volným rytmem
sténá
a vydychuje modrý kolorit
jak stíny na závěži.

Miluji tvoje stříbrné usínání
s krajkovím stínů na zdech podél
cest,
celý tvůj klidný obraz v Boží dlani,

ty líbezná, ty která ze všech měst
usínáš nejkrásněji.

--Nina Tučková (1888–1952)

Láska

Stesk jara zhoust v letní žár

a voní jasmínem a věncí akátem

tvé skráně, Praho,

den za dnem kane, Boží dar,
do ulic, jimiž okouzlení jdem',

i na tvou řeku, Praho.

To Prague

The City Falls Asleep

I love the silver way you fall asleep,
When in the evening, in the white
pollen of the stars,

You slowly fall silent, into a specter of
dreams and illusions,

You lovely one, you, who of all cities
Fall asleep most beautifully.

In the gardens you lie, chalkily frosted,
As the moon mists its cold shimmer
upon you;

Your fragile sadness sighs in loose
rhythm,

And exhales a spectrum of blue
Like shadows on a snowdrift.

I love the silver way you fall asleep,
With a lace of shadows on the walls
along streets,

The whole of your peaceful image in
God's hand;

You lovely one, you, who of all cities
Fall asleep most beautifully.

Love

The nostalgia of spring has thickened
into summer heat,

And it fragrances your temples with
jasmine

And wreaths them with acacia, O
Prague.

Day after day it flows, a gift from God,
Into the streets through which we walk,
enchanted,

And into your river, O Prague.

TEXT/TRANSLATIONS

Bolestmi korunovaná,
kde vzala's úsměvy a něhu věčných
jar,
jimiž dnes kveteš?
Přadena věky snovaná
ti dala zlatohlav protkaný snem,

ten živý je, ne veteš.

Tvůj sen jsem s tebou snil.
I dovol dnes, bych vzpomínaje
mrtvých,
kameny tvoje vděčně políbil.
--Karel Toman (1877–1946)

Prague

Jsi skutečnost, sen a vidina,
kamenná báseň s krajkou věží,

jsi milenka věčná a jediná,
do jejichž vlasů květy sněží.

Jsi tisícileté hvězdy třpyt,

země živé rudě bijící krev,

jsi noci čar a jitřní svit,

v něž modlitbou zvonů zní zpěv.

Jsi slunce mé i můj dech,
země mé slavná svatozář,
jsi milenka má ve všech dnech,
jíž srdce své kladu denně na oltář.
--Jan Grmela (1895–1957)

Crowned with pain,
Where did you find the smiles and
tenderness of eternal spring
With which you are blooming today?
The skeins spun by the ages
Have given you a cloth of gold,
interwoven with a dream—
A living one, not an old worn thing.

I have dreamed your dream with you.
And grant that today, remembering
the dead,
I might kiss your stones in gratefulness.

To Prague

You are reality, dream, and vision,
A poem of stone with a lace veil of
towers;

You are the eternal and only mistress
Into whose hair flowers fall like snow.

You are the radiance of a millennial
star,

The red-pounding blood of a living
nation;

You are the spell of night and the light
of morning

Into which the song of bells rings out
a prayer.

You are my sun and my breath,
The glorious halo of my country;
You are my lover day by day,
For whom I daily lay my heart on the
altar.

TEXT/TRANSLATIONS

Březen

Za svítání

Mně spánek víčka nesklížil
a zatím den se připlížil
a zírá v jizbu moji.
A v útrapách se zmítá duše má
ji souží pochybnosti zlé
ji děsí přízrak noci.

Zmírní úzkost svou má duše
zbav se tísně! Jásej, jásej!
Slyš jak zvolna s výše
ranní zvony znějí tiše.

Nostalgie

Již překonána zimní noci tma
a jarem rozkvetl kraj.

Hle, tam labuť brázdí
lem stříbrošedých mráčků
křídlem sněhobílým.
A míří tam v jih
kde týdny dlouhé má dívka dlí

po níž mé srdce touží.
Ó labuti má, dones mne k ní
na svých křídlech.

Jaro v ulici

Já třídami města bloudím
a sním, že potkám tě někde zas.
A proč, když vím, žes odešla z města

a že tě ztrácím.

Leč přece touha šve mne,
A tak bloudím městem,
bloudím a sním,
že tě náhle potkám zas. Ach!

March

At Dawn

Sleep has not yet closed my eyes,
And meanwhile, the day has crept up
and is gazing into my room.
My soul is buffeted by sorrows;
Evil doubts torment me,
Horried by the wraith of night.

Calm your anguish, my soul;
Throw off your distress! Rejoice, rejoice!
Hear how from above, one by one,
The morning bells are softly ringing.

Nostalgia

The darkness of winter's night is spent,
and the land has blossomed with
spring.

See, the swan is skimming
the hem of the silver-gray clouds
with its snow-white wing.
And it is flying south,
where for long weeks, my maiden
has remained,
the one for whom my heart longs.
O, my swan, carry me to her
On your wings!

Springtime in the Streets

I wander through the streets of the city
and dream that I will meet you again.
And why, when I know that you have
left the city
and I am losing you?

But my desire torments me;
And so, I wander through the city;
I wander, and I dream
That suddenly I might see you again.
Ah!

TEXT/TRANSLATIONS

Světlo

Když přejde noci stín
zas denní světlo svítne.
Jak z těžkých, tmavých, zimních
mraků
když jara paprsek tušením kmitne.

Zpěv ptáčat, plný víry
z mořských dalek k nám až zní
leč srdce po strastech léta

se ptá, se ptá, zda doufat smí.

Však když dětinná víra

je chrání, je chrání v tom moři běd!
V záplavě jarního slunce
mu s úsměvem rozkvete svět!

Melancholické písně o lásce

V svět přišla láska

V svět přišla láska, dávno je tomu,
divné to nebylo pranikomu.
Jako když řeka svahem svým běží,

les pláče, vítr hřmí bez otěží.

Jen jedno srdce hledala vroucí

a čistě, pro ni žijící, mroucí.

Co našla? Hrobu chlad neb sněhy,

neb sobectví pod maskou něhy.

V té chvíli tak jí smutno bylo,
jak děcku, v polích jež zabloudilo.
I chtěla zpět— leč k ráji z trestu,

že vyšla, nemohla najít cestu.

Light

When the shadow of night has passed,
The light of day will shine again,
Like when from the dark, heavy clouds
of winter,
a ray of light quivers with the
premonition of spring.

The song of the birds, so full of faith,
Rings to us from across the distant seas;
But the heart, after the year's
afflictions,
Asks the summer whether it may hope.

Yet when childlike faith guards the
heart,

It shelters it from that sea of sorrow!
In a flood of spring sunlight,
The world, smiling, blooms for it!

Melancholy Songs About Love

Love Came into the World

Love came into the world, long ago;
And it wasn't strange to anyone at all.
It was like a river running down its
slope,

The weeping of the forest, or the
unbridled thunder of the wind.

She searched for just one heart that
was loving and pure,

That would live for her, and die for her.

What did she find? The chill of the
grave, or snows,

Or selfishness beneath the guise of
compassion.

In that moment, how sad she was,
Like a child lost in the fields!

And she wanted to go back; but out
of affliction to paradise,
She could not find the way.

TEXT/TRANSLATIONS

A od té chvíle bloudí a hledá,
že najde, naděj vžít' si nedá.
Někdy jen v srdci věřícím, prostém
po léta tichým jest, neznámým
hostem.
Někdy jen v básníka mihne se písni,
jako když chudobku rosa potřísní.

To jsou však mžiky, pohádky jara,
staré to vzdechy— a píseň též stará.
A láska chodí od domu k domu,
a divné to není již pranikomu.

Je láska jako hvězda

Je láska jako hvězda:
zhasne a padne citů do moře,

a za okamžik stopy jasné
již nezůstane v prostoře.
Pak v duši hlucho,
pouští žasne jen měsíc, smutek
nahore.

Je láska jako hvězda:
zhasne a padne citů do moře.

Vír zavře se, tiš roucho řasné

po rudém prostře obzore,
těm klidný úsměv, vrásky časné,

těm zase zbyly od hoře.
Je láska jako hvězda: zhasne.

Kdy láska přilétá?

Kdy láska přilétá?
Když jaro dýchá po horách,

ze země mízu loudí
a labuť, jinde zrozená,
po našich vodách bloudí;

And since that time, she has wandered
and searched;
Yet she has no hope of finding.
Sometimes, only within the simple,
believing heart,
She has dwelled for years as a silent,
unknown guest.
Sometimes she flickers within the song
of the poet,
Like when dew flecks the daisy.

These are but glimpses, fantasies of
spring,
The old sighs—and the old song;
And love walks from house to house,
And it isn't strange now to anyone at
all.

Love Is Like a Star

Love is like a star
it will go out, and fall into a sea of
passions;

And after a moment, its bright trail
will no longer remain in space.
And in the soul,
the moon deafly watches the desert
of sadness above.

Love is like a star:
it will go out, and fall into a sea of
passions.

The vortex closes, its draped robe of
silence

cloaking the crimson horizon;
And a peaceful smile and untimely
wrinkles

remain with them still from the grief.
Love is like a star: it will go out.

When Will Love Fly Hither?

When will love fly hither?
When spring breathes along the
mountains,

Coaxing sap from the earth,
And the swan, born elsewhere,
Meanders upon our waters;

TEXT/TRANSLATIONS

s břehu když do vln bublavých
měkounká pomněnka se dívá

a lidem vonných za noci
v každinké žilce zpívá.

Kdy láska odlétá?
Když nad oblaky nahoře
labuř své mladé volá
a dole vítr v strništích
vzdorná si hvízdá kola;
v zpáteční vodě pod mlýnem,
když žlutavá se stříše točí,
a lidem němým za noci
i ve snu chladem vlnou oči.

Ó, lásky moře bezdné

O, lásky moře bezdné,
lze k tvému dospět dnu
Lze myšlence neb snu
pít z tvojí číše hvězdné?
O, lásky dlouhé pole,
lze uvít v kytici
vše kvítí zářící,
jež plá a svítí v kole?

O, perly ze dna moře,
o květy z lásky niv,
ať pozděj nebo dřív
z vás v duši padá hoře.
Ať oklame nás láska,
ať vše nám povolí,
vždy konec zabolí
a čelu zbude vráska.

Nechť člověk žal jen tuší,

vždy srdce svoje rád
v ten květný vrhá sad
a v moře to svou duši.

When from the waterside,
Downy forget-me-nots watch the
frothing waves;
And when, on fragrant nights,
Love sings within every human vein.

When will love fly away?
When over the clouds above,
The swan calls to its young;
And below, the wind in the shorn fields
Whistles a defiant roundelay;
When yellowed sheep-shearings spin
In the churned water beneath the mill;
And when at night, even in dreams,
The eyes of the mute people weep
from the cold.

O, the Fathomless Sea of Love

O, fathomless sea of love,
Could your depths ever be reached?
Is it possible, in a thought or a dream,
To drink from your starry goblet?
O, deep field of love,
Could one weave into a bouquet
All your shining flowers
That sparkle and gleam in their dance?

O, pearls from the ocean's floor,
O, flowers from love's meadow,
Sooner or later,
You bring grief to the soul.
Let love deceive us,
Or let her grant us all our desires;
The end will always hurt,
Leaving a wrinkle on the brow.

Though a person may foresee only
sorrow from it,
He will ever cast his heart gladly
Into that flowering grove,
And into that sea, his soul!

PROGRAM NOTES

Praze

Josef Bohuslav Foerster was a major figure in the transitional period between the Czech Romantics (Dvořák, Smetana, and Fibich) and the interwar avant-garde. A Christian humanist, Foerster imbued his compositions with spiritual themes of a highly emotional but complex and sometimes cerebral nature; his religious themes have been posited as a reason for his works' fading prominence after World War II as the Communist era began. Penned within the first years of Czechoslovak independence, this cycle blends Foerster's intellectual style of harmonic complexity, bold organ-inspired counterpoint, and Straussian phrasing, with the simple clarity and *naïveté* that characterized the composer's later works.

Praze is a love letter in song to Foerster's home city, and carries within it all the pride and elation that filled the nation as they declared independence after centuries of foreign rule—the very sentiment that motivated the composer to move home to Prague in 1918 after years abroad. The texts, a selection from the wellspring of impassioned nationalist poetry of the time, depict the city with the ardor of a lover, the devotion of a worshiper, and the spiritual reverence of a prophet.

The final song of the work concludes with a thundering, cacophonous ostinato of dissonant repeated patterns. Perhaps Foerster was here depicting one of Prague's most characteristic sounds at the time: the overlapping tones of church bells. The composer has here preserved, in song, a sound that was lost forever in 1941–42 when the Nazis confiscated Prague's bells along with nearly 10,000 from across the nation. Foerster's composition unites in spirit with the fabled priests who, in protest of their bells being turned into tanks and weapons, threw them into the Vltava River by night.

V mlhách

Janáček's four-movement piano cycle was written in 1912 during a "misty" period in his personal and professional life. His daughter, Olga, had died a few years earlier, he felt trapped in an unhappy marriage, and his operas were being repeatedly rejected by theaters in Prague. It is his final major piano composition, heavily influenced by the French Impressionism of Debussy's piano works and the sounds of traditional Czech folk instruments, like the fiddle and cimbalom. All four movements are largely written in "misty" keys with five or six flats; and also characteristic of the cycle are the frequent changes of meter. Janáček employs small melodic fragments borrowed from Moravian and Slovak folk music, which are developed and transformed throughout. Of the several possible interpretations of the title, the most persuasive is the mists of obscurity in which the composer most unwillingly dwelled.

PROGRAM NOTES

Březen

An outstanding composer whose works were frequently performed by notable musicians during her lifetime, Julie Reisserová studied with such luminaries as Josef Bohuslav Foerster, Albert Roussel, and Nadia Boulanger. Her time in Paris crystalized a style that combined French impressionism with the late Romantic tradition. The wife of a diplomat, Reisserová was a cosmopolitan personage adept at languages, who helped to raise the international profile of contemporary Czech music through her compositions and writings. In *Březen*, as in her later song cycle *Pod sněhem*, she infuses her harmonic and melodic language with threads of exoticism, setting traditional Chinese poetry in the latter three songs.

Piano Sonata 1.X.1905, "From the Street"

Janáček, a fervent Czech nationalist, witnessed the tragic death of František Pavlík (1885–1905), on October 1, 1905 during a political demonstration. Pavlík was bayoneted on the steps of Besední dům as tensions rose between the German-speaking Austrian majority and the Czech minority defending the use of Czech language at the Czech university in Brno. Janáček intended the composition to be a tribute to Pavlík, with the title referring to the date of his death. He started to compose it immediately after the incident and finished the three-movement sonata in January 1906. Right before the first public performance, Janáček cut out and burned the third movement, a funeral march. Fortunately, the pianist who premiered the work, Ludmila Tučková, saved a copy of the first two movements, which Janáček allowed to be published twenty years later.

Melancholické písně o lásce

The contemporaneous music critic Zdeněk Nejedlý tentatively noted Vítězslav Novák as an early champion of Czech modernism despite his so-called conservative training under Dvořák, particularly in the realm of large-scale instrumental works. However, Novák did not remain on the forefront of artistic innovation and would become a symbol of conservative style by the end of his career, owing in part to his use of folk elements. But by the same token, Moravian folk style also imbued his music with exotic harmony and distinctive rhythmic patterns. John Tyrrell writes, "What took [Novák] out of a conventional late-Romantic idiom derived from Brahms, Grieg and Tchaikovsky was his encounter with Moravia."

Novák penned this song cycle during an extended (and musically productive) trip to the sea. In a departure from his earlier work *Melancholie*, Op. 25, Novák here sought to convey "melancholy in major," a description that captures the spectrum of emotions depicted in the work just as aptly as the opus itself explores the many facets of love through the words of three poets.

PROGRAM NOTES

V svět přišla láska—The theme presented at the song's opening consists of two simultaneous melodies, one rising and one descending; together they depict the advent of love to the earth. The word “love,” *láska*, carries feminine grammatical gender in Czech, which here contributes to the anthropomorphism employed by the poet Jaroslav Vrchlický (1853–1912).

Je láska jako hvězda—Novák here loosely reflects the poetic form of Jaromír Borecký's (1869–1951) lines by punctuating through-composed verses with a concise but bold two-line refrain. It opens with an astral dominant ninth chord arpeggiating into the heights, passionately declaiming the likeness of love to a star. But with the sudden shift of tonality to E minor on the word *zhasne* (“it will go out”), we understand the dark nature of the comparison: not that love is like the beauty or brightness of a star, but that it is similar in its ephemerality and the emptiness it leaves behind. The composer's frequent use of extended dominant chords, secondary dominants, and added sevenths destabilize the tonal center of the piece so that it aurally alternates between B minor and its subdominant, E minor. The piece ends abruptly halfway through the refrain, lingering on the E minor chord, a bitter depiction of the sudden extinguishing of love and the hollowness left in its place.

Kdy láska přiletá?—The “flight” of love is here depicted in a capricious triplet motive which is rhythmically developed throughout the song. Like the poem, penned by Jan Neruda (1834–1891), the song unfolds in a parallel, contrasting two-part structure. Novák further illuminates the textual contrasts through repetitions of earlier material in new key areas and modes, consistently shifting between D and F# as the tonal centers of the piece. This alternation in tonal center reinforces the binary of love's presence and absence described by the poetry.

Ó, lásky moře bezdné—The conclusion of the cycle binds up the ideas of the fleeting joy of love, and the suffering that comes with heartbreak. The final four lines summarize the universality of this experience: that despite the pain brought by love, a person nonetheless throws himself at its mercy. Mirroring the poetic shift, Novák here departs melodically from the preceding material, arcing climatically through an ascending chromatic sequence to, finally, an emphatic arrival at the home key of E Major (the same key glorifying the boundless depths of love at the opening of the piece). The conclusion in E Major, fixed upon the supertonic of the cycle's opening key of D minor, grants a sense of transcendence of love's melancholy, literally stepping to a “higher” plane. This tonal area also gives closure to the unsatisfying suggestion of E minor in song two that symbolized love's expiration, so that the listener is left with the notion of accepting love's trials and relishing its beauties in spite of them.

BIOGRAPHIES

Bree Nichols is a UNT alumna (D.M.A. '21) and soprano praised for her "rich vocal disposition" (*KlasikaPlus*) and compelling stage presence. A Fulbright grantee to the Czech Republic in 2021–22, Bree is known for her interpretations of Czech vocal music in addition to a diverse operatic repertoire. Her career has taken her to the stages of the North Czech Philharmonic, Pilsen Opera, Symphony of the Mountains, Capitol City Opera, Opera Roanoke, Lewisville Lake Symphony, the Olomouc Baroque Festival, and more. A decorated competitor, Bree won first place in the Artist Division of the 2023 National Opera Association Vocal Competition and the 2023 Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition (Arkansas District), and was a recipient of the 2023 Bonnie Cummins Fielder Grant. She was also the winner of the 2020 Presser Award in support of her performance and study of Czech opera. Her recent performances include the title roles of *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *The Bartered Bride* as well as Gilda (*Rigoletto*) and Nedda (*Pagliacci*). Off the stage, Bree Nichols is an innovator in community opera initiatives; she is founder of Opera Arlington and serves emerging singers on the faculty of NTX Vocal Arts Exchange.

Isabel Keleti is a Kansas native and NYC-based pianist. A recipient of the 2021–2022 Fulbright award, Isabel studied with Jan Jiraský at the Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Brno and has a deep affinity for Czech music. Isabel has performed at a variety of concert venues across Asia, the United States, and Europe, including Xi'an Concert Hall in Xi'an; Renmin University in Beijing; Lied Center in Kansas; Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall; Bohemian National Hall; and the National Museum in Prague. She won first place in the ROXE MTSY International Music Competition in Xi'an, BIMFA Solo Piano Competition in Beijing, Sigma Alpha Iota Competition and Kansas Music Teachers Association Collegiate Auditions. She has been featured as a soloist with the Alicante Symphony Orchestra of Spain, Heritage Philharmonic Orchestra of Missouri, and Conero Festival Orchestra in Italy. Isabel completed a master of music at Mannes School of Music in New York City with Dr. Vladimir Valjarević and received her bachelor of music from KU School of Music with Dr. Jack Winerock. She was recently named a co-owner of Groupmuse, a platform which connects classical musicians with local audiences through house concerts.

