

“ZDENKA” *TEMA CON VARIAZIONI*: AN ANALYSIS OF  
LEOS JANACEK’S EARLY STYLE

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to analyze, both historically and theoretically, Czech composer Leos Janacek's first significant piano composition, the *Tema con Variazioni*. Written when Janacek, a native of Moravia, was a student in Leipzig, the Variations fuses together elements of Czech realism and Moravian folk music in a manner that is incredibly convincing and very personal. Furthermore, Janacek utilizes the idea of establishing two nearly-equal pitch centricities, or tonics, rather than maintaining one tonal center. In this manner, the Variations takes on the character of Moravian folk music, rather than that of typical Romantic Era music, and portrays the beginning of Janacek's mature style as a composer who bridges the style of Romanticism and the Avant-Garde. An analysis of this nature serves to provide the performer with the essential theoretical knowledge which will allow him or her to interpret the work correctly, and thereby enhance the performance.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Czech nationalist composer Leoš Janáček, who was born in Hukvaldy, Moravia in 1854 and died in Ostrava, Moravia, 1928, stands out as an individual who defined his art through the psychologically-compelling trademark of Czech Realism. His music composition originates in the latter portion of the Romantic Era, but also exhibits characteristics of Impressionism and Serialism, especially during the middle and late period of his life.

Janáček has been characterized as a composer who bridges the worlds of the Romantic and Avant-Garde.<sup>1</sup> He spent his childhood in the village of Hukvaldy, prior to moving to Brno to obtain his formal education as a choirboy at St. Thomas Abbey. Here he studied under the former student of his father (himself an educator), Pavel Křížkovský. He learned to play the organ at the Abbey and later continued studies in piano, organ, and music composition at the Brno Organ School. Afterwards, he went on to conservatories in Prague, Leipzig, Vienna.<sup>2</sup> He is best remembered as a composer, although he also worked professionally as a prominent theorist, educator, and conductor. Much of his professional life was spent in Brno where he held a twenty-year post at the Brno Organ School and later became its director.<sup>3</sup> His most significant works include his operas *Jenufa* (1904), *Sarka* (1887-1888), *The Makropulos Case* (1926), *The Excursions of Mr. Broucek to the Moon* (1920), and *Kát'a Kabanová* (1921). His programmatic work for orchestra *Taras Bulba* (1918), and his *Glagolitic Mass* (1926), continue to be performed to this day, and are regarded as emblematic of Janáček's Slavonic origins and strong nationalistic tendencies.

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1, 3. Jarmila Prochazkova, interview by the author, June 27, 2013, Brno, Czech Republic.

2. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "Leoš Janáček."

Janacek was fascinated with nuance and minutiae, both tonal and rhythmic. His solo compositions are just as meticulously crafted and as musically demanding as his larger works, exhibiting a control of tonal and rhythmic nuance that is highly original and which attempts to emulate human speech. He worked during the 1890s as an assistant to Frantisek Bartos, the leading Moravian ethnologist of the time, collecting and notating folk tunes from the region of Moravia surrounding Hukvaldy. This led Janacek to a method whereby he notated human speech patterns, indicating speech and rhythm.<sup>4</sup> After the year 1900, and especially in regards to his opera *Jenufa*, Janáček began to saturate his compositions with modifications of these collected speech patterns in a manner similar to that which German opera composers, such as Wagner, developed using the idea of the *leitmotif*. This is especially evident in his opera *Jenufa*. Janacek's use of the speech melodies, or *napevky mluvy*, resulted in a movement towards extreme dramaticism. Thus, many of his compositions, solo, large-scale orchestral, and operatic, inherently portray harsh reality and profundity. This style was readily embraced by the Czech audiences or critics. However, people such as Max Brod, who rescued the works of Franz Kafka,<sup>5</sup> recognized Janáček's original style and personal intensity as a composer, and helped to support the premiere of his works in Prague and abroad.

Today, Janáček's music is performed far less than that of his Czech contemporaries Smetana and Dvorak. This may be due to the fact that his music is quite difficult to understand and to perform. Correct interpretation demands complete focus or a state of existing solely "in the moment." Due to this, an analytical knowledge of the piece enhances a performer's interpretation and provides him the freedom whereby he may convincingly project Janacek's concept of realism.

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4, 5. Jiri Zharadka, interview by the author, June 24, 2013, Brno, Czech Republic.

Janáček composed four major solo works for piano, which include the “Zdenka” *Tema con Variazioni*, VIII/6; *On the Overgrown Path, Sets I and II*, VIII/17; the “sonata” *I.X.1905*, VIII/19; and *In the Mists*, VIII/22. The first completed solo piano piece, analyzed below, was composed in 1880 when Janáček was a student in Prague. This work embraces the traditional tonal, Romantic style of his forbears Dvorak and Brahms, but also uses folk elements and harmonic idiosyncrasies which anticipate his later compositions. These subsequent piano works include *On the Overgrown Path, Sets I and II*, which fuses the idea of the “speech melody” with Janáček’s usage of a tonal language that is similar to that of Moravian folk music. An analysis of this folk music reveals a style which often correlates dual tonal centricities, or pairs harmonically-distant keys together. Janacek utilizes this style via an incredible economy of writing which employs extensive enharmonicism as a means of transition from one remote key to another. In *I.X.1905*, he exhibits just as fully as in his orchestral work *Taras Bulba* his nationalist proclivity through the psychological usage of speech patterns and unprecedented (for him) harmonic intensity. Finally, in *In the Mists*, he increases the sophistication of his harmonic language to a level that resembles that found in Impressionist music. Also, in this work there is less use of speech melodies as a means of portraying realism.

As a whole, this cycle ventures into the world of realism, developing it to a nearly autobiographical level in the second and third works. It then devolves into a state of semi-ambiguity in the last piece. The cycle cannot be understood fully unless a significant basis for such understanding is established. That basis exists in the analysis of Janáček’s “Zdenka” *Tema con Variazioni*.

## “ZDENKA” TEMA CON VARIAZIONI, VIII/6

*“They are really nice and I regard them as my first completely correct work, as my op. 1. You will like them, my dear Zdenka, and should they ever be published, they will carry your dear name.”<sup>6</sup>*

Janáček composed his first significant solo piano work, the “Zdenka” Theme and Variations, JV VIII/6, while he was enrolled as a student at the Leipzig Conservatory from October 1879 to March 1880. He was on a one year’s paid leave-of-absence from his normal duties as an instructor at the Czech Teacher’s Institute in Brno. While attending the Leipzig Conservatory, he studied composition with Oscar Paul and Leo Grill, and piano with Ernst Wenzel.

Janáček’s experience in Leipzig was not quite what he had expected. Extremely poor, he was unable to attend many cultural and social activities which his fellow colleagues enjoyed. He never attended the opera while in Leipzig, but he did manage to attend concerts at the Gewandhaus.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the socially-undistracted Janáček enthusiastically and ambitiously threw himself into his studies, producing many student compositions, although few of these survive. We know of the rigor of his study, as well as of the nature of his experience working under Paul and Grill, through the detailed letters he wrote daily to his fiancé, Zdenka Schulzova. These letters document the details of his life almost to the hour.<sup>8</sup>

While Janáček described many of his compositions in these letters to Zdenka, only three of his student pieces remain to this day. Of these three, only the Theme and Variations, his “Opus 1,” is recognized as significant. Janáček composed the piece under Leo Grill, whom he originally

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6. John Tyrrell, *Janáček: Years of a Life, Vol. I: The Lonely Blackbird* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), 132.

7, 8. . John Tyrrell. "Janáček, Leoš." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed April 22, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/14122>



found less appealing a teacher than Paul. This was due to the fact that Grill had dismissed Janáček's first piano sonata as an inferior composition. However, after a period of time during which he developed an acute interest in Janáček and his writing, Grill came to significantly influence the budding composer. In response to Grill's interest, as well as in reaction to the frustration caused by his seemingly futile attempts to please the irascible Oscar Paul, Janáček eventually developed a great appreciation of Grill. This appreciation originated despite the fact that Grill insisted on a demandingly meticulous and methodical approach to composing, that the head-strong and impatient young Janáček found tedious. For example, under Grill's supervision Janáček completed composition assignments that included fourteen fugues (JW X/5), seven romances for violin and piano (JW X/8), and a set of rondos (JW X/14); in addition to the Theme and Variations JW VIII/6. With the completion of each of these pieces, Janáček achieved an incrementally more refined compositional approach than is apparent in the works written prior to his time in Leipzig.<sup>9</sup> Demonstrating his appreciation of Grill's methods, Janáček wrote to Zdenka, "The aim (of writing a symphony) I will achieve, calmly, with hard work and if I have real talent, only on the path that Grill showed me. I must master all forms so that they become second nature to me: I must be able to write in any form without having to think further about it myself. Which needs practice and time. That has become my main aim and in this respect I am quite calm and pleased with myself."<sup>10</sup> The result of this approach is made evident in the attention to detail and control of part-writing displayed in the Theme and Variations. John Tyrrell, who has written extensively over Janáček and his musical opines, "Janáček's Theme and Variations has the distinction of being one of his most carefully crafted pieces, with unusual

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9. Tyrrell. "Janáček, Leoš." *Grove Music Online*.

10. John Tyrrell, *Janáček: Years of a Life, Vol. I: The Lonely Blackbird* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), 167.

delicacy in figuration. . . [A]lthough not sounding remotely like the mature composer, this piece is evidence of his early mastery of imaginative variations of small motifs.”<sup>11</sup>

This craftsmanship of “small motifs” became a trademark of Janáček’s compositional style, and enabled him to control nuance and tonality in an ever more effective manner. Perhaps less obvious in the Theme and Variations than in his later works, is Janáček’s attention to detail and exacting control of the part-writing. This liberated him to create a world in which tightly-controlled enharmonic relationships allow for organic “progression” through disparate tonal regions, and where the texture allows for powerful nuance and startlingly poignant intervallic relationships. As stated by Paul Wingfield, an analyst of Janáček’s works and one of his biographers “Volatility of texture and economy of material combine in the mature Janáček to provide a relationship between harmonic colour and underlying tonality more highly-charged than in any other composer.”<sup>12</sup>

There is no doubt that Janáček’s experience as a student at the Prague Organ School between 1874 and 1876 had a tremendous impact on his compositional career in regards to the precision of his part-writing and the immediacy of his harmonies. For example, the most significant collection of works written for organ are those composed by J. S. Bach, undeniably the greatest contrapuntal composer who ever lived. Janáček certainly would have studied many of these works and thus become aware of the necessity to preserve clear vocal textures and chromatically-driven lines, for the effect of piercing through the accumulation and reverberation of sound produced by a cathedral’s massive pipe organ. As a result, he was likely acutely aware of the

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11. Tyrrell, *Janáček* (2006), 163-164.

12. Paul Wingfield, *Janáček Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 18.

potential which a single masterfully-crafted line of music intrinsically holds to produce a significant melodic idea or affect, regardless of its harmonic support. Such lines are evident in the Theme from Janáček's "Opus 1."

### Analysis

One of the most unique qualities of this composition is the ambiguity of tonic/key as a result of Janáček's use of enharmonicism. This is not to imply that the *Theme and Variations* denies the presence of key, as we see later in the works of Schoenberg and other composers of the avant-garde style. Rather, the keys B flat and G minor are shared throughout the piece, in which pitch centricity shifts relatively freely. This creates the sense that the piece has two "homes," or sources for return. Furthermore, the subtle shifts between key occur in such a finely-crafted way that the effect is somewhat like a suspension of typical harmonic progression. The writing suggests an objectified immediacy due to the fact that more lengthy regular development of progressions is often avoided.

### Theme

Tema  
29. 1. 1880

Leoš Janáček  
Rev. Vilém Kurz

Andante

The image displays a musical score for the 'Theme' from Janáček's 'Opus 1'. It consists of three systems of piano notation. Each system has a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The tempo is marked 'Andante'. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings like '(p)' and '(legato sempre)'. Fingering numbers (1-5) and articulation marks (accents, staccato) are present throughout. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The score is numbered 45 at the beginning and 21 at the end of the third system.

By examining the melodic voice leading of the main theme of the piece, it is readily apparent that this piece contains two tonal homes. This AB binary form, the main melodic theme consists of a slightly varied period in the first section, and a parallel period in the second section. There are B flat and G major interior and closing cadences within each period, and B flat is the key of the first and last cadences. However, the initial phrase indicates a strong presence of G minor. For example, the first instance of intervallic motion in the soprano contains a “so” to “do” motion, in G minor (from D to G). However, in the alto voice, which also begins on D, we move down a third to B flat, and then continue with a leading tone resolution from the subsequent A to B flat again. This alto line meanders around the B flat and A for the duration of this first four measure phrase, pointed toward B flat. The soprano line is more ambiguous, originating in the D-G (V-i) motion, and continuing downward in a natural minor scale through A. At this point, the line ascends to B flat, indicating that the A is a leading tone rather than the second degree of a G natural minor scale. Finally, the tenor line initially ascends from F to B flat, indicating V-I movement in B flat, but then returns downward to D with repetition an octave lower (which may perhaps be seen as a subunit of the descending G natural minor scale presented in the soprano earlier). However, in the pickup to measure 4, Janáček introduces the bass voice in cadential V-I movement to B flat. This bass movement corresponds to the upper voices, which remain in B flat for the duration of the measure. Lastly, if one considers B flat major to be the relative major of G minor, this implies a tonal relationship that is actually quite common in folk music. Considering that Janacek was fascinated by the Moravian folk music of his native region surrounding Hukvaldy, the fact that he would utilize this tonal relationship makes perfect sense.

The next phrase reveals the idea that this piece is situated in two equally significant keys. For instance, the soprano is clearly in G minor, beginning in m. 5. Also, the initial V-i movement, as

well as the ascent to B flat and then descent to G in m. 6, already suggests a line in G minor. This is further verified by the presence of chromatically-altered pitches F sharp and E natural in m. 7. However, Janáček still strongly suggests the presence of B flat in the alto line, which at first is an outgrowth of the original topmost line in m. 5. This line, rather than supporting the presence of G minor, contains voice leading that returns the pitch content to B flat (downbeat of m. 6), but then “decays” to G minor by m. 8. Both the tenor and bass voices seem to support B flat for the duration of measures 5 and 6, but then rejoin the soprano in voice leading that supports the G minor cadence, such as the strong D-G (V-i) movement of the bass in m. 7-8. In summary, while the individual lines themselves essentially each “choose” a key (B flat or G minor), when they are fused together in polyphonic texture, they demonstrate a modulation directly into G minor (m. 8). This idea may be proven by picking a voice line, and singing through its duration for each phrase; and then listening to the polyphonic combination of all lines.

Fascinatingly, at the beginning of the second section of the theme, Janáček immediately shifts away from G minor, and essentially tonicizes C minor throughout the next seven measures. Since C minor is the iv of G minor, as well as the ii of B flat, this tonicization may be developed in a manner which fully supports either of the two main keys as tonic. This ambiguity of key later becomes a trademark of Janáček’s compositional style. Because the listener is left for such a disproportionately long time in this non-defining key of C minor, he is forced to simply appreciate the moment for what it is, and “exist” momentarily in the world of pure realism which Janáček thoroughly expands upon in his later compositions.

The primary way in which Janáček achieves this modulation to C minor is not inherently sophisticated. He employs B natural, beginning in m. 9, in close proximity to the subsequent A flat, which emphasizes harmonic minor. Simultaneously, he outlines the descending C

major/minor scale between the tenor and bass voices in m. 9-11, and achieves a subphrase half cadence in m. 12, within the key of C minor. Following this, the next 2.5 measures contain an exact repetition of previous material, which continues until the last eighth note of the LH in m. 15. Here Janacek substitutes a B flat for the previous A flat. This substitution creates a  $v^7/F$ , which harmony is followed by a  $V^7/B$  flat in the final cadence. Additionally, Janáček substitutes B flat for B natural in the last pitch of the soprano (compare m. 16, b. 4 to m. 12, b. 4). In this manner of tightly-controlling the part writing, Janáček achieves maximum effect with minimal means, in a way that is totally convincing and thoroughly realistic.

### Variations

For each of the seven variations, Janacek generally adheres to the original tonal progression presented in the theme. With each variation, he develops the theme in a variety of ways by employing techniques seen in the theme and variation sets his contemporaries, the composers Dvorak and Brahms. This correlation derives from the fact that Janáček became familiar with the works of Brahms during the time of his study in Leipzig. In fact, upon presenting the Theme and Variations to his piano teacher for the first time, Wenzel commented that the piece reminded him of Brahms's Handel Variations, although Janáček had apparently never heard that particular work of Brahms before.<sup>13</sup> The rhapsodic character of several of the variations, as well as the general melancholy nature of the main theme, resembles the Theme and Variations in A flat, Op. 36 by Dvorak. Now, while there is no extant proof that Janáček had heard Dvorak's Op. 36, it is known that Janáček greatly admired Dvorak, and that the two eventually became close friends.

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13. John Tyrrell, *Janáček* (2006), 153.

Nevertheless, considering that the “Zdenka” Variations were written during the young composer’s years of impressionability and acquisition of individual style, it is quite likely that the early romantic tendencies of his writing reflects the style of influential German and Czech romanticist composers.

### Variation 1

Andante Var. 1.

In Variation I, Janáček preserves the same structural and harmonic progression established in the theme. Using the most common means of creating variation, he simply develops the thematic melody using embellishments such as neighbor and escape tones. In the first measure, beat 2, the F natural in the soprano serves as a neighbor tone one; while the third occurrence of the same pitch (in the last sixteenth note of the first measure) is an escape tone. This type of neighbor tone/escape tone embellishment proceeds throughout the variation within each individual voice. Additionally, these voices are often repositioned precisely so that they may be embellished. For example, take the tenor and bass lines of m. 4: here the second quarter note B flat and sixteenth note D are displaced one octave lower than they occur in the theme, so as to allow for the arpeggiated motion in the tenor. This carries the voice linearly across the bar line. Another example is provided in the eighth measure. Here, the alto moves parallel to the soprano in 6ths; whereas, before in the theme, the alto simply held on the B flat, as it does in fourth measure of this variation:

M. 8:

Musical score for M. 8, showing a vocal line with fingerings 5 1 2 5 1 5 2 and a piano accompaniment.

Janacek's evolving tendency towards exact marking of articulation is in evidence as he provides staccatos for the eighth note subdivisions of the original quarter notes of the tenor, bass, and soprano, in m. 6-8:

Musical score for M. 6-8, showing a vocal line with fingerings 4 3 1 5 2 1 2 3 4 1 2 1 5 2 and a piano accompaniment.

In m. 9 Janacek fills out the original movement of thirds in the soprano, with stepwise-leading 16<sup>th</sup> notes. He creates a more homophonic texture by blocking the triadic harmony in the alto and tenor, rather than displacing it by an eighth note as in the original:

M. 9-10, original:

Musical score for M. 9-10, original, showing a vocal line and piano accompaniment.

M. 9-10, Variation 1:

Musical score for M. 9-10, Variation 1, showing a vocal line and piano accompaniment with *mf* marking.

This type of embellishment, subtle yet effective, is typical in the variation and proceeds throughout.



## Variation 2

Allegro

*f* *legato*

In Variation 2, the repeat of the first eight measures is written out, allowing for greater embellishment and activity throughout the variation. At the point of the expected repetition (m.8), the voices move two octaves higher; while in the following measure, the lowest (original bass) line is repositioned as the topmost voice:

M. 8-9:

*f* *p*

This flavor of variation technique, which employs constant subdivisions of the original eighth note melodic pattern, can be compared to that which occurs in Variation VII of Dvorak's Op. 36. While not identical in terms of character, Dvorak also uses a constant recurrence of subdivisions and accidentals to create more vigorous character:

16

**Var.VII.** *Più mosso.*

Likewise, Janacek's second variation contains a much more energetic quality that makes use of 16th note embellishments throughout. Modification of pitches using accidentals allows for increased use of neighbor tones and leading tones. This is apparent in the above example of the second variation. In m. 9, the C sharp neighbor tone leads back to D, which is the initial pitch of the piece as well as the dominant of G minor. The C natural in the same measure resolves downward to B flat. This voice leading provides the "other" tonic of the piece (B flat). Since voice-leading of this nature allows for juxtaposition of the two "tonics" (G minor in the first half of measure 9, and B flat in the second half) through the half-step modification of a single pitch, Janáček is able to effectively develop the sense of tonal ambiguity which runs throughout the work. He then creates variation on this tonal juxtaposition in its second occurrence by employing voice exchange and doubling the 16ths:

M. 9:

M. 13:

Finally, the variation closes in a rousing manner by invigorating the eighth note rhythm with accents in the bass, and doubling the soprano in octaves, while overall providing a more homophonic texture:

M. 21-24:

Variation 3

Unlike the previous two variations, the third variation departs dramatically from exact restatement of the theme by utilizing skeletal development and departing from a primarily polyphonic texture. The descending bass line in the first half of Variation 3 is a retrograde augmentation of the original ascending bass line motif from the first variation:

Variation 1, M. 1-2:

Next, the 32<sup>nd</sup> note subdivision of the soprano and alto, and later of the tenor, give the entire variation a light, lilting mood that deviates from the serious quality of the previous variation. The fragmentation of the soprano line allows for other ideas to take precedence. Following the repeat of the first section, the harmonic progression varies greatly from that of the B area of the original theme:

Variation 3, m. 9-16:

In the thirteenth measure of the variation Janáček emphasizes the harmony  $D^{\circ}$ , to which he adds the B natural in the fourteenth measure, and outlines a  $B^{07}$  harmony (see m. 15, b. 1). This, in turn, serves as a  $vii^{07}$ , verified by its resolution to C major (distantly related to G minor/B flat) in m. 15-16.

Later, in m. 21-24 of the variation, a region of transition brings back the  $B^{07}$  harmony, followed by a chromatic descent through  $G^{\circ}$ ,  $C^{\circ}$ , and  $F7$ . This resolves to B flat upon return of the original theme of the variation in m. 25:

M. 21-24:

M. 25:

Throughout this variation, Janáček combines unconventional sequencing of diminished harmonies with rhythmic and textural diversity previously unseen in this piece, in order to develop the tonal and textural content of the original theme. This allows for greater variety in the subsequent variations, as each, in turn, invites a greater amount of harmonic, rhythmic, and textural freedom.

#### Variation 4

#### Var. 4.

The fourth variation provides a charmingly rustic character. The soprano clearly sings the main melody throughout the first half, supported conventionally by the bass and tenor. Interest is created by dynamics, as well as by the diversity of subdivisions; i.e., the “flowery” 32<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> notes of the melody which embellish the essential melodic tones. In this aspect, one could say that this variation is a combination of a figural and character variation, The 32<sup>nd</sup> triplets, which

first occur in the 4<sup>th</sup> measure, mimic folk-dance patterns, which Janacek perhaps derived from native Moravian folk music:

M. 4:



In m. 5-6, the rolling of the bass chords on the offbeats seems to indicate an accompanimental instrument, perhaps the guitar. This is paired with accents in the melody, evoking a vigorous dance quality:

M. 5-6:

In the second half of the fourth variation, the bass and tenor take over the subdividing figurations, doubling them through the use of octaves at the dynamic level of *forte*. Also, the 64<sup>th</sup> notes of the LH vigorously project these linear motives towards to the second and fourth eighth notes of each measure. Since the RH contains accents on the chords, this more or less provides an equality of emphasis on all eighth notes, intensifying the rhythm and reinforcing the dance element:

M. 8-13:

Finally, in the last measure, Janacek returns to the use of polyphonic texture, which brilliantly provides transition to the highly polyphonic fifth variation:

M. 16:

## Variation 5

## Var. 5.

Meno mosso

*p* *cantabile*

*legato*

In variation five, Janáček displaces the opening D-G motive by one eighth note, and rivetingly places the pitch A flat on the initial downbeat. This immediately creates tonal ambiguity and a sense of mystery, contrasting greatly with the previous variation's simple dance quality. Janáček explores harmonies B<sup>07</sup> and/or G<sup>7</sup>, which both resolve to C major/minor, as evidenced in m. 1's resolution to the second half of m. 2, as well as in the resolution of m. 5 to m. 6 (C minor):

M. 1-2:

*p* *cantabile*

*legato*

M. 5-6:

*l.r.* *mf*

This tension between G and C minor is later recalled by the arpeggiated movement of the bass in measures 13-16 of this variation:



The circle of fifths (G-C-F-B flat) progression in m. 13 - 14 is conventional. What is unexpected, however, is the placement of emphasis on the G7 (V7/iv) chord/harmony so early in the work. This sudden usage of unexpected material jolts the listener to attention, and thereby enhancing Janacek's realist tendencies. Additionally, the interplay between the RH and LH throughout the variation is charmingly well-crafted:

M. 9-10:

While this variation may seem more harmonically ambiguous than some of the previous variations, the clarity of the voice-leading provides definition and contour to the variation, and prevents the unexpected harmonic changes from becoming overwhelming. These sudden changes of character allow for a certain immediacy and realism that by now has become a trademark of the composition as a whole.

## Variation 6

## Var. 6.

Adagio

*p* sempre molto legato e con Pedale

*P* *xP* *xP* *xP* *xP* simile

As the only variation marked *Adagio*, the sixth variation is in complete contrast to the five former. It has a sedate, grave character and a semi-chromatic bass line in LH octaves. Janáček takes the predominant rhythmic motive of the *second* half of the theme, in the soprano (eighth note followed by two sixteenths), and places this motive in the *first* half of this variation:

Theme, m. 9 motive:

Variation 6, m. 2:

e con Pedale

Other than the original so-to-do movement in the first measure of the soprano, the main melody of this variation, as well as the general harmonic progression, is substantially dissimilar from the theme. For example, in the second to third measures, the harmony emphasized is a movement from G minor to D minor via the C<sup>#</sup> chord:

M. 1-4:

This use of minor adds to the sombre, grave character already provided by the bass line and chorale-like texture. In the second half of this variation, the ponderous bass line is preserved, with the addition of thirds to the RH. This allows the second half to again take on a homophonic texture, as well as a yearning character, via the grouping of three RH eighth-note thirds together in the fashion of a sigh motive:

M. 9-12:

Again, significantly, throughout this variation, there is tonal ambiguity, which draws the listener in and conjures a sense of immediacy, or realism. The frequent usage of F sharp supports G minor, but the six occurrences of A flat destabilize G, and only fit the second “tonic,” B flat, as a flatted seventh degree. Most often, though, the A flat is used in the harmonic context of the  $B^{07}$  chord, which belongs neither to B flat major, nor to G minor; but rather as a  $vii^{07}$  of C. Conveniently, this C minor harmony then serves either as the  $iv$  of G minor or  $ii$  of B flat. Because C minor serves effectively in either tonality, the manipulation of the  $B^{07}$  chord preserves the ambiguity of tonality, especially when accompanied by texturally amebic part-writing.

## Variation 7

## Var. 7.

19. 2. 1886

The musical score for Variation 7 is presented in two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The time signature is 2/4. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 100. The music begins with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The right hand (RH) features a complex melodic line with many slurs and fingering numbers (e.g., 4 3, 2 1, 4 3 2, 1 3 5 4, 1 1 4, 4 4, 2 2, 1 3). The left hand (LH) provides a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and single notes, including markings like 3, 2 1, 14, and 5.

Variation 7 is the longest of the set due to the fact that it contains an extensive transition back to the main theme of the work. It is the most improvisatory and rhapsodic of the variations, particularly during the transition, which is stylistically evocative of impressionism. Janáček places the melody in the tenor line, while simultaneously develops a secondary theme in the soprano. As usual, there is movement of so-do in G minor in the LH theme. However, overlapping the first bar line, the RH sweeps upward in the displacement of two octaves of B flat. These ascending motives provide a convincing argument for the theory that the piece contains two tonal homes. Likewise, in measure 5, we have an even more convincing pairing of G minor and B flat major. At this point the two predominant linear textures have exchanged registers of the piano:

M. 5:

The musical score for Measure 5 shows a register exchange. The top staff, which was previously the bass clef, now has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with slurs and accents. The bottom staff, which was previously the treble clef, now has a bass clef and contains a rhythmic accompaniment with slurs and accents. The dynamic marking *mf* is present.

This activity alternates with three bars of linear, virtuosic part-writing in 32<sup>nd</sup> notes of either one hand or the other, preparing the rhythmic fluidity of the transition.

In the transition, which begins m. 18 and continues until Tempo I, the RH maintains the 32<sup>nd</sup> notes, accompanied by the LH chords:

Here, the harmonies are prolonged longer than we have seen previously in the piece. For example, m. 18-20 maintain B flat major, followed by two measures of G minor, and two measures of A<sup>7</sup>. Each of the following measures then

modulates through one tonal area per bar, passing through D major, D minor, F<sup>7</sup>, B flat (major/minor), C half-diminished<sup>7</sup>, F<sup>7</sup>, and finally a measure which should resolve to B flat.

However, rather than resolving directly to B flat in measure 32, Janáček ascends linearly *through* B flat, and continues on to D-G, which returns the work to the primary “tonic” of G minor:

M. 31-33:

During the ascent, Janacek adds the pitches G sharp and C sharp, which belong to neither of the tonal “homes.” In this way he never allows for one tonicization to become more significant than the other.

Finally, in m. 33, we return to the main theme and tempo; but this is not an exact repetition of the original thematic material. After the transition, Janáček thickens the texture by maintaining octaves in both hands in the following eight measures.

M. 42-46:

Musical score for measures 42-46. The score is written for piano and features a complex texture with octaves in both hands. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor). The time signature is 4/4. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* (piano) and *f* (forte). Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. A fermata is present over the final measure (m. 46).

Finally, by m. 50, final cadential movement has commenced, with a return of the 32<sup>nd</sup> notes from the retransition and the augmentation of the harmonic rhythm. In this way Janacek achieves synthetic closure of all elements of this final variation:

Musical score for measures 50-54. The score is written for piano and features a final cadential movement. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor). The time signature is 4/4. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* (piano), *f* (forte), *ff* (fortissimo), and *riten.* (ritardando). Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. A fermata is present over the final measure (m. 54).

The piece ends almost “overly-convincingly” in B flat, with the last reference to the tonicization of G being made in m. 48, ten measures prior to the end. While there is no perfect explanation for Janáček’s ultimate decision to resolve the piece to B flat, perhaps the reason for this lies in the fact that he had written this piece as a love-offering for his fiancée, Zdenka.<sup>14</sup> Janacek had not gained Zdenka’s hand easily due to parental dissatisfaction with the match and disparity of the couple’s years. Zdenka was Janacek’s fourteen-year old piano student, before she ever became his wife at the age of sixteen. Her German mother objected to the union of her daughter to a Czech native. The tension created between the traditionally “loving” key of B flat and more deeply sad key of G minor perhaps symbolizes the complicated nature of the couple’s courtship, as well as the state of Janacek’s mind during their separation while he attended the university in Leipzig briefly (from 1879-1880). For example, in one of the 169 letters the couple wrote to each other during this period, Janacek describes his emotional and mental tension:

My state of mind was dreadful; I had no idea it could be like that with me. (...) Was it homesickness? Dissatisfaction with my teachers? Yes, doubts have been thrown on my high and cherished hopes, and I therefore sank into a very depressed mood. And the more I became absorbed in such thoughts, the worse I felt, until my state of mind was unbearable. Against this, I put the picture of you and the thoughts of our future....I called out your name, and I prayed for the first time so that I could keep you in my spirit during these excited states of mind, as only in you I can draw the strength to master all this emotional turmoil....<sup>15</sup>

Regardless of Janacek’s true reasons for ending the “Zdenka” Variation on a triumphant note, the final ten measures convey a quality of satisfaction and pride that is perhaps result of

Janáček's having completed his first substantial composition, his "Opus 1," as well as having won the heart of the woman he loved.

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14. Mirka Zemanova, *Janáček: A Composer's Life* (Boston: Northeastern, 2002), 32-35.

15. Zemanova, *Janacek* (2002), 36.

## CONCLUSION

Janacek's *Tema con Variazioni* is foundational activity because, while it adheres to the bounds of the Romantic style, it serves to begin the development of Janacek's personal voice. The substitution of the minor vi harmony for tonic is certainly not atypical of tonal writing, and is especially common in the writing of folk music. However, the dual emphasis on the two tonal centricities of G minor and B flat throughout the work creates a sense of ambiguity regarding true tonic, and leads the listener to remain in the moment as he seeks to comprehend the work's true tonal home. This emphasis on two related keys provides the inherent interest of the piece. It anticipates Janacek's future style, in which he typically employs distantly or completely unrelated keys side-by-side, so as to disrupt conventional harmonic references. He achieves an ambiguity of tonality which is more typical of the Impressionist or Avant-Garde styles, rather than of Romanticism. The overall purpose of this compositional technique is to draw upon a dramatic sense of the present. The listener and performer are forced to embrace the moment in order to comprehend the work's dramaticism. This sense of presence projects the concept of realism, suggesting a world in which we never truly know the future.

To appreciate Janacek's music, the listener must maintain a curious mind which attempts to absorb the intricacies of Janacek's harmonic language and unique voice-leading devices. By examining the subtle nuances of Janacek's writing, the performer of his music may achieve



a depth of interpretation inaccessible without proper analysis. This study has sought to provide the beginnings of such an analysis.

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