

Documentary opera

DOCUfilm Praha
Mindset Pictures
VIRUSfilm
Czech Television
MagicLab
Czech Film Fund
South Moravian Film Fund
The Slovak Audiovisual Fund
Lightdox

a film by Lucie Králová



# logline

Kapr Code is a playful reconstruction of life after death where the memory of film and Kapr's music interacts with the story of an artist's fight for inner integrity and freedom in an unfree world.



# a documentary opera by Lucie Králová

original title KAPR

english title KAPR CODE

countries

Czech Republic, Slovakia

language spoken Czech

running time 91 min

world premiere Visions du Réel - Burning Lights, 2022

trailer

<u>https://vimeo.com/</u>692195584

production

DOCUfilm Praha, Mindset Pictures, VIRUSfilm, Czech Television, MagicLab

world sales Lightdox

# SYNOPSIS

A Documentary Opera featuring the contradictory life of progressive composer and prominent communist Jan Kapr (1914-88), Stalin award laureate, later banned in socialist Czechoslovakia. While Kapr's life escalates towards pivotal moments, we follow opera songs reflecting these crucial life junctures, those establishing an artist's fate. The film explores the nature of memory, and narration, using Kapr's personal, never before seen amateur films manifesting his humor, inner struggles and desire to leave traces for eternity.



# long synopsis

KAPR CODE aims to bring the experience of the contemporary New Opera genre to the medium of cinema and is based on a unique collaboration between acclaimed musicians and well-established filmmakers. The film transfers Kapr's extraordinary life story into a radical form of New Opera. The storyline in the form of "documentary libretto" will guide us through Kapr's life. It's based on deep research within Kapr's personal archive full of boxes with letters, political articles, secret police reports, tapes, photos and amateur films. The libretto is written with humor and an emphasis on sound qualities by notable librettist Jiří Adámek.

Film shows Kapr's deep personal, political and musical transformation, from composing propaganda odes to new music, innovative language. The libretto was set to New Opera songs by experienced composer Petra Šuško. Her music doesn't compete with Kapr's in the film but tries to reveal the fact that throughout his life Kapr's music reflected political turbulences in Czechoslovakia from 1945 to late eighties. In the entire film, new scored opera songs create approximately the same proportion as Kapr's music.

17 opera singers from the internationally renowned Czech Philharmonic Choir Brno sing scenes from Kapr's life, including his meeting with secret police or battle with the president. Among the Choir, 5 solo singers represent main characters including Kapr himself. The Choir is under the direction of the Choirmaster, 77 year old Petr Fiala, Kapr's last living student, who also contributes with his memories.

Kapr's story is reflected in a broader narrative framework with a contemporary perspective. We uncover for viewers the backstory of this narration: the traces Kapr left behind from which we create his story, including the reflection of its missing parts, the "holes in memory". It also opens the question of how to relate to Kapr's legacy today.

The process of opera songs rehearsals is captured in "behind the scenes" footage used to add complexity to the main narrative. We can follow the occasional comments of the Choirmaster or librettist on specific details from Kapr's life connected with the sung scenes. This reflexive approach shouldn't distract the viewer's attention from

This reflexive approach shouldn't distract the viewer's attention from following Kapr's captivating story.

Chronological narrative focuses on the essential situations of Kapr's dramatic life and is organized using the structure of an opera (8 Acts including a Pause and Finale).

A substantial element of the film is Kapr's unique 8mm personal amateur films, exclusively provided to us by Kapr's daughter. Materials demonstrate Kapr's inclination to play and experiment, his sense of humor and passion for staging. Kapr himself is a frequent "object" of these films. The archive allows us to visualize and reconstruct the essential themes in Kapr's story. Most of the important people in Kapr's life are no longer alive but thanks to Kapr's filming obsessions we can "meet" Kapr's second and even first wife or his friends, often the music stars of the period, including popular swing singer R.A.Dvorský or the famous bass from the Metropolitan Opera, Pavel Ludikar. In our film, these people are represented by solo singers.

To emphasize the specific themes in the sung scenes, we elaborated choreography organically accompanied by the visual qualities of the functionalist architecture of the Choir's rehearsal space. These scenes are then combined with Kapr's film archive and the few available witness's comments, or images of places connected with Kapr's life.

Kapr Code is a playful reconstruction of life after death where the memory of film and Kapr's music interacts with the story of an artist's fight for inner integrity and freedom in an unfree world.





# director's statement

#### LIFE AS A COMPOSITION

I have been making so called documentaries for almost two decades, many on 16mm. It usually didn't fit into the "documentary" box. Kapr Code is a prototype, a documentary opera.

Jan Kapr (1914-88), progressive Czechoslovak composer and innovator, the author of 180 compositions, including 10 symphonies, was successfully erased from official memory during communism. I knew only some myths about Kapr, a "communist version of John Cage", a "hero" but also a "real political animal".

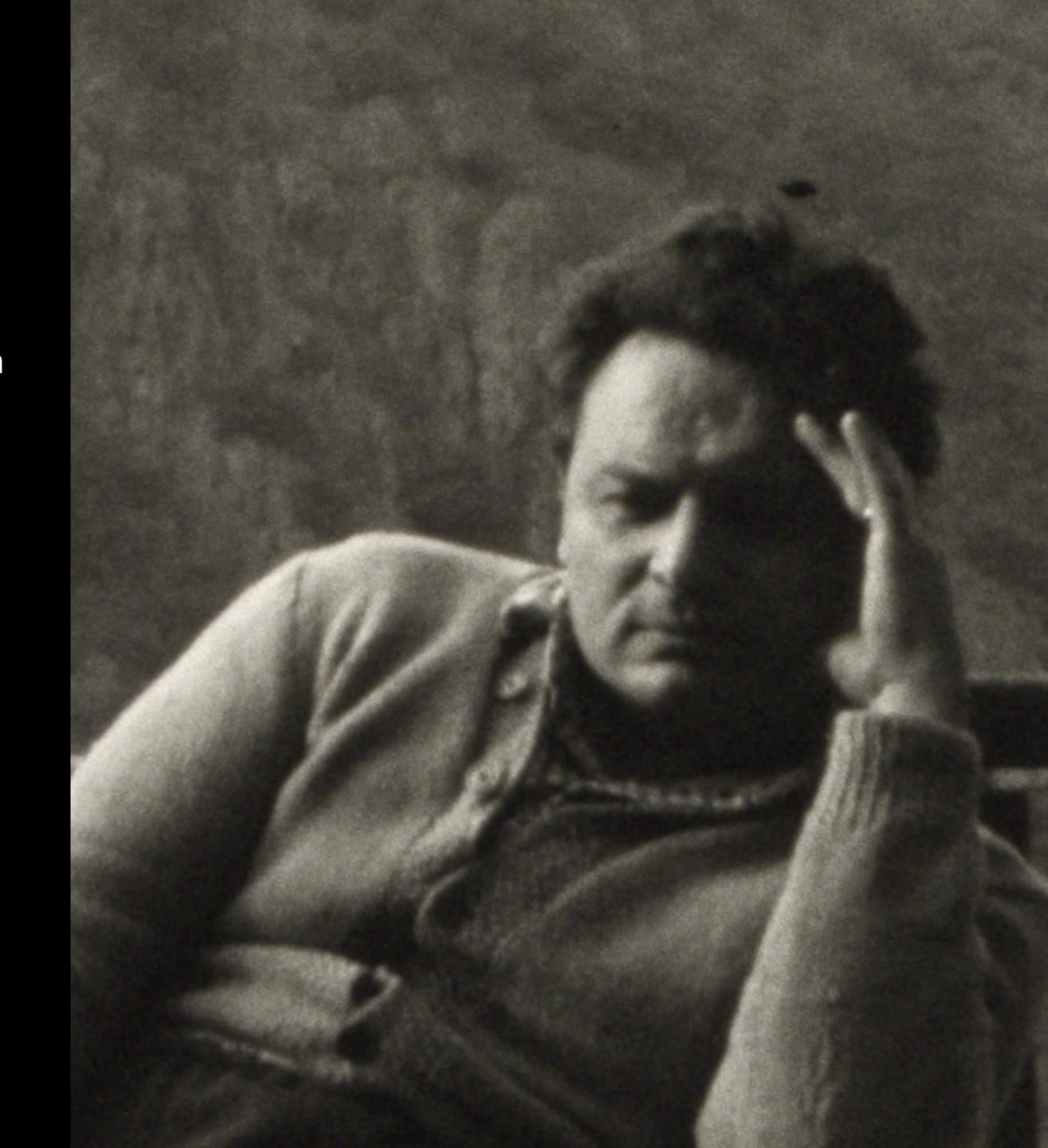
For the cinematic transformation of Kapr's dramatic life we chose the original genre of "documentary opera", which helps us to show how deeply connected his personal

and public life was with his music development. This form enables us to expand the screenwriting and staging possibilities of a traditional biopic towards the specific experience of the sound universe of an ambivalent hero, who no longer lives but who is still "alive" thanks to his music, letters and many films.

We faced the question how to transfer Kapr's story to the medium of film while keeping its complexity, ambivalence and strength, and still reflect the unknown "holes" or "blind spots" in memory. Do we have a right to interpret a person's life, especially when there are so many contradictions?

The title KAPR CODE reflects Kapr's famous composition "Codes" which uses a method of coding and decoding. The film works in a similar way and reveals Kapr himself also as a kind of "code": within one personality, the identity of a prominent communist meets that of a dissident. To interpret his legacy responsibly from a contemporary perspective, we wanted to elaborate a specific "musical" film language, similarly to Kapr searching for a new music language during his career.

In my filmmaking, I am interested in reflexivity - to explore the very essence of memory, media and narration. We reconstructed Kapr's story, from the fragments of memory we found. Kapr actually recreated his story with us, as he is the author of 8mm footage, his letters, music, but also his own life-story which we follow in the opera songs. In this way, Kapr composes his life thus co-creating this documentary. Can we say that Kapr was a composer of a vision of his own life? When does the composition end?





### director

MgA. Lucie Kralova, Ph.D. is acclaimed Czech film director, scriptwriter and lecturer at FAMU Prague. Her docs, often produced on 16mm film, were screened at many international film festivals and received number of awards, e.g. ILL-FATED CHILD (2003) and SOLD (2005) were both awarded as Best Czech Documentary at Jihlava IDFF; documentary detective story, LOST HOLIDAY (2007), distributed internationally on 35mm, received the Crystal Globe for Best Feature Doc at Karlovy Vary IFF and other prizes; Lucie also woks as dramaturgist on significant documentaries, e.g. CAUGHT IN THE NET (2020) by Klusák/Chalupová (the most successful Czech doc in cinemas ever) or ALCHEMICAL FURNACE (2020) screened e.g. at IFF Rotterdam 2020. Recently, she has finished new documentary opera Kapr Code which was during development awarded for Best Project at Avant Premiére/Sunny Side of the Docs Pitch in Berlin 2020 and selected as WIP for Cinema du Réel Paris Doc Work in Progress 2021.

# Jan Kapr (1914 - 1988)

Composer, teacher, theorist, critic and music publicist Jan Kapr has written numerous compositions such as symphonies, orchestral works, chamber and vocal pieces, incidental music and literary works. He is the author of more than 200 musicological essays and reviews published in the daily and professional press. He was one of the top composers in his time, winning a number of foreign awards, but due to his strong moral attitudes he was banned in 1968 and he and his works went into oblivion.

Jan Kapr suffered a severe injury during his youth, which prevented him from playing an instrument himself. Nevertheless, he graduated from the Prague Conservatory from Jaroslav Křička's master class. He was a music editor for the Czech Radio in Prague (1939–46), a music critic (1946–49), and an chief editor of a national music publisher (1950–54); from 1961 to 1970 he taught at the Janáček Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts in Brno. His style of composition is derived from the Czech national school; in his later works, he audaciously introduced modernistic serial procedures. He published a vol. on contemporary music entitled Konstanty (The Constants; Prague, 1967).

His focus was on composing, including political mass songs and propaganda film music. As a loyal member of the Communist Party, he received the Stalin Award in 1951. However, he returned the award, protesting the 1968 Soviet Occupation. Consequently, his works were not allowed to be performed in Czechoslovakia and his 8th Symphony, for instance, premiered on Bavarian radio. Jan Kapr was one of the few artists who was actively engaged in sports, particularly gymnastics. But the injury that he received during an exercise inhibited a sports career.

Kapr is an author of 10 symphonies and more than 160 chamber compositions. In the 1960s he became interested in avant-garde composition techniques and started to investigate the articulating possibilities of the human voice on various instruments, combining electronic and acoustic sounds. His work Marathon Scherzo (in most sources called Marathon: scherzo symphonique), one of his earlier works composed in 1939, received an "Honorable Mention" during Olympic games in London in 1948. The composition, which contains a lot of 12-tone sequences, was compared with the neo-Classicism of Paul Hindemith. Kapr's music was performed internationally by prestigeous musical bodies (e.g. in 1973, acclaimed Hamburg Radio Orchestra choir ordered a composition by Kapr, who set to music experimental poetry of Christian Morgenstern including his visual poems (Guten Morgen, Stern) and got several awards.



# Jiří Adámek – librettist, theatre director

Jiří studied directing at the Department of Alternative and Puppet Theater at the Theater Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, where he later completed his doctoral studies.

During his career, Jiří developed a specific type of theater, in which he mixes a musically composed structure, stylized acting and a special approach to language. He systematically works with the theater group Boca Loca Lab, which he founded in 2007.

He completed several internships in France and is significantly influenced by the French postmodern théatre musical, a subject he prominently tackled in his book THEATER BOUND BY MUSIC (2011).

He has won a number of awards at home and abroad for his "musical-theatrical" productions: The Music Theater Now! Award for his production TICK TOCK POLITICS (2006) in Germany and the Award for Original Theatrical Form at the Kontakt Festival in Torun, Poland. His project EUROPEANS (2008) won the Best Young Director Award at the MESS Sarajevo festival (2011) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Together with the composer Martin Smolka, he won the Theatre Paper Award for the opera LIST, OPEN! (2014), in which he participated as a librettist and director and in which members of the Boca Loca Lab performed as opera singers.

In 2007, the jury of the Next Wave festival chose him Person of the Year in the field of alternative theater. In the years 2004–2011, he regularly published texts on contemporary theater in notable theatre magazines. Since 2010 he has been teaching at Theatre Academy in Prague KALD DAMU.

# Czech philharmonic choir of Brno

The Czech Philharmonic Choir of Brno has earned a place at the very summit of the choral world. Conductors, orchestras and soloists, who have cooperated with the Brno singers, extol their qualities, while the critics acclaim particularly the ensemble's compact sound and broad range of means of expression. The Choir, founded in 1990, is a regular guest at the most prestigious European festivals and appears on the most distinguished concert stages. The audiences are captivated by its level of professionalism as well as extraordinary musical feeling.

The man behind the Choir's accomplishments is Petr Fiala (1943), its founding father, Choir Master and Director. A graduate of the Brno Conservatory and the Janáček Academy of Fine Arts (where he studied piano, composition and conducting), Fiala is also a prolific composer (his output numbers some 180 pieces) and last living student of Jan Kapr. He has been an active choir master and conductor for the past 45 years. The Czech Philharmonic Choir of Brno focuses especially on the performance of oratorios and cantatas. Its qualities are displayed in as many as 90 concerts annually, both in Czech Republic and abroad.



DOCUfilm Praha is an independent film production company established in 1992. Production is focused mainly on producing the values of the Czech creative film documentary.

Since 1992 the company produced a flock of short documentaries mostly in coproduction with Czech TV. Some films have brought awards from festivals both at home and abroad. Feature movie Lost Holiday (directed by Lucie Kralova) was widely acclaimed internationally, besides other prices won at the Karlovy Vary IFF the Crystal Globe for feature documentary in 2007.

Mindset Pictures was founded in 2016 by Prague-based producer Andrea Shaffer, and is solely committed to the creation and production of film and other visual media. The production company is to tell significant stories, and is particularly oriented towards author-driven films which hold a high standard of content and form as well as unique approaches to human understandings of senses and the space around us. The most current line-up includes three documentary films/co-productions in a long-term partnership with DOCU film Praha.

VIRUSfilm has been found by Zuzana Piussi and Vít Janeček as a platform for cinematic projects produced or co-produced in Slovakia, in 2019. We are focusing on themes with strong reflection of society in documentary as well as fiction cinema.

written and directed by Lucie Králová libretto Jiří Adámek/Austerlitz music Petra Šuško sound designer Richard Müller editor Adam Brothánek

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