Leos Janacek – Jenufa (Berlin 1984)



1. Jenufa 1 2. Jenufa 2 Bonus: *Holländer & Walküre (Simon Estes) Konzert in Genf, radio Broadcast.*
Jenufa - Gabriele Benackova Küsterin - Ruth Hesse Laca - Wieslaw Ochman Stewa - Peter Gougaloff Altgesell - Paul Wolfrum alte Buryja - Vera Little Richter - Tomislaw Neralic Frau - Barbara Scherler Karolka - Gudrun Sieber Barena - Barbara Vogel Jano - Yoko Nomura Tante - Sieglinde Wagner Vaclav Neumann – conductor

Despite the director of the Prague National Theatre, Karel Kovařovic's, refusal to perform the work in Prague until 1916, Jenůfa was the work that launched Janáček's operatic career. Since those Prague performances the opera has enjoyed great popularity and is now firmly established in the repertoire throughout the world. The work marked Janáček's most intensive consideration of the operatic genre. He spent a huge amount of time over its composition, and revised the work considerably after its first 1904 Brno performances. Although many argue that the opera (particularly Act One) shows traces of a 'number' approach (as with Počátek románu) its differs greatly from its predecessors as being a fluid approach to music drama, combined with its verismo-violence Moravian village setting. It follows a tradition in late 19th century Czech literature of social-realism, and the operatic realist tradition born in Mascagni's Cavalleria Rusticana, which Janáček so loved. Notwithstanding the fact that Janáček's opera didn't meet with half the controversy that Gabriela Preissová's original play did, the opera's story coupled with Janáček's increasing use of violent textures and speech melody still has the power to shock its audience. One proviso of the 1916 Prague premiere was that Kovařovic insisted that he should reorchestrate the score, thus roThe 1998 Hamburg production with Carl Schultz and Jan Blinkhofbbing it of the immediacy of its brittle style. It is only recently with the appearance of the Mackerras/Decca recording of the work and the Tyrrell/Mackerras score of the Brno version that the composer's own final 1908 thoughts on the work can now be performed. This is the version that is currently being adopted in this country and has been recently recorded by Haitink on Warner and Mackerras (again) in English on Chandos, where the opera enjoys many performances. Although the Prague premiere marked a tremendous turn-around in the composer's career, for Janáček's wife it was when she became fully aware of her husband's infatuation and affair with the Prague Kostelnička, Gabriela Horvátová.

Synopsis

Place: A Moravian village Time: the nineteenth century

The plot depends on a tangled set of village relationships. Before the opera begins, the mill-owner Grandmother Buryja's two sons have both married twice, fathered children, and died. Their wives have also died, except for the Kostelnička (widow of the churchwarden), the younger son's second wife and Jenůfa's stepmother. Custom dictates that only Števa, the elder son's child by his first marriage, will inherit the mill, leaving his half-brother Laca and cousin Jenůfa to earn their livings.

Act 1

Jenůfa, Laca, and Grandmother Buryja wait for Števa to return home. Jenůfa, in love with Števa and secretly pregnant with his child, worries that he may have been drafted into the army. Laca, in love with Jenůfa, expresses bitterness against his half-brother's favored position at home. As he complains he plays with a knife and, finding it blunt, gives it to the mill foreman to be sharpened. The foreman tells the family the news that Števa has not been drafted after all, to Jenůfa's relief and Laca's increased frustration. The others leave, and Jenůfa waits by herself to greet Števa. He appears with a group of soldiers, extremely drunk and boasting of his prowess with the girls. He calls for music and drags the miserable Jenůfa into dancing with him. The Kostelnička steps into this rowdy scene, silences the musicians and, shocked by Števa's behavior, forbids him to marry Jenůfa until he can stay sober for one full year. The soldiers and the family leave Števa and Jenůfa alone, and she begs him to love her, but he, unaware of her pregnancy, gives her casual answers and leaves. Laca returns, as bitter as ever. He attempts to goad Jenůfa into criticizing Števa, but she takes her lover's side despite everything. Laca rages that Števa would never even look at her if it weren't for her rosy cheeks, then slashes her across the cheek with his knife.

Act 2

Months later, it is winter. The baby has been born, but Števa has not yet come to visit his child. Jenůfa's face is still disfigured, but she is happy in her love for the baby. While Jenůfa sleeps, the Kostelnička summons Števa and demands that he take responsibility. He answers that while he will provide money in secret, no one must know the baby is his. His love for Jenůfa died when Laca spoiled her beauty, and he is now engaged to marry Karolka, the mayor's pretty

daughter. Števa leaves, and Laca enters. He still doesn't know the truth about the baby, and when the Kostelnička tells him, his first reaction is disgust at the thought of taking Števa's child under his wing. Fearful that Jenůfa will be left with no one to marry, Kostelnička hastily lies that the baby is dead. Laca leaves, and the Kostelnička is faced with the necessity of making the lie true. She wraps the baby in a shawl and leaves the house. Jenůfa wakes up and says a prayer for her child's future, but the Kostelnička, returning, tells her that the baby died while she slept. Laca appears and comforts Jenůfa gently, asking that they spend the rest of their lives together. Seeing the tenderness of the couple, the Kostelnička tries to convince herself that she has acted for the best.

Act 3

It is now spring, and Laca and Jenůfa's wedding day. All seems right again, except that the Kostelnička is a nervous wreck. Števa and Karolka visit, and a chorus of village girls sings a wedding song. Just then, screams are heard. The body of the baby has been discovered in the mill-stream under the melting ice. Jenůfa immediately says that the baby is hers, and in her grief appears guilty of the murder. The village is ready to exact immediate justice against Jenůfa, but the Kostelnička calms them and says that the crime is hers. Hearing the whole story, Jenůfa forgives her stepmother. The crowd takes the Kostelnička off to jail. Jenůfa and Laca are left alone.

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back