

A warm, golden-toned portrait of Geraldine Mucha, a woman with short, wavy blonde hair, smiling slightly and looking off-camera to the right. She is wearing a dark, textured jacket over a light-colored blouse with a dark, patterned scarf.

BRILLIANT  
CLASSICS

Geraldine  
**MUCHA**

**CHAMBER MUSIC**

Stamic Quartet  
Prague Wind Quintet  
Patricia Goodson *piano*  
Vilém Veverka *oboe*  
Jan Machát *flute*



## Geraldine Mucha 1917-2012

### Chamber Music

#### String Quartet No.1

1. I. Variations on a Hucul folk-song 6'07
2. II. Dumka 6'46
3. III. Arkan 3'11

#### Stamic Quartet

Jindřich Pazdera, Josef Kekula *violins*  
Jan Pěruška *viola* · Petr Hejný *cello*

4. Variations on an Old Scottish Song 9'50
5. Tempo di Mazurka 1'36
6. Karel František Josef 0'28
7. Minna Loveday DeCandole 0'24
8. Freddie DeCandole 0'33
9. Lullaby for Alisdair 1'04
10. For Erika 1'46

Patricia Goodson *piano*

11. Naše cesta / Our Journey 10'42

Jan Machat *flute*  
Alena Grillová *piano*

12. String Quartet No.2 13'43

#### Stamic Quartet

Jindřich Pazdera, Josef Kekula *violins*  
Jan Pěruška *viola* · Petr Hejný *cello*

13. Wind Quintet 13'46

#### Prague Wind Quintet

Jan Machat *flute* · Jurij Likin *oboe*  
Vlastimil Mareš *clarinet*  
Miloš Wichterle *bassoon*  
Jan Vobořil *French horn*

14. Epitaph in Memory of Jiří Mucha 8'13

Vilém Veverka *oboe*  
Jan Machat *flute*

#### Stamic Quartet

Jindřich Pazdera, Josef Kekula *violins*  
Jan Pěruška *viola* · Petr Hejný *cello*

Geraldine Mucha's long life spanned two world wars and a brutal Communist regime. She was born in London; her Scottish father Marcus Thomson – Geraldine always considered herself a Scotswoman – had been a professional singer and was on the staff of the Royal Academy of Music, and her mother Maisie Evans was a singer-actress. Geraldine's affinity with music became evident very early in her childhood – she could read music before she could read words and was a fluent improviser at the piano. Her upbringing also brought her into the heart of the capital's artistic establishment, and her talent was encouraged by Arnold Bax and Benjamin Dale. From 1935, aged 18, she studied formally at the Royal Academy of Music, where her teachers included two younger, more modern composers, William Alwyn and Alan Bush.

It was during her time there – which included four years of the Second World War – that she met a young, exiled Czech war correspondent called Jiří Mucha, at a party in 1941. The meeting and their subsequent marriage in 1942 was life-changing. Her new husband was the son of the artist Alphonse Mucha (who had died in 1939, after being interrogated by the Nazis), a leading figure of the Art Nouveau movement. She and Jiří moved to Prague in 1945, at the end of the war. Life there became very hard as the Communists took control of Czechoslovakia in 1948, and even harder in 1950



with Jiří's arrest and imprisonment for alleged espionage. The young Mrs Mucha became increasingly absorbed in protecting and, later, promoting Alphonse Mucha's legacy, and there are hair-raising stories of her fending off Communist attempts to seize her father-in-law's 'decadent' (and increasingly valuable) collection, while her husband endured forced labor in the notorious uranium mines at Jáchymov.

Jiří was released in the mid-1950s when there was a decade of political relaxation, during which time he and his wife consolidated Alphonse Mucha's reputation with the help of a major exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in 1963. Then things became very bad again, with the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. As life and travel became increasingly restricted, Geraldine chose to live in Scotland. Apart from occasional trips, she didn't move back to Prague until the Velvet Revolution in 1989, and stayed for the rest of her life in the apartment near Prague Castle that had been the family home since the 1950s. Jiří died in 1991.

Despite a significant part of her adult life circumscribed by the chilly exigencies of the Cold War, Geraldine Mucha kept composing, possibly out of the desire to create her own perfect parallel universe, and it would be fascinating to know what music she loved or disliked, whose music she played, the books that meant a lot to her. For now, in 2021, there are many people with strong memories of her vitality and searching intelligence, qualities which come across vividly in the works on this album.

Geraldine Mucha wrote her **String Quartet No.1** in 1944, having graduated from the Royal Academy of Music the year before. She was nearly 27, had been married for two years, and was combining her musical career with war work in London. Her first String Quartet is a tight, well-argued work, and shows off her skill and judgment in writing for this exposed medium. Although she had yet to move to central Europe, she had absorbed the fiercely rhythmic folk idiom of Janáček and Bartók. The first movement, based in the key of F sharp, is a set of twelve variations on a Hucul (Carpathian) folk-song bound together by a nervous rhythmic motif. The music

juggles athletic counterpoint with passages of open-air lyricism, there is a strong sense of propulsive energy, and the movement ends with a short, quiet coda. The second movement is that staple of Czech music, a Dumka. It starts as a Lento espressivo lament in D minor, and carries over the first movement's nervous rhythmic motif, first heard on the cello. The style is more romantic, with a rhapsodic central section close in mood to German late romanticism. The third movement is a rondo based on a Carpathian dance called an Arkan, with lots of drones, elaborate shifts of time signature and strongly contrasted episodes. Since she had yet to move to Prague with her husband, it is a mystery how completely she had absorbed the Central European idiom. The score is signed 'Geraldine Thomsen', in the alternative spelling of her maiden name.

The **Variations on an Old Scottish Song**, Mucha's longest work for solo piano, were written in 1954, based on a tune used to set a text by Robert Burns about a shepherd boy getting close to a shepherd lass. Mucha was a fine pianist and composed at the piano. The piano writing has a stature and confidence in its command of color, rhythm and perspective, and the influences of Debussy, Bartók and Tippett are so thoroughly assimilated into her idiosyncratic Scottish Impressionist voice that the listener can only wonder how she would have thrived in the British musical establishment had she not moved to eastern Europe.

The next six tracks are all short piano pieces, written for Prague friends, probably in the first years of the new century – attractive, full of character and, in the case of the Chopinesque **Tempo di Mazurka** well within the grasp of a non-virtuoso pianist. She composed the longer **Naše cesta** ('Our Journey') for flute and piano in 2008, dedicated to the Czech flautist Jan Machat. In its pastoral lyricism and passages of darting virtuosity, the piece plays to all the flute's expressive strengths.

The composer completed what she called her **String Quartet No.2** around 1988, but the Mucha Archive has recently discovered another quartet written in 1970 (the chronological No.2), which the composer completed but put aside for reasons

unknown. There is also a further quartet score, undated with each page crossed out in pencil but leaving the music completely legible. The 1970 work is the one performed on this disc and is in one movement. The mood of the long opening section is intensely tragic, a keening lament with a strong Scottish flavor that gives way to a faster, shorter dance section, again with a distinct Scottish accent. The opening lament returns, now explicitly more troubled, and a brief, darker version of the dance leads to an abrupt close. This is music with an intense emotional hinterland, about which one can only speculate. The date of composition coincides with the renewed oppressiveness of the Soviet regime, and the Scottish stylistic hints perhaps are evidence of homesickness. It was written, according to Mucha's sign-off on the manuscript, in Deecastle, Scotland 1970.

Mucha wrote her **Wind Quintet** in 1998. She had been living in Prague full-time for nearly ten years, and it is easy in this assured work to hear memories of her beloved Scotland. Scored for flute, oboe, clarinet, horn and bassoon, the work has seven short sections, each one heralded by solos from clarinet, horn and bassoon, the clarinet's more like elaborate cadenzas. The horn opens the Lento espressivo with a magical, remote call, and the music goes on to balance lament and longing over a gentle 6/8 flow, given momentum and anchored by pervasive octave leaps from the lower instruments. As in many of her larger scores, Mucha's counterpoint is spacious and elegantly argued, and contrasts well with the second section, an antique-style dance built on precise staccato figures with flute and oboe taking the melodic lead. An extended, Gershwin-like clarinet cadenza opens into a brisk Allegro, which soon reverts to the style and mood of the slow opening. The horn call then pushes the music into a change of time signature, a spiky two-to-the-bar Allegro using the earlier staccato figuration, before another horn call slows things down with a further change of time-signature: to 5/8 in a passage with accompanied clarinet and flute solos. Via a second clarinet cadenza, the music returns to the mood and time-signature of the opening, abruptly blown away by a dramatic acceleration to the close. Mucha handles

the rapid changes of mood and style with beguiling flair, and the writing, some of it markedly virtuosic, is finely geared to the character of each instrument.

The Scottish flavor is especially strong in the **Epitaph in Memory of Jiří Mucha**, commemorating her husband, for solo oboe and strings. The Skye Boat Song marked their first meeting in 1941, and this set of variations goes behind the famous melody to build to a full statement, in a simple, affecting arrangement.

As you listen to these striking works, you appreciate how completely Geraldine Mucha had learned her craft. Just as important is how the demands of a complicated life imposed their own discipline, expressed in a sense of urgency and concision that still manages to sound spacious. I would like to thank the Geraldine Mucha Archive for their unstinting help, and I wish them well in bringing more of this fascinating composer's music to the public ear.

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