

PROGRAM NOTES

Leoš Janáček – *Jealousy*

Leoš Janáček

Born July 3, 1854, Hochwald (Hukvaldy), Northern Moravia.

Died August 12, 1928, Moravska Ostravá, Czechoslovakia.

Jealousy

Jealousy offers us our earliest glance at the work of Leoš Janáček, music's most extraordinary late bloomer. Janáček completed his first major score at the age of fifty, attracted international attention at sixty-one, and entered the most prolific and adventuresome stage of his career as he neared his seventies. It is largely the works of his final years, mostly composed in the 1920s, which have given him a place among the important composers of his time.

Janáček was born in 1854, the year Liszt published his revolutionary B minor piano sonata and Wagner began *Die Walküre*. His contemporaries were Elgar, Humperdinck, Dvorák, Mahler, and Wolf—composers who all finished their careers before Janáček hit his stride. But artistically, Janáček doesn't belong to their generation. The period of his most significant and original work is the time of Berg, Ravel, Stravinsky, Bartók, and Schoenberg—younger composers forging a new language—and the era of such landmarks as Berg's *Wozzeck*, Stravinsky's *Les noces*, and Schoenberg's first twelve-tone pieces.

Jealousy began life as the overture to Janáček's opera *Jenůfa*, the work with which he found his voice and developed his personal harmonic and melodic style. He worked on the opera for nearly ten years beginning in 1894, and apparently the idea of opening with an overture was part of his plan from the start. He completed the score in 1903, the year he turned fifty, working at all hours in his study next to the room where his twenty-one-year-old daughter Olga lay on her deathbed. On February 22, Olga asked to hear *Jenůfa*, and Janáček sat down at the piano and played through the entire opera for her, no doubt beginning with the overture we now know as *Jealousy*. She died five days later. "I would bind *Jenůfa* with the black ribbon of the long illness, pain, and sighing of my daughter Olga," he later wrote. The work is dedicated to her memory.

Janáček apparently had second thoughts about the need for an overture, and when *Jenůfa* was premiered the following year in Brno, a provincial capital far from the centers of new music activity, the opera was staged without it. With a new

name, *Jealousy*, it soon entered the small but select company of concert overtures, beginning with a performance given by the Prague Philharmonic in 1906. When the complete vocal score of *Jenůfa* was published in 1908, the overture was omitted, and although Janáček considered adding it for the subsequent Prague premiere, he was advised against it.

A powerful, compact piece without obvious thematic ties to the opera, *Jealousy* has become known, if at all, as an independent composition. It shares some of the opera's explosive mood and underlying tension, but in the end Janáček may have realized that it was a musical companion to *Jenůfa* rather than an integral part of the theatrical work. It wasn't performed with the opera for which it was originally written until it was staged in Greiz, in the German Democratic Republic, in 1959—more than three decades after Janáček's death. But that was an anomaly, and *Jenůfa*, now considered a landmark of modern opera, is regularly presented without its overture.

Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

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