

Writing techniques in the 1st Movement (*Fanfare*) from Leoš Janáček's *Sinfonietta*

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Abstract: *Sinfonietta* is one of the most eloquent examples of the compositional mastery that Leoš Janáček had reached in 1926, when his art was finally acclaimed on a national and international level. The 1st movement, much like the entire work, illustrates as convincingly as possible the symbiosis between the musician's theoretical concepts and his orchestral writing. Presupposing that a researcher of this work does not know about Janáček's studies of harmony, rhythm and metre, (s)he would nevertheless observe in the score a few techniques and expressions inexistent with other composers. What the Czech musician succeeds in almost fully not only in the 1st movement but in the entire *Sinfonietta*, I would say in all his great compositions of his last years, is the way in which expression subjugates, transcends the techniques. Thus, Janáček reaches the nearly absolute simplicity to which any composer aspires, conveys a lot intensely with the help of long-perfected tools, which evince harmonic, melodic, rhythmic and metric layers.

Keywords: Janáček; study; layers; rhythm; metre;

• Introduction

If we regard Leoš Janáček's entire musical creation, the eighteen works dedicated to the orchestra (from JW² VI/1 from 1875 to JW VI/18 from 1926³) do not seem to have significance, which would differentiate them in relation to the other opuses. Should we compare them to the opera works, the latter appear to us much more brilliant. Thought out for the entire orchestral apparatus or only for strings, some of the works are inspired from traditional music, especially from the music of Czechs and Moravians but also from Russian, Cossack, Serbian folklore. Nevertheless, two of the opera influenced by folk traditions have for us, Romanians, special meaning, because they reflect the composer's links to the folklore of Romanian origin: *Valašské tance* JW VI/4 from 1889 and *Lašské tance* JW VI/17 from 1924. Inspired from literary creations, some of the orchestral works that Janáček wrote in his last compositional period prove a pragmatic orientation and here we can list: the ballad for orchestra *Šumařovo dítě* (*The fiddler's child*) JW VI/14 from 1913, after a poem by Svatopluk Čech⁴; the rhapsody for orchestra *Taras Bulba* (JW VI/15, composed in 1915 and revised in 1918, after the eponymous novel by Nikolai Gogol) and *Balada Blanická* (*The ballad of Blaník*, JW VI/16, probably from

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² The acronym comes from J(anáček) W(orks).

³ See Nigel Simeone, John Tyrrell, Alena Němcová, *Janáček Works, A catalogue of the music and the writings of Leoš Janáček*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997 and <https://www.leosjanacek.eu/en/orchestral/>, accessed on 9 February 2022.

⁴ Svatopluk Čech (1846-1908), a Czech writer, the author, among others, of the famous novels *Výlet pana Broučka do Měsíce* (*The true excursion of Mr. Brouček to the moon* – 1888) and *Výlet pana Broučka do XV. Století* (*The new epoch-making excursion of Mr. Brouček, this time to the fifteenth century* – 1889), after which Janáček wrote two of his opera works. See Nigel Simeone, *The Janáček compendium*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2019, p. 32.

1919, after a poem by Jaroslav Vrchlický⁵. Beyond diversity, the above list evinces a unifying matter, i. e. the influence of words.

Extracted either from literary works or from the speech of ordinary people from the countryside – transferred to their dances, more precisely to their rhythms –, or a prerogative of city folk, words have been Janáček's lifelong passion. He dedicated minute research to them, he formulated theories of a musical and linguistic nature, he “sipped” people and animals' voices, which he wanted to fix in his famous notebooks of daily notes under the form of those *nápěvky mluvy* (*speech melodies*). The Czech composer believed strongly that the musical notions of harmony, rhythm and metre are inseparable and had been kneaded by the voices of living beings, people, animals and birds at the same time. This is where the rhythmic freedom he assumed originates in, next to the ingeniousness of his metric notation, both constituting aspects of great importance in his works, which Janáček connected to a specific compositional technique, that of layers.

- **Objectives**

The goal of the present study is to research the connection that Janáček imagined between rhythm and metre and the way in which this is the base of the variational thinking in his last orchestral work, *Sinfonietta*, JW VI/18 from 1926. I equally wish to emphasize the layerings of rhythmic, metric and timbral nature, which the composer used in this phenomenal work.

- **Leoš Janáček's *Sinfonietta***

On first sight it can seem surprising that the musical genre of symphony is not among the ones that Janáček approached. Whoever does not know the particular features of the Czech musician's life and work cannot imagine the reason out of which he avoided this monumental, important genre, revelatory for any composer's creative capacities. It is likely that Janáček did not write any symphonies because he did not find himself between the limits of such a cerebral genre, influenced rather by thinking and technique than by feelings and experiences. Even some symphonies belonging to genius composers, like Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, then Schumann, Brahms and Tchaikovsky prove the above assertion. Moreover, when Janáček was reaching creative maturity the symphony was no longer among great contemporary composers' preoccupations, whose attention was focused on new means and techniques of compositional expression. Let us only think about the directions that Arnold Schoenberg and his disciples or Béla Bartók și Igor Stravinski headed towards. Maybe only George Enescu represents the contrary... In what regards Janáček, we will see below how tightly the content and the message of his orchestral work are related to the title of *Sinfonietta*, i. e. the small symphony.

- **The context of the appearance of the work**

A fruit of his Slavophile and Russophile attitude, Janáček's patriotism was manifested without reserve, firstly supporting the emancipation of the Kingdom of Bohemia, the Margraviate of Moravia, the Duchy of Upper and Lower Silesia and the territory comprising modern Slovakia in the Kingdom of Hungary from under Austro-Hungarian rule and, after the creation of the new republic of Czechoslovakia, through gestures of special pride and

⁵ Jaroslav Vrchlický (1853-1912), Czech poet Emil Frída's pseudonym, on whose lines Janáček compsed several works. Ibid., p. 239.

satisfaction towards this event. At the same time, the composer was also completely dedicated to the city of Brno, which he loved with devotion and passion. Musically, one of the most important proof of patriotism and Slavophile orientation is the collection and use of folklore in his works. But this streak is not the only one: “On 27 June 1924, Janáček went to an outdoor concert in Pisek with Kamila Stösslová. The music he heard in the park that day included fanfares played by four trumpeters, their ceremonial instruments draped in the flags of the Czechoslovak Republic. This sowed the seeds for an idea that later became the *Sinfonietta*”.⁶

From the same source we find out that the work was commissioned by the sportive-patriotic association “Sokol” (“The Falcon”) – Janáček had been co-opted as a member as early as 1876 – in order to mark the organisation of a great national event in the year 1926, so that the first name of the work was *Rally Sinfonietta*. “Janáček started the work on 2 March 1926 and had finished it a month later. The first performance took place in the Smetana Hall, Prague, on 26 June 1926. [...] Janáček often called the work ‘Military Sinfonietta’ [‘Vojenská Symfonieta’], and this is the title on the autograph manuscript and authorized copy. It no doubt refers to the military band inspiration, but also suggests that he envisaged the work as a kind of patriotic statement.”⁷ The name of the work was simplified in 1927, when it was published by Universal Edition Vienna with the short title *Sinfonietta*, dedicated to Rosa Newmarch⁸.

From the information above there results that, beyond the fact that the first audition took place within a hall, the work was dedicated to an event, which had been set to be carried out outdoors, which accounts for the impressive number of brass instruments and of cymbals. Very soon after the first public audition some performances in various festive contexts followed both in Prague and in Brno, which led to a few stipulations, of a temporary character, from the composer himself. The five movements evinced in the beginning only through tempo indications also received contextual names: “Janáček jotted down titles for the movements on his copy of the programme for the first performance: ‘I. Fanfares; II. The Castle; III. The Queen’s Monastery; IV. The Street; V. The Town Hall’. Apart from the first movement, all these titles refer to locations in Brno.”⁹ The reason out of which these names were renounced in the printed score was, of course, known to the composer and is probably explained by Jiří Zahradka¹⁰ in his study of 2017 dedicated to this wonderful symphonic work. Anyway, in order to be able to draw close to the profoundness of the score, contemporary conductors need to know all this information, whose not only historical importance should be transposed in an aesthetic message.

- **Janáček’s theoretical contributions**

Leoš Janáček’s name is not only tied to musical composition but also to the theoretical aspects of the act of sonic creation, which the musician approached in articles from the specialty press of the time. Very active, Janáček signed numerous statements, in which he expressed his theoretical opinions and, beyond registering and commenting upon artistic events he attended, he was writing especially about matters like speech and its influences on the musical notions of melody, harmony, rhythm and metre. I will list below a few theoretical contributions. A first study, entitled *O skladbě souzvukův a jejich spojův* (*On the composition of chords and their*

⁶ Nigel Simeone, op. cit., p. 200.

⁷ Loc. cit.

⁸ Rosa Newmarch (1857-1940), a British writer, the first person who supported and promoted Janáček’s music in the United Kingdom. See Nigel Simeone, op. cit., p. 159.

⁹ Ibid, p. 201.

¹⁰ Jiří Zahradka (b. 1970), a Czech musicologist, especially known for researching Leoš Janáček’s works. According to <https://www.mhflj.cz/doc-phdr-jiri-zahradka-ph-d/>, accessed on 10 February 2022.

connexions) appeared in 1896 and bears today catalogue number JW XV/151. Other theoretical articles appeared during the following years, the period 1906-1911 being especially prolific from a musicological point of view. In 1906 there appeared the study *Rozhraní mluvy a zpěvu* (*The border between speech and song* – JW XV/185), in 1907 *Moderní harmonická hudba* (*Modern harmonic music* – JW XV/190) and *Můj názor o sčasování (rytmu)* (*My opinion about rhythm* – JW XV/191), while in 1908 another study dedicated to rhythm saw the light of print, entitled *Z praktické části o sčasování (rytmu)* (*From the practical parts of rhythm* – JW XV/192) and, finally, *Nauka o harmonii* (*Harmony manual* – JW XV/202¹¹) from 1911.

Convinced by the importance and the influence of all these notions on the act of musical composition, Janáček was equally preoccupied with making the tools of his own creative laboratory known. “One of Janacek's most characteristic contributions to music theory involves his individual approach to rhythmic events, and their relationship to harmonic phenomena.”¹² In his quality as researcher of the sonic phenomena from the surrounding world, the Czech musician tries to impose the idea according to which harmony and rhythm influence each other both horizontally and vertically, which gives birth to veritable sonic layers, on the one hand indivisible, on the other hand interdependent, in which metre does not only play the neutral role of a framework but an especially active one. His statements are supported by numerous musical examples but unfortunately these do not always manage to clarify the discussed matters.

Thanks to intelligent technology, many of these articles can be consulted by today's researchers but these, depending on their nationality, come up against one or two great problems. Fellow countrymen of the author and privileged through the fact that they can also consult physical archives, Czech researchers only have difficulties in understanding and interpreting the message that Janáček wished to convey. For all the others, confronting the issue of translating from Czech into their own language renders the perception and transmission of ideas even more difficult.

And Janáček had many, novel, interesting ideas found at the confluence of music with linguistics and philosophy but which he expressed in a not altogether scientific language. Here is what Jarmil Burghauser writes in a study published in 1984, entitled *Hudební metrika v Janáčkově teoretickém díle* (*The musical metre in Janáček's theoretical works*): “Janáček's musical-theoretical work must be considered under the specificity of its completely distinctive character. It is not a work in the true sense of science but rather a wide riverbed of Janáček's reflections on the phenomena of musical composition. [...] Nevertheless, Janáček lacked several essential premises for a real scientific contribution, as a series of authors dealing with his theoretical work have stated: systematisation and even-handedness in thinking, the wish to produce precise, intelligible and logical expressions, the capacity to permeate all contexts and to use professional methods and techniques of scientific research”.¹³

Because theory is extracted from practice, let us see below how some of the phenomena described above appear in the score of Leoš Janáček's *Sinfonietta*.

¹¹ The title and the other pieces of information are taken over from the website <https://www.leosjanacek.eu/en/published/>, accessed on 10 February 2022.

¹² Michael Beckerman, *Janáček as Theorist*, Pendragon Press, Stuyvesant, NY, 1994, p. 81.

¹³ Jarmil Burghauser, *Hudební metrika v Janáčkově teoretickém díle*, Sborník Prací Filozofické Fakulty Brněnské Univerzity, Studia Minora Facultatis Philosophicae Universitatis Brunensis, H 19—20, 1984, p. 137. „Janáčkově hudebně teoretické dílo je nutno brát sub specie jeho zcela osobitého rázu. Není to dílo v pravém smyslu vědecké, nýbrž spíše široké řečiště Janáčkových reflexí o jevech hudební skladby. [...] Ke skutečné vědeckosti ovšem chybělo Janáčkově několik bytostných předpokladů, jak už konstatovala řada autorů, zabývajících se jeho teoretickým dílem: systematická a nezaujatost v myšlení, ochota k přesnému, srozumitelnému a logickému vyjádření, schopnost pronikat do všech souvislostí i užívat profesionálních metod a techniky vědeckého bádání.” Translated by Leonard Dumitriu with the help of electronic means of linguistic interpretation. According to https://digilib.phil.muni.cz/bitstream/handle/11222.digilib/112240/H_Musicologica_19-1984-1_19.pdf?sequence=1, accessed on 10 February 2022.

- **Compositional techniques of the 1st Movement from the *Sinfonietta***

The first of the five parts of the work – called *Fanfare* in one of the composer's notes, as we have seen above – presents a succession of nine variations of a theme. Naturally, this aspect alone does not have particular significance but a few other features of the opening movement impress both audiences and researchers. Whoever perceives this music only through their senses is charmed by the ample, massive and imposing sonorities of the cymbals and numerous brass instruments – the only instruments participating in the sonic discourse -, which convey a state of euphoria, pride, even patriotism. Refined listeners can also sense a subtle folkloric influence, appearing to come from an ancestral past, which together with the other stimuli creates a downright uplifting feeling.

No doubt that researchers are also captivated by the entire sonority of the first movement of the *Sinfonietta* but thanks to their musicians' experience they can also permeate the bends of its compositional concept. The orchestral apparatus has a distinctive note, made up of no less than thirteen brass instruments: nine trumpets in C, two tenor tubas in B flat and two bass trumpets, also in B flat. To them are added the cymbals, which play pairs of sounds tuned downright unusually¹⁴: G flat and E flat, B flat and G natural, A flat and F flat, G sharp and E, all from the small octave; then the pair D flat from the small octave with A flat from the great octave; there follow G flat with D flat, A flat with E flat and, finally, F with D flat, also sounds from the small octave.

If we list them all from low to acute, we observe a scale of nine sounds, whose extremes are found at an interval of ninth, with just a single one, A flat, repeated at an octave. Although the aspect of the scale is a preponderantly chromatic one, the character of the music is a predominantly diatonic one with modal touches.



Fig. 1. *The scale of the sounds played by the cymbals in the first movement*

The compositional procedure, which Janáček handles here with special mastery is the one of layers, grouped in more or less obvious ways. Even at a cursory look at the score, the vertical layering is more than visible. In the exposition of the theme two such layers are remarked: one of the tenor tubas, in half notes – which also makes up the theme –, the other one of the bass trumpets and cymbals.¹⁵

¹⁴ The order of the pairs is that of their appearance in the score.

¹⁵ The examples are inserted after the score published by PHILARMONIA PARTITUREN in der UNIVERSAL EDITION, WIEN – LONDON, 1927, taken over from [https://imslp.org/wiki/Sinfonietta_\(Janáček,_Leoš\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Sinfonietta_(Janáček,_Leoš)).

THEME

Allegretto (♩ = 72) Layer 1

Tube tenori 1.2 in Bb

Trombe basse 1.2 in Bb

Timpani

f a2 f f Layer 2

Fig. 2. *The exposition of the theme and the two layers*

A very careful analysis of the example above reveals a further couple of layers – which target the melodic and harmonic aspects of the intervals – represented by techniques such as fifth parallelism and the juxtaposition of thirds.

THEME

Allegretto (♩ = 72) Layer 2 Layer 2 Layer 2

Tube tenori 1.2 in Bb

Trombe basse 1.2 in Bb

Timpani

f a2 f f Layer 2 Layer 2 Layer 2

Fig. 3. *Intervallic layers*

In these first seven bars, rhythm and metre are elements of overwhelming importance. If to these we associate notions like pulsation and the expression links of the sounds, then the same music unearths further extremely interesting matters, also found in the sphere of layers. First we see that the pulsation is that of half note, therefore metre can be rewritten not with the time unit of crotchet but with the time unit of the half note. Corroborated with the expression links, this mode of thinking transforms metre from homogenous (2/4) into heterogenous (3/2 and 4/2). Subsidiarily, a layer of the values of half note and a layer of smaller values of crotchet and quaver are also observed here.

3 THEME 4

2 $\text{♩} = 72$ **2**

Fig. 4. *Layers of rhythmic values*

The layerings also continue in the variations, beginning as early as the first one, where next to the previous layers, which are simply repeated, a new melodic-rhythmic layer is added, found in a polyphonically imitative dialogue with another. The fact that this itinerary is played by nine trumpets in unison renders the sonority a solemn, bewildering character.

3 VAR I 4

2 Allegretto ($\text{♩} = 72$) **2**

Fig. 5 *Layers in the 1st Variation and imitative dialogue*

Although in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th variations the compositional procedures are the same, Janáček adds new melodic-rhythmic layers, originating in the separation in groups of three of

the nine trumpets and, even though he keeps the voice of the tenor tubas, he modifies the structure of the theme. We observe rhythmic processing through the counterpoint procedure of value diminution and melodic processing given by the fragmentation of the groups of parallel fifths and even the disappearance of one of them. Both from an aural and a visual point of view, our feeling is that the same sonic dough, permanently kneaded, dons the cloak of diversity.

A welcome dynamization of the discourse can be observed beginning with the 5th variation, where the mention appears in the score that the time unit is the dotted half note, while the metronomic value remains the same as before, i. e. 72. This transformation gives the composer the opportunity of a metre change from 2/4 in 3/4 and the pulsation becomes now that of crotchet, the concrete result being a feeling of the rushing of the tempo.

VAR V
Allegro (♩. = 72)

The musical score for Variation V is presented in six staves. The top three staves are for trumpets (1.2.3. Trp. in C, 4.5.6. Trp. in C, and 7.8.9. Trp. in C). The bottom three staves are for tenor tuba (1.2. Tenor Tuba in B \flat), bass trumpet (1.2. Bass Trp. in B \flat), and timpani. The time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Allegro' with a metronomic value of 72 (♩. = 72). The score includes dynamic markings such as 'f' (forte) and 'sf' (sforzando). The music features a mix of rhythmic patterns, including dotted half notes and eighth notes, with some parts marked with a '7' indicating a triplet.

Fig. 6 *The dynamization of discourse*

From here to the end of the first movement the sonic dough continues to be kneaded, with a change in the composer's attention from the uninterrupted technique of layers to the technique of the relentless change of rhythms and of the metric system, the latter being one of the most personal characteristics of Janáček's style. The 7th variation brings again the time signature of 2/4 and the half note as a unit in the same metronomic indication, 72. The extraordinary happening now is the combination of two pulsations, a rhythmic and a metric one. My statement can seem surprising, because, usually, the time unit plays the role of the metric pulsation, noted here as crotchet. Nevertheless, in this variation the metre unit, that is to say the metric pulsation becomes the half note again, along the metric scheme of 2/2, while from a rhythmical point of view the pulsation of quaver triplet makes up a continuum. The internal, i. e. rhythmic combustion of the music is brilliantly rich, while the metric one tries to assume the role of girdle that the rhythm needs. Towards the end of the 7th variation, the series of quaver triplets ceases and is replaced by a counterpoint rhythm, and the 8th variation

reintroduces the heterogenous real metre, i. e. 2/2, 2/2 and 3/2, while the written metre remains 2/4.

The ending, the 9th variation, crowns the sonority in apothetic fashion and, as far as writing is concerned, gathers together all the techniques up to then. Finally, Janáček ends up by noting the 3/2 time signature, in which the time and pulsation units are identical, i. e. the half note. The nine trumpets make up three layers, two of them found permanently in a dialogue, while the theme is reduced to a single harmonic fifth, which seems to be euphorically repeated, and the bass trumpets and the cymbals play isorhythmically a melodic-rhythmic motif in a mirror with a grandiose sonic effect. It is a triumph of humanity, an outburst of positive energies, an explosion of light and enthusiasm.

Var IX

The musical score for Var IX consists of six staves. The top three staves are for trumpets (1.2.3., 4.5.6., and 7.8.9. Trp. in C), the fourth for Tenor Tuba (1.2. in Bb), the fifth for Bass Trumpet (1.2. in Bb), and the sixth for Timpani. The score shows a complex rhythmic structure with various note values and rests, including dynamic markings like *sf* and *ff*. The time signature is 2/4.

Fig. 7. Apotheosis (the first four bars)

• Conclusions

The symbiosis between Janáček's theories about the various elements of musical construction and their application in his compositional endeavor is a matter found nowadays under serious debate. In my analytical endeavor I have tried to succinctly present with arguments a few aspects that prove the link between the Czech musician's theories and compositional practices, stressing the theory of the layers of sonic pitches and its extension towards rhythm and metre. Because of the lack of space, out of this universe I have only selected the first movement of the *Sinfonietta*, a nowadays very well-known and appreciated orchestral work, found in the repertoire of the greatest ensembles and the most renowned conductors. I have observed that the musical material is made up, on the one hand, of only a few sounds and timbres, on the other hand of few rhythmic formulas and metric patterns. I have also seen the very ingenious modes, in which all these musical elements are combined and how Janáček decisively capitalizes on their expressive possibilities, thus reaching layered sonic complexity. I have also remarked that the mere form of a theme with variations can don the cloak of

exuberant, bright modernity, at the same time the way in which century-old techniques from the sphere of imitative polyphony adapt to a compositional concept coagulated around the idea of layering.

We can compare this theory and practice of Janáček with the indeterminacy cultivated by Schoenberg, especially with regard to “enrolling” some musical notions within a planned, cerebral system. But the similarities stop at this, because indeterminacy is immutable, while the layers leave room for inventiveness. Beyond the writing manners, the categorical difference between one constructive concept and the other is the sonic result, quite blunt with the Viennese composer, laden with the Czech one with intense musical poetry. This is the difference between a troubled, captive and insecure ethos faced with a serene, winged and free one.

I hope that my study guide Romanian musicologists’ attention towards a source of research, which, out of various reasons, they have explored too little until now. Once initiated, I further hope that this way contribute to better and wider knowledge in Romania of the creative and cerebral inheritance of one of the most important musicians of the 20th century, Leoš Janáček.

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