Writing Techniques in the 4th Movement of Leoš Janáček's *Sinfonietta*

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Abstract: *Following my initial study in 2022[2], which focused on the introductory section, Fanfare, of Leoš Janáček's Sinfonietta and was published in that year's issue of the ICC, my in-depth examination of the Czech composer's work continued in 2023 and 2024 with analyses of Part II[3], The Castle, and Part III[4], The Queens's Monastery. As of early 2025, my research turns to Part IV of this remarkable composition, The Street. In addition to exploring Janáček's compositional approach, I will extend the imaginative exercise initiated in previous studies, drawing upon his article Moje město (My Town), published in the Brno newspaper Lidové noviny on December 24, 1927 (JW XV/298[5]).*

Keywords: *Janáček; form; variations; expression; imagination; Brno;*

Introduction

The scholarly investigation of one of the most significant symphonic works of the first half of the 20th century, now advancing with the analysis of Part IV, *The Street*, has been confronted with two fundamental challenges. First, my research aligns with a comprehensive study, essentially a preface to the score published by Universal Edition in Vienna[6], where the esteemed Czech scholar Jiří Zahrádka provides a detailed contextual framework for Leoš Janáček's composition. In addition to examining the circumstances in which the work was written, Zahrádka also discusses modifications introduced in the initial version by conductors, such as Václav Talich and Otto Klemperer. Although his preface does not explicitly focus on formal analysis, any attempt to examine the score necessitates a thorough, if not exhaustive, understanding of the stylistic characteristics of Janáček's late works, an area in which Jiří Zahrádka's expertise remains unparalleled.

Secondly, while the score and its analysis serve as a fundamental reference point in this study, my approach extends beyond purely structural examination. My objective is to convey, albeit subjectively, the emotions, sensations, and experiential depth that the music of the brilliant

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[2] Leonard Dumitriu. 2022. „Writing techniques in the 1st Movement (Fanfare) from Leoš Janáček's Sinfonietta". *Education, Research, Creation, periodical of the Faculty of Arts of the University «Ovidius» from Constanța, Romania;* Vol. 8 (1): 95-104.
[3] Leonard Dumitriu. 2023. „Writing techniques in the second movement of Leoš Janáček's Sinfonietta". *Education, Research, Creation, periodical of the Faculty of Arts of the University «Ovidius» from Constanța, Romania*; Vol. 9 (1): 61-81.
[4] Leonard Dumitriu. 2024. „Writing techniques in the 3rd movement of Leoš Janáček's Sinfonietta". *Education, Research, Creation, periodical of the Faculty of Arts of the University «Ovidius» from Constanța, Romania*; Vol. 9 (1): 79-99.
[5] See Nigel Simeone, John Tyrrell, Alena Němcová. 1997. *Janáček's works, A catalogue of the music and writings of Leoš Janáček*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 427.
[6] See https://www.universaledition.com/en/Works/Sinfonietta/P0066155.

Czech composer evokes in the listener. This brings me to a second key point of reference: Leoš Janáček's own perspective, as articulated in his article *Moje město* (*My Town*).

Accordingly, this article will follow two distinct directions: an objective analysis, centered on specific compositional techniques present in the score, and a more subjective exploration, in which my interpretation will be enriched by the essence of the composer's own words.

1. The Objective Approach to Analysis

In the pursuit of an objective analysis of the fourth part of Leoš Janáček's *Sinfonietta*, I will begin by examining the overall structure of the musical composition. To discern the compositional ideas, the seasoned researcher need not rely on listening alone, as the theme and variations form is immediately evident upon a careful review of the score. As a whole, the musical structure presents a theme, followed by 14 subsequent variations, culminating in a coda. Delving into the specifics, a thorough objective analysis of the components of the work reveals distinctive elements of the composer's musical thinking.

The theme is introduced as follows:

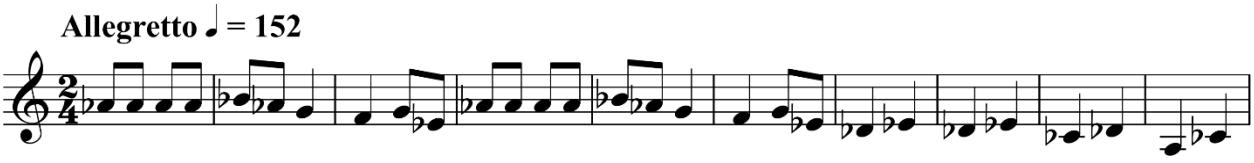


Fig. 1. *The theme*

This musical structure unveils several certainties:

- The identification of three melodic-rhythmic segments, as demonstrated in the figure below:

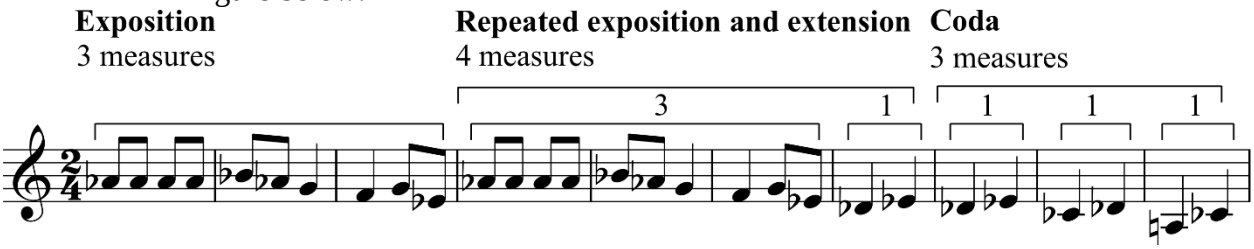


Fig. 2. *The melodic-rhythmic segments of the theme, as delineated*

- structure based on repetition:
  - of a sound (A flat);
  - of an interval (major second, with measures 8-10 representing descending sequences from measure 7);
  - of a motif (measures 4-6 as a repetition of measures 1-3);
- the nearly absolute predominance of stepwise motion (leaps are exceedingly rare and occur at close melodic intervals);
- the playfulness of the arithmetic operation of addition:
  - the digits 3 and 1, with 4 as their sum, in relation to the measures;

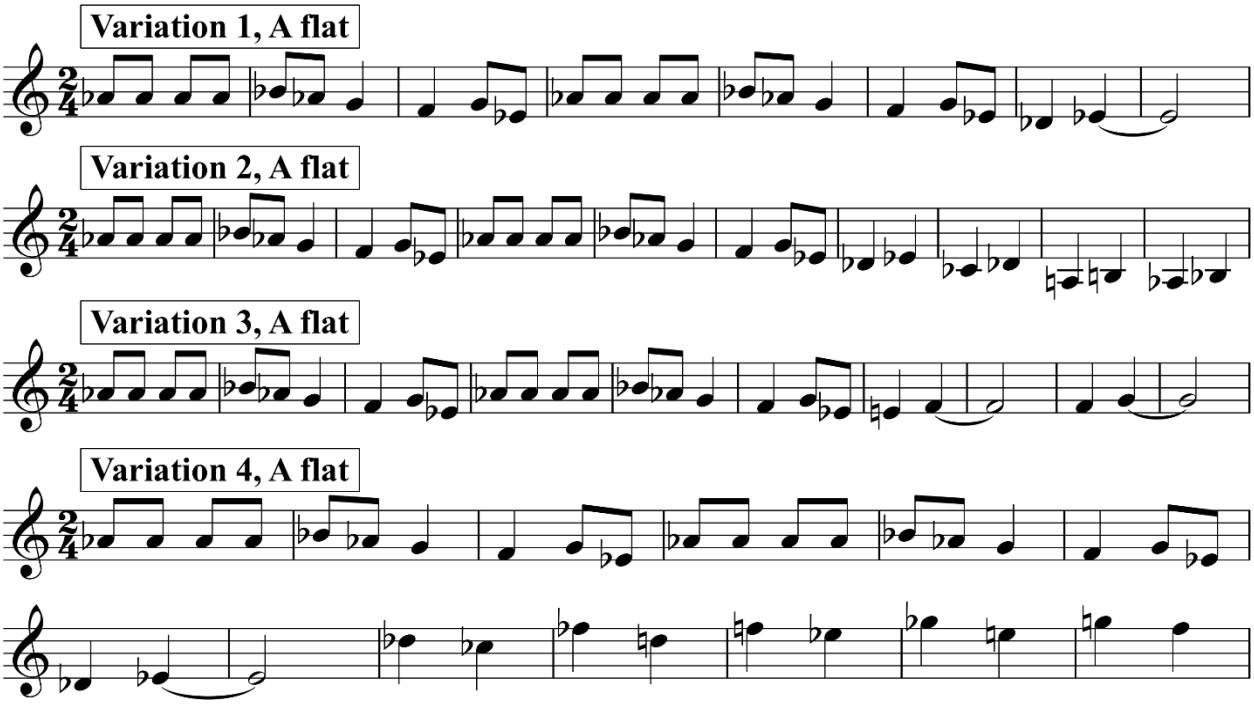
- starting from 1 (the prime interval), with the addition 1 + 1 = 2 (the second), 1 + 2 = 3 (the third), and 1 + 3 = 4 (the fourth), in relation to the intervals present in the theme.

The objectivity of the arguments presented above is indisputable. However, it raises a fundamental question: what is the source of the composer's melodic-rhythmic inspiration? The interest in uncovering these sources is entirely justified, as the sound of the theme evokes both folk dance and the naïve songs from children's games. Nonetheless, the answers to this question require a somewhat speculative assumption, given that Janáček was a passionate collector of folk music and a highly perceptive observer of spoken language and human behaviour across all ages, a quality he diligently documented over several decades in his notebooks. In truth, both explanations are equally plausible, and selecting only one of them would constitute a research topic in its own right, which exceeds the scope of the present study.

Similar to the theme, the variations also provide space for specific observations, for which the score itself is instrumental in their formulation. In the examples below, three key issues will be addressed:

- from the orchestral ensemble, I have extracted only the staff that contains the theme;
- I have indicated the note from which each repetition of the theme begins;
- I have excluded Variation no. 11 and the coda, both of which will be discussed separately.

I urge the readers to first familiarize themselves with the musical fragments, as this will provide insight into the rationale behind my approach.



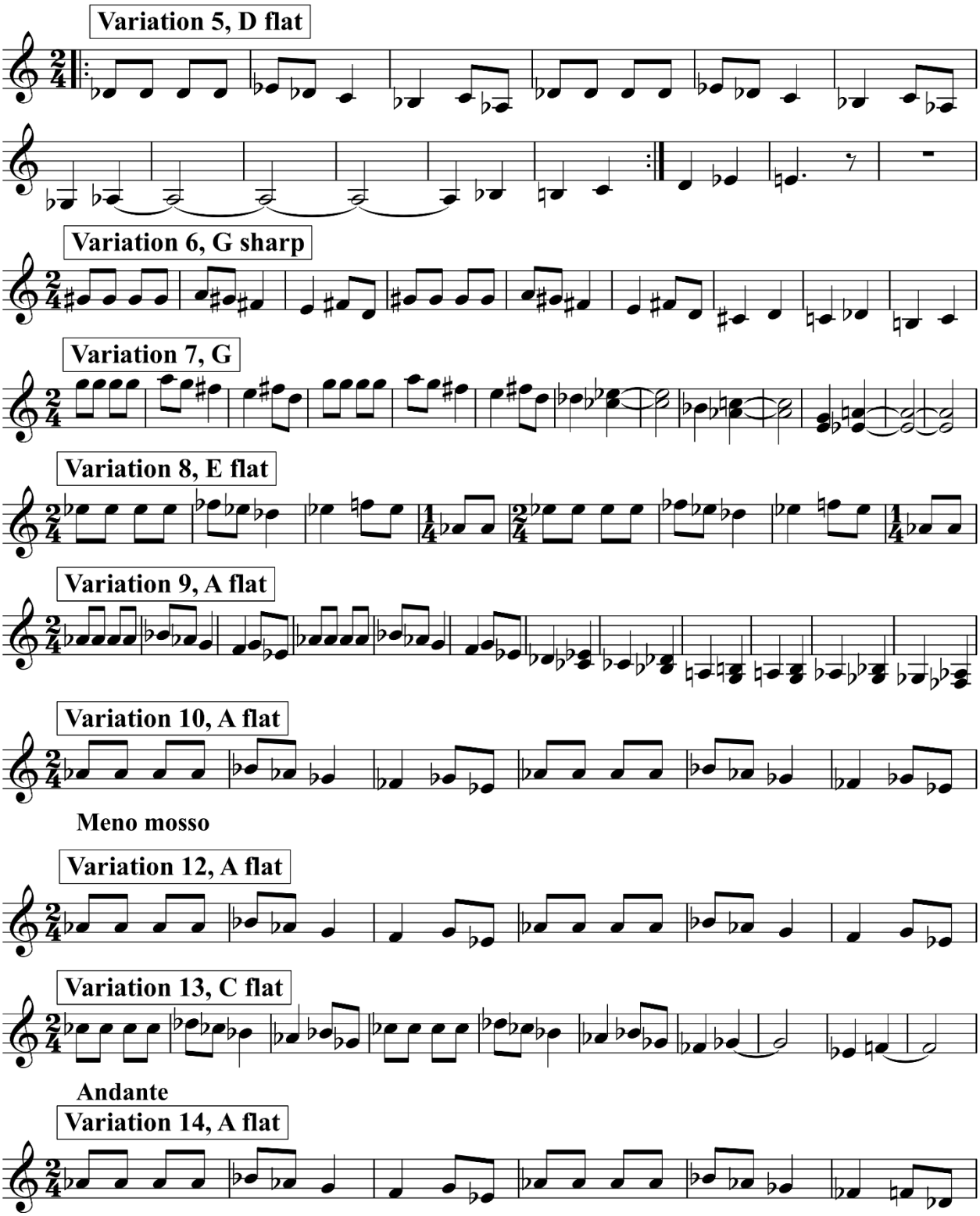


Fig. 3. *Variations 1-10, 12-14*

A primary and significant aspect highlighted by the aforementioned fragments is that the variations are, in fact, faithful repetitions of the theme. No fewer than nine times, they begin with the same note:

- Eight times, they begin with A flat (variations 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 12, and 14);
- Once, they begin on the enharmonic equivalent of G sharp (variation 6).

In other instances, the starting notes are as follows:

- D flat (variation 5);
- G (variation 7);
- E flat (variation 8);
- C flat (variation 13).

The repetitions are nearly identical in terms of intervals, with the major second occasionally substituting the minor second and a change in direction. Throughout, the theme remains easily recognizable; it undergoes no significant transformation, with the rhythm, sound colours, and even the dynamics remaining almost entirely consistent.

These findings substantiate the argument that the variation technique does not conform to the thematic development characteristic of Classical-era theme and variations. Instead, it exhibits a closer affinity with the Baroque passacaglia, distinguished by the fact that the theme does not occupy the lower register of the musical discourse. In the section dedicated to the subjective dimension of analysis, readers will discern that this assertion extends beyond a mere stylistic classification, serving as the conceptual foundation for an exposition of ideas that is both unconventional and, nevertheless, theoretically substantiated.

Returning to the objective framework of analysis, I have previously established that, with each repetition, the theme undergoes subtle modifications. To identify these variations and to assess the ingenuity and structural economy of Janáček's approach, I will first reexamine the theme. However, rather than interpreting its construction through the lens of melodic-rhythmic juxtaposition, I will examine it from the perspective of its metric organization. From this standpoint, the theme consists of the juxtaposition of two distinct segments: a six-measure fixed segment and a four-measure variable segment.

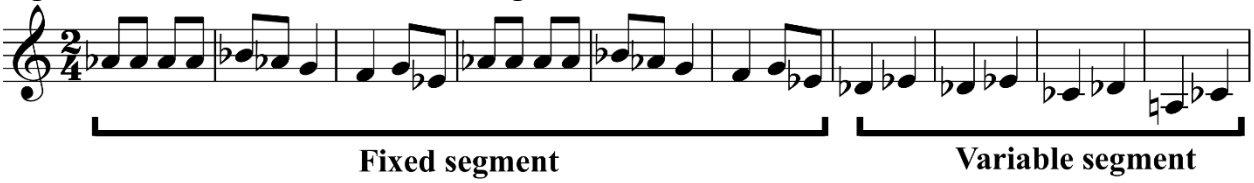


Fig. 4. *The thematic segments examined from the perspective of their metric structure*

The fixed segment represents a unifying characteristic of variation groups 1–7, 9–10, and 12-14. The fluctuations observed in the variable segment are as follows:

- Variation 1: two measures;

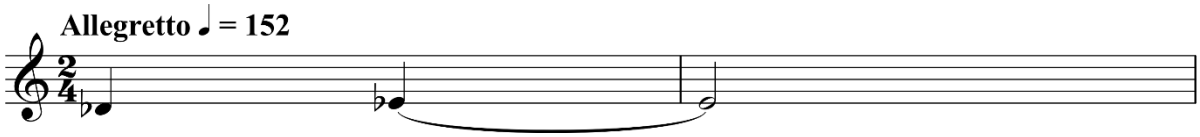


Fig. 5. *Variation 1, variable segment*

- Variation 2: four measures;

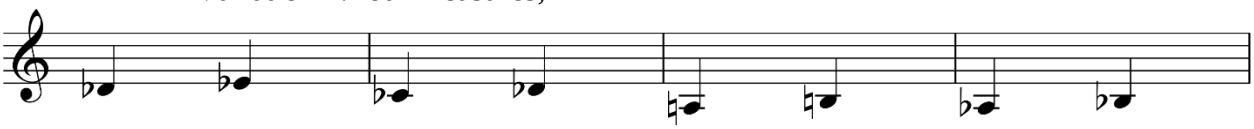


Fig. 6. *Variation 2, variable segment*

- Variation 3: four measures;

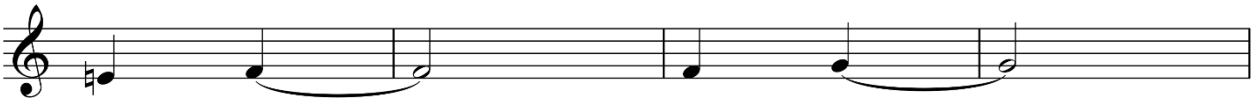


Fig. 7. *Variation 3, variable segment*

- Variation 4: seven measures;

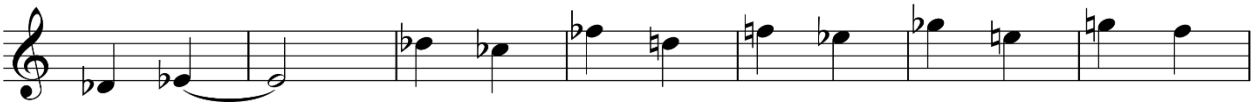


Fig. 8. *Variation 4, variable segment*

- Variation 5: eight measures;

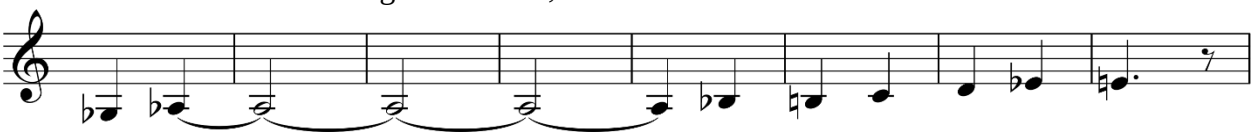


Fig. 9. *Variation 5, variable segment*

- Variation 6: three measures;

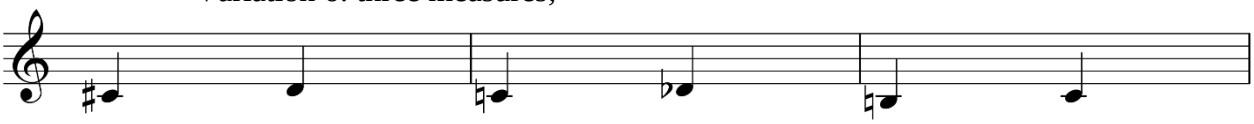


Fig. 10. *Variation 6, variable segment*

- Variation 7: seven measures;

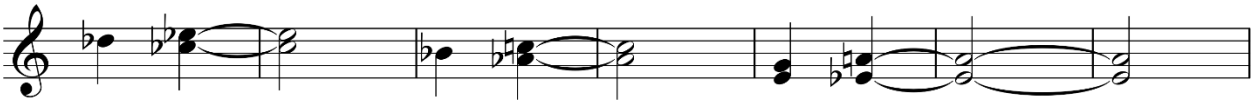


Fig. 11. *Variation 7, variable segment*

- Variation 9: six measures;

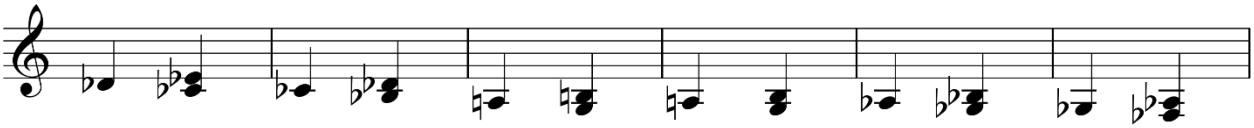


Fig. 12. *Variation 9, variable segment*

- Variation 10: The variable segment undergoes transformation (the specific manner of which will be examined);

- Variation 12: The variable segment is entirely omitted;
- Variation 13: four measures;

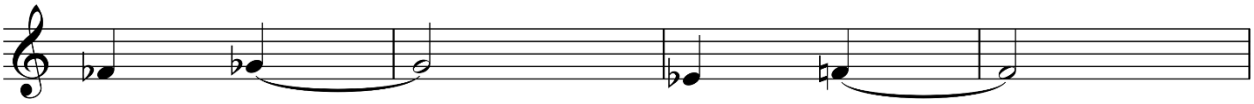


Fig. 13. *Variation 13, variable segment*

- Variation 14: The variable segment undergoes transformation (the specific manner of which will be examined).

The foregoing examples clearly demonstrate that the process of variation is principally confined to the techniques of repetition and sequencing, specifically in relation to the melodic interval of the second and the rhythmic configuration of paired quarter notes, both ascending and descending. At the same time, the evident economy of resources is inversely proportional to the sonic diversity achieved, a salient feature that, in fact, pervades all of the works composed in the later years of the distinguished Czech composer's life.

It is likely that the reader has already observed that, up to this point, we have deliberately postponed the discussion of three specific moments from the fourth movement of the *Sinfonietta*. However, the reasons for this deferral will soon become apparent. I will commence with Variation No. 8, the sole variation in which the rhythm undergoes a transformation that is both fleeting and radical in nature. The binary rhythmic progression is interrupted by a syncopated beat, a clear indication of the *aksak* rhythm, which Janáček encountered during his ethnographic fieldwork in Moravia and Slovakia. In the following figure, the reduction of the entire sound framework to rhythm alone in Variation No. 8 is thereby fully justified, revealing Janáček's use of meter in a schematic, visual capacity, an approach particularly comprehensible to those grounded in the Western European musical tradition.

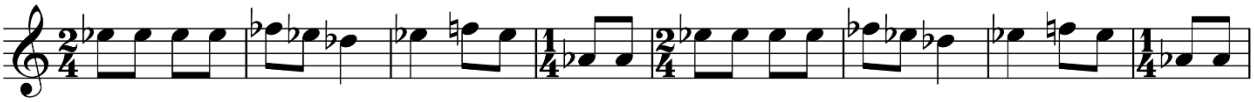
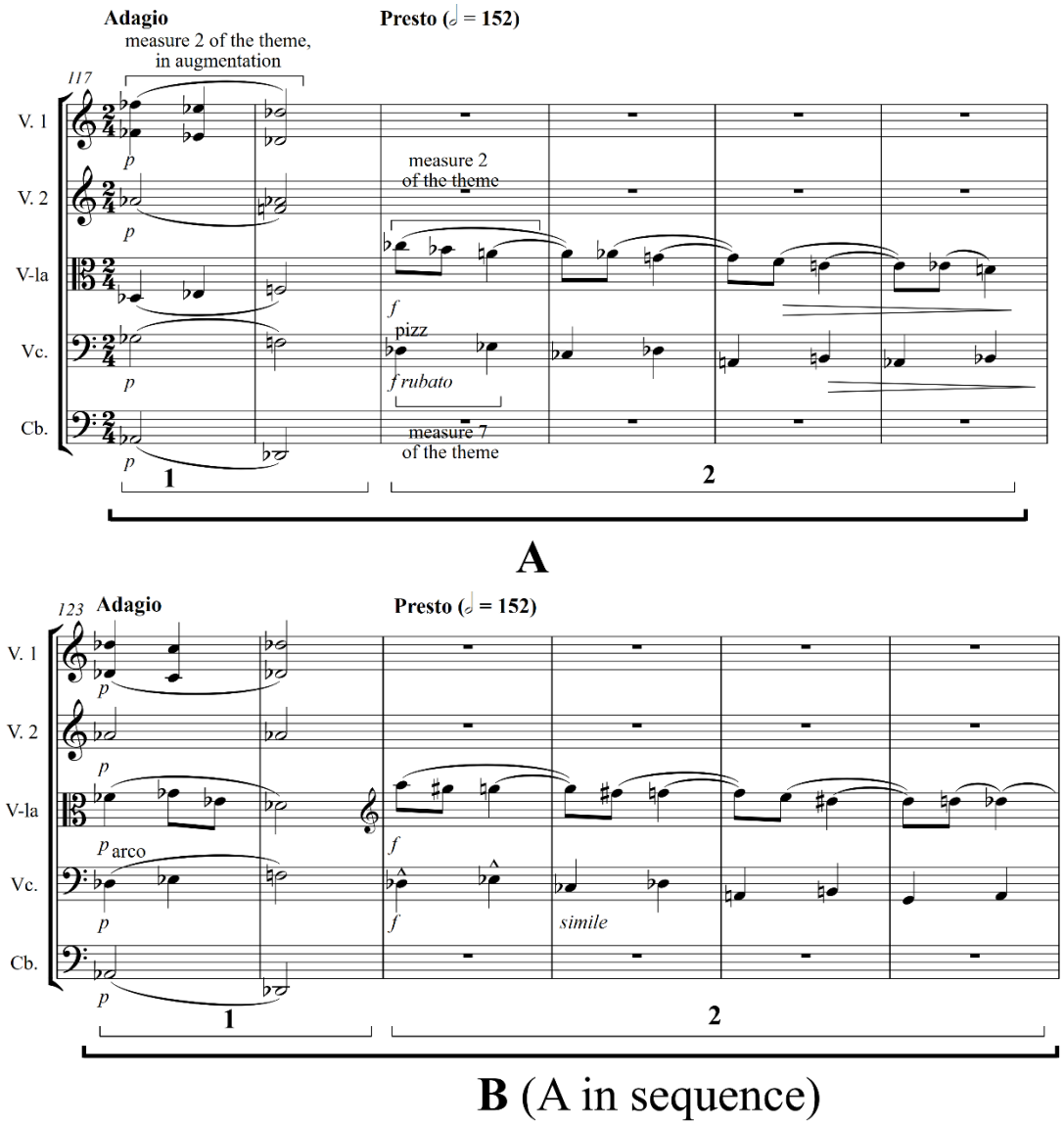


Fig. 14. *Aksak rhythm*

The second fragment, which has been intentionally deferred in the preceding analysis, is situated between measures 117 and 134. The structural composition of this passage, in conjunction with the tempi specified by the composer, presents a considerable challenge to both the researcher's theoretical framework and intuitive judgment. While the theme has been persistently present, almost obsessively, throughout the preceding sections, here it appears to be absent, and the musical tempo undergoes a sudden and marked deceleration. These two factors might lead one to conclude that we are confronted with a distinct segment within the fourth movement of the *Sinfonietta*, one that ought to be excluded from the variations and instead considered as an interlude or as the central section of a tripartite form. However, I contend that this interpretation is flawed, and I shall substantiate my position by demonstrating that measures 117-134 represent, in fact, another variation, specifically No. 11.

The entirety of the musical composition is constructed upon the technique of sequencing, which pertains to melody, and is further shaped by rhythmic processes such as repetition, augmentation, and diminishment, all of which fall under the umbrella of melodic-rhythmic variation. The composer begins with the second measure of the theme, characterized by the movement of seconds, which, in the Adagio section, is subjected to rhythmic augmentation and later revisited in Presto. While the sounds diverge from those in the theme, and occasional interplay between major and minor seconds occurs, the thematic affiliation remains evident, particularly as the same structural approach—sequencing—persists. From the perspective of melody (horizontal progression), this is readily apparent, while harmonically (vertical progression), Janáček intertwines measure 2 with measure 7 (the extension), both derived from the theme. The string path, as demonstrated below, elucidates the preceding observations, thereby justifying the exclusion of the wind instruments, which merely serve a doubling function.



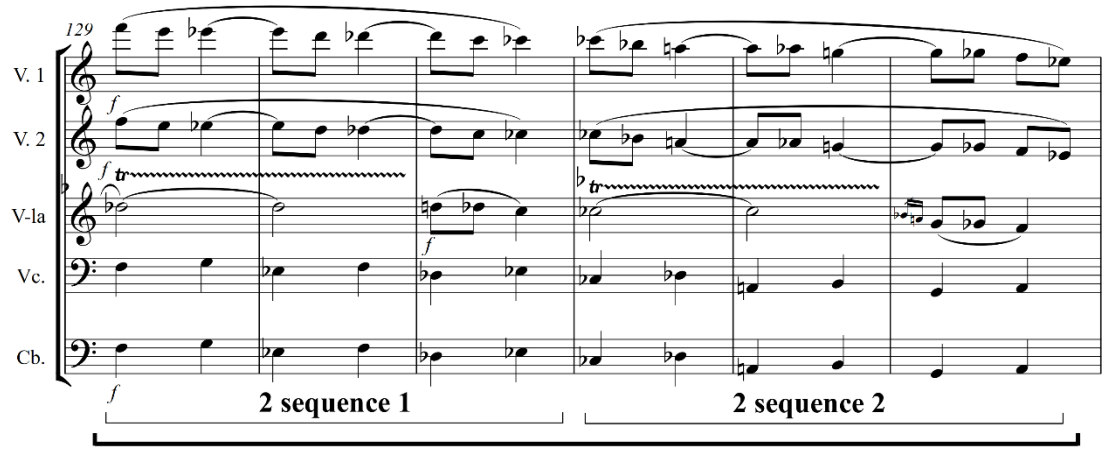


Fig. 15. *Variation No. 11, strings*

The sound produced is reminiscent of a character variation, which, upon a first hearing, may appear to diverge from the theme. However, a closer examination of the score affirms the validity of the interpretations I have previously presented.

It is now fitting to address the passage between measures 157 and 167, the final segment of the fourth movement of Leoš Janáček's *Sinfonietta*. The composer designates both the purpose and sonority of this passage through the deployment of a coda, which is divided into two distinct segments, differing in tempo and measure count, yet united in their intonational qualities. Specifically, segment 1 consists of four measures in the Presto tempo, while segment 2 spans seven measures in Prestissimo. The musical content of both segments is identical, with the second segment serving as a transposed sequence of the first, transposed a perfect fifth upward and extended by three additional measures. While it may initially appear that the composer has omitted the variable segment of Variation No. 14, closer scrutiny reveals that he has, in fact, transformed it into the Coda, utilizing the technique of rhythmic diminution. To clarify this further, I will present below the uninterrupted progression of Variation No. 14 (measures 151-156) alongside the Coda (measures 157-167), reduced to three wind instrument parts: oboes, clarinets, and horns. Let us now observe:

- The sequence of tempos, highly appropriate for a conclusion;
- The theme of Variation No. 14, entrusted to the clarinets, is presented solely with the fixed segment, while the variable segment, introduced by the horns, undergoes rhythmic diminution and serves as the opening of the Coda;
- Measures 161-164 represent a direct sequencing of the upper fifth from measures 157-160.

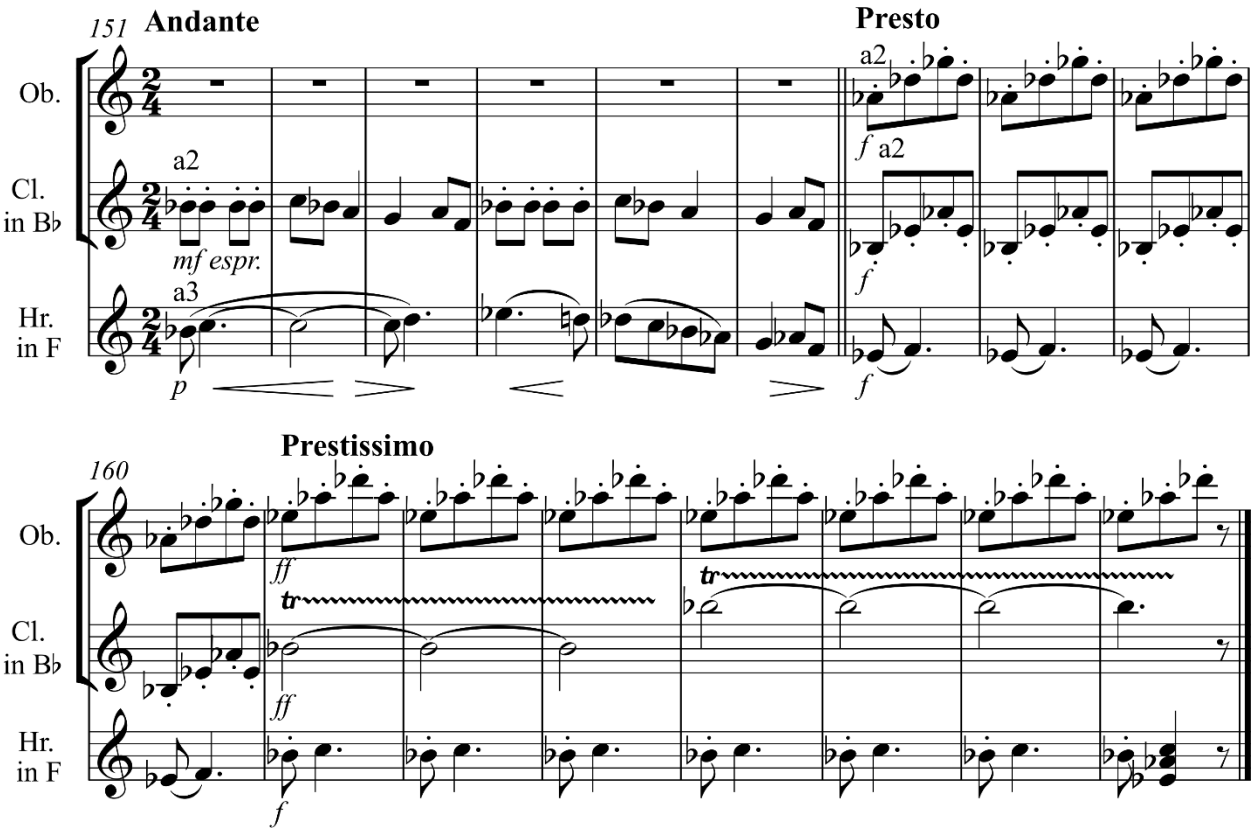


Fig. 16. *Variation 14 and Coda*

At the conclusion of the objective phase of the analysis, I bring the reader's attention once more to the compositional economy—an austerity that borders on maximalism—demonstrated by Leoš Janáček in this section. It is only through this lens that we can properly categorize the repetition and sequencing of an exceptionally simple sonic material, drawn by the composer from folklore or children's games. On the other hand, it is remarkable how, with only these few and fundamental tools, Janáček constructs an interesting, convincing, and expressive sonic structure. Everything I have discussed so far can be observed in the score, and my text may appear to be aimed exclusively at researchers, while offering other musicians and non-specialists a dry, technical, and emotionally detached reading. It is precisely from this last characteristic of Janáček's music—its suggestiveness and emotional resonance—that I will transition into the subjective direction of my analysis, one which I hope will be accessible and enjoyable to all readers.

2. The Subjective Approach to Analysis

In addition to the evocative quality of the music within the symphonic work, the subjective direction of the analysis is also informed by a literary text by Leoš Janáček, namely his article *Moje město* (*My Town*, JW XV/298), published on December 24, 1927, in the daily newspaper *Lidové noviny*. It is well established that there is no direct connection between the newspaper

article and the musical composition, and that Janáček's assignment of subtitles to the five movements of *Sinfonietta* was, to some extent, arbitrary[7]. Nevertheless, it seems undeniable that the composer's sentiments toward Brno—the city that embraced him and where he resided from his adolescence until his death—were not a transient outpouring, but rather a culmination of experiences, emotions, and reflections accumulated over the course of his life. Consequently, the content of the December 1927 article cannot differ significantly from the composer's feelings in 1926, when he composed *Sinfonietta*, particularly regarding events from his youth. This understanding provides a compelling basis for the direct connection between the meanings conveyed by the music in the fourth movement of the symphonic work, entitled *The Street*, and specific passages from the aforementioned article.

In the text published in 1927, the composer retrospectively reconstructs his experiences of walking through several streets of Brno in 1866—Pekařská, Křížová, Vídeňská, Ypsilantiho, Františkánská, and Starobrněnská—while bearing witness to events that he would later recount more than four decades afterward. His reminiscences not only document specific locations and individuals but also encapsulate the socio-historical milieu of the period. The narrative meticulously details significant architectural landmarks, including St. Anne's Hospital, The Queen's Monastery, a shoemaker's workshop, a school, a tannery, a bridge spanning the Svratka River, and the residence of the so-called „Turk" Ipsilanti. Equally integral to his recollection are the various individuals who inhabited this historical landscape: Prussian soldiers, the historian Vincenc Brandl, a carter struggling to control his vehicle, a cantankerous shoemaker, and the educator Vilemína Normanová-Nerudová. Far from being a mere enumeration of past events and structures, the composer's recollections are imbued with a profound emotional and subjective dimension. His perspective transforms these historical elements into a dynamic and affective tableau, wherein memory and sentiment converge to reanimate the past with striking immediacy.

I approached the article with meticulous attention, carefully tracing the route described by Janáček on an online map and noting the names of the streets. I then engaged in multiple attentive listenings of the section entitled *The Street*, deliberately setting aside any analytical preoccupations regarding compositional techniques in order to immerse myself fully in the realm of impression, emotion, and resonance. My aim was to experience the music in its purest affective dimension, unmediated by theoretical considerations.

In doing so, I envisioned myself as a spectator in a silent film theatre, where the unfolding actions and emotions of the characters were not merely accompanied but, as faithfully as possible, mirrored by the improvised performance of a pianist or a pre-recorded soundtrack. The transition from text to music, and subsequently from music to image, was seamless, culminating in a profoundly synesthetic experience—one of the most compelling I have encountered.

[7] For an explanation regarding the origins of these titles, see Nigel Simeone. 2019. *The Janáček Compendium*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, pp. 200-202.

I present this experiential reflection to my readers and fellow researchers not only for the intellectual and aesthetic resonance it has evoked but also in light of a further parallel, which I shall soon elucidate.

One of the moments in which I was deeply engrossed in listening to Janáček's music was unexpectedly interrupted by a sudden revelation. The melody of the *Promenade* from Modest Mussorgsky's monumental piano cycle *Pictures at an Exhibition* emerged in my mind—a motif widely understood as the composer's own musical self-portrait as he traverses Viktor Hartmann's commemorative exhibition. This association led me to a compelling question: could the thematic material of the fourth movement of *Sinfonietta* serve a similar function, representing Janáček himself as he navigates, many years earlier, his own "exhibition" of figures and events along the streets of Brno?

Finding no persuasive reason to refute this hypothesis, I propose an interpretative framework in which the music traces the journey of the young choir member of the Augustinian monastery, following him from the moment he steps into the city until his return to the boarding school where he resided. The theme's insistent and nearly unaltered repetition reinforces its emblematic presence, while the evolving transformations of the surrounding musical texture evoke the shifting emotions, encounters, and narratives that animate this imagined tableau.

In precise and somewhat schematic terms, the framework of my interpretation unfolds as follows:

- The sound of the Theme (measures 1-12) conveys the exuberant mood of a twelve-year-old adolescent as the child departs from the confines of the boarding school and immerses himself in the dynamic tumult of urban life;
- Variations No. 1, 2, 3, and 4 (measures 13-53) assume a distinctly somber tone. As the adolescent traverses Pekařská Street, he is confronted by a pensive crowd amid a cholera outbreak. Within the courtyard of The Queen's Monastery, he observes the flurry of activity among the Prussian soldiers. On the bridge connecting Pekařská and Křížová Streets, he witnesses an event that, in contemporary terms, would be categorized as a traffic accident: a cart overturns, spilling coffee from the ruptured sacks onto the cobbled pavement;
- The musical character of Variation No. 5 (measures 54-68) adopts a more cheerful tone, possibly reflecting the adolescent's approach to the shoemaker's house;
- In Variation No. 6 (measures 69-77), the muted horns evoke the cobbler's incessant grumbling, a reflection of his perpetual annoyance with the monotony of his work;
- Variation No. 7 (measures 78-90) illustrates the adolescent's amusement in response to the cobbler's incessant complaints, as he leisurely moves away from the house;
- In Variation No. 8 (measures 91-98), the adolescent's path leads him along Ypsilantiho Street, whose name evokes the „Turk" Alexandru Ipsilanti, a prominent and exotic figure in Brno during his time. The *aksak* rhythm stands as the most distinct musical reference to this historical character;
- Variations No. 9 and 10 (measures 99-110) present a subtle transformation in the musical character, suggesting a gradual reduction in the number of passersby, with the street slowly emptying and taking on an air of desolation;

- Variation No. 11 (measures 117-134), characterized by abrupt tempo changes—alternating twice from slow to fast—represents the only instance thus far in which the first section of the theme is omitted. Its musical expression evokes the adolescent's wavering concentration, as his attention and thoughts are easily diverted by the various street advertisements that capture his gaze;
- Variations No. 12, 13, and 14 form a cohesive group in which the narrative nears its conclusion, with the storyline becoming progressively more focused, conveyed through a gradually slowing tempo. This musical transformation reflects the adolescent's sense of regret as he returns home;
- The Coda, characterized by a vigorous tempo (measures 157-167), invites the imagination to unfold in two distinct directions:
    - The adolescent arrives at his destination, his spirit enriched by the experiences encountered on the city streets, and, with a surge of energy, storms into the boarding school,
      WHEREAS
    - reaching the age of senescence and wisdom, the composer observes and is delighted by the changes that have taken place in his beloved city (an idea with which the article concludes).

Before drawing this discussion to a close, I wish to introduce another aspect, which is of considerable significance within this context and further substantiates my imaginative exercise. This pertains to the circumstances surrounding the creation of one of the most monumental lyrical works of the 20th century, Leoš Janáček's opera *Příhody lišky Bystroušky* (*The Cunning Little Vixen*), whose world premiere occurred on November 24, 1924, in Brno—preceding the publication of the article *Moje město* and the *Sinfonietta*. Given that the relevant details are readily accessible, I shall proceed by outlining only the principal components:

- a graphic artist publishes a series of children's drawings, with the central character being a fox;
- inspired by cartoons, a writer crafts a story featuring the same fox as its central character;
- drawing further inspiration from the illustrated story, a composer pens an opera on the same theme, which, in time, comes to be regarded as a masterpiece.

Whether viewed with understanding or skepticism, my imaginative exercise was prompted by two undeniable realities: the newspaper article and Leoš Janáček's music from the fourth movement of the *Sinfonietta*. Ultimately, it is these two elements that demand our attention, as we endeavour to uncover new interpretations and perspectives.

3. Conclusions

Upon first encountering the works of Leoš Janáček, a musician unfamiliar with his compositions might feel a sense of uncertainty, perhaps even perplexity, and ask: What accounts for the Czech composer's stature as one of the most significant musical innovators of all time? The answer may be explored through three interrelated perspectives, which, ideally, should be considered in conjunction:

- through an in-depth examination of the existing literature on Janáček;
- through a critical listening of his works;
- following the study and subsequent public performance as an interpreter.

The present research emerges from the first two approaches and complements my prior articles and books focused on the eminent Czech composer.

In discussing Janáček's music in general, one arrives at a first, irrefutable conclusion: a single hearing of any work by this composer is never sufficient. While the listener may initially be struck by the apparent simplicity and the seemingly limited range of compositional techniques—where repetition and its various forms play a central role—the aesthetic and emotional messages of the music lie in hidden depths, only revealing themselves to those who are patient and persistent. This is equally true when considering the fourth movement of the *Sinfonietta*, the focus of the present research. We encounter groups of a few notes, repeated multiple times, instrumental timbres that appear constant, an unremarkable rhythm often confined to a predictable pattern, and a noticeable absence of expansive melodies and dramatic climaxes.

How, then, do we come to perceive the value of this music? To answer this, I will draw a comparison. It is universally acknowledged that, in literature, public success does not arise from an overabundance of words and expressions, particularly when these are artificial or deliberately convoluted. Instead, success is achieved through an expression that resonates with a wide range of readers, each with an average level of cultural understanding. This, however, does not imply that the writer is superficial or neglects the depth of the narrative. Similarly, in music, what leaves a lasting impression is not the sheer quantity of sounds, but rather their thoughtful arrangement within a coherent form and the clarity of their aesthetic message. Moreover, the appreciation of a musical work's value is not determined solely by the creativity with which its elements are organized. Perhaps more importantly, it hinges on an elusive context that, rather than offering the listener fixed aesthetic certainties, raises new questions—questions that, in turn, stimulate further engagement, encouraging a fresh listening experience in search of answers.

Exactly here lies the immense achievement of Leoš Janáček, I repeat, not only in this section of the work: we can rationally explain almost every compositional gesture, note, rhythm, and timbre found in the graphic score. Yet, the sound emerges from the composition on paper, soaring toward horizons where reason nearly fades away, where sensory perception takes precedence, and, above all, where the soul manifests itself as an expression of faith in the Divine.

To sum up, it is suggested that, in order to truly grasp the musical brilliance discussed in this study, listeners should follow a structured path: first, they should recognize the compositional methods employed; then, they should actively engage their imagination; and finally, they should move towards an aesthetic, ecstatic, and transcendental experience, allowing their soul to be enveloped in the musical atmosphere skillfully crafted by Janáček, thus fostering a profound connection with the Divine.

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