

Revealing Janáček: *On an Overgrown Path—Series I*

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## Abstract

This document challenges the marginal and neglected status of Leoš Janáček, Czech composer of the late Romantic to early twentieth-century era, through an analysis of compositional techniques in the solo piano cycle *On an Overgrown Path—Series I*. By examining Janáček's musical background, specifically: (1) musical studies and early influences, (2) the influence of Herbartian philosophy on his musical theoretics, and (3) the influence of his ethnographic studies on his musical theoretics, I will provide important context in understanding the development of his innovative and distinctive compositional style. As a composer and theorist, Janáček sought a purer and more modern means of expression than that of his contemporaries with the artistic aim of relating all compositional elements to real human emotion and psychological phenomena. *On an Overgrown Path* is one of his first of his works to reflect this cultivated technique. Each piece in the cycle's first series will be explored by analyzing the features that can be linked to his philosophical and cultural influences and by discussing the resulting emotional affects. Through this study, a clear connection between Janáček's influences, progressive compositional techniques, and masterful expression of the human condition in *On an Overgrown Path* will be made, challenging his current minor rank in music history.

## Acknowledgements

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Many thanks to my teacher and mentor of seven plus years, Jack Winerock, for his help in interpreting the deceptively simple pieces of *On an Overgrown Path*. (The psychological and emotional complexity Janáček aims to express was certainly felt from a performer's standpoint, which made the interpretive process challenging, yet always introspective, creative, and exciting.)

Finally, I would like to sincerely thank my committee members, Jack Winerock, Richard Reber, Scott McBride Smith, Kip Haaheim, and Ann Schofield. They have been a wonderful support system during my doctoral studies and I thank them for their wonderful teaching, kindness, and mentorship all these years.

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## Introduction

Today, the composer Leoš Janáček is generally considered to be a minor figure of the late Romantic to early twentieth-century era of music. If Janáček were to be brought up in conversation, one might recall that he has written some operas, orchestral works, or a few pieces for solo piano, but most would probably end the discussion there and think no more of the Czech composer (and perhaps, draw attention to Dvořák or Smetana instead). His music, without question, diverges from that of his contemporaries. Compared to the flowering melodies, lush orchestration, and increasingly complex harmonic sound of the late Romantics, Janáček's music is shockingly simple, raw, unfamiliar, and thus, difficult to grasp. Indeed, Janáček felt that the Romantics fell short of expressing true emotion and that their attempts at such were hackneyed and false. In search of a purer and more modern means of expression, he rejected traditional techniques of form, elaborate counterpoint, and conventional harmonic functionality in favor of simplicity and economy acting as governing principles.<sup>1</sup> However, Janáček was not resistant to the evolving trends in music for the sake of being reactionary. He resisted the current because he was a true innovator with clear ideals firmly rooted in his own philosophical beliefs, musical theoretics, and Czech heritage.

The first of Janáček's works to masterfully reflect his unique compositional style is a cycle for solo piano, *On an Overgrown Path*. The first series was published in its entirety in 1911 when Janáček was 56 years old. Although he had been composing long before his fifties, the first half of Janáček's life had been virtually consumed with intense musical training, and it was in these years that he finely cultivated his own theory of music and compositional methods. After so many painstaking years of study and personal development, it is in *On an Overgrown Path* in which the composer's voice finally shines. Janáček's theories and ideas finally come to fruition, forming a modern style and sound that is distinctively his own. On the surface are quintessential characteristics of Janáček: short, motivic ideas which piece together or overlap, a strong presence of modality both melodically and harmonically, asymmetry in meter, phrasing, and form, the incorporation of prosification (speech-melody elements), and

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<sup>1</sup> Milan Kundera, "He Saw the Coming Night," *Cross Currents* 2: 371 (1983) <<http://name.umdl.umich.edu.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/ANW0935.1983.001>> (accessed March 11, 2013).

an objective musical background with descriptive titles and commentary provided by the composer.<sup>2</sup> However, looking beneath the surface, it is clear that the reasons for such compositional decisions were shaped by careful and deliberate thought. One cannot fully grasp these pieces without understanding the influence Herbartian philosophy had upon Janáček's sense of aesthetics and musical theory development, how his nationalist sentiments affected his compositional writing, and how his personal experiences and tragedies are woven into his work. Most importantly, it must be understood that through each component of his music, it was Janáček's primary purpose to genuinely express aspects of human existence and emotion. By exploring each piece in *On an Overgrown Path*, it is possible to reach a fuller understanding of how Janáček achieves what he aims for: an honest expression of the human condition, and ultimately, this will create a dialogue in which Janáček's significance and contribution to our musical history can be seriously reconsidered. This paper will focus on the first series of *On an Overgrown Path*.

First, a discussion of Janáček's musical background regarding his studies, philosophical influences, development of musical theoretics, and ethnographic work will be shared, as they provide important context for *On an Overgrown Path*.

## **Part I: Musical Background**

### **Chapter 1 Musical Studies and Early Influences**

Janáček, born in 1854, grew up in the mountain hamlet of Hukvaldy, located in eastern Moravia. In Hukvaldy and surrounding villages, folk music was an inherent part of life, bringing people together for festivals, celebrations, and church activities. Janáček's parents played an important role within the community's musical life: his mother, Amalie, played guitar, sang, and performed at local church gatherings, while his father, Jiří, held the esteemed position of kantor, a prominent schoolmaster-musician post originating from the Middle Ages. Jiří was an outstanding teacher and musician who learned piano, organ, and singing from his father, Jiří senior. It is said that Leoš was most like his grandfather who was a

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<sup>2</sup> Jiří Vyzloužil, *Leoš Janáček Today*, ed. Michael Beckerman and Glen Bauer, *Janáček and Czech Music: Proceedings of the International Conference (Saint Louis, 1988)* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1995), 360.



passionate musician with a volatile disposition. Despite his extreme temperament, his grandfather, a highly skilled organist, singer, and teacher, was loved and respected for his musical genius. Coming from a musical family, it is not surprising that Leoš excelled in music as a young child. His first training came from his father, but at the age of 11, this ceased. His father fell ill, and due to finances being difficult, the family sent Leoš to the Queen's Monastery in Brno where he was accepted to study music on scholarship.<sup>3</sup>

The monastery school was the finest institute in Moravia and was under the directorship of accomplished composer and fervent Czech nationalist, Pavel Křizkovsky. Interestingly, Křizkovsky's first teacher had been Leoš's grandfather, Jiří, who had taken the boy under his wing. Jiří later secured Křizkovsky with a choral scholarship at the Church of the Holy Ghost in Opava, thus laying the grounds for Křizkovsky's success as a composer and eventually, as Leoš's first formal teacher. The coursework and lessons Janáček went through with Křizkovsky were intense and disciplined, yet stimulating and nurturing. Although Křizkovsky was strict and highly critical, he always stressed to his students the importance of creativity and artistic freedom.<sup>4</sup>

Janáček was also exposed to more Czech folk music at the monastery. Křizkovsky was renowned in Moravia for using Czech folk song as the basis for his own liturgical compositions which made an impression on the young Janáček. This higher level of exposure to Czech folk music was to remain meaningful to Janáček throughout his life, as in his old age he said of Křizkovsky: "he was able to feel the spirit of the pieces [folksongs] he selected, and from this he let his compositions grow...he thereby did justice to the songs, and served Czech music as well."<sup>5</sup> The time spent at the school was certainly impactful upon Leoš, who at an early age, was instilled with the importance of self-discipline, individual expression, and cultural roots.

In 1869, Janáček completed his studies at the monastery and entered the Brno Teacher's Institute to prepare for a teaching career. He graduated in three years and took a position as an unpaid assistant to

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<sup>3</sup> Mirka Zemanova, *Janáček* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Brim Beckerman, *Janáček As Theorist* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

gain experience, and was also appointed assistant conductor to Křižkovsky. A year later, Janáček was elected choirmaster at a local laborers' choral society, and in 1874, he completed his exams at the Teacher's Institute to finally become a paid assistant. Despite having the option to pursue teaching full-time, Janáček desired to continue his musical studies and enrolled at the Prague Organ School. Here he studied with notable theorist, composer, and teacher František Skuherský, who wrote one of the first leading modern theoretical treatises in Czech.<sup>6</sup>

Skuherský's ideas on harmonic systems were a major influence on Janáček. Skuherský felt that the traditional major-minor diatonic system was insufficient and limiting, and firmly believed that all twelve tones should be considered as a basis for new harmonic systems. The following principles in particular shaped Janáček's own musical theoretics:

- 1) Every interval and every chord is found on every degree of every scale.
- 2) It is possible to move immediately from one key to another key.<sup>7</sup>

The first principle eschews the common practice of building tertian chords based on a diatonic system. Instead, Skuherský advocated the classifying of chords based on their level of dissonance, which led to the development of Janáček's own theories on chordal connection. The second principle refers to Skuherský's take on modulation which he felt should be dictated by the aesthetic nature and goal of the piece rather than by predetermined rules.<sup>8</sup> These new harmonic approaches took a stronghold on Janáček and were critical in the shaping of his own ideas about music theory and composition.

In just two years, Janáček completed his studies at the Prague Organ School in 1875, receiving the highest examination marks out of his whole class. For the next four years, Janáček gained practical experience conducting a local orchestra, the Brno Beseda, and continued to work as an assistant teacher. During this period, he took a course in Prague to focus on musical form, and in 1879, upon completion of his apprenticeship as assistant teacher, he became fully certified to teach music. Even with certification,

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<sup>6</sup> Skuherský's treatise, *The Basis of Modern Harmonic Music by the Systemization of Altered Chords* was published in Prague in 1866. Other important works include *Theory of Musical Composition: On Cadences and Modulation* (1880) and *Theory of Harmony on a Scientific Basis In the Simplest Form With Special Regard to the Impressive Development of Harmony in the Newest Age* (1885). Beckerman, 5n.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

the ever-studious and motivated Janáček still chose to continue his musical education. He entered the Leipzig Conservatory in 1880 backed by a strong recommendation from Skuherský, and here he continued to work obsessively, focusing on composition and ear training. Although his teachers were impressed and pleased with Janáček, he felt that his teachers were not strict enough and that they failed in correcting obvious mistakes. As such, he transferred to the Vienna Conservatory where he studied piano with Josef Dachs, a student of Czerny, and composition with Franz Krenn. He stayed only for a semester though, being quite dissatisfied with this school's standards as well. He particularly did not like the "neo-Romantic" leanings of the institute, in which there was too much of a Wagnerian influence on his peers. However, it is during this time in Vienna that Janáček decided to devote his life's work to composing.<sup>9</sup> By now, Janáček was fully skilled in the areas of composition and theory, had professional experience as a conductor, pianist, and teacher, and had studied at four major conservatories working closely with great teachers such as Křížkovsky and Skuherský. Janáček finally had the musical foundation he needed to begin finding his voice as a composer.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Herbartian Philosophy and Influence on Musical Theoretics**

Before discussing the main principles of Janáček's musical theoretics, it is important to understand the impact of Herbartian philosophy upon the composer. Johann Herbart (1776-1841) was a German philosopher, psychologist, educational theorist, and musician, who "viewed his task as a search for the underlying unity of the diverse phenomena of existence."<sup>10</sup> His philosophy was considered to be on the same level of Kant, Hume, and Hegel, and received wide attention in the Czech lands in the nineteenth century. The appeal of Herbartianism was that it could be applied to many fields and acted as a logical method to clarify concepts in science, psychology, pedagogy, the arts, and many others. Due to its

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> John Daverio, "Herbart, Johann Friedrich," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/subscriber/article/grove/music/12828>> (accessed March 15, 2013).

overarching relevance and ease of comprehensibility, Herbartianism became the official philosophy of the Austro-Hungarian empire and the chief philosophy taught at Prague University.<sup>11</sup>

The essence of Herbartianism lies in the belief in the unity of all things and an adherence to the fundamental rule of “non-contradiction” in all things. It is believed that by reducing things to their smallest possible component (atomism) and by understanding how these small parts relate to the whole, contradiction can be resolved and unity achieved.<sup>12</sup> In applying this notion of reduction to the field of aesthetics, Herbart felt that aesthetic judgment must focus on internal relationships between the compositional elements of the specific art-form (color and line in art, melody and harmony in music, etc.). Therefore, in music, a pleasing aesthetic could be judged by the successive and simultaneous relations between harmony, melody, and rhythm.<sup>13</sup>

Janáček was first introduced to Herbartianism at the Brno Teacher’s Institute and became increasingly interested while studying in Prague. He immersed himself in the writings of Czech Herbartians, in particular, Josef Durdík’s treatise, *General Aesthetics*. The following passage from this work defines the role of aesthetics:

Only the pleasure which is derived from the form of the image is aesthetic. The conditions for the sense of beauty can only be forms. The task of aesthetics is to deduce the conditions of pleasure, that is, form, the components of which stand in definite relation to each other, part to part, and part to whole.<sup>14</sup>

Janáček underlined this passage, writing: “part to whole—correct!”<sup>15</sup> Here, Durdík reinforces the Herbartian principle that aesthetic pleasure originates from a system of underlying, simple relations that intertwine and integrate, clearly connecting to their complex wholes. This idea is crucial in every aspect of Janáček’s work and explains his own economical practice in composition.

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<sup>11</sup> Milan Kundera, “He Saw the Coming Night,” *Cross Currents* 2: 371.

<sup>12</sup> Beckerman, *Janáček As Theorist*, 16.

<sup>13</sup> John Daverio, “Herbart, Johann Friedrich,” *Grove Music Online*.

<sup>14</sup> Beckerman, 21.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

This notion of atomism and connecting all parts to a whole is at the core of Janáček's theoretics about harmony. Under the influence of Skuherský's harmonic principles (every interval and every chord is found on every degree of every scale and it is possible to move immediately from one key to another), Janáček developed his theory of connecting forms and chordal connection. He felt that the level of dissonance created between intervals of successive chords (which he called antecedent-interval relations) and the aural connections they made could produce particular emotional affects. He classifies these connections in the following passage from his work, *The Complete Theory of Harmony*:

The emotion depends on the tones of each voice unfolding and concluding by connecting form in affect. In each connection of a four-note chord a number of emotional events take place....there are four, and in theory they suffice for the comprehension of the nature of the connection. Conciliation, disturbance, amplification, and change are the names of the approximate aesthetic sensibilities. As a result it is possible to rank a connection of chords.<sup>16</sup>

Figure 1 provides examples from theorist Michael Beckerman's *Janáček as Theorist* which explain the different connecting forms:

**Figure 1.**

Conciliation represents the movement to an interval that is more consonant:



Disturbance moves to a more dissonant interval:



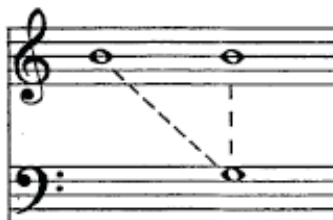
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<sup>16</sup> Beckerman, 65.

Change (exchange<sup>17</sup>) describes a situation when the consonance stays the same:



Amplification occurs when there is no intervallic change.



In the following example, Janáček applies this to two chords that have a third connection in the bass:

**Figure 2.**



Janáček writes: “Change in the bass 6 - 1, amplification in the alto 8 - 8, in the tenor 3 - 3, it is livened only by the sweet conciliation 6 - 5 in the soprano.”<sup>18</sup>

Janáček believed that the goal of any chord connection is always the fundamental note of the second chord (here it is the bass D $\flat$ ). Hence, the individual intervallic resolution occurring from the first to the second chord determines the emotional affect.

<sup>17</sup> The Czech word *zamena* may be better translated as “exchange” to be understood in this musical context. Beckerman translates *zamena* as “change.”

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 63.

Janáček takes the Herbartian aesthetic demand for balance between conflict and resolution even further in his explanation of connecting forms. He describes a perceived, aural chaotic moment (which he called *spletna*) in which two chords clash by overlapping or interpenetrating (twine), creating melodic dissonance. Following this, disentanglement ensues, which is the resolution of the twine between two successive chords.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the balance of tension and resolution between the chords and their resulting emotional power is the source of a pleasing aesthetic. This idea sets Janáček apart from other theorists because movement from one chord to the next is not determined by functional rules of harmony, but rather by the degree of melodic dissonance created between the intervals within two successive chords. As such, chords and their relationships are explained by the voice-leading of individual notes instead of by block movement of tonal hierarchy.<sup>20</sup> What sets Janáček even further apart is the fact that he associated each chordal connection with an emotional affect. Beckerman eloquently summarizes the beauty in Janáček's connecting form theory:

This notion has at its core the belief that even the simplest, most insignificant chord connection contains an emotional power of an unrealized explosive capacity. With its system of simple relations still intact, Janáček's theoretical world retains its atomistic, Herbartian framework; it is not only the whole connection which finally creates the "sheen of beauty," each little part has become animated with an emotional quality.<sup>21</sup>

Janáček infuses the Herbartian principle of atomism not only with his harmonic ideas, but into his rhythmic and melodic theories as well. He breaks these components down into their smallest parts, calling the rhythmic unit a *sčasovka* and the melodic fragment a real motive (a motivic unit derived from speech-melody or *napevky mluvy*). Janáček's compositional treatment of these units involved stratification and interpenetration. With stratification, the rhythmic and melodic units are layered in such a way that multiple emotions and psychological phenomena can be expressed simultaneously. Likewise, interpenetration involves the overlapping or "melting" together of either chords, rhythmic units, or motives to also express complex emotions.<sup>22</sup> As with chordal connection, these rhythmic and melodic

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>20</sup> John Tyrrell, *Janáček: Years of a Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), 221.

<sup>21</sup> Beckerman, 71.

<sup>22</sup> Beckerman, 108-109.

treatments align with Herbartian aesthetics in which simple relations combine to create a complex psychological and emotional quality.

Another Herbartian principle that was influential for Janáček dealt with pedagogy and social improvement. Herbartianism believed that the individual should strive to attain intellectual potentiality, and once acquired, one had a civic responsibility to use their talent and specific knowledge for the betterment of society. Durdík supported this notion in *General Aesthetics*, calling for “the active participation of human beings in improving their society.” Janáček noted this passage with the word “important!” and marked it with six vertical lines.<sup>23</sup> This reveals much about Janáček’s strong sense of nationalism and cultural consciousness. It seems that this credo was at the core of Janáček’s next undertaking as an ethnographer, as the collection and preservation of folksong became a way for Janáček to give back to Czech society, and consequently, it also enlightened his own compositional views.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Ethnographic Studies and Influence on Musical Theoretics**

In the 1880s, Janáček was busy developing his ideas about philosophy and theory, teaching full time at several institutions, and composing, but in 1884, he turned his attention to the collection and preservation of Moravian folk music. His interest in ethnography was initially sparked by his friendship with František Bartoš, leading Czech scholar and folklorist, but the political and cultural climate in the late 1800s was also instrumental. At the time, the Czech National Revival was well underway and the nationalist spirit was ripe. The Czech lands had been under Germanic rule for centuries, and as such, the Czech language had been eradicated in all public institutions (universities, government, schools) and banned from published literature. Fortunately, the peasantry had kept the spoken language alive, and in the 1790s, a movement began to revive national identity and in particular, the Czech language.

By the 1850s, small military defeats and shifts in the empire’s power led to a more liberal era in which Czech cultural organizations could more easily be established. Thus, Janáček grew up in a period of Czech nation-building, actively participating in local organizations and supporting the language

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<sup>23</sup> Beckerman, 22.



movement.<sup>24</sup> In fact, Janáček had a strong anti-German attitude, and was adamant that only Czech be spoken in his household.<sup>25</sup> Considering his patriotism along with his strong sense of civic responsibility and devotion to music, it is only natural that Janáček ventured into the field of ethnography when presented the opportunity to work with Bartoš.

Among Bartoš and Janáček's activities together, the most important was an extensive project of collecting and promoting Moravian Folk Music for the Ethnographic Exhibition of 1895. Janáček's wife, Zdenka, recalls how Janáček "travelled through the Moravian countryside and to Prague; oversaw the practicing of dances and above all supervised their musical performance."<sup>26</sup> The event was hugely successful and resulted in the duo's publication of *Moravian Folk-songs Newly Collected*. This work invigorated Janáček a great deal, and henceforth, ethnography became central to his life's work. He continued traveling to rural areas collecting folksongs and writing over 500 pages of discourse on the subject (only half of which were published).<sup>27</sup>

During the early years of collecting folksong, Janáček became fascinated with patterns of human speech, believing that there was a connection between the dialectic intonation of words, phrases, and emotions. He felt that speech intonation expressed a spectrum of mood and tone, and that by applying this in music, a personal, human quality could be achieved. This idea developed into a concept he called real motives in which fragments of human speech or folk melodies are transformed into musical motives, instrumental or vocal. These motives were not necessarily exact transcriptions of pitches, but rather captured the essence of inflections or emotional attitude. He called these motives *napevky mluvy*. In the following passages, Janáček defines *napevky mluvy* (speech-melody) and explains the expressive nature of speech through imitation:

Speech melody is a true, momentary musical description of man; it is a photograph of a moment. Speech melodies are the expression of the whole state of the organism and all the phases of the mental activity which follow from it...

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<sup>24</sup> Tyrrell, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Zdenka Janáčková, *My Life with Janáček: The Memoirs of Zdenka Janáčková* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), 60.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>27</sup> Tyrrell, *Janáček*, 349.

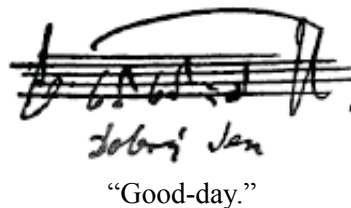
....When, during a conversation, we quote the words of someone else, we are halfway to a theatrical performance, we even quote the speed of speech, a thin little voice or a coarse one, a sing-song tone, a nasal intonation...an angry expression, a reproachful look, or a look of unctuous tenderness, And we quote even the tonal register of the speech and its melodic rise and fall.<sup>28</sup>

He goes on to discuss how real motives capture the national spirit:

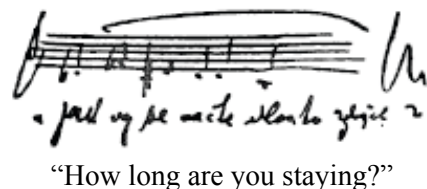
The most essential *real motives* are *napevky mluvy*; through them the national element enters into a musical work without impeding the individuality of the composer. They are so expressive that through them we grasp subjects and concepts; we get an immediate lifemood from them. Instrumental motives grow out of a narrow field. They delineate space by time and interval. By tone color and sparse harmonic effect they correspond to mood—they are metaphorical, not realistic. It is necessary to permeate instrumental motives with national spirit.<sup>29</sup>

On a quest to capture the Czech spirit, Janáček constantly listened to the speech of people going about their everyday activities, recording the intonations of children’s conversations, local merchants, and even dialogue with his own acquaintances, like Dvořák. His notebooks are filled with hundreds of examples of *napevky mluvy*, and one which is more well-known is his “speech-photograph” of an exchange with Smetana’s daughter. The following excerpt illustrates how Janáček turned this snippet of conversation into motives:<sup>30</sup>

She is buying a lemon in the shop. I hear her making her greetings.



So I wait for her in front of the shop. On the way to the Smetana House, she asks me:

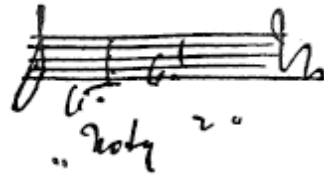


<sup>28</sup> Zemanova, *Janáček*, 75.

<sup>29</sup> Beckerman, 49.

<sup>30</sup> Zemanová, ed., *Janáček's Uncollected Essays on Music* (London: M. Boyars, 1989), 34.

I take down her words. She says:



“Music?”

I explain that if she inherited something from her father, then perhaps she inherited his manner of speech. She says:



“That interests me very much.”

—when she sees her speech-motifs noted down.

Besides human dialogue, he found the tunes of Czech music to be equally satisfying as inspiration for real motives. He poetically describes how to incorporate the national spirit into compositions:

Instrumental motives simply taken from the truest Czech tune. Sometimes only its rhythm becomes the theme. Pluck these petals from a song and use them as the focal point of a composition. Strew them out as the form requires; into the coda, the development, etc. A bedding consisting of rose petals. Every tone that falls into its aroma exhales its fragrance. We must water instrumental motives with Czechness—to take them to their source, to the present, to the sphere of Czechness.<sup>31</sup>

From these examples, it is clear how Janáček’s concept of *napevky mluvy* was firmly rooted in the Czech language and folk music. This development demonstrates not only Janáček’s deep sense of nationalism, but also his innovation as a composer in finding a new, economical way to express human emotion.

Janáček’s folksong work also influenced his theory of rhythm, which first appeared in “On Musical Aspects of Moravian National songs” in a section titled “*Sčasování* in Folk Songs.” Janáček is unconventional in his perception of how rhythm and meter function, feeling that a tune should not be forced into a preset mode of rhythmic organization, rather, the opposite. He writes:

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<sup>31</sup> Beckerman, 49.

...there is a difference between a trained composer, able to notate music, and a folk composer. A trained composer has in mind empty, evenly measured time and fills it with a tune; the folk composer has in mind the words, a certain number of melodically fixed notes.<sup>32</sup>

Janáček goes on to explain that he perceives time not as an empty, evenly measured scheme for keeping music in time, but rather something that should relay an emotional and artistic concept. Instead of considering rhythm as alternations of notes of various lengths and meter, and meter as alternations of accented and unaccented beat, he viewed rhythmic organization as a series of layers relating to levels of rhythmic activity going from slow to fast. He called this theory *sčasování* and the smaller individual units of time, *sčasovka*.<sup>33</sup> This idea stems from *napevky mluvy*: just as intonations of speech-melody motives are related to moods, Janáček felt that rhythmic events taken from spoken language were related to distinct states of mind, and as such, his *sčasování* theory aims to take psychological, social, and cultural aspects into account.<sup>34</sup> Janáček explains *sčasování* further:

I first recognized the phenomenon of *sčasování* through the study of *napevky mluvy*. As a consequence of *sčasování*, single tones, chords, and the entire fabric of chordal connections are welded, differentiated, and in the listener's mind, unconsciously broken down into *sčasování* layers.<sup>35</sup>

Following is an example of how *sčasování* layers are classified:<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Tyrrell, *Janáček*, 222.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Wingfield breaks down the word *sčasování*: "This noun is derived from the invented verb 'sčasovat' (to put into time). From the verb are also derived an adjective, 'sčasovací,' and a further noun, 'sčasovka' (a unit of rhythmicised time)." Paul Wingfield, *Janáček Studies* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 221.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>35</sup> Beckerman, 83.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

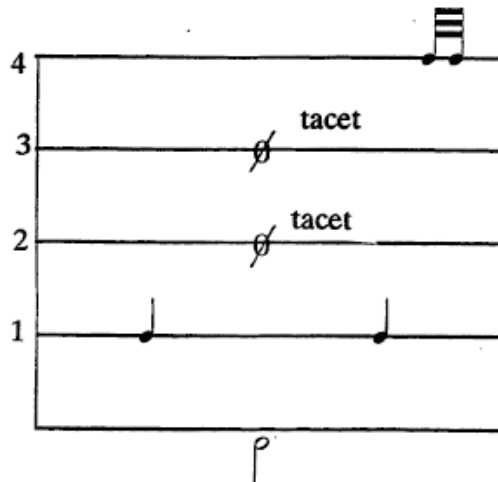
Figure 3.



Thus, the following rhythmic figure in 2/4



would be broken down into these rhythmic layers:



For example, ostinatos (short groups of notes that repeat) are one type of *sčasovka* that permeate Janack's work. The ostinato is placed on one rhythmic layer, while other rhythmic units occur on a different layer. When juxtaposed in various ways, the simultaneous layers create several emotional affects at once, and from that stems a myriad of chordal connections and expressive nuance. This concept of layers working independently on one level and connecting with others to create a new expression is central to Janáček's compositions, and of course, links back to the Herbartian aesthetic principle of how

the connection of parts to the whole is essential. Since the layers are derived from intonations and rhythms naturally found in human speech, they express something directly connected to the human spirit, and when intertwined in layers, complex psychological moments occur. Through the textures and layers of real motives and sčasování, Janáček developed a new way to capture and express human emotion.

Beyond the development of harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic theories inspired by philosophical studies and Czech folksong, Janáček infused his work with traditional elements of folk music such as asymmetrical phrasing and form, modal elements in melody and harmony, and folk instrumental imitation (pedal points to simulate bagpipes, ostinatos, cymbalom effects, and textural arrangements).<sup>37</sup> The music of his country was clearly a meaningful and influential source to Janáček, who declared: “I have one great joy: Moravia alone is enough to give me all necessary inspiration. So rich are her sources.”<sup>38</sup> Moravian folk music vividly reflected the Czech spirit, rich with life and depth of emotion, which Janáček passionately sought to harness. There is no doubt of the connection between his explorations in Moravian folk music and his own pieces, as from this point on, it remained a permanent fixture in his style. By the turn of the century, Janáček had an exceptional musical foundation and knowledge. His extensive work as a musical theorist and ethnographer led to major developments in defining his compositional technique, and *On an Overgrown Path* is one such work that truly encapsulates his distinctive style.

## **Part II: *On an Overgrown Path*—Series I**

### **Chapter 4**

#### ***On an Overgrown Path*—Origins (Po zarostlém chodníčku)**

The first series of Janáček’s *On an Overgrown Path* consists of ten intimate, miniature piano works given programmatic titles that express a striking range of emotion. The title is a reference from

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<sup>37</sup> Zdeňka Pilková, *Eighteenth Century Folk Music in the Czech Lands: Comments on the State of Research*, ed. Michael Beckerman and Glen Bauer, *Janáček and Czech Music: Proceedings of the International Conference (Saint Louis, 1988)* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1995), 156.

<sup>38</sup> Mirka Zemanová, ed., *Janáček's Uncollected Essays on Music*, 33.

Moravian folk poetry, suggesting a time gone by, which is reflected in the nostalgic quality of each piece.<sup>39</sup> Janáček wrote:

The little pieces, ‘On an Overgrown Path’ contain distant reminiscences. Those reminiscences are so dear to me that I do not think they will ever vanish... Whenever I have a moment to indulge myself undisturbed in these recollections, then I find another such little piece comes to mind. It is on an overgrown path.<sup>40</sup>

In total, the complete piano cycle took eleven years to come to fruition. In 1900, Janáček was approached by Josef Vávra, a Moravian schoolteacher, to contribute to a compilation titled *Slovanské melodie* with folksong arrangements written for harmonium (an instrument used by village schoolteachers). Instead of folk arrangements, Janáček produced five short pieces, which he called “moods.” Originally, these did not have individual titles, though as a whole they were titled *On an Overgrown Path*. These pieces were published in the fifth volume of the harmonium series, and two more were published the following year. The pieces were set aside until 1908 when Janáček was contacted by Jan Branberger, a critic from Prague, who asked Janáček if he had short piano pieces to submit for publication. Janáček thought of his pieces from *Slovanské melodie*, and with the possibility of having his works published, he decided to add onto the set. Upon receiving the music, Branberger was very enthusiastic and requested Janáček to send him explanations of the pieces, which he did. Janáček wrote incipits for eight of the ten pieces, describing love, death, disappointment, suffering, and distress to be among the moods expressed. Several of the pieces also reflect an event or scene, while the last piece uses motivic symbolism to express the inevitability of death.<sup>41</sup>

Although the pieces were ready for publication in 1908, unsettled negotiations with Branberger led Janáček to seek other options. In 1909, Janáček offered his pieces to a Brno publisher, Arnošt Piša, and after a wait of two years, the first series was finally published in 1911. (It is likely that Janáček composed the pieces of the second series, of which no titles were given, in 1911 as well, but not all were published during his lifetime. The second series was published in its complete form in 1942.) *On an Overgrown Path* was a success and reception was highly positive—a first for Janáček. He received letters

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<sup>39</sup> Zemanova, *Janáček*, 106.

<sup>40</sup> Leoš Janáček, *Po zarostlem chodnicku / On an Overgrown Path* (Barenreiter Kassel: Barenreiter, 2006), IX.

<sup>41</sup> Tyrrell, 490.

from admirers and had favorable reviews published in leading musical journals. The work even became popular among reputable piano teachers in Prague. Biographer John Tyrrell argues that out of the other works Janáček had published around this time, “*On an Overgrown Path* has stood the test of time and, for all its modest ambitions, ranks today as one of Janáček’s most haunting and profound utterances.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the pieces are simple, their complexity in composition barely noticeable on the surface. However, as each piece is explored, one may come to understand how Janáček’s compositional techniques convey such enduring sincerity and depth.

### I. Our Evenings (Naše večery)

*Our Evenings* was not given a description by Janáček making this piece rather enigmatic. Initially, the title might suggest a comfortable, quiet evening at home, possibly between husband and wife, but the music does not portray this scene for long. It begins with a haunting yet tender, folksong real motive in quarter-notes in the soprano, but a chromatic inner voice expresses unease, foreshadowing a violent outburst to come in the B section.

#### Example 1.1. *Our Evenings*, mm. 1-8:

The musical score for Example 1.1, 'Our Evenings' (mm. 1-8), is presented in a grand staff. The tempo is marked 'Moderato' with a quarter note equal to 80 beats per minute (♩ = 80). The dynamics are marked 'mf'. The score shows a soprano line with quarter notes and a chromatic inner voice in the bass line. Fingerings and articulation marks are indicated throughout.

Tyrrell casually speculates that *Our Evenings* could depict marital strife or a domestic argument, which is not too far-fetched to suppose.<sup>43</sup> It is well-documented that Janáček and his wife, Zdenka, had a very difficult, cold relationship from the start of their marriage in 1884. In the B section, a second real motive,

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 780.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 493.



a *leggiero*, staccato figure in sixteenth-notes, interrupts a momentary lull in m. 48 (Ex. 1.2). As this transforms and escalates with repetition, crescendo, and accents, it is difficult to hear this as anything but an angry, nagging rant in a heated verbal fight (Ex. 1.3). It is reasonable to suggest that this motive is derived from a napevky mluvy due to its angered speech-like rhythm, and staccato, accented state.

**Example 1.2. mm. 40-48:**

**Example 1.3. mm. 59-72:**

After this intense moment, Janáček returns to the opening theme. Although it is repeated, it seems to take on a different meaning and feeling after the outburst. The B section is repeated, but this time the angry motive continues for an extra four measures, slowing and transitioning into a new *Adagio* section (Ex. 1.4). Here, Janáček layers the angry motive with the opening lyrical motive.

**Example 1.4. mm. 95- 101:**

The juxtaposition of these two elements coupled with a change in tempo creates a complexity in emotion. The second motive takes on a different character of bitterness and sadness while the sense of anger lingers. This is a stunning transformative moment and is an example of how Janáček layers real motives to create emotional dimension.

Another striking aspect about this piece is the way in which Janáček abruptly modulates and changes character. For example, within the A section Janáček moves from C# minor to E major to C# major, creating an unsettling quality. In transitioning to the B section, he uses C# in the bass as a pivot to move from C# minor to D♭ major, but the fleeting moment of major is interrupted with the *napevky mluvy* figure. All of a sudden, the piece is in B♭ minor, expressing a stormy, violent mood quite remote from that of the opening in C# minor. The repetition of sections also highlights the sharp, sudden contrast between keys. This immediate manner of modulation is in line with Skuherský's principles and speaks directly to his assertions on how modulation creates affect:

Modulation...not progressing above the relation of the first degree may have validity for compositions of a calm nature. Otherwise, in compositions of a stormy, passionate mood...such mild ingredients will not suffice; it is necessary to reach out to distant progressions, sudden, abrupt, sometimes even harsh.<sup>44</sup>

*Our Evenings* is a perfect example of how Janáček uses *napevky mluvy* to act as bases for compositional construction, and how he allows the story he wants to tell, dictate moments of modulation. The application of these elements creates an unusual setting, but they are highly effective in creating a complex and unsettling psychological atmosphere.

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<sup>44</sup> Beckerman, 8.

## II. A Blown-away Leaf (Lístek odvanutý)

Janáček referred to this piece as “a love song” along the overgrown path.<sup>45</sup> Between the tender opening melody and passionate, vigorous B section, the piece can easily be perceived as a declaration of love, or taken more literally as a portrait of a leaf fluttering upon gusts of wind (or perhaps a combination of both). The piece is driven by an energetic rhythmic impulse, and so, expanding upon Janáček’s rhythmic theory of *sčasování* is appropriate here. Janáček once said: “A musically gifted man measures time by music.”<sup>46</sup> He felt that although rhythm and *takt* (meter) are interrelated: “Rhythm is a superior concept, *takt*, a subordinate concept.”<sup>47</sup> By looking at Janáček’s meter, this idea is clear. Metric notation in the authoritative editions of Janáček’s works are based on his descriptions of his rhythmic theoretics, wherein the denominator is replaced by the note itself.<sup>48</sup> For example, the opening, rather than 2/4 is written  $2 / \text{♪}$ , and in m.10 it is noted as  $2 / \text{♪} + \text{♪}$ . rather than 5/8. The latter is written to show that the overall pulse of two remains, but that the second beat is now extended by an extra eighth-note, expressing a bit of unease or sense of yearning. Thus, the meter is subordinate to what the emotional affect demands.

In Janáček’s *sčasování* theory, a measure is built in rhythmic layers as pictured earlier in Figure 3. In this theory, when each rhythmic layer is extracted, it has its own harmonic implications and distinct state of mind. However, when layered together they create various combinations of chordal connections and thus differing mental states to occur. As a half-note is the length of a full measure in *A Blown-away Leaf*, Figure 3 would act as a *sčasování* template. As such, the bass  $A\flat$  in the opening eight bars operates independently in its base layer, which, as a pedal point provides a grounding quality. However, its syncopated entrance on the second sixteenth-note creates an unsteady, wavering state. This layer is double-stemmed, and so is part of the sixteenth-note layer which changes harmonic implications in each measure. The soprano provides the eighth-note melodic layer, which too, has its own harmonic

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<sup>45</sup> Jaroslav Vogel. *Leoš Janáček: A Biography* (London: Orbis Publishing, 1981), 197.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Wingfield, *Janáček Studies* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 225.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Michael Beckerman and Glen Bauer, eds., *Janáček and Czech Music: Proceedings of the International Conference*, 234.

implications (Ex. 2.1). Janáček felt that base layers suited more serious states, while higher layers comprising of sixteenth-notes and higher were more facile or superficial.<sup>49</sup> In this sense, knowing the piece is a love song, the sixteenth-notes feel like nervous, heart palpitations and suggest emotions that are fleeting and spontaneous while the base layer gives support, lasts longer, and is more grounding and serious in character. The eighth-note melodic layer lies in between the two states of mind, acting as the lyrical voice of expression.

**Example 2.1. *A Blown-away Leaf*, mm. 1-4:**



Looking at the material from an extracted, rhythmic perspective, we can see how Janáček is viewing the rhythm as small, independent units that, when layered together, form a more complete harmonic whole and simultaneously express different states of mind.

If we take the title literally and imagine a leaf blowing, we can easily interpret the sixteenth-note layer as the rustling of a leaf in a strong wind and hear the falling eighth-note motive in m.10 as a leaf rising and falling on gusts of wind.

**Example 2.2. mm. 10-13:**



<sup>49</sup> Beckerman, 84.

Beyond the alternation of meter with four eighth-notes to five in m. 10, Janáček continues to distort our sense of timing and pulse with rhythmic acceleration in which a fragment of the opening motive in eighth-notes is varied melodically in m. 22, turns into sixteenth-notes, and then accelerates as a measured tremolo (which Janáček considered to be a foreground rhythmic phenomena<sup>50</sup>) until it turns into a trill, suspending time. From here, Janáček revives the fragment adding a new *sčasovka* layer of tied quarter-notes in the soprano within a *con moto* section (Ex. 2.3).

**Example 2.3. mm. 23-33:**

This creates a new state of mind and feeling of unrequited love or a buildup of passions, though it is all derived from the same material. As such, it retains some of the feelings of the previous sections while stirring new ones.

**III. Come With Us! (Pojd'te s námi!)**

*Come With Us* is a departure from the first two pieces in its lightness, softer dynamics, and playful mood. Taking only a little over a minute to play, this short piece highlights several of Janáček's stylistic traits, the first of which is the use of *napevky mluvy*, or speech-melody. The rhythm of the

<sup>50</sup> Wingfield, *Janáček Studies*, 223.

opening tunelet in mm.1-3 suggests the title phrase from a popular Moravian folk song, *Come With Us, You Lads*, as pointed out by Czech pianist, Jaroslav Pvakil.<sup>51</sup> In Czech, the phrase: *pojd'te s námi, vy mládenci* fits the rhythmic structure of the opening melody nicely. Also, the contour of the melody gives us an impression of the Czech phrase's inflections.

A second characteristic present in *Come With Us* is Janáček's prevalent use of perfect fourths. Janáček, being highly influenced by Skuherský's resistance to the diatonic system, turned to melodic principles originating with folk music, in which tetrachordal, quintachordal, and modal patterns act as primary sources for the piece.<sup>52</sup> *Come With Us* is saturated with perfect fourths, and the primary motive of the piece containing the interval (appearing in m. 6, Ex. 3.1) is important structurally when it returns transposed later in m. 25. Janáček described this motive as the "filing away of a letter for good" which supports the feeling of simple closure the two-measure motive creates.

**Example 3.1. *Come With Us!* mm. 6-7:**



The third and most striking characteristic demonstrated in the piece is Janáček's ability to economize, creating unity with motivic and enharmonic relationships. The C# major chord from bar 4 is what theorist Thomas Adès calls the "germinal enharmonic event of the piece."<sup>53</sup> This chord, initially appearing in the key of D Major, becomes a D $\flat$  major chord in the B section (m. 17) which modulates to D $\flat$  major:

<sup>51</sup> Zemanova, *Janáček*, 290n.

<sup>52</sup> Jiří Vyzloužil, *Leoš Janáček Today*, ed. Michael Beckerman and Glen Bauer, *Janáček and Czech Music: Proceedings of the International Conference*, 360.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Adès, *Nothing but Pranks and Puns: Janáček's Solo Piano Music*, ed. Paul Wingfield, *Janáček Studies* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 23.

**Example 3.2. mm. 4-5:**

**Example 3.3. mm. 17-18:**

Furthermore, Janáček treats the G# octaves in m. 6 enharmonically in the B section where they appear as Dbs. Here, the bass A $\flat$  harmonically underpins the whole section while the treble A $\flat$  is the melodic goal of the two measure phrase. Adès concludes that the “true correspondence which closes the enharmonic gap” occurs between mm. 6-9 and mm. 25-28 (Ex. 3.4 and 3.5) in which an exact statement transposed up a major third appears.<sup>54</sup> The transposed motive briefly tonicizes the remote key of G $\flat$  major, which shows how Janáček eschews any sense of conventional, functional tonality.

**Example 3.4. mm. 6-9:**

**Example 3.5. mm. 25-28:**

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

The way in which Janáček skillfully structures a piece around motivic and enharmonic connections speaks again to his Herbartian influence, in which every part matters and must relate to the whole. In *Come With Us*, he expresses this in such a way that creates a unique expression of spontaneity and mischief.

#### IV. The Frýdek Madonna (Frýdecká Panna Maria)

This piece paints a picture of a village procession gathering to honor the Virgin Mary in the town of Frýdek (now Frýdek-Místek). This town neighbors Hukvaldy, and it is very likely that as a child, Janáček traveled to Frýdek with his family for Marian celebrations. In the 1890s, Janáček also spent his summers in Hukvaldy with his daughter, Olga, and perhaps took excursions with her to Frýdek.<sup>55</sup> A third possible source of inspiration comes from Zdenka's memoir in which she writes about how she and Janáček recalled their early days in Místek, when "only the two of us were left from the whole of that company, we thought of the Frýdek Madonna from Leoš's [piano] work, *On an Overgrown Path*."<sup>56</sup> Whatever the exact reminiscence may be, it is certain that Janáček was familiar with the Catholic festivities so common in the Czech culture, where music-making and the singing of hymns would have played a central role.

Janáček explains that the piece is based on the opening motive in the first four bars, and that following is a "motif sung by a far-off procession."<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, this same motive appears in a 1904 work by Janáček entitled, *Hail Mary*. In this piece for tenor, chorus, violin, and piano, the words "Hail Mary, full of Grace" (which in Czech is "Zdrávas Maria, milosti plná") are set to the hymn tune of *The Frýdek Madonna*.<sup>58</sup> Considering this textual link, it is fair to consider the hymn tune to be a napevky mluvy, particularly because the rhythm of the Czech phrase fits the rhythmic figure so well. The embellishment in the motive fits the rise and fall of the word "Maria," and when fit to the motive, it is

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<sup>55</sup> Tyrrell, 491.

<sup>56</sup> Janáčková, *My Life with Janáček*, 213.

<sup>57</sup> Janáček, *Po zarostlem chodnicku / On an Overgrown Path*, IX.

<sup>58</sup> Tyrrell, 494.



also the melodic high point in the phrase, expressing adoration and praise. Beneath this devout melody are tremolos in sixteenth-note triplets which create an effect similar to that of a cimbalom, a popular instrument used in Czech folk music, enhancing the picture of a rural procession.

While Janáček agreed with Skuhersky’s belief that development in music composition could not proceed with the diatonic system, that all twelve tones must be considered, it is important to realize that Janáček felt tonality and having a key was essential, saying: “without key there is no music.”<sup>59</sup> He felt that a successful piece would “eventually consolidate a tonal goal which—even if unclear at the outset, will emerge through the tendency for large-scale harmonic progression to be centered on recognizable patterns of consonance and dissonance.”<sup>60</sup> This concept is evident in *The Frýdek Madonna* in which the tonal goal of D $\flat$  major is not realized until the final section. In the beginning, there is no sense of being in a clear key. The fourth bar in the opening motive sets the tonal context for the first statement of the hymn tune/cimbalom combination, in which Janáček writes an A $\flat$  major chord. This is tonally prolonged through the first section:

Example 4.1. *The Frýdek Madonna*, mm. 1-7:

The musical score for Example 4.1, *The Frýdek Madonna*, mm. 1-7, is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 1 through 5, and the second system covers measures 6 through 7. The tempo is marked 'Grave' with a quarter note equal to 60 beats per minute. The time signature is 2/4. The dynamic is piano (*pp*). The right hand part features a melodic line with triplets and a phrase marked '(z dálky) (quasi lontano)'. The left hand part features a complex rhythmic pattern of sixteenth-note triplets. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat).

<sup>59</sup> Wingfield, *Janáček Studies*, 246.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

In the next statement of the initial motive, the fourth chord in m. 16 is D $\flat$  minor (a 6/4 chord with A $\flat$  in the bass, connecting it aurally to the previous section), and the hymn tune follows in that key, taking on a darker, solemn quality:

**Example 4.2. mm. 12-18:**

A development section follows in which the opening motive grows out of its initial quiet, grave emotional quality, intensifying with more motion, louder dynamics, and a wider registral range. A climax occurs and ends haltingly on D $\flat$  minor, again with A $\flat$  in the bass. The opening motive is stated a final time in its initial form, but now the penultimate chord is extended for a full measure, leaving a moment of suspense, until finally the fourth chord arrives at D $\flat$  major (m. 58, Ex. 4.3), the tonic goal of the piece. The hymn tune plays for a final time in the home key, and tonal closure is achieved.

**Example 4.3. mm. 54-59:**

Janáček also uses Czech words instead of dynamics to help the listener absorb the completion of reaching the tonal goal. With the three hymn tune entrances, he writes: *z dálky*, *blíže*, and *blízko*: from a distance, closer, and near. The procession is the closest when the hymn tune is stated for the last time in the home key of D $\flat$  major.

## V. They Chattered Like Swallows (Štěbetaly jak laštovičky)

According to Janáček, the fifth piece depicts the following scene: “A group returns from an outing late in the day. Their drawn-out song is punctuated by the terse little motif of women’s chatter.”<sup>61</sup> Once again, the concept of *napevky mluvy* comprises the basis for the work which is present at all times, though in different guises. Janáček first presents it in a biting, unrelenting fashion in both treble and bass (Ex. 5.1), but in m. 17, the motive becomes more expressive and questioning as it is slightly stretched rhythmically (5:4 eighth-notes in Ex. 5.2).

Example 5.1. *They Chattered Like Swallows*. mm. 1-6:

Example 5.2. mm. 17-18:

<sup>61</sup> Janáček, *Po zarostlem chodnicku / On an Overgrown Path*, IX.

The emotional affect changes again in m. 39 when Janáček splits the opening motive in half, repeating the initial four eighth-notes for the whole section while placing the second half in the tenor as an independent, short lyrical figure:

**Example 5.3. mm. 36-45:**

The musical score for Example 5.3, measures 36-45, is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 36-40) begins with a piano (P) dynamic. The tempo is marked 'Meno mosso' and the time signature is 5/4. The second system (measures 41-45) continues the piece, also marked with a piano (P) dynamic at the end. The score shows intricate rhythmic patterns and harmonic changes across the two systems.

This section recurs twice more with harmonic variations. It is in these sections that a completely different scene emerges—the terse motif of women’s chatter turns into swallows flying.

Janáček was always concerned with having each element of his theoretical systems relate to the expression of what he called “life moods.” While Janáček was interested in capturing the essence of human emotion through speech-melody, he was also interested in capturing the essence of sounds in nature. He believed there was a relationship between the outer world and the theoretical world, and as such, his theoretical writings are full of poetic associations that relate the feelings derived from sonic moments to feelings derived from nature. For example: “the 4-3 connection does ruffle the V7 as a breeze ruffles the surface of a fish pond,” and “the 6/4 inversion seems like the swallow flying which almost touches the ground, and by that refreshing, lifts into the heights.”<sup>62</sup> The latter description perfectly captures the essence of *They Chattered Like Swallows* as the 6/4 inversion is used predominantly. It acts

<sup>62</sup> Beckerman, 115.

as harmonic support for the motive in two different guises: as the chattering of women in the opening, and as swallows taking flight in mm. 39, 58, and 68:

**Example 5.4. 6/4 inversions:**

The image displays three musical staves, each representing a different inversion of a motive. The first staff, labeled 'm. 39', is marked 'Meno mosso' and has a 5:4 time signature. It shows a melodic line with notes and rests, and a bass line with notes and rests. The second staff, labeled 'm. 58', is marked 'Più mosso' and has a 4/4 time signature. It shows a melodic line with notes and rests, and a bass line with notes and rests. The third staff, labeled 'm. 68', is marked 'Adagio' and has a 5:4 time signature. It shows a melodic line with notes and rests, and a bass line with notes and rests. Dynamics like 'ppp' and 'pp' are indicated.

Janáček presents a very interesting dichotomy with the alternating sections and varied motives, creating a tension with the abrupt changes in mood. However, the unity is present and felt at the same time. The motive has two sides in complete opposition of one another, yet they are derived from the same material. He initially uses the motive to represent a human quality, that of women returning from a busy day, chattering hurriedly and excitedly, but smoothly transforms it into a motive of nature, depicting swallows in flight. As such, Janáček creates a unique texture of “life moods” in which multiple scenes can be pictured, multiple sounds can be heard, and multiple feelings derived from nature and everyday life can be expressed.

**VI. Words Fail! (Nelze domluvit!)**

“The bitterness of disappointment” described by Janáček in the sixth piece is expressed through the character of opposing motives: a lyrical, outward lament against a rhythmic representation of inner turmoil and instability.<sup>63</sup> A notable aspect of *Words Fail* is the way in which Janáček uses a folk device called melodic inflection as the basis for creating a complex tonal structure and environment. Defined by theorist Jaroslav Volek, melodic inflection is a term that “denotes a phenomenon that occurs in the folk

<sup>63</sup> Janáček, *Po zarostlem chodnicku / On an Overgrown Path*, X.

music of Eastern and Southern Moravia...and involves the lowering or raising of the originally “established” tone usually by semi-tones...within a limited area of a musical syntagma (immediately in the motif, theme, or its repetition, transposition, variation etc.) in the development of the melody, provided that key or tonal center does not change.”<sup>64</sup> The inflection can take place at any scale degree, and the new “included” tone actually changes the mode. This device occurs in *Words Fail*, in which an altered third scale degree (G-G $\flat$ ) blurs the line between diatonicism and modality.

The piece is in E $\flat$  major, but there is no strong tonal indication of this from the onset. Janáček opens with a motive that begins and is centered around an E $\flat$  octave. Taking into account the pitches in the first 5 measures (E $\flat$ , G, F, D $\flat$ , C $\flat$ , B $\flat$ , A $\flat$ ) Janáček is using the aeolian mode with a raised third degree, which initially suggests E $\flat$  major, but aurally is arranged to suggest a whole-tone scale (Ex. 6.1). Thus there is no sense of tonal center until m. 4 where the G is used as a leading tone to the A $\flat$  minor chord in m. 5.<sup>65</sup>

**Example 6.1. *Words Fail!* mm. 1-5:**

However, Janáček thwarts the sense of tonicization as this *sčasovka* becomes the model for a sequence, being transposed down a whole step in the following measure and referencing the opening whole-tone

<sup>64</sup> Jaroslav Volek, *The “Old” and “New” Modality in Janáček’s The Diary of One Who Vanished and Nursery Rhymes*. ed. Michael Beckerman and Glen Bauer, *Janáček and Czech Music: Proceedings of the International Conference*, 58-59.

<sup>65</sup> According to the authoritative Barenreiter edition of *On an Overgrown Path*, the opening incomplete measure is considered to be measure 1.

octaves. The  $E\flat$  sounds off again in octaves creating a brief sense of tonal centrality. This is quickly lost in m. 9 in which the opening motive is transformed into a clear melody over functional harmony:

**Example 6.2. mm. 6-14:**

Here the  $G\flat$  replaces the G of the opening motive, and now an  $E\flat$  aeolian mode is tonicized. A continuation of the melody follows until we hear the *sčasovka* a second time, tonicizing  $B\flat$  minor. The sequence in whole steps follows dismissing any sense of tonal center still. This chasing of tonality continues on until the *Adagio dolce* section in m.30 when the  $G\flat$  is altered back to G with the tonicization of  $E\flat$  major (Ex. 6.3).

**Example 6.3. mm. 27-31:**

When it seems Janáček will lead the music astray yet again with another *sčasovka* sequence, he simply repeats the measure once and suddenly ends on an E $\flat$  major chord. This abrupt and unexpected finality seems like a gesture of resignation to the feeling disappointment.

The whole tone sequence housed within the *sčasovka* is emphasized by chordal planing of first inversion minor chords, a compositional device usually associated with Debussy. This sequential section, in which no tonal center is identified, conflicts with the lyrical sections in which Janáček reharmonizes the opening motive over functional chords. Although the following passage by theorist Volek refers to how Janáček achieves this in a comparable section of a different piece, it applies perfectly to *Words Fail*:

Janáček uses a very clear and “eloquent” major with fully expressed harmonic functions, with a more compact sound. Now, something like a little miracle unfolds: that which elsewhere sounds conventional, here brings refreshing and emotionally rich music (thanks to his invention and courage to move for a while in the opposite direction—back to the non-modal means).<sup>66</sup>

Again, Janáček uses opposing forces but ultimately pulls them together through the melodic inflection of the G and G $\flat$ . This alternation of closely related diatonicism and modality brings a vibrancy to the functional harmony which otherwise would have felt plain and conventional.

### **VIII. Good Night! (Dobrou noc!)**

*Good Night* is an intimate and rather tender portrait of leave-taking. It is constructed by the layering of three motives: a short, restless ostinato, a simple lyrical tune (to which Janáček says: “you will recognize the mood of parting here...the words “Good night” are suited”<sup>67</sup>), and an accompanimental tenor and bass line. Initially, the piece feels sparse and hollow, but it takes on a very rich texture, full of emotional nuances as Janáček layers and develops the motives. The ostinato figure at first seems like a cricket, or a bird in the distance—some type of creature you might hear as night falls—and it is set against the accompanimental figure which sets the backdrop of an evening atmosphere (Ex. 7.1). The sustaining of middle C which changes to B minor evokes a sense of awe and wonder.

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<sup>66</sup> Jaroslav Volek, *The “Old” and “New” Modality in Janáček’s The Diary of One Who Vanished and Nursery Rhymes*, 79.

<sup>67</sup> Janáček, X.



**Example 7.1. *Good Night!* mm. 1-5:**

Andante (♩ = 76)

2/4

pp

1/4 5

1/3

Once the lyrical folk tune enters in m. 15 (Ex. 7.2), perhaps a *napevky mluvy* referencing two lovers saying goodnight to one another as Janáček describes, a vivid soundscape has been established, becoming more vibrant as the motives interact.

The notion of interpenetration, which is essential to Herbartian philosophy, is present in *Good Night* through the stratification and overlapping of motivic figures. In principle, the elements must not be “idly juxtaposed, but must interpenetrate each other” in order to facilitate a complex emotional affect.<sup>68</sup> Janáček feels that interpenetration must occur through some sort of sonic glue, which acts as a connecting impulse between figures. For example: the high double-stemmed E in mm. 9-10 acts as glue to the entrance of the lyrical tune in m. 15 by foreshadowing its opening note. Also, by sustaining the high note of the original octave ostinato, it provides soprano support and allows a second ostinato to grow out of it, transforming from an octave to a third in m. 10 (E-G). In turn, the ostinato motive, now a third, is tied through mm. 12-14, gluing itself to the sustained fourth in the bass accompaniment. That E also acts as a glue to the entrance of the lyrical motive an octave higher in mm. 14-15 by mirroring the bass leap to low C. Further, when the accompanimental figure turns to a B minor first inversion chord in m. 18, the D-F# triggers the ostinato figure, which also steps down, echoing the D-F# third in the bass. (Ex. 7.2)

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<sup>68</sup> Beckerman, 70.

Example 7.2. mm. 6-22:

This activity of “sonic gluing” continues throughout as the piece develops, and as such, the motives stay fresh as they cycle through various treatments of harmony, tempo flux, and dynamic changes.

Regarding the influence of folk music in Janáček’s writing, the arrangement of the motives in *Good Night* represents that of a traditional Moravian folk ensemble in which the first violin plays a lyrical tune, the cello and/or double bass supplies the bass harmonic support, and the second violin, or *kontras*, which has a built-in, disruptive quality, provides middle register harmony. The sixteenth-note ostinato in *Good Night*, which is a *sčasovka*, acts as the *kontras* and provides an important contrasting element to the simple, lyrical tune. Its unrelenting nature and disruption of the tune at more climactic moments presents an interesting power-struggle interplay. This provides a contrast that allows the motives’ ultimate resolution to feel that much more harmonious. Tyrrell notes that *Good Night* is one of the first pieces in which Janáček employs an ostinato as a *kontras* element, which goes on to become one of his signature compositional traits.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Tyrrell, 395-396.

## VIII. Unutterable Anguish (Tak neskonale úzko)

The final three pieces in *On an Overgrown Path* are linked to the death of Janáček's daughter, Olga, in 1903 at the age of 20. The title of this piece is actually a phrase that Janáček used constantly when he wrote of his feelings about Olga's incessant illness which she contracted during a long stay in Russia but never fully recovered from.<sup>70</sup> (Today's medical science asserts that Olga suffered from chronic rheumatic heart disease.)<sup>71</sup> Janáček, deeply traumatized by her death, references her in these last three pieces. *Unutterable Anguish* is a chilling expression of Janáček's state of grief during her deterioration.

As in *Good Night*, an unrelenting ostinato pervades the piece. It is a jittery *sčasovka* of thirty-second-note murmurs that fall to a quarter-note, expressing extreme anxiety and uncertainty. A soprano motive is intertwined with this *sčasovka*: a falling motive of four notes, D#-C#-A#-G#, which in its descent, signifies a despairing lament (Ex. 8.1). The *sčasovka* starts on beat one, and the falling motive on beat two. It is tied over the bar in quarter notes creating a syncopation which conveys an uneasy atmosphere. The actual placement of the *sčasovka* lies in between or "inside" the outer quarter notes which align on beat 2, even further representing an "inner" anxiety or instability.

### Example 8.1. *Unutterable Anguish*. mm. 1-4:

Andante (♩ = 72)

pp

P

Janáček continues to express the complicated emotion of anguish through various treatment of the outer and inner motives. For example, harmonically there is never a moment of tonal certainty, as there is a clear use of modes and whole tones. However, this instability is given more weight when for a brief,

<sup>70</sup> Zemanova, *Janáček*, 106.

<sup>71</sup> Tyrrell, 548.

startling moment it is contrasted with a flash of harmonic clarity. The texture changes with a rolled, *forte* E $\flat$  major chord in m. 24 (Ex. 8.2) which provides a fleeting sense of optimism, but it only lingers for a few measures.

**Example 8.2. mm. 22-26:**

The upper and lower voices soon break apart their alignment in m. 34, as the lower voice takes over the soprano motive in eighth-notes. Several repeated measures of imitation follow between the outer voices, and with an *accelerando*, the emotion spirals out of control. The intensity culminates in a power struggle between the outer voices in m. 40 in which the soprano motive takes back control, reverting to quarter notes. The *sčasovka* continues on every eighth-note beat now as the music slows:

**Example 8.3. mm. 35-41:**

This melts into a new *meno mosso* section. The *sčasovka* ceases, but the descending motive is laced into a homophonic texture with wide a registral range. Here it occurs in whole tones. Following this section the *sčasovka* now shifts to the “and” of beat 1, while the outer motive remains on beat 2:

**Example 8.4. mm. 56-58:**

This rhythmic displacement creates even more sense of unrest and despair, which continues until the coda. The ending is marked *Adagio*, and an E minor tonic chord enters, offering the only and final moment of tonal resolution (Ex. 8.5). However, the four note motive makes one final statement, representing a last sigh of anguish before the E minor chord closes the piece in resignation.

**Example 8.5. mm. 77-82:**

Janáček has taken just two elements, a rhythmic unit (*sčasovka*) and a descending four note motive to create an intense psychological state of emotion. Through use of modality and whole tones, various rhythmic devices, and motivic overlapping, he exploits the small motives to their fullest. This piece is definitely one of the harder ones to grasp in the cycle, but in knowing Janáček’s goal was to always express a pure human emotion, it seems this air of confusion is intentional. The complex emotions of suffering Janáček felt over his dying daughter are probably nearly impossible to comprehend.

## IX. In Tears (V pláči)

Out of all the pieces in the cycle, *In Tears*, written after Olga's death, has the most specific programmatic reference from Janáček's life. In his letter to Branberger he wrote: "Do you sense crying in the penultimate piece? A foreboding of certain death. An angelic being lay in deathly anguish through hot summer nights. Since those times I have ceased to take excursions into the beautiful countryside around Hukvaldy for the pleasure of it."<sup>72</sup> One might expect a piece with this description to be extremely sorrowful and mournful, but it is actually, overall, quite peaceful. In his wife's memoir, Zdenka recounts an intimate exchange between father and daughter on the eve of her passing that sets the scene and tone of *In Tears* rather beautifully. She writes that Olga: "began to be delirious. My husband leant over her and she said softly: 'Daddy, it's so beautiful there, there are just angels there.' And he said to her fervently: 'And you're the most beautiful angel of all.'" <sup>73</sup>

Formally, *In Tears* is straightforward, comprising of two contrasting sections that share the same theme. This use of monothematicism is typical of Janáček's compositional style and something he is often criticized for. (Some consider this particular trait of his as a sign of incompetence.) In discussing this aspect, musical philosopher Jaroslav Jiránek points out that Janáček's monothematicism is different from other Romantics, like Beethoven and Smetana, because it is not based on developing motives through musical logic. Rather, it stems from his goal of creating a "uniform mood of the life moment."<sup>74</sup> Besides employing monothematicism, Janáček also establishes a uniformity of mood through harmonic stasis and repetition, which allows the listener to fully absorb the moment that Janáček wishes to convey.

The first section is in G major and consists of three antecedent-consequent phrases. Janáček uses repetition within the phrasing by restating each consequent phrase exactly as the antecedent, which produces an interesting paradox: he creates a sense of closure with the balance and symmetry of the phrasing (4+4, 3+3, 4+4) without actually achieving any tonal resolution (Ex. 9.1). This, again, speaks to

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<sup>72</sup> Janáček, IX.

<sup>73</sup> Janáčková, *My Life with Janáček*, 88-89.

<sup>74</sup> Jaroslav Jiránek, *The Conflict between Reality and its Living in the Work of Leoš Janáček*, ed. Michael Beckerman and Glen Bauer, *Janáček and Czech Music: Proceedings of the International Conference*, 368.

his defiance of tonal and formal convention. The three phrases do change, climbing higher and growing subtly in texture and dynamics, but they are tightly unified. They each retain the same rhythm and are harmonically supported by G major with a pedal point on D, along with inner voices sustaining a B and G. This use of harmonic inertia allows the piece to maintain an underlying mood of calm and peace, despite the phrases' increasing intensity and failure to resolve.

**Example 9.1. *In Tears*, mm. 1-22:**

The musical score for 'In Tears' (mm. 1-22) is presented in four systems. The tempo is marked 'Larghetto' with a quarter note equal to 150 beats per minute. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is written for piano, with a treble and bass clef. The first system (mm. 1-6) begins with a dynamic of *p dolce* and includes the instruction 'una corda'. The second system (mm. 7-11) continues the melodic line with a dynamic of *p*. The third system (mm. 12-16) shows the melodic line rising further, with a dynamic of *p*. The fourth system (mm. 17-22) features a dynamic of *sf* (sforzando) and concludes with a key signature change to three flats (B-flat major/C minor).



The B section employs the same theme, but it is barely recognizable as Janáček modulates to the remote key of B $\flat$  minor and completely transforms the sonic atmosphere. Although we are in B $\flat$  minor, there is no sense of being in a clear key. The D pedal point is now replaced by a rocking accompaniment with an A $\flat$  in the bass, and the melodic contour is now much higher and outlined in octaves:

**Example 9.2. mm. 23-36:**

Also, rather than three phrases in the B section, Janáček only supplies two (4+4, 3+3). In the second phrase, the bass ascends to B $\flat$ -C-D $\flat$  and the melody becomes dissonant with half step movement. After this, there is a three-measure whole-tone transition back to the A section. These elements create a completely different realm from that of the first: one that is writhing, feverish, and delirious. The rest of the piece continues with a repeat of A, another statement of B slightly altered in length, and a final statement of the first phrase of the A section, which remains unresolved: again, a G major chord over the D in the bass.

Through use of monothematicism, repetition, and harmonic stasis, Janáček achieves his goal of expressing a uniform mood, allowing the listener to fully grasp the moment. While the piece is monothematic, Janáček still manages to add psychological complexity, taking the theme to a remote, contrasting world in the B section while maintaining a subconscious link to the mood, rhythmic flow, and harmonic inertia of the A section. By framing the feverish moments of delusion and discomfort with the



repetition of a simple, comforting melody over unwavering harmony, Janáček constructs a peaceful world, full of solace, for his angelic daughter and for himself.

### X. The Barn Owl Has Not Flown Away! (Sýček neodletěl!)

The last piece along the path is a poignant reminder of the fleetingness of life. Janáček writes: “in the final piece an intimate song of life is punctuated by the portentous motif of the barn owl.”<sup>75</sup> In Slavic folklore, the owl is considered to be a harbinger of death, and the motive Janáček uses to represent the owl is a minor third. It is marked to be played *dutě*, a Czech word meaning “hollow.” The piece opens with a foreboding, loud sweep that seems to imitate the flapping of wings. Then, a bass accompaniment enters as a two-note tremolo in sixteenth-note triplets. As in *The Frýdek Madonna*, this figure imitates the sound of the folk cimbalom and creates a haunting, looming atmosphere with a minor sixth. The ominous, hooting owl motive first appears in quarter notes, then in triplet-sixteenths (Ex. 10.1), which, in the interval of a minor third is the “drum-roll” figure used in Italian opera to signify death.<sup>76</sup> Interestingly, the minor third is also the interval of Olga’s last sigh, as noted in Janáček’s speech-melody notebooks.

Example 10.1. *The Barn Owl Has Not Flown Away!* mm. 1-6:

The musical score for Example 10.1 is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time, marked 'Andante' with a tempo of quarter note = 66. It features a piano accompaniment with a bass line of sixteenth-note triplets and a treble line with a melodic motif. The score includes dynamic markings like 'f' and 'p', and performance instructions like 'dolce, dutě (cupo)' and 'dim.'

<sup>75</sup> Janáček, IX.

<sup>76</sup> Tyrrell, 493.

Following this section is what Janáček calls the “intimate song of life” theme which is completely opposite in character.<sup>77</sup> It is a joyous, celebratory folk tune in E major that is set slightly off by breaths of quarter rests between four bar phrases:

**Example 10.2. mm. 13-28:**

This section alternates with the opening section twice, until the opening, flapping flourish appears in E major and begins to intertwine with the “song of life”:

**Example 10.3. mm. 62-68:**

The last statement of this theme reaches a declamatory climax followed by a suspenseful pause. The theme winds down in tempo, yet ends strongly and resolutely on a *fortissimo* E major tonic chord on a

<sup>77</sup> Janáček, IX.

half-note. This firm, rhythmic closure makes a strong impact, as previously the “song of life” had always been interrupted by either a rest or entrance of the first theme. The notion of an optimistic, triumphant ending here is quickly thwarted as the owl’s flapping wings sound again. The piece closes with a restatement of the first section and ends with two menacing bass staccato notes in a descending fifth.

**Example 10.4. mm. 112-117:**

In this piece, we see several characteristics typical of Janáček’s style: the influence of Czech folklore, use of motives directly linked to human emotion (in this case, the opposing elements of life and death), and as in *In Tears*, the use of repetition and harmonic stasis to reinforce the individual mood of the two themes. Despite the static, contrasting nature of the themes, Janáček incorporates subtle changes that create a profound narrative. The “song of life” section occurs four times throughout the piece, and each time, it consists of four statements of a four-bar phrase. Through all this repetition, Janáček makes harmonic changes that vary slightly each time. With this gradual transformation, Janáček expresses life’s constant state of change and growth, but by inserting the ominous theme between these statements, the listener is constantly reminded of the inevitability of death. Then, when the opening flourish of the owl’s wings becomes intertwined with the “song of life,” it is a seamless moment in which the two motives are linked in such a way that we understand, in spite of the opposing nature of the themes, and in spite of life’s resistance to death, that the two are inherently bound to each other.

## Chapter 5

### Afterthoughts

Just as Janáček felt that every part in his compositional writing must be linked back to its whole, it is appropriate to reflect upon *On an Overgrown Path* in a similar fashion. Now that each piece has been individually explored, it is worthwhile to consider how they unite, creating a cohesive, satisfying work. First, all the pieces share the same compositional elements: modal associations in melody and harmony, unconventional tonal structure and form, use of motives (speech-melody and rhythmic) as constructional bases, and Czech folk elements. In sharing these traits, the pieces always feel closely related, yet retain their own personalities, and as a whole cycle, the pieces combine to present a clear view of Janáček's unmistakable compositional style. Second, in understanding Janáček's application of realism in music—that is, expressing life's emotions and events as accurately as possible—and knowing that everything he did compositionally was done with much thought and consideration to this goal, it seems that the progression of the pieces presents an important narrative. The first half of the path is interspersed with love songs, cheerful moods, and memories of excursion and youth, while the second half seems to take a darker turn, focusing on the moods of anxiety, despair, grief, and death. The way in which the cycle progresses, ending with *The Barn Owl* is not optimistic, but foreboding and bleak. In fact, the Czech title word in this piece, *sýček* (barn owl), is a word with a dual meaning that can be used to describe someone with a pessimistic outlook on life.<sup>78</sup> Thus, the cycle tells a story of life through a montage of memories and various emotional stages which culminates in an overarching, bitter reminder of the imminence of death. Finally, as a whole, the pieces come together to express the gamut of human emotion as told through Janáček's experiences and memory. It is often considered a fallacy to try to link a composer's life events with his work, but in this case, it is essential and significantly illuminating. The pieces along the path reveal much about who Janáček was, and as such, *On an Overgrown Path* is a true example of music as autobiography. Thus, the insight gained from exploring Janáček's life is invaluable in understanding this work.

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<sup>78</sup> Tyrrell, 493.

## Conclusion

After discussing the innovative theoretical and compositional elements in Janáček's work, it is evident that the composer infused elements of Herbartian philosophy and his Czech heritage into every aspect of *On an Overgrown Path*. The work is strongly influenced by the Herbartian philosophy of relating the whole to its smallest constituent components in the unification of all compositional elements, whether it be through chordal connection, *napevky mluvy* (smallest unit of melodic activity), *sčasovka* (smallest rhythmic unit), or the layering and interpenetration of these units and connections. Additionally, his music is highly charged with Czechness. Influenced by his ethnographic studies and heritage, Janáček tried to view music like a folk musician, identifying his music with the feelings of daily life. Through *napevky mluvy* and Czech tunes as sources for real motives and *sčasovka*, the imitation of folk instruments or bands, asymmetry in phrasing, modal elements, and basing harmonization upon the melodic impulse of folk tunes, he connects his audience with his experience of Czech life and creates art in which his heritage and culture can be preserved. Beyond that, how these compositional elements are linked with references to Janáček's life—allusions to childhood memories in *Hukvaldy*, religious feasts, moments with family, being in nature, and personal tragedy and loss—make *On an Overgrown Path* all the more richer.

Clearly, Janáček was innovative and progressive, forming a striking, unique sound that sets him apart from the composers of his time, but rather than being recognized for his original thought, he has generally been neglected and forgotten amongst the late Romantics and early modern composers. Ironically, beyond what has been discussed here, Janáček was the first composer to do many things. He was collecting folk songs and incorporating their traditions in his music before Bartók. He annotated the “concrete music of life” in form of intonations derived from speech, sounds in nature, and even birdsong before Messiaen. He experimented in using all twelve tones as a basis for a harmonic system before Schoenberg. His opera, *Jenůfa*, which closely resembles Berg's groundbreaking, realist opera, *Wozzek*, preceded it by eighteen years. And when a German critic compared him to Debussy, Janáček replied angrily, “harmonic freedom was proclaimed by me before Debussy and I have nothing to do with French

impressionism.”<sup>79</sup> Yet, despite his many breakthroughs, he remains overlooked, often considered a marginal composer. Czech novelist and essayist Milan Kundera, who firmly believes Janáček to be one of the truly great modern composers, poignantly describes Janáček’s situation with a metaphor. He writes:

Not without a certain stupidity, art critics consider authors to be like runners on the track of History and appreciate them according to their speed: who was the first to paint a cubist work, who attained polytonality first, atonality, etc. If we retain this metaphor, we note that Janáček was running too, but without being noticed...consequently, his music has the air of a simple accident outside of History, of a beautiful garden off to one side of the main route.<sup>80</sup>

*On An Overgrown Path* presents to us the composer of Leoš Janáček in full force. In this work, he dares to express the complex psychological moments and emotions that occur with everyday life, which is something all audiences can relate to. In understanding how much Janáček was concerned with finding his own way as a composer, a new perspective of music from this era can be gained along with the realization that there are untapped dimensions to music history waiting to be explored. In closing, Kundera poses an interesting question that eloquently comes to terms with Janáček’s place “off the main route of History.” He asks: “But doesn’t this handicap offer a rare advantage? We listen to this music as a value that posits itself by itself without being taken over by its historical significance. It remains unclassifiable, always surprising and, after half a century, still awaiting discovery.”<sup>81</sup> *On an Overgrown Path* is a work that is truly unclassifiable: the way in which Janáček expresses complex psychological phenomena and emotional affect with such economical writing is remarkable. Underneath this simple folk sound is a highly sophisticated theoretical and compositional system that creates profound, meaningful moments that are always surprising. But beyond that, the overall intimate nature, simplicity, and sincere quality of the cycle make *On an Overgrown Path* a perfect gateway for discovering Janáček. He is a composer that must not be overlooked any longer, for his music, infused with all aspects of life from the smallest part to the whole, has a powerful and unique capacity to connect with audiences unlike any other composer of his time.

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<sup>79</sup> Milan Kundera, “He Saw the Coming Night,” *Cross Currents* 2: 378.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

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