

## From the Harpsichord Editor

It was East Texas Pipe Organ Festival director Lorenz Maycher who first alerted me to the news that Zuzana Růžicková had passed away. Shortly thereafter I read her extensive obituary in *The New York Times* (which, following their standard style, indicated the correct pronunciation of the name: (rouge-ITCH-ko-va). Immediately it was obvious that a tribute should be written for Harpsichord News. She was a familiar name to me, for I had attempted to arrange a meeting with her during my singular one and a half-day day visit to Prague, as I hoped to glean her insights into one of my favorite twentieth-century harpsichord compositions, Bohuslav Martinů's *Sonate* (1959). Alas, Mme. Růžicková was not in Prague at that particular time, but she wrote a gracious letter apologizing for that absence, and she included her CD recording of the work, as well as several scores by her husband, Viktor Kalabis.

Rather than my quoting the writings of others, it occurred to me that a longtime friend and Dallas colleague, Robert Tiff, would be the best person to compose a unique and intimate tribute for this legendary figure, and even more so since he is comfortable with the plethora of diacritical marks required to render authentic spellings in the Czech language! His websites can be found at: [www.jsebestyen.org/harpsichord](http://www.jsebestyen.org/harpsichord).

All of us who treasure harpsichord history are indebted to Mr. Tiff for the fine essay and the private photographs that comprise our December Harpsichord News.

—L. P.

## Remembering Zuzana Růžicková Personal Association

I was in high school when I first encountered Zuzana Růžicková through her Supraphon LPs. These recordings, impossible to find in the remote corner of Iowa where I grew up, were readily available from Qualiton Imports in New York. I first wrote her after hearing the harpsichord concerto by her husband Viktor Kalabis, a work of staggering intensity that made a profound impression on me. Růžicková replied and I soon discovered, much to my amazement, that she always answered. She was an inveterate correspondent, and it was a pleasure to receive her beautifully handwritten letters and postcards. In January 1994 she wrote to inform me of her concerts in Washington, D.C., and included a phone number. This initiated the first of many conversations. She was wonderful on the phone—always engaging, always laughing, and genuinely interested in what I had to say.



Zuzana Růžicková with harpsichordist János Sebestyén in Prague, 1979



Jury members Jacques Ogg, Giedrė Lukšaitė-Mrązková, Jitka Navrátilová, Zuzana Růžicková, and Kenneth Gilbert at the Harpsichord Competition of the 1999 Prague Spring Festival (photo credit: János Sebestyén)

My first and only encounter with her in person took place in March 2010. I was in Budapest visiting our mutual friend János Sebestyén and planned a short train trip to Prague. Miklós Spányi accompanied me in hopes of examining her Ammer harpsichord, and my friend Ria Brézova joined us in Bratislava. We met Růžicková for lunch, then spent the afternoon at her home trying out the Ammer and sharing stories. That evening the four of us attended a concert by the Graffe Quartet at the Rudolfinum to hear music by her late husband. It was a memorable day, not just for me, but for Ria and Miklós as well, each of us vividly aware how fortunate we were to spend at least a few hours in the company of this extraordinary woman.

## Her Life and Career

Zuzana Růžicková, the legendary Czech harpsichordist, died in Prague on September 27, 2017. She was a virtuoso on her instrument, a noted teacher and recording artist, and a survivor of Nazi atrocities. In recent years she was the recipient of numerous honors celebrating her life and accomplishments.

She was born January 14, 1927, in the city of Plzeň where her father owned a successful department store. Her piano teacher, Marie Provazníková, introduced her to the music of Bach and encouraged her to study harpsichord. Růžicková's abilities were apparent from an early age, and preparations were made for her to study with Wanda Landowska at Saint-Leu-la-Forêt near Paris. The possibility of study abroad became impossible as the Second World War advanced, and in January 1942, Růžicková and her family were interned at the Terezín ghetto (Theresienstadt).

Described by the Nazis as a "model community," Terezín was the only camp that allowed some artistic activities. Růžicková labored in the fields during the day but was able to continue her



Zuzana Růžicková with harpsichordist Luciano Sgrizzi in Bratislava, 1972 (photo credit: János Sebestyén)



Zuzana Růžicková with harpsichordist Luciano Sgrizzi in Budapest, 1969 (photo credit: János Sebestyén)

education. She studied harmony with Gideon Klein and attended concerts and lectures staged by other residents. She also befriended Fredy Hirsch, who was later credited with saving the lives of hundreds of Jewish children.

Růžicková's father died at Terezín, and in December 1943 she and her mother were transferred to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Here she once again came in contact with Hirsch, who told her to lie about her age so she could work alongside him as a teacher's assistant, protecting her from more dangerous work within the camp. She and the others transferred from Terezín were scheduled for the gas chamber but were miraculously spared, most likely because of a disruption in camp routine after the Allies invaded France on June 6, 1944. Růžicková and her mother were then sent to Germany as forced laborers, working on oil pipelines and at the shipyards near Hamburg. In February 1945 they were transferred to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, described by Růžicková as the "lowest part of hell." As the war neared its end, German guards abandoned the camp and English and Canadian soldiers liberated the surviving prisoners on April 15. In July, after months in a hospital where she assisted medics as a translator, Růžicková and her mother returned to Plzeň only to find their home occupied and possessions gone. She credited her survival through all this not to courage, but "a hundred lucky moments" and her mother's strength.

Despite conditions endured during the war, Růžicková's passion for music remained undiminished. Her hands nearly ruined



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Zuzana Růžicková with harpsichordist Luciano Sgrizzi in Bratislava, 1972 (photo credit: János Sebestyén)



Zuzana Růžicková in Budapest, 1994 (photo credit: János Sebestyén)

from physical labor, she was determined to regain her skills. In Plzeň she studied piano with Bohdan Gsöllhofer, and in 1947 was admitted to the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague where her professors included pianist František Rauch and harpsichordist Oldřich Kredba. She decided to specialize in the interpretation of early music and gave her first harpsichord recital in 1951.

It was while teaching piano to composition students at the academy, a position she obtained in 1950, that she met her future husband, composer Viktor Kalabis. They married in 1952.

In 1956 she won the ARD International Music Competition in Munich and accepted a scholarship from jury member Marguerite Roesgen-Champion to continue her harpsichord studies in Paris. Her success in Munich marked the beginning of an international career. She performed regularly throughout Europe, made repeated visits to Japan and the United States, and appeared at Bach Festivals in Leipzig, Stuttgart, Heidelberg, Ansbach, Frankfurt, Schaffhausen, Bath, and Oregon.

In 1962 she co-founded the Prague Chamber Soloists with conductor Václav Neumann, and 1963 saw the formation of a very successful duo with violinist Josef Suk, with whom she recorded the Bach sonatas on four different occasions. Other chamber music partners included János Starker, Pierre Fournier, and Jean-Pierre Rampal, and she worked with many noted conductors including Serge Baudo, Herbert Blomstedt, Neville Martin, and Helmut Rilling. Her repertoire spanned works by the English virginalists through contemporary composers. She championed the harpsichord concerto by Bohuslav Martinů, performing it frequently and recording it for the first time in 1967. She premiered compositions by Emil Hlobil, Hans-Georg Gömer, and Elizabeth Maconchy, and several composers dedicated works to her, the most important being those by her husband. He composed his first piano concerto as a wedding gift, and significant works for harpsichord followed: *Six Two-Voice Canonic Inventions* (1962), *Concerto for Harpsichord and Strings* (1975), *Aquarelles* (1979), and *Preludio, Aria e Toccata* (1992).

The music of Bach, however, remained central to her art. In 1964 she recorded a *Partita, English Suite, and French Suite* by Bach for the French label Erato, and this soon led to a contract to record all his works for solo harpsichord. The sessions took place in Paris and Prague over a period of eight years, and an integral 21-LP edition

appeared in 1975, winning the prestigious *Grand Prix de L'Académie Charles Cros*.

Růžicková's teaching career at the Academy of Performing Arts spanned 50 years, but her refusal to join the Communist party led to her being denied the title of professor until after the "Velvet Revolution" in 1989. She also established a harpsichord class at the Music Academy in Bratislava and gave master classes in Zürich for 23 years, with additional courses in London, Stuttgart, Budapest, Kraków, and Tokyo. Her students include Christopher Hogwood, Ketil Haugsand, Anikó Horváth, Borbála Dobozy, Giedrė Lukšaitė-Mrážková, Jaroslav Tůma, Václav Luks, and Monika Knoblochová, and during her last years she mentored Mahan Esfahani.

Růžicková approached the harpsichord as a modern instrument for the modern world. Her goal was never to recreate Bach's music exactly as he would have heard it, but to communicate its essence to a contemporary audience. In her own words, "I am a synthesist who remains within the style of a certain period yet does not eschew modern means." Růžicková's playing sounds like no one else, and her approach to interpretation is not easily classifiable. She operated within the mainstream of classical music, the result of her association with contemporary music and close friendships with the leading musicians of her day, and refused to confine herself to a particular niche.

Růžicková's diminutive stature belied her commanding presence on discs. She excelled in large-scale works, such as Bach's *French Overture* or sixth *English Suite*, and one often senses in her many concerto recordings that she, and not the conductor, is the guiding force behind the interpretation. Critics were sometimes unconvinced by her recordings, quibbling over tempos, registrations, or the type of harpsichord she played, and yet her integrity and the conviction with which she approached everything she committed to disc remained unquestioned.

In Prague she was limited to revival-style harpsichords from the East German firm Ammer for the first three decades of her career. This is the instrument she played at home, took on tour, and with which she is most closely identified. In the early 1980s she turned to an instrument by German builder Georg Zahl. In France she most often played instruments by Neupert and Sperrhake, but there were experiments with historic harpsichords, and she played instruments by Hemsch for two LPs in her Bach edition. In 1975 she recorded Purcell's suites in Tokyo on a condor-quilled instrument by Michael Thomas. But it was

not until the late 1980s that she had access to historical copies in Prague, and when she returned to the *Well-Tempered Clavier* in 1995, she played instruments copied after Ruckers and Harraß by František Vyhnaněk and Jürgen Ammer.

The marriage of Viktor Kalabis and Zuzana Růžicková was one of exceptional devotion that lasted 54 years. It was through his encouragement that she returned to Germany as a concert artist little more than a decade after the war, and later to speak publicly of her wartime experiences in order to fight

the "Auschwitz Lie"—the denial that the Holocaust ever took place. After Kalabis's death in 2006, Růžicková devoted her last decade to preparing his manuscripts for publication by Schott Music and established a foundation to promote this music through concerts and recordings. This decade also saw numerous accolades for Růžicková herself, including the Czech Cultural Prize in 2012 and the Bohemian Heritage Fund Award the following year. Her 90th birthday was celebrated with interviews in the international press, the reissue of her complete Bach cycle in a 20-CD edition from Warner Classics, and the release of the film *Zuzana: Music is Life*, which screened at festivals throughout 2017 in Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, London, and Prague. Her legacy to future generations is secure through the film and her recordings, but her most enduring legacy to those fortunate to have known her is the gift of her friendship. Her graciousness and generosity, the sincere warmth of her personality, her unflinching sense of humor and delight in the ironic, and of course her incredible tenacity, were unforgettable. She was an inspiration and comfort to all and a remarkable human being.

Further information is available through the Viktor Kalabis & Zuzana Růžicková Foundation:  
[www.kalabismusic.org](http://www.kalabismusic.org).

—Robert Tiff

Comments and questions are welcome. Address them to Larry Palmer: [lpalmer@smu.edu](mailto:lpalmer@smu.edu) or 10125 Cromwell Drive, Dallas, Texas 75229.

## THE DIAPASON

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