

**Jiří Zahrádka**

**„Divadlo nesmí býti lidu komedií“. Leoš Janáček a Národní divadlo v Brně**  
(Brno: Moravské zemské muzeum, Editio Janáček, 2012)

This monograph is devoted to Janáček's contacts with the Czech National Theatre in Brno. Since the composer lived in Brno all his adult life and all but one of his nine operas received their premières in the Brno theatre (either at Veveří or 'na hradbách') this is a central topic for any account of Janáček's life and work. Dr Zahrádka's treatment of the subject is divided into seven chapters. The longest describes the staging of Janáček's operas at the theatre and another the performances of his orchestral works by the theatre orchestra; there are also chapters devoted to Janáček's reviews of the performances given at the Brno National Theatre and an especially useful one on Janáček as a member of the National Theatre Družstvo. The remaining chapters deal with Janáček as a theatregoer, his experience of opera before the opening of the Czech theatre, and the commemorative concert given at the theatre after his death. This part of the book, together with the footnotes, takes up 119 pages of large-format pages though this total is misleading since the book is lavishly illustrated with many photographs and designs, and room is also taken by the English translation given in smaller type together with the larger-type Czech text. The book is completed with lists of chairmen of the National Theatre Družstvo, directors of the Czech National Theatre, a list of performances there of Janáček's operas (giving cast lists and dates of repeat performances), a glossary of individuals who feature in the book, a list of illustrations and an index of persons.

From this description it will be evident that this is a very orderly monograph that covers the subject in an intelligent and comprehensive way. This is of course not a completely new subject: the premières and early performances of Janáček's operas at the Brno theatre have been covered by earlier writers; Janáček's activities as a theatre critic were examined eighty years ago by Leoš Firkušný. But this is the first time such information has been brought together in a single volume. Furthermore Dr Zahrádka, as curator of the Janáček archive of the Moravian Museum and as editor of many of Janáček's operas for the publisher Universal Edition, has an unrivalled access to sources and an unmatched authority in this subject, which means that he is able to look at the material critically, evaluate it and bring it up to date with new findings. Some indication of Dr Zahrádka's previous publications on the subject, all of which have fed logically into this monograph and enriched it, can be found in the ten items that he cites in the bibliography. Despite its comparatively modest proportions, this monograph thus serves as a culmination of Dr Zahrádka's thorough and focussed exploration of the subject over many years.



In addition to the book's scholarly merits, this is also a beautifully produced volume, printed on coated paper which has allowed the reproduction of illustrations in colour where necessary (giving, for instance, the attractive designs for the Brno *Bystrouška* by Milén on pp. 78–80, the Hofman designs for *Šárka* on pp. 84–5, and the Josef Čapek designs for *Brouček* on pp. 86–7). I was delighted to see illustrations of people whose names I knew but had no idea what they looked like. Dr Zahrádka is to be congratulated in taking into account not merely written and printed documents but also images to complement his arguments. As co-author of *Leoš Janáček ve fotografiích*, it is clear that he has a particular expertise in this area and the 139 illustrations (listed on pp. 138–41) should be seen as an integral part of this enterprise, rather than something added merely to make the volume more commercially attractive. The fact that it is published with a bilingual (Czech–English) text means that it can reach out to an international readership that a purely Czech volume would not.

The central topic of the book, given at the greatest length (more than a third of the main text), is of course Janáček's operas. Here Dr Zahrádka's original slant is to comment on productions and performances during Janáček's lifetime in order of presentation at the theatre rather than in order of composition. So that Janáček's first opera *Šárka* has to wait until its belated première of 1925 (after accounts of *Káťa Kabanová* and *Příhody lišky Bystroušky*), and *Brouček* until 1926, when it was given in Brno in a truncated form six years after the Prague première. The two operas that Janáček never saw on stage, *Osud* and *Z mrtvého domu*, are necessarily dealt with differently: in his account of *Osud* Dr Zahrádka describes the early but aborted negotiations in Brno (and Janáček's attitude towards them); with *Z mrtvého domu* we learn of the completion of the opera and how the deaths of both Janáček and the conductor František Neumann contributed to the delay in performing the work. Non-operatic works given at the theatre are also included: *Otče náš* (where Janáček wrote the music to go with *tableaux vivants*) and *Lašské tance*, given as a ballet. While some of this is familiar material, Dr Zahrádka is able to complement existing sources with new ones that he has discovered. These include the reminiscences of the theatre director Václav Štech and those of the writer and editor Karel Tauš, the press reports in *Divadelní šepety* and many reviews. Dr Zahrádka has even tracked down František Neumann's diary to find out more about the tensions between him and the stage director Ota Zitek during the rehearsals for *Makropulos*. Also included are the findings that have come from the editor's previous editorial work such as an expert account of the changes made to *Brouček* for the Brno 1926 version (and which changes Janáček successfully resisted). Dr Zahrádka's research in the Brno National Theatre Archive has revealed the existence of a set of orchestral parts of *Osud* (thus confirming the seriousness of the theatre's intention to stage the work) as well as important information about rehearsals (when they began, how many there were for soloists and orchestra, etc., the number of performances for each production) and the royalty fees Janáček received for each set of performances. The following chapter deals in a similar chronological way with the



concerts given by the Brno National Theatre orchestra of Janáček's orchestral works and the *Glagolitic Mass*. This again presents its material through the same interesting prism of the order in which these works were heard in Brno and can be considered in the context of the wide range of repertory that Neumann included in his concerts.

In terms of staking out a new area of study the most valuable part of the book is the chapter on Janáček as a member and representative of the Družstvo of the Czech National theatre in Brno. This is an immensely difficult topic to research and one that defeated me in my own monograph on Janáček. The sources are widely dispersed and difficult to get at and in many cases incomplete so that expert interpretation is needed the whole time to make sense of them. The results are remarkable, uncovering Janáček's active involvement in trying to manage what went on at the theatre, his strong views and surprisingly practical initiatives in many fields. I liked the detailed examination of the controversy over the New Czech National Theatre building illustrated with the many unrealized designs for the new theatre. This has been researched on the basis of press reports and fill out considerably the sparse information on this topic previously available in standard Janáček sources (such as the footnotes to the edition of Janáček's correspondence with Artuš Rektorys, pp. 107–9). I was glad to learn of the debate about whether to perform *Brouček*, based on minutes of meetings of the theatre board. Similarly new are many details in the extensive description of Janáček's commemorative funeral concert.

One criticism I would offer is that Dr Zahrádka is inclined to trust only the primary sources. This of course is an admirable and essential trait for any scholar, but it comes with a tendency to disregard whatever has been written before. This means that sometimes the wheel is invented afresh.. I was sorry, for instance not to see any mention of Leoš Firkušný's monograph *Leoš Janáček kritikem brněnské opery* (Brno: Oldřich Pazdírek, 1935). This was a remarkable piece of research which came out only seven years after Janáček's death, reproducing all of Janáček's reviews in *Hudební listy* and considering whether this activity contributed to his growth as a composer. At seventy-four pages Firkušný was able to devote more space to the subject than Zahrádka could in five and it is shame that readers wishing to explore the subject in more detail could not be made aware of this work.

Occasionally Dr Zahrádka takes a parochial view of life outside the Czech world, for instance his mention of 'dnes již zcela zapomenutých oper'. Balfe's *Bohemian Girl* may be forgotten in the Czech Republic (despite its attractive title), but it is well known elsewhere, with CD recordings and occasional performances. The same, if to a lesser extent, can be said of Kreutzer's *Nachtlager in Granada* and the Ricci brothers' *Crispino e la comare*. A final suggestion is that Dr Zahrádka could take more time to reflect on the implications of all the

facts that he has amassed. For instance in assembling his excellent information on the large number of critics present at the première of *Makropulos* and the very positive critical reception he might have thought more about the implications of the discrepancy between this and the pitifully small number of performances during Janáček's life.

But these are minor considerations. This is a monograph written to a high scholarly standard and provides an excellent, insightful account of the subject, beautifully organized and presented, with sources carefully laid out in detail for future researchers, both at home and abroad. This is a study which has considerably expanded our knowledge of the subject, especially in the account of Janáček at the National Theatre Družstvo. It brings together the rich harvest of many productive years of work in the field and I commend it as complying fully with international standards of Habilitation theses.

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