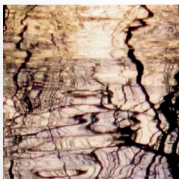
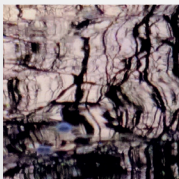
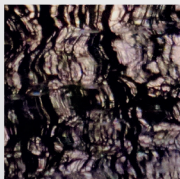
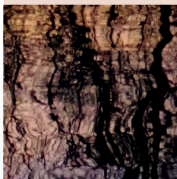


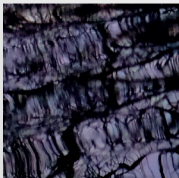
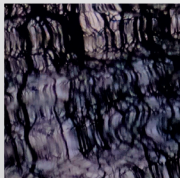
Josef **Suk**
Jaroslav **Kvapil**
Bohuslav **Martinů**
Vítězslav **Novák**
Jaroslav **Křička**
Leoš **Janáček**



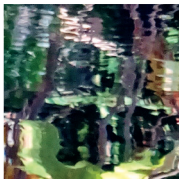
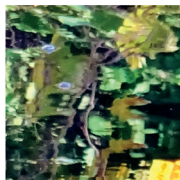
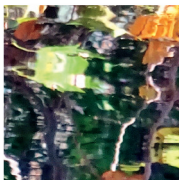
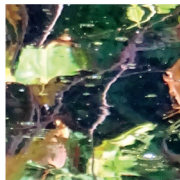
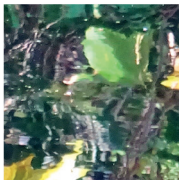
Vánoce



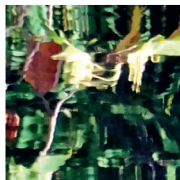
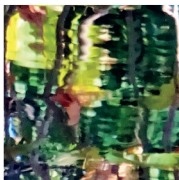
KSENIA PIANO
KOUZMENKO



CHRISTMAS IN
CZECH PIANO MUSIC



KSENIA
KOUZMENKO
PIANO



Vánoce

CHRISTMAS IN CZECH PIANO MUSIC

Josef Suk (1874 - 1935)

1. **Christmas Eve** (1923) 2:19
2. **A Child's Christmas Dream**
op.33 no. 5 (1912) 3:01

Jaroslav Kvapil (1892 - 1958)

Vánoce (Christmas) (1924) *

3. I. Con fuoco 4:53
4. II. Con moto 4:10
5. III. Lento 3:21
6. IV. Allegro molto 4:30

Bohuslav Martinů (1890 - 1959)

Christmas (1927)

7. I. Sledge 1:05
8. II. Lullaby 2:18
9. III. Christmas Carol 2:19

Vítězslav Novák (1870 - 1949)

Songs on Winter Nights op.30 (1903)

10. I. Song on a Moonlit Night Andante amoroso 4:10
11. II. Song on a Stormy Night Allegro tempestoso 2:20
12. III. Song on Christmas Night Andante misterioso 6:48
13. IV. Song on Carnival Night Allegro burlesco, rubato 4:12

Jaroslav Křička (1882 - 1969)

Intimate Pieces op. 17 (1910-11) *

14. I. Andante con malinconia 3:01
15. II. Grave, con effusione 2:07
16. III. Andante con tenerezza 2:27
17. IV. Tempo di Valse 3:51

Vítězslav Novák (1870 - 1949)

Sonatina op. 54 no. 6 (1920) (Christmas)

18. I. Pastorale. Quasi allegretto 5:00
19. II. Advent Matins Chant from the Time of Hus
Andante. Doppio movimento 4:59

Leoš Janáček (1854 - 1928)

20. **Christ the Lord is born** (24. XII. 1924) 0:45

Total playing time: 67:47 min.

* World Premiere Recording

Vánoce

“In the backroom Mrs Sládeček is lighting little candle after little candle on the Christmas tree. What light is in every corner! Even in the darkness of the two windows the gentle flames of the little candles are mirrored. Every passerby will stop to see this galaxy of light. In the deep darkness you can't see the little cottages, only their golden windows”.

(Leoš Janáček - “Early Morning Lights”, Brno, 24. XII. 1909).

On the kitchen table stands a very large doll. It's so big that I cannot see its entirety. It's a girl, almost the same size I was at the time. My grandmother does something with sugar and cotton wool which will become the clothing of the doll, Snegurochka (Little Snow Girl). We had been collecting candy foil to cut little stars from all year. Lots of them, because my grandmother made other dolls, too. Little ballerinas, dolls on skis and sledges, clowns, all to be hung on the Christmas tree. She had drawn the faces herself, the eyes of the dolls looking openly at you. After the war, making these kinds of dolls and sewing had been one of her ways to feed her children. Two weeks later we went to my other grandparents for a real Orthodox Christmas. My grandfather was an Orthodox priest (they had long been persecuted). The entire family came together. There was hardly any space in the room to seat everyone at the table. I remember an enormous bookcase which I would lean against, filled with books on history, literature, and philosophy. We were allowed to come to grandfather's Christmas mass. Grandmother was the leader of the church choir; she had a beautiful, clear voice. The sound of choir singing, grandfather's prayers, and the smell from the incense burner always comes back to me at Christmas.

This atmosphere of warmth and joy can also be felt in the music on this CD. But there is a lot more. Winter songs, long walks, dreams, games, a snowstorm, carnival, presents, and love... each piece is its own story.

And again you'll find two world premières here. On one of our trips through the Czech Republic I was permitted to look at some sheet music from Jaroslav Kvapil in the National Library in Prague. One of the pieces was called “Vánoce” (Christmas).

Without an instrument I read through the first page, and was gripped by the emotional power of the music. I wanted to play it. In the following months I discovered more and more Czech piano music around a Christmas theme. Thus the idea formed to record a beautiful Christmas program with all these pieces. The last work I found was “Intimate Pieces”, a cycle of Jaroslav Křička, one of the most important pupils of Vítězslav Novák. This composition was a Christmas present in 1912 for a certain Růža Pluhařová. It seems to be a tonal declaration of love. The intensity of its lyrical expression streams from beginning to end. In every piece on this CD we experience the immediacy of emotion in all its richness of color, which is so strongly present in Czech music.

Merry Christmas!

Ksenia Kouzmenko





These two short pieces by **Josef Suk** (1874-1935) bring distinctly different Christmas atmospheres. In “Christmas Eve”, festive bell ringing and a warmhearted folkloristic song announce the birth of the Holy Child. A very different mood reigns in the second piece, the mysterious “Child’s Christmas Dream”. It is characterized by fragile melodic lines and harmonies which touch on the border of dreaming and awakening. Both pieces are fine examples of Suk’s mature style, where he gets further away from the Romantic idiom that he studied under Dvořák. Psychologically subtle, with many voices and harmonically complex, but always melodic, sincere, and generous.



The cycle “Vánoce” by **Jaroslav Kvapil** (1892-1935) is the first of two world premières on this CD. It was written in 1924. This was a very special year for Kvapil, the year in which he got married. According to Ludvík Kundera, prominent Czech musicologist and pianist (father of the writer Milan Kundera) and head of the Janáček Music Academy in Brno for years, “Vánoce” is not ordinary Christmas music, but the very personal Christmas of the composer himself. In the manuscript Kvapil had originally given titles, written in pencil, to three of the four pieces: “Christmas”, “On the Way to

Church”, and “Lullaby”. But in the end he didn’t publish the pieces with titles, as he saw that it wasn’t really programme music. “The first part could be an image of a stormy winter landscape that suddenly brightens, but it’s actually an inner journey from chaos to peace. The bells which ring fairy tale-like, silvery in the second part, and ring with hymnic jubilation in the last part, are also the bells which rang in his own life”. Kvapil makes masterly use of polyphony, from very transparent single lines to elaborate almost orchestrally shifting layers, which together form complex rhythmical and musical structures. “Probably the happiness of his new life was so overwhelming, that the intimate sound of the piano didn’t suffice to express it all. The well-balanced sound craves an orchestra... It is not only the most personal work of Kvapil, but also an expression of an ardent life experience full of lyric beauty”.

In these pieces Kvapil’s spontaneous musicality blossoms again, his inexhaustible melodic creativity, natural musical intuition and inspiration, and his inclination to improvise are all manifested. The immediacy and intensity with which he expresses his emotions brings to mind the compositional style of his teacher, Janáček.



Bohuslav and Charlotte Martinů, Christmas 1935

Bohuslav Martinů (1890 - 1959) composed his cycle “Vánoce” in Paris during the Christmas season of 1927. Three short character pieces (“Sledge”, “Lullaby”, and “Christmas Carol”) render the atmosphere of the Christmas period and what typically belongs in it: snowy fun on a sledge, a children’s lullaby with magical bells which get more and more festive, and a merry Christmas pageant with singing and dancing. These miniatures sound very natural, but are considerably more complex than they seem. They are more like jewels, precisely finished and beautifully transparent.

Together with Josef Suk, **Vítězslav Novák** (1870 – 1949) was one of the best known pupils of Antonín Dvořák and one of the most important Czech composers of the beginning of the 20th century. He was an extraordinary pianist and taught composition for 30 years at the Prague conservatory. He educated an enormous number of Czech and Slovak composers (Habá, Kapr, Rauch, Hurník, Suchoň, Vypálek, Cikker etc.). In his music, from small miniatures to large scale orchestral works, Novák was inspired by nature, folk music, and love. In the last years of the 19th century he travelled through Moravia and Slovakia to collect folk songs, on one occasion together with Janáček. He analyzed their melodic and rhythmical features, and tried to distinguish their common characteristics. His music is full of passionate and loving lyricism, and has an enormous, sometimes impressionistic richness of color.

In his own words: “In my inner self I lived through everything that I ever wrote, every single note”.

“...when I saw her, the most tender strings played inside me... she was the object of my silent worship. She was the inspiration for my “Amoroso”— the love for Růžena sounded through in my “Songs on Winter Nights”, the “Valley of the New Kingdom” and “Eternal Longing”— an unhappy love gave life to happy pieces” Novák wrote.

The “Songs on Winter Nights” are extremely varied in atmosphere: after an amorous moonlit night follows a nightly storm, after a mystical Christmas night a burlesque carnival’s night. Night moods are very frequent in Novák’s music. He himself joked that he was “ideally qualified for the night shift”.



Vítězslav Novák

One of Novák's best and, in the Czech Republic, better known pupils was **Jaroslav Křička** (1882 - 1969). He studied in Prague and Berlin, and for several years taught and directed in Russia. While in Russia he befriended many Russian composers (including Glasunov and Taneev) and artists, introduced a lot of Czech music to Russia, and regularly wrote articles on Russian music for Czech magazines. After returning to the Czech Republic Křička directed premières of pieces by Novák and Janáček as a choir director, in addition to teaching composition and being the rector of the Prague conservatory.

His compositions stretched, in his own words, "from passion to operetta", with a strong emphasis on vocal works. His output included song cycles, cantatas, operas, operettas, symphonies, string quartets, a lot of chamber music, and theatre and film music. His music for children, including the first Czech children's opera, was unique for that period.

The music of "Intimate Pieces", the second world première on this CD, breathes love, tenderness, and passion. Křička uses many specific Italian music terms which underline the passionate character even more: *con desiderio crescente*, *con somma passione*, *con effusione*, *con tenerezza*, *con impeto*. Very characteristic of this music is a current of nostalgia and melancholia, the long, almost unending breath of the musical lines, a finely worked hidden polyphony, unexpected melodic and harmonic turns, extreme contrasts of fragility and grandiose sonority, and of the playful, the lyrical, the impulsive, and dramatic. Thematically, the four pieces are very close. Some motifs return throughout the cycle, which conveys a strong feeling of unity.



Jaroslav Křička



In 1920 **Vítězslav Novák** wrote 6 sonatinas for piano. Conceived as pieces for children, they soon exceed the confines of educational music. “I would think that the technical finesse, the canonic voice leading, a passacaglia, and the combination of two themes are not that simple. Beethoven wrote his Bagatelles, which are not to be bagatellized, Schumann in his small “Kinderszenen” is more grand than in his d-minor symphony. In short, the quality of a piece is not to be judged by its size, but by its content” wrote Novák about these sonatinas. The entire Christmas sonatina grows out of a three-note motif. The first part, which still starts the most “sonatina-like”, has a warmly lyrical and dance-like character. In the second part Novák uses an old song from the period of Jan Hus, which was sung during Epiphany. This song serves as the basis for a chorale which gets more and more personal, and emotional. The piece ends in a truly orchestral triumphant vein.



Vítězslav Novák, Jaroslav Křička (standing), Marie Novák, Ladislav Vycpálek, Jan Löwenbach, Václav Štěpán.

The last small piece, "Christ the Lord is born" (24 December 1909) by **Leoš Janáček** (1854 - 1928) is a charming and tender piano version of a very well-known Czech Christmas carol from the 15th century.

"A quiet, gentle song woven like a spider's web by the voices of two children... Inside the cottage a little girl kneels by the table, so small that the shadow from the corner falls across her face. Only her wide open eyes are in the light. The boy, who is also kneeling, is taller, his head level with the table top", wrote Janáček on 24 December 1909 in his feuilleton "Early Morning Lights". He made this transcription on that same day.

me corda

p

Na - ro - dil se Kris - tus Pán - - ve - sel - me - - se - - -

Z rů - že kví - tek vy - kvet nám - , ra - duj - me - - se - - - - -

Z ži - vo - ta čis - té - ho - - , ro - du krá - lov - ské - ho - - ;

nám - - , nám - - , na - ro - dil - - se.



KSENIA KOUZMENKO

Ksenia Kouzmenko is internationally renowned for her sensitive and technically accomplished piano playing, and is a much sought after partner in chamber music. Born in Minsk, Belarus, to a family of pianists, she studied with Vladimir Zaretsky and Grigory Shershevsky, the former teacher of her father, at the National Music College in Minsk. At the age of twelve she made her solo debut with orchestra. Over the next few years she performed piano concertos of Beethoven and Rachmaninov. She graduated cum laude, with a Gold Medal and continued her piano studies at the National Music Academy with Igor Olovnikov, where she received her Master degree cum laude. She pursued her postgraduate studies with Naum Grubert at the Royal Conservatory in The Hague, with financial support of the Yuri Egorov Foundation.

Ksenia Kouzmenko has taken part in many masterclasses with outstanding musicians such as Abbey Simon, György Sándor, Earl Wild, György Kurtág, and Ivan Moravec, and attended courses in Bach-interpretation with Walter Blankenheim. In the summer of 1997 she followed an intensive chamber music program at Tanglewood in the USA.

Ksenia Kouzmenko won the 2nd prize at the Tromp Competition in Eindhoven, where she also received the Audience Prize, and the 3rd prize at the Rencontres Musicales de Gaillard, France. She also received many prizes for accompaniment at numerous international competitions.

She has performed with the National Symphony Orchestra of Belarus, the Brabants Orkest, the Collegium Instrumentale Brugense, and the Nederlands Blazersensemble. She was a soloist in the Kurtág-project of the Royal Conservatory conducted by Reinbert de Leeuw, and on recommendation of György Kurtág himself played his "...quasi una fantasia..." with the Orchestra conducted by Olivier

Cuendet, at the Lugano Festival. She recorded concerts for the National Broadcast Corporation of Belarus, Radiotelevisione Svizzera Italiana, Dutch television, and Dutch and Belgian national radio channels (Radio 4 and Brava).

Ksenia Kouzmenko has performed in Germany (Beethoven Festival in Bonn), England, Greece, Switzerland, Belgium (Festival van Vlaanderen), Italy, Slovenia (Tartini Festival), Spain (Festival "Semana de Musica Caja Astur"), Russia (Hermitage, St. Petersburg), and all over the Netherlands.

Since 1999 she has been teaching at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague.

Ksenia Kouzmenko plays chamber music in almost every combination possible, and has built up an enormously broad repertoire ranging from Bach to Kurtág. Among her long-time partners are wonderful musicians such as the violinist Lisa Jacobs, cellist Lucie Štěpánová, clarinetist André Kerver and many others. She is constantly searching for new, unknown compositions and is fond of making unusual, inspiring programs. This results in very personal CD-projects and a number of world premières. Recently, she discovered the joy of playing on an Érard grand piano, with its exciting sound possibilities.

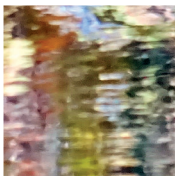
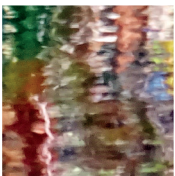
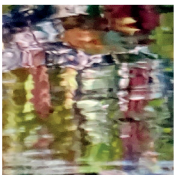
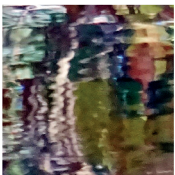
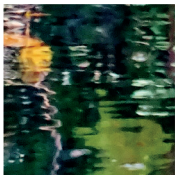
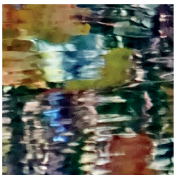
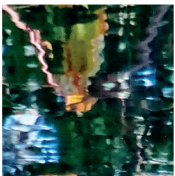
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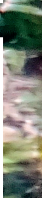
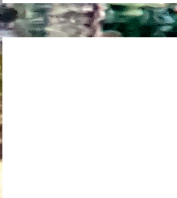
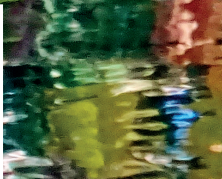
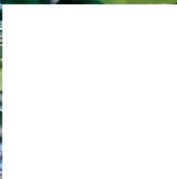
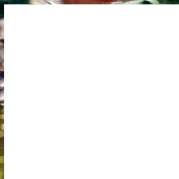
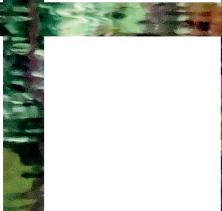
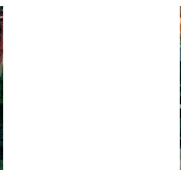
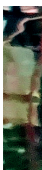
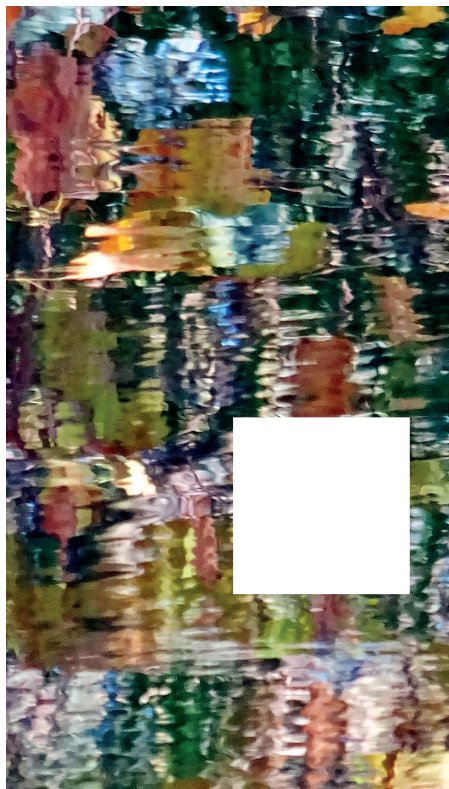
2013 **Poème** Franck/ Ysaÿe. With Lisa Jacobs (violin) - Challenge Records (CC72624)

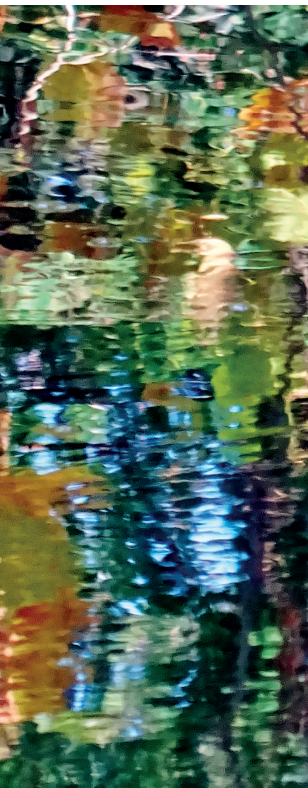
2018 **Whispering Leaves** Janáček/ Páleníček */ Martinů With Lucie Štěpánová (cello)
Cobra Records (COBRA 0069)

2018 **Ranges of Érard** Heller/ Chopin/ Schumann/ Tchaikovsky/ Debussy/ de Falla
Rachmaninov/ Scriabin/ Cervantes. *This recording was made in Middelburg on an Érard
Concert Grand (London, 1863)* - Zefir Records, (ZEF 9656)

2019 **Fenêtre sur le jardin**: Czech music for piano solo. Suk/ Janáček/ Martinů/ Kvapil *
and Kabeláč *. - Cobra Records, (COBRA 0070) *world première on CD







performers
Sena

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Piano technicians/tuners: Charles Rademaker, Matthijs Jongepier

Recording location: Westvest90, Schiedam, The Netherlands

Recording dates: July 20, 21, 22 & 23, 2020

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Microphone cables, interlinks: Acoustic Revive

Text: Ksenia Kouzmenko

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