

MARTINŮ

The Months

Songs • 2

Jana Wallingerová, Mezzo-soprano
Giorgio Koukl, Piano



Bohuslav Martinů (1890–1959) Songs • 2

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|---|------|---|------|
| 1 Libej, milá, libej! (Keep On Kissing, Love), H. 27 (P. Manin) | 1:55 | 11 Pastel, H. 8 (Bohdan Kaminský, 1859–1929) | 2:41 |
| 2 Ráno raníčko pleju obilčko (Early Of A Morning I Am Out A-Weeding), H. 49 (Augustin Eugen Mužík, 1859–1925) | 1:39 | 12 Kdysi (Long Ago), H. 69 (Ludmila Grossmannová-Brodská, 1859–1935) Tři písně pro ‘Červenou sedmu’ (Three Songs for the ‘Red Seven’ Cabaret), H. 129 | 1:05 |
| 3 V zahradě na hřadě (In The Garden At The Roost), H. 77 (Traditional) | 1:56 | 13 No. 1 Balada letní (Summer Ballad) (Jiří Herold) | 6:02 |
| Měsíce (The Months), H. 135 (Karel Toman, 1877–1946) | | 14 No. 2 The Bar (Jiří Dréman, 1892–1946) | 4:43 |
| 4 No. 1 Leden: Po cestách zavátých (January) | 2:28 | 15 No. 3 Havířská (The Miner’s Song) (František Gellner, 1881–1914) | 2:39 |
| 5 No. 2 Březen (March) | 2:43 | 16 Mám staré parky rád (I Love Old Parks), H. 79 (Jaromír Borecký, 1869–1951) | 1:05 |
| 6 No. 3 Září (September) | 4:22 | 17 Spící (The Sleeper), H. 19 (Edgar Allan Poe, 1809–1849: Czech translation by Jaroslav Vrchlický (1853–1912)) | 4:10 |
| 7 No. 4 Ty jenž sídlíš v nebesích (Thou Who Art In Heaven) (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 1749–1832: Czech translation, author unknown, of Wandrer’s Nachtlied (Wanderer’s Nightsong)) | 2:20 | 18 Zimní noc (The Winter Night), H. 26 (Adolf Heyduk, 1835–1923) | 1:59 |
| 8 Ohnivý muž (The Fiery Man), H. 71 (Václav Hlavsa) | 3:19 | 19 Velikonoční (Easter Carol), H. 230 (Popular) | 1:12 |
| Dvě písně (Two Songs), H. 21 | | | |
| 9 No. 1 Kde jsem to byla (Where Was I?) (Růžena Jesenská, 1863–1940) | 6:14 | | |
| 10 No. 2 Proč zoubky tvé tak smály se? (Why The Smile Of Your Teeth?) (Vladimír Houdek, 1869–1908) | 3:06 | | |

Bohuslav Martinů was born at Polička (Bohemia) on 8th December 1890, in a bell-tower where his father was employed as watchman. In his childhood he learned the violin from a local tailor, giving his first concert in his hometown in 1905. In 1906 he became a violin student at the Prague Conservatory, but some four years later, after having been relegated to the Organ School, he was expelled. His principal interest continued to centre on composition, and he pursued this right through the war, which he spent as a teacher in Polička, before joining the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra as a violinist in 1918. Although there had been an abortive period of instruction by Josef Suk at the Conservatory, it was not until 1923 that, assisted by a state scholarship, he moved to Paris as a pupil of Albert Roussel and studied composition in earnest.

Over the ensuing years Martinů’s music began to gain a hearing, not least through Václav Talich in Czechoslovakia, Paul Sacher and Ernest Ansermet in Switzerland, Henry Wood in England, Charles Munch in France and Serge Koussevitzky in the United States. In June 1940 he and his wife fled Paris four days before the German army marched into the city, reaching New York during March 1941. In the United States he was the recipient of several commissions from the Koussevitzky Foundation, while various other organizations commissioned further large-scale works. After the war he planned a return to Prague, having been offered a professorship at the Conservatory, but was prevented from doing so by serious illness as well as the rise of the Communist Party, and in 1948 he became a professor at Princeton University. He then lived in Nice for two years until 1955, when he moved to Philadelphia to lecture at the Curtis Institute before returning to Europe to teach at the American Academy in Rome. He spent his final years in Switzerland, dying in Liestal on 28th August 1959.

Although Martinů is known for a number of significant choral works, not least his summative 1954 oratorio *The Epic of Gilgamesh* [Naxos 8.555138], attention is rarely paid to his vocal music. Songs with piano actually comprise a fair proportion of his output

until 1930, with many of them still unpublished or only recently made available in print, and cover the range of styles and genres in which Martinů worked during that time. The present recording, however, focusses on those songs that were written during the years 1910 and 1912, a period in which the composer began writing in earnest and during which time his favoured poets (if with one notable exception) were Czech poets from the middle and later nineteenth century. Understandable, then, that the folklore of his native Bohemia should have played a major rôle. None of these songs can be said to relate directly to the larger chamber and orchestral pieces on which Martinů was fitfully engaged at this time, though the set of cabaret songs from the early 1920s definitely anticipates the vocal and theatrical projects into which he threw himself after arriving in Paris, while the final song here is very much a product of that period when the composer reconnected with the Czech musical traditions of an earlier era: in doing so, it might be said to bring the present selection full circle. If not primarily a song composer, this genre must surely go a long way towards defining the soul of Martinů.

Keep On Kissing, Love (1910) is among the earliest of Martinů’s songs and is an attractive instance of a post-Dvořák love-song, though its warning to enjoy ‘first love’ to the full brings a degree of expressive ambivalence towards the close. *Early Of A Morning I Am Out A-Weeding* (1912) pursues an analogy between the equilibrium of the natural world and the inconsolability of the (presumably) rejected lover, and is notable for the abruptness of its conclusion. *In The Garden At The Roost* (1912) is a simple verse-and-refrain song in which the mother thrice tempts her daughter with suitors, who are rejected on account of their trade, before she accepts the shepherd – though here also the final bars tend to undercut the blitheness of what is being sung.

The Months (1922) is a short cycle, the first three songs of which have texts by Karel Toman (Martinů’s choice for many of his early songs). *January* depicts the dispossessed struggling through the snow, while *March* contrasts the joyous awakening of spring with the wintry

feel as it persists within the subject's heart. *September* begins as an evocation of the impending harvest before turning to that of the nearby congregation and the ringing of church bells which continues almost to the close. *Thou Who Art In Heaven* likens the benediction of the Father to the entreaties of the lover, in music whose bitonal qualities (increasingly evident in this cycle) again admit of an expressive ambiguity at the close.

The Fiery Man (1912) is essentially a nonsense poem concerning the anticipation of love, its initial frustration and its final attainment – all of which Martinů sets in his liveliest and most effervescent manner. *Two Songs* (1910) are among the most ambitious of the composer's early works: *Where Was I?* is a lengthy meditation on the transience of life and love, such as Martinů sets with a portentousness and overt reliance on rhetoric that says much about his understanding of the text; by contrast, *Why The Smile Of Your Teeth?* is a more compact and also cohesive setting of a poem which intriguingly compares the smile of the departed lover with the light that shines through the darkness as night gradually becomes day.

Pastel (1910), almost the first of Martinů's songs, tells of the enduring nature of 'first love' in terms to which the young composer responds with eager overstatement. *Long Ago* (1912) then goes to the other extreme, in its tale of far-off love whose setting lasts no longer than the words themselves. *Three Songs for the 'Red Seven' Cabaret* (1921) are an interesting diversion into the

sophisticated popular song that was much in demand in Europe on either side of the First World War. *Summer Ballad* is a depiction of love, its subsequent betrayal and overwhelming guilt in an extended song whose dark humour summons an imaginative response – not least in those passages when another voice can be heard at a distance from that of the main singer. *The Bar* is a black comedy in which the expected comings and goings of the place in question are disturbed by the deaths of one couple, while *The Miner's Song* is something of a morality tale in that the miner's son may have the local squire as his 'real' father but is still condemned to a life of hardship and unrewarded toil.

I Love Old Parks (1912) is among the most attractive and unforced of all Martinů's songs, its laconic text telling of a need to seize life (and love) while one can. *The Sleeper* (1910) is notable in being a setting of Edgar Allan Poe, typical in its Gothic aura of gloominess and dread, to which the young composer responds in notably unequivocal terms – not least during its sombre piano prelude. *The Winter Night* (1910) is a rather more subtle evocation of the approaching of daybreak, though whether this will bring happiness or merely pained remembrance is not made explicit by the text or in its setting. *Easter Carol* (1933) ends this selection with its simple message of seasonal charity – set here with a disarming simplicity.

Richard Whitehouse



Photo: Alexandr Špunda

Jana Wallingerová

The mezzo-soprano Jana Wallingerová, née Štefáčková, studied at the Prague Conservatory with Jarmila Krásová from 1993 to 1999, undertaking private study with the soprano Natalia Romanová in 2001. In 1998 she came second at the Czech Conservatories Singing Contest. Her first engagements were at the Estates Theatre of Prague Opera between 1997 and 2000. In 2000 she joined the opera company of the National Theatre in Brno, Czech Republic, where her repertoire has included Carmen (*Carmen*), Rosina (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), Suzuki (*Madama Butterfly*), The Fox (*The Cunning Little Vixen*), Varvara (*Kát'a Kabanová*), Fenena (*Nabucco*), Nancy (*Marta*), Hänsel (*Hänsel und Gretel*), and Nicklausse (*The Tales of Hoffmann*). Guest performances have taken her to a number of Czech opera houses, including the Prague National Theatre, at the Estates Theatre of Prague Opera, Plzeň, Ústí nad Labem, Liberec, and Ostrava. Her concert activities have brought collaboration with leading Czech orchestras and in 2011 she sang the alto solo in Dvořák's *Requiem Mass* at the state funeral of Václav Havel. The Brno National Theatre honoured her with the DIVA 2005, 2008 and 2010 Award, and in 2012 she was nominated for the Thalia award for her rôle as Dulcinée in Massenet's *Don Quichotte* in a production at the F. X. Šalda Theatre in Liberec.

Giorgio Koukl

Giorgio Koukl is a pianist/harpsichordist and composer who lives in Lugano, in the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino in southern Switzerland. He was born in Prague in 1953, and studied there at the State Music School and Conservatory. In 1968 he moved to Switzerland and continued his studies at both the Conservatories of Zürich and Milan. While studying there he took part in the master-classes of Nikita Magalov, Jacques Février, and Stanislaus Neuhaus, and with Rudolf Firkušný, friend and advocate of Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů. It was through Firkušný that Koukl first encountered Martinů's music, prompting him to search out his compatriot's solo piano works. Since then he has developed these into an important part of his concert repertoire and is now considered one of the world's leading interpreters of Martinů's piano music, having recorded that composer's complete solo piano music, together with a disc of Martinů's vocal music and two discs of his piano concertos. As a logical continuation of this work, and a nod to his own maternal Russian ancestry, Koukl has now tackled the complete solo piano works of Alexander Tcherepnin, a Russian composer who belonged to the same Parisian group of composers as Martinů, along with Arthur Honegger, Tibor Harsányi, Marcel Mihalovici and Théodore Beck, a group which Albert Roussel referred to as "Les Constructeurs".



Photo: Chiara Solari

Songs with piano formed a fair proportion of Bohuslav Martinů's output until 1930, and this collection focuses largely on those written during 1910-1912. With the notable exception of the Gothic gloom of Poe's *The Sleeper*, Czech poets provided the younger Martinů with a wealth of texts on themes of life and love, expressed in songs both lively and luminous. Evocations of nature are also to be found, as well as a diversion into popular genres with the sophisticated 'Red Seven' Cabaret cycle. Volume 1 (8.572588) of this edition has been admired as "beautifully and often movingly sung ... a most rewarding disc". (*Gramophone*)



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| 8 The Fiery Man, H.71 | 3:19 | 18 The Winter Night, H.26 | 1:59 |
| Two Songs, H.21 | 9:22 | 19 Easter Carol, H.230 | 1:12 |
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Sung in Czech • Full track details will be found in the booklet



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Texts and translations may be downloaded from www.naxos.com/libretti/572310.htm

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