

LIZA FUCHSOVA

by Dr David C. F. Wright

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Czechoslovakia was ruled by the Catholic Austrian Habsburg Empire from 1526 but, in 1918, Czechs united with Slovaks to form Czechoslovakia. But to go back in time, Prague University was founded in 1348 and the six volume Kralicka Bible (1579- 93) helped establish the Czech language which had existed from the seventh century. This was the eventual result of the Reformation headed up by the martyr John Huss (1372-1415) who, in turn, was influenced by Wycliffe. Huss preached in defiance of Catholic laws and he was burned at the stake. His followers in Bohemia were so incensed at this injustice, that this led to the Hussite Wars which lasted until the battle of Lipany in 1434 when Habsburgs took control.

The Nazis occupied Sudeterland in 1938 and Bohemia and Moravia in 1939 the Czech government were exiled in Britain during World War II. Czechoslovakia gained its independence in 1945 but with some loss of territory to the USSR. The Communists took over in 1948 but Alexander Dubcek tried to achieve liberation in 1968. Communist power failed in 1989 and, in 1992, it was agreed to divide the country into the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Prague is the capital of the Czech Republic and Bratislava is the capital of the Slovak Republic.

Brno is the second largest city in what is now the Czech Republic and this is where Liza Fuchsova was born on 31 March 1913.

She began piano lessons at the age of three and, at the age of ten, she made her debut with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra in Prague, presumably under Vaclav Talich. She was a brilliant player even as a child.

Horowitz's debut with a professional orchestra was at the age of 17 in Kiev, Ogden's at 19!

She studied in Brno and at the Prague Conservatoire and, upon graduating, became a professor of piano there.

She premiered Martinu's Concertino for piano and orchestra, H 269, which he completed in 1935.

To escape the Nazi regime, she came to London in 1939 as a refugee making her London debut with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, presumably under Boult. That, of course, would make her an emigre. The war time exile and exile grant was held in high esteem by the Czechoslovakia people.

She became a naturalised British subject.

Her first marriage was dissolved but her second marriage was to a successful London surgeon Ernst Kirz to whom she was devoted. When he died of kidney cancer in 1970 Liza announced, "My life is over," and she became sad and lonely.

There were no children.

They lived at Willesden Green and also had a large thatched cottage in the country in Surrey and Liza used the adjoining barn for her music room. One night she was frightened by a roaring lion and it was discovered that her neighbour had a lion which was caged in their garden at nights.

Several well known musicians have stated that she was the best interpreter of Janacek's music. She performed all the piano works of Smetana, Dvorak and Fibich.

She was very active in London during the war with morale boosting concerts which were unlike those of Myra Hess since Fuchsova did not bring the music down to the levels of the audience, but treated the audience both as equals and as educated people.

It was Fuchsova who was the pillar of London concert work during the war. She introduced many to Dvorak's Piano Concerto in G minor, Op 33, and a particular performance in Leeds Town Hall with the Northern Philharmonic under Vilem Tausky on 29 July 1944 is recalled. It is sad to record that this work is a poor work.

She was associated with the Society for the Promotion of New Music and gave the premiere of several new works. She had a wide repertoire. She travelled extensively throughout Europe and was a frequent broadcaster.

Humphrey Searle wrote the Toccata from his Threnos and Toccata, Op 14 for her.

Karel Janovicky wrote his Variations on a theme of Brigadier H Smith, Op 7, in 1953 which she premiered at a SPNM concert.

When I met her, she was to take part in the second half of a concert. I asked her if she wanted to come back stage or sit in the auditorium. "Neither," she said. She sat in the car until it was time for her to go on stage. She was quiet, modest and immaculately dressed with a tilted hat, I remember.

She was a small person and full of energy and was known as the bouncing Czech. Latterly, she became plump and, perhaps, a little overweight.

She was the pianist in the Dumka Trio, the other members being the violinist Suzanne Rosza, who was Hungarian, and the cellist Vivien Joseph, who was Welsh. Vivian had a pretty blond girl friend who apparently left him for Arthur Rubinstein.

Fuchsova played all of Dvorak's music which employed a piano. She also recorded piano music by Alexis Rago together with violin and cello works with piano of this Venezuelan composer, born in Caracas in 1930, and who lived in London from 1964 to 1967.

It is thought that the founder of the Dumka Trio was Susie Rozsa who was born into a Jewish family in Budapest on 14 September 1923. She studied in Vienna and came to London in 1938 where her mother worked as a dressmaker. Rozsa married Martin Lovett the cellist with the Amadeus Quartet and they had a son and a daughter. The Dumka Trio was formed in 1965 and it was disbanded on the death of Liza Fuchsova. Rozsa died in London on 9 November 2005.

Liza Fuchsova recorded all the Dvorak chamber music with piano for Vox. In the Piano Quartets the Dumka trio was joined by the violist Walter Gerhart and in the Bagatelles, in which Liza played the harmonium, the second violinist was John Willison.

In the first two years of the Dvorak society, the Dumka Trio gave two recitals for them. At the Wigmore Hall on 8 September 1975, the programme was :

- Piano Trio in E minor Op 90 (Dumky)
- Three Romantic Pieces for violin and piano Op 75
- Rondo in G minor for cello and piano Op 94
- Three short piano pieces
- Piano Trio in F minor Op 65

The three short piano pieces were to include the world premiere of the Forget me not polka, said to be the earliest piano piece Dvorak wrote, but the manuscript could not be found. There is another story about a Meditation or Variation, or Variations, on a theme, or themes, from the New World Symphony but that did not materialise either. Perhaps they were figments of someone's imagination.

On the death of the pianist Helen Pyke, the Austrian born pianist Paul Hamburger (1920- 2004) successfully approached Fuchsova to be his partner in music for piano four hands. Hamburger was a big man and Liza was very small which was just as well sitting at the same piano with him.

She played all the concertos in the classic repertoire and was a non-demonstrative pianist unlike Richter, Curzon and Lang Lang. Her playing in chamber music was exemplary, balanced and never dominant or over the top. Unlike pianists like Richter, she did not treat chamber music as piano concertos.

She was an excellent piano teacher in London and among her pupils was Margaret Bruce who studied with her for about five years once a fortnight at 90 minutes a time at the Willesden Green house. Margaret has told me that Liza was an excellent teacher without any 'method' and taught her the Viennese classics, Chopin, Schumann, Debussy and some of Shostakovich's Preludes and Fugues. Margaret added that Liza was always positive, full of enthusiasm and most encouraging and insisted that Margaret gave recitals at Wigmore Hall and the Purcell Room.

Fuchsova found life difficult as a widow and had a massive heart attack. She died in a London hospital where she had another attack in February 1977 about a month before her 64th birthday. Her funeral service was at Golders Green Crematorium,

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