

**Leoš Janáček.** Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Reihe C,  
Band 1: *Männerchöre I.* Herausgaben von Leoš Faltus,  
Petr Oliva. Prague: Supraphon, and Kassel:  
Bärenreiter, 1983.\*

The sixth volume of the Complete Critical Edition of Janáček's works, consisting of the early unaccompanied male choruses, has recently appeared. This collection, which covers the years 1873 to 1897, takes us from the very beginning of Janáček's compositional career up to the composition of *Jenufa*. These are not Janáček's greatest works in the genre; that distinction is reserved for works like *Kantor Halfar* (Schoolmaster Halfar), *Maryčka Magdónova*, *Sedmdesát tisíc* (The Seventy Thousand), and *Potulný šilínec* (The Wandering Madman), which were composed between 1906 and 1922. Yet this collection is nonetheless an important one; it marks the first time that all of Janáček's early male choruses have been available together. Thus it becomes possible to follow the progress of the composer from *Orání* (Ploughing), where, as a nineteen-year-old, he was almost completely indebted to the musical language of his teacher Pavel Křížkovský, to *Slavností sbor* (Festive Choir) of 1897, a work which reflects elements that we associate with Janáček's mature style: incessant repetition; short, jagged phrases; and fresh modulations and inflections.

The problems and strengths of the Janáček Edition itself have been discussed rather fully in the last several years, by myself and others.<sup>1</sup> The remarks here will only concern themselves with specific features of the present volume.

The volume is handsomely presented and has many attractive qualities, but there are several elements that reduce its value, particularly for the English-speaking reader. The first of these concerns the opening notes by Ivo Stolařík. The content of the notes, especially in the Czech version, is for the most part quite good, yet the English translation is totally inadequate. Witness the following description of the years after 1886 (at least one *assumes* the passage refers to those years since no dates are given): "a new intensive creative period timidly began for Janáček after the culminative [*sic*] accumulation of those non-composing duties. . . ." (p. xvii). The entire introduction is couched in that "dialect" of English which we students of Czech music lovingly call "Supraphonese."

As well, the introductory notes do not provide much background to the text. For example, Janáček's teacher, Pavel Křížkovský (1820–85) was, as mentioned above, one of the most important influences on Janáček's early choral works. Křížkovský's compositions for unaccompanied male chorus reflect both his love for the folk song and his strongly nationalist orientation; these make him one of the most important precursors of the Smetana school. Though his name is mentioned several times in the text, no information about the composer is given, whatsoever. Nor is there so much as a note

about any of the other figures who dominated this period of the Czech national awakening. It would certainly be an improvement if future volumes of the edition supplied additional information in the German and English translations of the introductory notes, material which may be common knowledge to Czech musicologists but completely unknown to others. This is especially important for a composer such as Janáček, who came of age in a milieu unknown to most Western readers. The introduction might also have profited from an extended treatment of Janáček's ethnographic studies in the 1880s, the period during which he developed many of his most characteristic ideas, especially his famous "speech melody" theory, a theory which no doubt played an important role in changing his approach to text setting.

The most serious problem in this volume, however, involves the translation of the text. The English texts provided for the works themselves are quite simply travesties, and this is unforgivable in an avowedly definitive edition which purports to be international in character. As a choice example of both the carelessness of production and of purely linguistic problems, we might take a look at the translation of the following stanza, one of Janáček's favorite snippets of folk poetry:

O láska láska ty nejsi stálá  
jako voděnka mezi horama studená  
Voděnka plyne láska pomine  
jako lísteček na rozmarýně zeleném

A literal translation of these lines would be something like:

O love, love, you are not constant  
like a cold mountain brook.  
The brook flows and love disappears  
as a leaf on the green Rosemary.

This line occurs in two separate choruses. In the chorus "O láska," composed in 1886, the following translation is given:

O love, o true love never long remains  
as water constant between the mountains.  
Water flows onwards but love does not last  
like Rosemary leaves whose day is soon passed, green of hue.

Now this isn't too terrible, although the flavor of the vocative case is lost, and the image of cold water is missing, yet compare this with another translation of the *very same text* in "Nestálost lásky" (Fickleness of Love), composed in 1873:

O love, o passion, you are not constant  
as the plashing rills sporting twixt the hills, ever cold.

Water, the water always flows, love may surely die,  
like the handsome leaves of the Rosemary, shrivelled old.

This is simply ghastly! It is no doubt an inferior, singing translation made many years ago. The text would seem to belong in *Acis and Galatea* rather than in this volume.

Sometimes the translations are passable, but more often they evoke spontaneous giggles, as does this example from "Výhrůžka" (The Threat) of 1886, which recalls *Ruddigore* and *Iolanthe*:

Mark well, O sonny, what I now say,  
if you're a bad lad turn from that way.  
I've considered my position,  
leaving you is my decision.

This kind of translating cannot go on. Janáček was obsessed with words, with both sound and meaning. An edition which purports to be definitive must do better. I would strongly suggest that, in the future, literal translations be given for all texts, preferably in a separate section.

Yet, despite all these pitfalls, the works themselves are exceedingly attractive and absolutely essential to a fuller understanding of Janáček's career as a composer. A final note: anyone who wishes to study these works should perform them, even with one on a part. Janáček's activity as a choral conductor, well documented in the introductory notes, made him especially sensitive to choral sound and effect. These are not "paper" harmonies, but living ones which only come to life in performance. When one considers the quality of Janáček's choral works and the interest in choral music in general in this country, it is astonishing that his works are not presented more often. Hopefully the publication of this volume will lead to greater frequency of performance and will awaken scholarly interest in this neglected area of the composer's works.

—Michael Beckerman

#### NOTES

\* 156 pp.; full score with text in Czech, German, and English; introduction.

<sup>1</sup> For reviews and responses to the editorial principles and general characteristics of the edition see the following reviews: Rudolf Firkušný and Roland John Wiley, [Piano Music] *Notes* 37 (1981): 942–44; Paul Wingfield, [Piano Music] *The Musical Times* 125 (July 1984): 394; Roland John Wiley, [*Taras Bulba*] *Notes* 39 (1983): 683–84; Michael Beckerman, [*Na Solaní Čarták*] *Notes* 40 (1984): 637–39; and Beckerman, [*Návod pro vyučování zpěvu*] *Notes* 41 (1984): 369–71. For a full discussion and debate over the editorial principles see: Michael Beckerman, "Janáček's Notation Revisited: An Interview with Jarmil Burghauser," *Notes* 41 (1984): 249–58.