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## Janáček Studies

This volume of essays constitutes the first major study of the music of Janáček, now widely considered one of the most important composers of the early twentieth century. The essays deal with a broad range of topics relating to opera, symphonic poem, instrumental music, cultural context and reception. Some topics, such as the sources of Janáček's musical expressivity, questions of narrative, Janáček as musical analyst and Janáček as realist, have hitherto received little attention, whilst other more conventional topics, such as 'speech melody' and Janáček's ethnographic activities, are reappraised. A transcription of Janáček's analytical study of 'Jeux de vagues' from Debussy's *La mer* is published for the first time, and this document is considered in the light of Janáček's theory of music as a whole and of the reception of *La mer*.

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# Janáček Studies

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK
Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York
www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521027724



First published in print format 2006

ISBN-13 978-0-511-36817-2 eBook (Adobe Reader)
ISBN-10 0-511-36817-8 eBook (Adobe Reader)

ISBN-13 978-0-521-02772-4 paperback
ISBN-10 0-521-02772-1 paperback

# Contents

# Preface

Robin Holloway writes on p. 11 below of this volume: '[Janáček's] reception is both ardent and on-target; he is not misunderstood, and no longer a cause. The next steps, alas, are academic appropriation and universal establishmentarianism.' Holloway is surely right to suggest that Janáček's works are now viewed widely and enthusiastically as core repertory – particularly the operas, which are performed more regularly than those of almost any other twentieth-century composer. And, of course, the devotion of a 'Studies' volume to a composer's music is the seal of 'academic appropriation' *par excellence*. Nevertheless, I hope this volume might be excused on the grounds that very little has yet been published about Janáček's music, even if, as Hanns Eisler once famously remarked, he is perhaps this century's most innovative composer in terms of musical 'expression'. In fact, the Janáček literature is still so overwhelmingly dominated by popular biography that a 'Studies' book could be regarded as long overdue, or at least as a valuable corrective.

The essays are not themed: the weighting towards opera, for example, reflects Janáček's apportioning of his energies rather than a scholarly agenda. Two authors essentially share Eisler's view of Janáček as the ultimate creator of musical expression. Holloway takes on both the entire oeuvre (centred on opera) and Janáček the man, seeking to discover how music 'can be reconciled with an aesthetic of unmitigated expression grounded in human utterance'. Tom Adès confines himself to a single 'underestimated' medium (solo piano), arguing that conventional analytical approaches are powerless when confronted by a composer who can transform a simple enharmonic shift into the most potent of signifiers.

A notable feature of Janáček research hitherto has been an avoidance of the concerns of modern musicology in the broader sense. This is certainly not true of the chapter by Geoffrey Chew and Robert Vilain, who, by exposing tensions between the music of *From the House of the Dead* and the work's literary model, raise important questions about the nature of

operatic realism. Similarly, Hugh Macdonald's essay, which investigates the fractures between Janáček's symphonic poems and their programmes, has significant implications for the study of musical narrativity in general. Michael Beckerman's essay invites us to contemplate nothing less than the 'critical' differences between musical and dramatic time.

Not that familiar Janáček topics are excluded. Miloš Štědroň tackles the most frequently debated subject of all, 'speech melody', arguing that, contrary to received opinion, Janáček's deployment in his operas of vocal motives based on the rhythms and inflections of spoken Czech is a relatively rare, if powerful, compositional device. Zdeněk Skoumal offers a new approach to another mainstream topic: the interconnections between Janáček's activities as composer and ethnographer. Two further essays have a historical orientation. Nigel Simeone provides details about the provincial musical marketplace within which Janáček operated for most of his career. Adrienne Simpson reminds us that major developments in the reception of Janáček's music have not been limited to Europe and the United States.

One recurring motive in the book is the vital relationship for Janáček between music theory and composition. My own chapter thus grants the final word to Janáček the theorist and analyst, offering a transcription of his unpublished 1921 analytical study of 'Jeux de vagues' from Debussy's *La mer*, and considering this document in the light of Janáček's theory of music as a whole and of the reception of *La mer*.

I should like to take this opportunity to record some personal debts. First, to all my contributors, for their conscientious scholarship and their good-natured forbearance in the face of my editorial interference and constant requests for clarification. Also, I am grateful to Dimitra Stamogiannou for practical assistance. David Gascoigne provided invaluable advice concerning translation of the French texts quoted in my article. Inevitably, the period of a book's preparation is one of great trial to those close to the editor or author, and I would like to acknowledge my profound indebtedness to Anne, Jack, Alison, Pam, Christine and David, who have in different ways suffered and given their unqualified support over the last year or so. Finally, just as Debussy's *La mer* was written at a time of personal crisis for the composer, so the completion of this volume coincided with a turbulent phase in my own life. Penny Souster has borne the resulting delays and ditherings with considerable patience and understanding.

# 1 Expressive sources and resources in Janáček's musical language

ROBIN HOLLOWAY

Broadly speaking either composers want primarily to make shapes, patterns, forms, journeys, buildings, tables, gardens, mud-pies, or they want primarily to utter what wells up from within themselves, or from what is suggested within themselves by the impact of things from around them. If Haydn is the ultimate instance of the 'pure' composer writing 'music about music' (though manifestly not deficient in humanity), Janáček can surely be seen as the ultimate composer of *Affekt* in whom music becomes the medium for expression so immediate as to transcend the linguistic metaphor to become in itself the thing that feels and moves.

Suppose, when traversing the back routes of his loved and hated native land by coach or train a vast pang of inarticulate emotion swells up around the composer's heart – 'my country'; suppose, thinking of his parents, his earliest memories, impressions, motivations, sensations, thoughts – 'my childhood'; suppose, reliving the deepest, tenderest, most painful intimacies, their mixture of harsh and delicate, tender and cruel, guilty and carefree, blighted and flowering, dampened and burning – 'my life'; suppose, then, the composer would seek to 'express' these feelings, to capture the unutterable, as music purportedly can, in a chord-sequence, in a turn of phrase, a rhythmic gesture, a timbral combination, how would he do so? *What* chords, intervals, rhythms, timbres? They would need to be precise, notated without ambiguity (let alone mistakes) as performance-instructions to players; also accurate containers of the complex of emotions and sensations, to be conveyed to the listeners so that they understand aright. It would be Janáček above all, and in some respects Janáček alone, who would be able to show how such things might be done.

But only if the means were sonorous – utterance, articulate or

inarticulate, though not necessarily verbal. His *raison d'être* for writing music, and his main source of material with which to, is the sound of a human being in a condition of body and soul that compels such utterance. The human sound, whether heard or imagined wrung from the depths, or casually observed in, as it might be, the vocal intonations of two girls chatting as they wait for a man who doesn't turn up. Here with something concrete to start from, Janáček speculates about their characters, their lives, their futures; notates their converse as if collecting a folk-song, finds the clue to its rhythmicisation and pitching; and eventually from these, the harmony and coloration that will realise its latent musical life:

> Perhaps it was like this, strange as it seemed, that whenever someone spoke to me, I may [not have] grasped the words, but I grasped the rise and fall of the notes! I knew what the person was like: I knew now he or she felt, whether he or she was lying, whether he or or she was upset. As the person talked to me in a conventional conversation, I knew, I *heard* that, inside himself, the person wept . . . I have been collecting speech melodies since 1879; I have an enormous collection. You see, these speech melodies are windows into people's souls – and what I would like to emphasize is this: for *dramatic music* they are of great importance.[1]

The same eager appetite to record is applied to birds, beasts, the mosquitoes of Venice, even the waves on the seashore at Vlissingen: there he is, notebook in hand, pencil poised, ears pricked.[2] One feels he could have understood the language of 'rocks and stones and trees' and give contour to 'what the wild flowers tell me', so long as they spoke in noises not signs.

Thus far it could almost be the attitude of an ethnologist, a naturalist, even a speech-therapist. But not quite. Janáček, in being after all a composer, can take the idea further: 'Identical ripples of emotion compel rhythms of tone which accord with rhythms of colours and touch. This is the secret of the conception of a musical composition, an unconscious

[1] Janáček in an interview (8 March 1928) for the Prague literary fortnightly *Literární svět*, translated in Mirka Zemanová, ed. and trans., *Janáček's Uncollected Essays on Music* (London and New York: Marion Boyars, 1989), pp. 120–4 (pp. 121–2).

[2] See Zemanová, J*anáček's Uncollected Essays*, Plate 8 – a reproduction of a photograph of Janáček on the seashore at Vlissingen, Holland, taken around 8–10 May 1926.

[3] From Janáček's feuilleton 'Sedm havranů' [Seven Rooks], first published in the Brno daily *Lidové noviny* (30 November 1922), and translated in Vilem and

spontaneous compilation in the mind.'[3] After conception, however, the problems begin: continuation, for a start, then continuity into whatever forms and organisations such material will suggest and be able to sustain. The empirical approach – 'successive minute touches linked together by instinctive clairvoyance' as Debussy in characterising Musorgsky also characterised himself – is all very well, but there has to be coherence and direction however spontaneous, and logic, even grammar, however wayward or erratic. Janáček of course knew all this, and here too his solution is typically extreme. Strange though it is to think of him as a theorist of music, he attacked aesthetic and linguistic problems with all his wonted assiduity, fervour and oddness for most of his life, alongside the composing or, more usually, in unconscious prophecy of it. The almost impossibly elusive current of utterance mooted above, equally with the prosaic chit-chat of daily life, and every shade of feeling in between, as it emanates in sound, were for him deliberated theoretical goals as well as artistic starting points of tingling immediacy. He wished by his notions of 'percolation', 'interpenetration' etc.,[4] to elaborate a thoroughgoing quasi-scientific dossier of affective usage wholly congruent with, indeed inseparable from, his 'enormous collection' of human and animal sounds. Old Janáček hearsay – 'a chord that bleeds', 'a chord that makes you wring your hands' and so forth – can now be substantiated from what amounts to a composing-kit, however sketchy and in some obvious ways absurd. For Janáček even the most ordinary chord-connections contain an explosive emotional potential. Thus the $\frac{6}{4}$ is 'like the swallow flying which almost touches the ground, and by that refreshing, lifts into the heights', and the 4–3 'ruffles' the $V^7$–I cadence 'as a breeze ruffles the surface of a fishpond'.[5] If these bedrocks of tonal cliché can evoke such fantasy, the idea that more complex

Margaret Tausky, eds., *Leoš Janáček: Leaves from his Life* (London: Kahn and Averill, 1982), pp. 101–4 (p. 103).

4 These terms are both attempts to render into English different connotations of Janáček's concept of 'prolínání'; further details can be found in Michael Beckerman, *Janáček as Theorist* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1994), pp. 72–9. [ed.]

5 See Beckerman, *Janáček as Theorist*, p. 115. '4–3' refers here to the intervals formed in a perfect cadence by the seventh of chord $V^7$ and the third of chord I in relation to the tonic (e.g. F–C and E–C in C major). Janáček's theory of harmony in fact rests on the hypothesis that in chord progressions all the notes in both chords relate to the bass note of the second chord. [ed.]

dissonances can cut, or be cut into, with a knife, like a knife,[6] suddenly ceases to be so preposterous.

The aim is for music to achieve its purpose, the intense utterance of feeling, via the startling physicality of its every sonorous constituent. Together, they reach the auditor direct, circumventing formalist routines and play of conventions. Music's innermost meaning lies 'above', 'behind', 'beyond' the working-relationships of its notes that make its intrinsic, non-referential grammar.

This sense of what music can legitimately and naturally do leads inevitably to claims still more ambitious. Janáček would, one senses, have endorsed with enthusiasm these questions from the Shostakovich/Volkov *Testimony* that resounds with his own Slav urgency:

> Meaning in music – that must sound very strange for most people. Particularly in the West. It's here in Russia that the question is usually posed: What was the composer trying to say, after all, with this musical work? What was he trying to make clear? The questions are naive, of course, but despite their naiveté and crudity, they definitely merit being asked. And I would add to them, for instance, Can music attack evil? Can it make a man stop and think? Can it cry out, and thereby draw man's attention to various vile acts to which he has grown accustomed? To the things he passes without any interest?[7]

'All these questions began for me with Mussorgsky', Shostakovich continues. They are equally germane for Janáček. The problem is, how with such views of music as essentially a humanistic moral agent, can it be composed as an art, disinterested, uncommitted, as organisation into grammar and form of pitches and durations and timbres?

Composers who put the *cri expressif* before all else usually have an internal music-machine to turn the wheels, which flows, courses, surges, spins; a force they can drive or be driven by – Schubert, Wagner, Tchaikovsky, Mahler. But when the utterance-type lacks this inner stream, or cannot reach it easily, cannot swim, or finds it dammed, choked, frozen –

[6] See Janáček's employment of the term 'zářez' (incision) in relation to certain types of voice-leading: Beckerman, *Janáček as Theorist*, pp. 66–7.

[7] Solomon Volkov, ed., *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dimitri Shostakovich*, trans. Antonina Bouis (London: Faber, 1979), p. 181.

Schumann, Brahms, Berg are instances – schemes and artifices are needed; games, codes, constructivistic manipulations of material not 'naively' born from music in its primeval state. Though their eventuality appears spontaneous, its making has been contrived, even arbitrary. And when the utterer by instinct is by technique a stutterer – whether because the need for scaffolding or gameplaying denies in its defiance of naturalness the utterer's 'from the life' directness, or through sheer lack of musical skill, or even talent, to match the sensitivity of the vibrations and the intensity of the vision – then there are radical problems for which only radical solutions will suffice. Examples of this are Musorgsky again, and Janáček, and indeed Shostakovich too, were it not for his being cursed, contrariwise, with one of the most facile music-machines ever seen. (Instances of vision outweighing skill or talent would include very obviously a Gurney or a Satie, rather controversially a Delius or an Ives.) What all these composers have in common, however different and mutually incomparable, is the primacy of expression. Each has his unique 'letter to the world', or, as Wordsworth said of the poet, he 'rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him'; he has a message and will burst if it is not delivered. They all stand at the polar opposite from the Stravinskian position which objects in sheer self-defence to music's capacity to say anything whatsoever outside itself.

It is not immediately clear how Janáček relates to these fellow-utterers. To Musorgsky for passionate commitment to naturalism, the expression of emotional truth via truth to human speech. But Musorgsky's manifest deficiencies in compositional technique and miraculous capture, in a handful of songs and some moments of opera, of exactly what he was after – exquisite musical precision in the teeth of incompetence – are like Janáček only in the upshot. For Musorgsky despised learning and training, whereas the youthful Janáček could not get enough. His bottomless craving for discipline is touchingly evoked in the early pages of Michael Beckerman's *Janáček as Theorist*.[8] Then came the revealing moment (possibly apocryphal) when his youthful work was deemed 'too correct'; a judgment inconceivable *chez* Musorgsky, notoriously 'corrected' by an overseer who mistook empirical genius for ignorant ineptitude or wanton perversity. (The truth being in Musorgsky's case a bit of all three.) The mature Janáček offers a comparable

[8] Beckerman, *Janáček as Theorist*, pp. 1–14.

mix, again involving well-meant and sometimes well-made improvements to scores wherein brilliance and clumsiness are often juxtaposed and sometimes combined. He was determined, clearly, that his music could never again incur the same charge!

The middle category can be discounted. Janáček did not need scaffolding or schemes to unbind utterance. He is, rather, the most urgent of all composers. Once he found himself, in late middle life, the sheer impetuosity precludes Schumannish letter-and-word-play as much as Brahmsian note-play, let alone the sedulous ramifications and sophistries of a Berg. What he shares with this composer-type is a more personal trait, the obsessive fixation upon an unattainable muse to whom every aspect of his art is referred. Yet while his mature musical speech is nothing if not obsessional, the two fixations do not go hand in hand. He would never chain in codes the fetishistic initials or names or events: blurting directness, not swathed secrecy, is his intonation. But neither does he contain a mighty machine like Schubert, nor the infinite interweave of Wagner's leitmotivic procedures, nor the melodic fertility (and sequential shamelessness) of Tchaikovsky, nor the improvisational splurge of Mahler. The native endowment is song-and-dance length, Dvořák as prototype, manifested in modest, blameless Slav-nationalist successes like the *Lašské tance* (Lachian Dances; 1893) or the faded lyricism of the *Idylla* (Idyll; 1878) and the Suite (1877). When he gets into being himself the lengths remain brief and the units become tiny, but the shapes are large, and the powers of driving continuity inexhaustible.

The problem is to discover just how music as such can be reconciled with an aesthetic of unmitigated expression grounded in human utterance and guided by such peculiar theories (however well they worked for him in practice). His getting into being himself is a matter first of finding the right genre to take these overriding preoccupations – opera; then of finding what can be done with opera that squares with them, what can be put in and left out, what it can, when radically deconventionalised, astonishingly turn out to be able to do. The crucial leap, precipitated by the harrowing illness and early death of Olga, comes between *Jenůfa* (1894–1903; rev. 1906–7) and *Osud* (Fate; 1903–5; rev. 1906, 1907), the first a masterpiece in a received mould (Smetana not so far behind, except in stature), the second a Confession, of the utmost artistic oddity, an apparently unworkable maverick which, as it happened, prognosticates his late flowering into total idio-

syncrasy. Once opera could be made wholly odd, other genres followed: song cycle, string quartet, piano sonata and lyric (here alone are precedents, for this is what the small piano lyric had always been for), all the way to 'Concerto' (the two bizarre works of 1925–6), 'Symphony' (*Sinfonietta*; 1926) and 'Mass' (*Glagolitic*; 1926; rev. 1927).

'Unmitigated expression': Janáček places a higher premium upon this dangerous weapon than any composer before or since. Not that music before him had lacked the desire or the means not just to be freely expressive but to encapsulate emotion within a sonorous image so fully that one has to say that this music means, or says, this thing. Its pre-romantic history lies in tropes from madrigals and lute songs, onomatopoeia and charged-up rhetoric from Monteverdi to Purcell, Charpentier, Rameau, the entire charter of baroque *Affekt* and its individual intensification in the hands of J. S. Bach. Nietzsche's notion of a 'lexicon' in Wagner of the most intimate, decadently perfumed, *telling* fragments, the miniaturist in him who palpitates with expressive life whereas the colossal remains stillborn, simply brings into the open what had been achieved with consummate success in countless unflawed gems of Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, and was to flower further in Brahms, Fauré, Wolf, Webern.

As this latter list shows, it is a gift that lies at the opposite end of music's spectrum from opera. The phrase that speaks low, bearing a secret caress or a private message, is a creature of small spaces and small forces – song, solo piano, music for the chamber. Opera is, obviously, a collective genre that needs to raise its voice to cross footlights and be heard in the upper circle. The illusion of intimacy is one of its resources. That it can whisper was well known to such professional masters of the caress as Puccini or Massenet; their desired reaction is corporate, a unison 'oooh!' throughout the house. At the other extreme, the most famous whisper in all opera, the declaration of love in *Pelléas*, is overheard not shared. Janáček's intimacy is guiltless as Debussy of titillation, but otherwise resembles neither extreme. He is doing something else. Each individual within an attentive audience must feel that this music's utterance is directed to them alone. Even in communal scenes this tendency can be sensed; in the monologues it is undisguised. In Wagner's monologues or duologues the audience is witness to a situation and its participants – this Wotan or Sachs, these two lovers, or two squabbling brothers, or two contrasted sisters (and

so on). The presentation is detached, indeed objective, for all the nudging commentary in the orchestra's tissue of leitmotives and the heated immediacy of the musical language in general. Whereas Janáček compels every hearer to identify with the single figure – the Forester, say – and with every person in a group as their turn comes – the circle of regulars at the village inn, or badger, vixen and dogfox, owl, in the forest. Nothing could be further from the various ways in which opera usually proceeds; different though they already are, Janáček is in contradistinction to them all; he makes verismo and Wagnerismo seem as stylised as aria and cabaletta. Music in Janáček's operas is his means of dissolving the distances and boundaries of convention, not of establishing them. And inasmuch as the same goes for his concert-music, thus far does he differ from all other composers.

Auden declared that in *Pelléas* Debussy flattered the audience, meaning (presumably) that, being given so little in the way of the usual vocal delights, their only compensation is the glow of cultural refinement their sacrifice has won them. Yet *Pelléas* is for the most part lovely to hear, if a little washy and deficient in dramatic momentum. These particular criticisms clearly do not apply to Janáček! But he is still more deficient than Debussy in grateful voice-centred lyricism, and can often be harsh, insistent, obsessive, tedious; even his brevity can seem aggressive because so foreshortened and brusque. Whole stretches and one or two whole works could fairly be called repellent for all his growth straight out of Dvořák and Smetana, and his non-relation to any of the commonly hated veins of 'ugliness' in twentieth-century music. He neither 'flatters' the specialised susceptibilities of the refined, nor wows his audience *all'italiana* to bring down the house. In this genre of music more posited than any other on pleasing, he does not try to please. More often, he stings, shocks, burns. His music to go with the whipcracks and chain-bearing in *Z mrtvého domu* (From the House of the Dead; 1927–8) renders physical pain that makes the hearer wince; crueller still is rendition in sound of mental and spiritual anguish. Compare the lashing in *Elektra*, the crushing in *Salome*, the torture in *Tosca*, or even such deeper expressions of psychological distress as the Kiss and its outcome in *Parsifal*, or Tristan's delirium. The audience writhes in its plush-covered seats with a groan of satisfaction. These places are protected, and distanced, by music, as surely as the padding and plush separate the soft body from the hard frame. Only such exceptional moments as Boris with

the vision of the murdered boy, Golaud twisting Mélisande by her hair, Katerina Ismailova's song about the black lake, the music for the hanging of Billy Budd, dare go so naked as Janáček does by habit. While *Wozzeck*, enthusiastically hailed in the last year of his life ('a dramatist of astonishing importance, of deep truth . . . each of his notes has been dipped in blood'),[9] can seem altogether too well-dressed, in interesting, absorbing, intricate, richly inventive *music*. And in *Lulu* the discrepancies between its gorgeous sonic opulence, its intellectual fascination and the moral then physical degradation of its characters can often be hard to bridge.

Be it unbearable physical pain or mental torture; or quivers, ecstasies, visions, desires, delusions; or merely some equivalent of the two girls waiting for the man to arrive (like the tiny cameo for the engineer and the young widow in *Fate* Act I) Janáček's unique grip upon utterance, from mind and spirit, in the body, via the voice, produces this 'intimate letter' from individual to individual that, so far from pleasing – flattering, wooing – his audience, is an exposure of them as much as of his characters. He strips the warm clothing of protective safety to reach naked empathy. To get 'into the skin' of, say, Káťa's religio-erotic outpourings or Emilia Marty's 337-year-old weariness, he puts every auditor there too, singly – there is no plural.

Also there is no space between the state of being and his rendition of it, whether it be just a flock of silly hens or the repartee of visitors at a summer spa – but it might equally be the farmer's decent son suffused with desire and shame, excitement and compunction – and correspondingly, no space between the music and its recipient. The only thing he does not express is *himself*; the absence of romantic egotistic self-projection is remarkable. As, also, the complete avoidance of preachiness; no judgements are made, no moral is drawn. The incentive is generous but by no means soft. Hard, if anything. Also aggressive: shocking in rawness; rude, embarrassing, button-holing, speaking too close in your face in public places; as excruciating, or as boring, as it would be in reality – the mad mother's accusations and leap from the balcony, the breakdown at the piano, the night of illicit romance and the subsequent admission wrested from guilt by the

[9] Janáček in his 1928 interview for *Literární svět*, translated in Zemanová, *Janáček's Uncollected Essays*, p. 123. [Chew and Vilain quote the whole of this passage about *Wozzeck* on p. 64 below of this volume. (ed.)]

conniving elements, the night of icy sex in exchange for a much-desired document, the three prisoners' successive slow motion monomaniac monologues for the first yet umpteenth time. 'Realism' – not so much an art-historical term, as something the dog brings in, mangled and disgusting, a tribute yet also a victim, for its unwilling owner to share – see, feel, smell, taste, with its own keen senses; added to which, the wholly human sense of what everything *means*.

Yet it is not so much an appeal to pious *Family of Man* humanity ('from the heart, let it go to the heart' as its facile motto), still less a compassionate weepie of emotive blackmail anticipating tendencies all-too-familiar nowadays. 'Janáček is, if anything, hard.' He presents documentation of people observed, caught, notated, collected. The truest alignment lies with the photo-document, akin to the work of August Sander, who plonked a specimen of 'businessman', 'architect', 'composer', 'peasant', 'artiste', before his camera, squeezed the bulb, and gave the world the dispassionate image that makes the viewer weep. It's worth remembering that Janáček too began as a 'human naturalist' in observations from the 'field' that claimed quasi-scientific objectivity. For him this employment is without retirement. The humanity is boundless; the attitude towards its all-too-human manifestations is ardently unsentimental, most of all in its refusal to stereotype.

To achieve all this his actual music itself, if not exiguous, ought at any rate not to be given first place. In the old operatic debate *prima la musica, poi le parole*, Janáček would award the *pomo d'oro* to expression, rendered by natural human utterance. Which would imply that music as such must be thinned out – the Monteverdi/Musorgsky/*Pelléas* aesthetic rather than the Mozart/Wagner/*Wozzeck*. In fact it is anything but: rather, it is vehement, assertive, busy, gesticulatory, frantic, emotive, and sometimes violently unrestrained. Simply on the practical level the orchestra has often to be curbed in order that the sensitive *parlante* of the voices that it ostensibly supports can be heard properly. Another kind of convention is at work, surprising but necessary, in this recasting of the genre that throws formality to the winds; for music undoubtedly comes first, possibly in spite of Janáček's wishes. He is in the end a composer, odd though this sometimes seems, and the composer in him cannot be prevented. It's not simply that the music is every bit as close-up as the life it renders – this is the first characteristic to strike every newcomer. It is something about his music itself. It can often be

insufficient as such, yet it is the only medium that can carry his 'enormous collection' of human intonations, so spontaneously affixed to subjects and characters that it seems he might have collected these, too, at the bus stop or in the fishmongers. It is the medium for his simultaneous detachment from and involvement with them all, and for his urgent concern to confront each single recipient in a physical encounter with what he has apprehended so acutely. It is the medium through which his recourse to the 'exotic and irrational' genre of opera (though his recasting of it is just as bizarre) can be rationalised and used, and its artificialities made real. It is the medium through which he can utter human speech. As this, it becomes great music like any other – albeit unlike any other in its premises and procedures.

Because Anglo-Saxon culture came quite late to Janáček, some potentially prohibitive problems of interpretation, in every sense, have been largely avoided. From pioneering productions, mainly by the old Sadler's Wells, the operas have become standard repertory in the other principal companies. Our chamber musicians play the chamber works, our tenors sing *Zápisník zmizelého* (The Diary of One Who Disappeared; 1917–19; rev. 1920) in Czech, our orchestras pitch bravely into the orchestra pieces and our choirs into the *Mass*. And with the benefit of outstanding scholarship both historical and textual (its first fruit lies in the series of superlative recordings under Mackerras) the chaos over 'versions' that stood so long in the way of authentic Musorgsky, and can still bug authentic Bruckner, has been obviated. Thus the Anglo-Saxon embrace of this initially so localised music has given a picture true enough to need little or no exegesis. What we hear and admire is exactly what there is. His strangeness and extremity have become normative, his obliqueness direct, his foreignness native.

This makes him difficult to write about further. His reception is both ardent and on-target; he is not misunderstood, and no longer a cause. The next steps, alas, are academic appropriation and universal establishmentarianism. That he remains resistant to analysis one discovers when banging one's head against his music in vain. He lays his materials and his processes, however eccentric, so squarely and clearly that there is nothing that cannot be followed, and description or unknitting seems more than usually futile. Monumentalising him is more attractive and more damaging. He has become the unlikely but perfect candidate in an epoch of fragmentative,

alienating experiment, deliberate renunciation, even spurning, of liberal-humane themes, for music's continued concern with and expression of them without recourse to the bankrupt debris of late-romantic *espressivo*. He is in his own freaky way a Modern, who retained pre-modernist values while driven to 'make it new' in idiosyncrasy and isolation.

Such is human nature that the moment anything revolutionary shows signs of settling into marble, an impulse of reaction sets in. Perhaps an attempt to work it out can help towards further definition of this strange and wonderful figure. The qualms begin with the element of wilfulness, deliberate mannerism, even affectation – the perversity, cussedness, going-against-the-grain, in all that he does. It is provocative – he seems to be saying 'look how peculiar I can be'. Which is of course inseparable from his genuine strangeness whose authenticity and ardour cannot be mistaken. The choice of way-out subjects goes with the choice of way-out instrumental registers, voicing and spacing, odd habits of momentum and eccentric notations both of pitch and rhythm. It is as if burning sincerity *depended* upon being peculiar. When it works, his idiosyncratic vision carries music's empire into territory hitherto unsuspected. When it does not work, the result is merely eccentric without illumination.

And there is no difference. His manner is so all-pervasive that the stretches where he is tedious are indistinguishable from the stretches where he is electrically inspired. The pressure is as consistent as if he wrote always in *italics* or CAPS. Thus, initially at least, discrimination is disarmed. Recognition of the co-existence of inferior material indistinguishable from superior material, with plenty of infill between the two, is compounded by the unfamiliarity of the idiom as well as its gestural consistency. And that all of it is equally aimed at the utterance of burning human intensity makes it still more difficult. When everything depends upon the throb of committed subject-matter, making secondary the calibre of the materials and their workmanship, then tendentiousness looms. Because Janáček is manifestly as artist and as exalted spirit far above any low emotional blackmail, it seems mean to hold artistic scruples concerning the protagonists of a Makropulos affair or amidst the denizens of a prison-house. Like holding one's nose; like denying that in every living creature is a spark of God. But one has to acknowledge that, in taking on such subjects and treating them with such all-out sincerity, Janáček has deprived his listeners of their options.

*Fate* near the start of his maturity, *Věc Makropulos* (The Makropulos Affair; 1923–5) and *From the House of the Dead* at its end show the difficulty most clearly. Between them comes the bulk of his mature achievement with its exact match of idiosyncratic music to the subject it sets, from the most intimate – *The Diary of One Who Disappeared* and the two programmatic string quartets (1923, 1928) drawn respectively from fiction and from life with equal immediacy – to the most public and ceremonial – *Sinfonietta* and *Glagolitic Mass*; not forgetting such joyous divertimenti as *Mládí* (Youth; 1924) and the *Říkadla* (Nursery Rhymes; 1925; rev. 1926). But the triumphant vindication of theory and practice alike, in all their peculiarity, comes in the two central operas, *Káťa Kabanová* (1920–1) and *Příhody Lišky Bystroušky* (The Adventures of the Vixen Bystrouška; 1922–3). Their greatness silences reservations; the human tragedy with its blight upon happiness, tenderness and ardour crushed beneath the pitiless tyranny of propriety, and the animal comedy with its ecstatic cycle of endless renewal circumventing the vicious circle of ageing and death, are manifest high peaks of the century's artistic endeavour, good deeds in wicked times, vindicating humane themes in an epoch of cynicism and mechanisation.

So too are the three more awkward pieces, where greatness is flawed by his peculiarities outstretching their limitations, the inescapable obverse of his chosen manner. In all of them situations of extreme boldness are matched in music that appears to be on the point of fraying through sheer stress of wear. Sonorous images of unforgettable originality and intensity lie alongside stuff that sounds as if it was the first thing that came into his head in his tearing haste to get it down on paper.[10]

In some ways *Fate* is musically the most satisfying. It shines with unforced surprise at what the new techniques can release, above all the way that the speech-intonation of the voices grows into instrumental texture and thence into a continuity which can shape a whole act. Both in the 'photographic' rapportage of its places – the sunny day at the animated spa, the storm raging while the apprehensive students gather round the piano to rehearse their master's opera – and in the 'reports' from a terrain of private

[10] This observation applies equally to the early drafts of the Second Quartet, where some passages (removed before Janáček compiled his final score) are astonishingly humdrum. [ed.]

anguish shot through with twisted disturbed states of being – Janáček is pushing to the ultimate from two opposing yet fused positions, the avid theorising and the lacerating poignancy of his daughter's words notated as she lay dying.

Yet the artistic catalyst was Charpentier's *Louise*, that talentfree piece of cheap tat! Like many a child of its time, something in it, lost to later comers, sufficed to fertilise a work that completely transcends it. But *Fate*'s deeper kinship is rather with such adjacent theatrical adventure as Strindberg (for the painfully private pushed into public exhibition), Pirandello (for its extraordinary games of life *vis-à-vis* art in the work's own workings), Chekhov (for acute human observation, told by implication and ellipsis), and Maeterlinck (poetic suggestiveness in meshes of repetition and echo). Of course it is in such company vitiated by its amateurishness – the inept stage mechanics, the arty language, the inartistic ambiguities as opposed to those that function. Livid, red-hot content, clumsily handled, into which sensitive production can breathe the convincing theatrical life given it by the music, every page of which is infused with the passion that forced it into being. *Fate* is the first opera ever in the difficult new area, set up by Janáček, where the music, though vehemently present, could not exist as such without the pressure of what has caused it, without which it would simply disintegrate. Which is more of a tribute than a qualm.

And *From the House of the Dead* is the last. (It is worth remembering that he neither saw nor even heard either work.) Every discovery so fresh and vivid in *Fate* – speech-intonation filling out the entire instrumental fabric, violent foreshortening, quasi-cinematic flashback, intercutting, montage – here reaches the end of its tether. The three acts are articulated through sonorous imagery of unforgettable simplicity, sometimes sweet, sometimes exalted, more often naked, gawky, awkward, and frequently pulverising in its ferocity. The simplest and most memorable idea of all, the *Urklang* that, like the *Tristan*-chord brings the whole work before one's eyes in a flash, is a chord of only three pitches but so spaced and voiced as to verge upon the physical pain it depicts.

This sound dominates Act I in an orchestra of squeals, squawks, shrieks up high, and growls, lurches and scrabbling down below, presenting a claustrophobic *huis clos* of oppression, lashings, privation, that makes *Billy Budd* seem snug as a captain's cabin. Between piercing acridness and

menacing snarl the 'stuffing' – the orchestra's middle range of warmth and support – has been kicked away, replaced only by the clash of chains and the furious orders of a military drum. The shafts of ardent tenderness in the course of Luka's Lujza-narrative provide pain of a different kind. In Act II the bare start – a *Bohème* Act III, with chains – then the brilliant success in the risky endeavour of presenting bell-sounds by real bells as well as their instrumental imitation, then the unwonted gentleness of Skuratov's monologue, all yield to the riot of crazy energy discharged into the holiday double-bill – cheeky, coarse, vulgar, parodistic, cubist Dvořák crossed with X-ray instrumentation *à la Renard* (the nearest comparison in burlesque folkloric puppet-theatre), littered with 'the right wrong notes', real 1920s impertinence but entirely his own, all the more remarkable within an idiom that however stretched remains fundamentally euphonious and Czech.[11]

The first part of Act III presents in the piteous tale told by Shishkov a perfect instance of Janáček's 'manners' as distinct from his mannerisms. Its villain/hero, unrecognised, is nearby, dying. Coughs, spasms, death-gasps, are rendered, but not the actual moment of death – not a nudge, let alone a symphonic elegy, simply a stage direction at an arbitrary turn of the narration, which itself is equally non-expressionistic. The agonising tenderness of the scenes with Akulina, so long ago, so immediately relived, is not exuded by the haunting beauty of the accompanying string-phrase but contained within it – the ultimate example of Janáček's 'concordance' (so to speak) hurting more, wringing more from its hearers, than the most excruciating of dissonances or the most swooning *espressivo*. Yet it is during the later stages of this same monologue that inspiration flags and monotony sets in which is not intended and does not contribute to the artistic impact. Instead, it is accidental: the music, going on just as before, goes off the boil to become not the suggestive minimum that permits a closer proximity to

[11] Like all great originals he was anxious to appear unbeholden, but he has to wear borrowed garments boldly because the personality within is incapable of disguise. Strauss and Debussy, as well as Puccini, figure unmistakably yet wholly translated. The remarkable parallels with Sibelius are presumably the result of affinity rather than knowledge (some of the most striking, the 'Janáček' in the *Kullervo Symphony* written when Janáček himself was still writing 'Dvořák', he couldn't possibly have heard or seen since the work lay withdrawn and unpublished after its first performance in 1892 till well after Sibelius's death).

emotional truth, but merely, actually, scrappy. A dividing line that cannot be drawn has nevertheless been passed. Once discerned, it can never be ignored.

And thus the closing stretches stir up contrary reactions into a profoundly disturbing ambiguity. A wild priapic character infuses this music; it is 'possessed' in Dostoyevskyian fashion, driven by demons, written in speed and chaos, faster than it can be composed, written as if 'each of its notes has been dipped in blood'. This churning brew of simultaneous upsurge and downtread produces extraordinary emotional turbulence. A clear comparison again comes from *Billy Budd*, where the fomenting mutiny after Billy's execution is drilled backed into order (Janáček provides the visceral thrust, Britten the fudge). A longer shot might be to find it akin to the feelings of the elect, among the audience revelling in the Hymn to the Leader, who share the unspeakable secret that by this music Stalin is excoriated. But in sheer musical calibre – and what else is there? – the ideas cannot take the strain. The power, incontrovertible and in its way beyond compare, comes from everything else. This is great *something* – Electricity, Intensity, Strangeness, Compassion, Uplift, Humanity – the actual notes are second to whatever in Janáček's version of the operatic equation comes *prima*.

*The Makropulos Affair* shows such worries more plainly. The electricity and shock inherent in story and situation go without saying. They produce awed astonishment at the boldness of treatment and breadth of understanding. But cavilling cannot be sopped. One is aghast at the really poor musical ideas upon which so much depends, especially the big primal melodic gesture manifestly intended to be the clue to the opera's dizzying subject; most of all when it is given in the fullest blaze of his orchestral heat an apotheosis that it cannot bear. Not even recourse to wordless off-stage voices (unforgettable for the seduction in the *Diary*, wonderfully atmospheric as soul of the Volga in *Kát'a* or the spirit of the forest in *Vixen*) can save the scene of Elena's rejuvenescence and disintegration which, by virtue of its extreme singularity, leaves the listener aghast anyway. The chorus in the third act of *From the House of the Dead* falls just the right side of emotional manipulation to be heartstopping, but it's a near thing. Its use in *Makropulos* is not so much manipulative as by rote, an 'effect', synchronised with the surreal lighting, disconcerting in a composer who, unlike Wagner,

would seem to have no truck with such old tricks.[12] Elsewhere, *Makropulos* surpasses all his other stage works for variety, quiddity and unexpected wit – the 'Spanish' vignettes, for instance, which encompass a tiny world of quaint, touching vulnerability; though it also has, overall, the highest proportion of routine, humdrum, and (dare one say) note-spinning. Often one wishes he had never happened upon the whole-tone scale or the ostinato. In really bad moments one can even regret the whole doctrine of speech-inflection upon which his art is based.

Such qualms, reservations, scrupulous attempts to sift chaff from grain, attempts to pinpoint the weakness within the greatness, are all very well. Then one hears Janáček again and falls to one's knees. He pulls and pulls your ears till you scream with the pain. Your art and your life fly about you in demented fragments; you are 337 years old and life has dried within you; you have murdered an officer, and a man who came between you and your girl, and then your sweetheart herself. You are exposed in all your human baseness. Yet you are not just told about the spark of God in every creature, you are made to feel its actual presence. You rejoice not with the stoical wriggle of the cut worm who forgives the plough but with the soaring flight of the freed eagle. Janáček, musical theorist, human ethnographer and composer, has brought all this about. There has never been anything like it, with or without music. 'What's music to do with it anyway?' Though, more often than not, the music is fully up to the insistent demands he makes upon it.

[12] It's true, as the editor pointed out to me, that Janáček wanted the *Diary* to be performed in a ghostly 'half-dark' lighting; but the work does not *depend* upon such an adventitious effect: here, as always when at his best, he's got the emotion into the notes.

# 2 'Nothing but pranks and puns': Janáček's solo piano music

THOMAS ADÈS

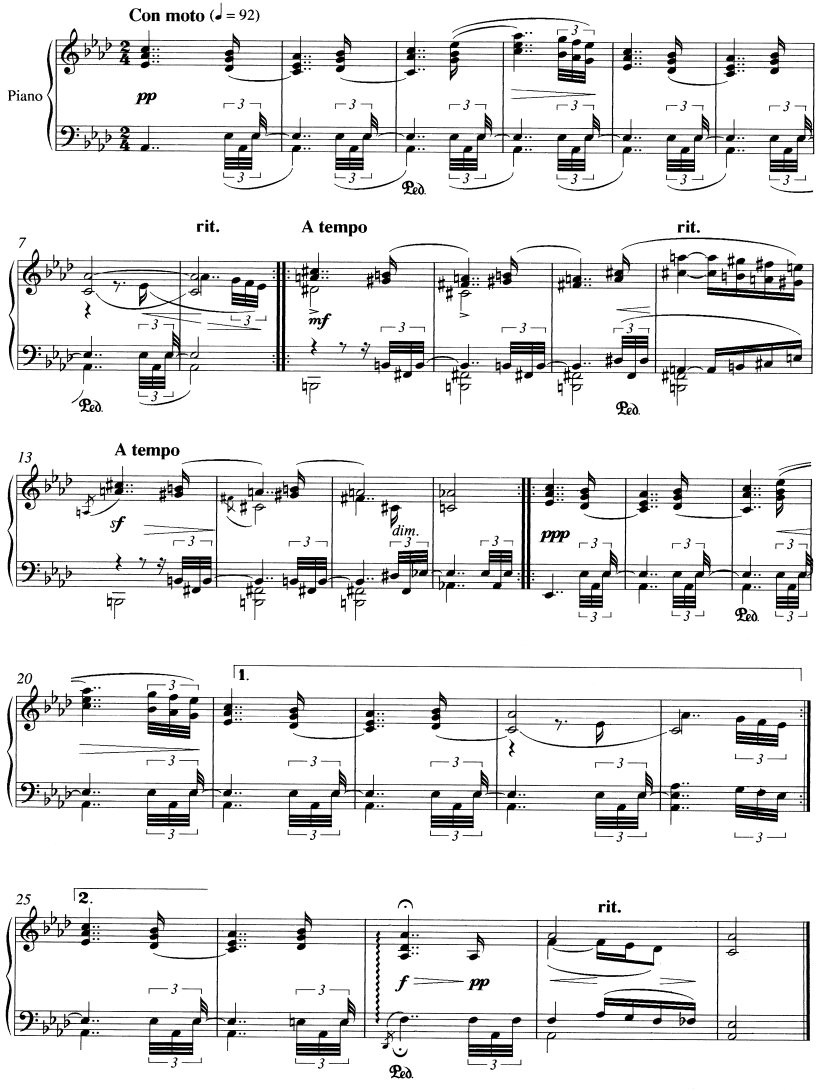
The growing recognition of Janáček as a true radical, rather than a crank, has two primary bases: the technical daring of his orchestration, and the dramatic works' uniquely intense relationship between linguistic and musical motivic expression.[1] Innovations are, therefore, far less frequently identified in his solo piano music, whether because its instrumental sonority appears closer to convention than is the case with the orchestral work, or because Janáček's single most far-reaching quality, seen at its purest in these pieces, is still generally underestimated: the redefinition of structural tonality through an unprecedented concentration on ambiguous, and particularly enharmonic, key relationships.

Volatility of texture and economy of material combine in the mature Janáček to give a relationship between harmonic colour and underlying tonality more highly-charged than in any other composer. *Na památku* (In memoriam), thought to date from 1886–7, sows the seeds of all the major piano works to come (Example 2.1).[2]

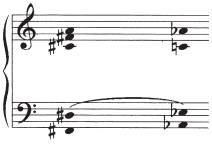
Each of the three paragraphs is underpinned by a perfect-fifth pedal, giving an apparent **ABA** tonal structure of A♭ – V of E – A♭; yet it makes no sense to describe these pedals as functions of a tonal scheme. The low $B_1$/F♯ dyad of bb. 9–15 is not resolved at any stage; neither in b. 16, nor in b. 17, with its extraordinary second inversion, nor even in the closing bars of the piece. The sense of resolution in the last four bars is far from merely rhetorical; but *tonality* is only tangentially involved. To speak of the second paragraph of

[1] Janáček remarked about the Capriccio (1926) in a 1928 interview: 'je to rozmarné, samé schválnosti a vtipy' (it is capricious, nothing but pranks and puns); see Adolf Veselý, 'Poslední rozhovor s Leošem Janáčkem' [A Last Interview with Leoš Janáček], *Hudební rozhledy* (Brno), 4 (1928).

[2] This edition of *Na památku* is by Paul Wingfield.




**Example 2.1** Janáček, *In memoriam*

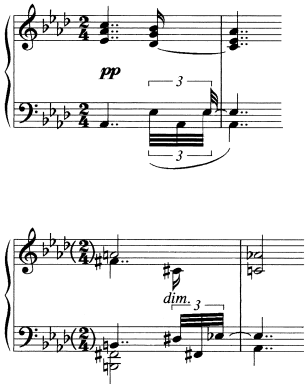


**Example 2.2** Janáček, *In memoriam*, bb. 15–16: summary

the piece as 'an excursion to E major', as the appearance of the score might suggest, gives no clue as to its true role within the structure. For that, it is necessary to isolate the cadence in bb. 15–16 (Example 2.2). D♯ translates into E♭, C♯ retrospectively into D♭. That this, rather than any modulation, is the defining event of the piece already has an index in the 'orchestration' of b. 9: a significant *subito* dynamic increase, the dramatic introduction of a new register; and, crucially, an accent distinguishing the central d♯$^{1}$ from the melodic e♭$^{2}$/e♭$^{1}$ of bb. 1–8. This coloration is sustained in b. 10, raising the d♭$^{1}$ of bb. 1–8 into the new context as a c♯$^{1}$. The independence of this stratum of the texture is emphasised by its being suspended for the succeeding three bars, an absence made palpable by the rich d♯ of b. 11, the stretched spacing of b. 12, and the contrast between the voice-specific accent of b. 9 and the bare *sforzando* of b. 13. Its resumption in b. 14 is gently, though still unequivocally, pointed by an unconventionally spread chord. Furthermore, the control of this enharmonic shift over the cadence into b. 16 is sealed by its assuming the rhythmic personality of the principal melodic voice, thereby revealing a latent identity with the germinal idea of the piece (Example 2.3).

The other enharmonically translated note involved in this cadence has an equally strong structural weight: the d♯ on the final semiquaver of b. 11, evident from its textural and rhythmic position as a coinage from the e♭ of the first seven bars. This note too is confirmed as an independent event by the bar which follows, in which the otherwise consistent triplet figure at the end of every bar is slowed down threefold, placing an answering e♮ on the final semiquaver of b. 12, which is in turn resolved, on the final semiquaver of b. 15, in the cadence of Example 2.2.

It is these two threads in the texture which alone determine the strategy by which Janáček unifies *Na památku*. The *forte* D♭ chord (from '***ppp***') of b. 27 owes its great conclusiveness to the melodic voice in the left hand, describing a curve of a tone in either direction from b. 25 to the end: up




**Example 2.3** Janáček, *In memoriam*, bb. 1–2 and 14–15

from the e♭ on the final semiquaver of b. 25 through an e♭ exactly a bar later – a restaging of bb. 11–12 – then reclaiming that e♭ for the tonality of the third paragraph and of the piece with the climactic f♮ of b. 27. The melodic curve is completed by the f♭ of the penultimate bar, also on the final semiquaver, providing a synthesis with the e♮ on the final semiquaver of b. 12, its forebear in deceleration.

Though ostensibly an early work, *Na památku* offers all the essentials of the profoundly new approach to the materials of composition which Janáček was to develop in his maturity. A traditional tonal structure (the **ABA** solo piano miniature) is motivated not by the received imperatives of a tonal system, but by texturally and melodically defined enharmonic shifts. Apparently germane terms such as 'dominant' or 'flattened submediant' are in fact quite useless to any meaningful account of the piece; the structural event is an enharmonic progression, acting as a caesura in the structure, a problem solved by a closure of the enharmonic circle (Example 2.4). The subservience of merely tonal functions in the piece is discreetly but unambiguously demonstrated by the inimitable second inversion at b. 17, gently defusing any possible finality in the return to the tonic, and preparing the more truly conclusive D♭ of b. 27, which serves not as a functioning subdominant but as ancillary coloration of the long-range enharmonic shift described by Example 2.4.

The inclination towards a structure defined by a harmonic bifurcation is, in fact, already evident in the *Thema con variazioni (Zdenčiny*