Leoš Janáček and His Influence on Slovak Music

Milan Adamčiak

Two of the Janáček myths which have survived intact to this very day are: a. that Janáček somehow embodied a "Moravian" attitude, both musically and ideologically, and b. that he was too much of an individual to have influenced subsequent generations. Both of these are neatly punctured by Milan Adamčiak, a member of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and a noted theorist and musicologist. In his study he gently but firmly suggests how important Slovakia was in the development of Janáček's thinking, and also shows the way Janáček's influence, both directly and indirectly added to the tremendous vitality of Slovak musical development.

When I was informed about the possibility of appearing in front of you with a report on Leoš Janáček and Slovak music I asked myself how to formulate this problem. How could I contribute at least in a small measure to the rich and fruitful contact between Janáček and Slovakia? I had in my mind many constructions and associations, e.g. Janáček and Slovakia, Janáček and the Slovaks, Slovakia in Janáček's works, Janáček the Folklorist and Slovak Folk Creations. Since I devote myself more to the music of Slovak composers than I do to our folk song or Janáček's works, I chose as the topic for my contribution the title: "Leoš Janáček and his Influence on Slovak Music." I would like to introduce a few composers, in whose music we can detect Janáček's echo.

First of all, let me mention some well-known facts about Janáček's personal relationship to Slovakia. He often expressed his sincere respect and admiration for the land and its people. It is known that he was concerned with the fate of our nation and culture in the context of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and later was interested in the common life of Bohemians, Moravians, and Slovaks in the Czechoslovak Republic. For Janáček, there were no frontiers between Moravia and Slovakia; they were amalgamated in his mentality, his humanism, and his national and social feelings. He visited Slovakia a few times for different reasons — traveling and searching for folk songs in northwestern Slovakia, going to the High Tatras for relaxation, and journeying to Bratislava several times for premieres of his works. Along with some

harmonizations and adaptations of Slovak folk songs and some of his choral compositions, he made many notes of speech melodies and the sonic environment, including waterfalls and bird sounds from the High Tatras. In Bratislava he was inspired to compose the symphonic work the "Danube." But his most intensive interest in Slovakia and its national identity was awakened when it became useful in the support of his own theoretical and compositional attitudes.

At a time when Slovakia was largely unknown and thus had almost no contact with European musicians, Janáček found confirmation of his theories of folklore. He considered Slovak singing as the model manifestation of Slavic musical thinking. The very rich and individual strains of Slovak folklore supplied a broad background which could be developed, and confronted him with the equally rich musical traditions of other Slavic groups. The backward, poor and miserable Slovakia of the early 20th century was the home of a certain measure of archaism or primitivism of musical thinking, which was emphasized by Janáček. It is natural that Janáček, as an admirer of folk expression and the creator of a new and deep relationship to a type of musical folklore stripped of romantic rusticity and idealization, supported this state with his critical realist attitude. We thus find the roots of what we may consider echoes of Janáček in many works by Slovak composers.

The efforts of Janáček as a folklorist deeply influenced the need of Slovak ethnographers, musicologists, and composers to cope with the traditional music of their homeland in the early 20th century. In spite of the efforts of Czech musicians and collectors, it was only after World War II that Slovak musicology penetrated more deeply into the structure of Slovak folk songs; especially important here are the works of Jozef Kresánek. Janáček's influence upon the work of Slovak composers took place a bit earlier and involved the relationship between Art music and national song and dance.

In speaking about Janáček's relation to Slovak composers we cannot avoid his contact with the Nestor of our modern music, Ján Levoslav Bella (1843–1936). Janáček showed interest in his string quartet and wanted to perform it on a concert by the Brno Beseda as early as 1880. But Bella, though pleased by Janáček interest, as the two letters by Bella from Transylvania show, had disagreements with Janáček about his approach to the score. These two figures have, however, much in common. For example: at Kremnica Bella worked as a organist, conductor, pedagogue and organizer of musical events, and he devoted himself to improving the quality of musical life in middle Slovakia; these were the

same kinds of activities which Janáček performed in Brno. Bella's fight for the professionalization of Slovak composers in the contemporary cultural context of the Slovak musical public did not gain much support; and for a long time his music, like Janáček's, remained unknown and unappreciated.

Janáček's organ school in Brno also influenced the relationship of Slovakia to the Moravian master. In Bratislava, between the two wars, a number of students and graduates of Janáček's school performed in concerts, and it was thus possible to get a real sense of their style and approach. Perhaps more than any other figure Frańo Dostalík (1896–1944), who wrote about several concerts of faculty and students of the Slovak Academy of Music and Drama, oriented himself towards the works of Janáček's disciples and Czech composers of the 1920's. I believe Janáček's influence in Slovakia was promoted by a number of Czech and Moravian musicians working here, but especially by this legendary composer and pedagogue. His articles, concert reviews, notebooks and quotations by those who knew him make this clear. Dostalík did not neglect any opportunity to show his admiration for the great Moravian master. Let me say a few words about the relationship between Dostalík and Slovak composers. Even today he is looked upon as an outsider in Slovak music, standing apart from the main trends, and his Janáčekism played a large part in creating this situation. Dostalík is said to have been an eccentric, erratic enthusiast for everything new, a representative of immature modernism, an admirer of polarities for their own sake, and an obstinate supporter of everything that interested him.

In composition he was a self-taught man, incorrigible, and perhaps even incomprehensible. Between 1919 and 1921 he studied at the Brno Conservatory and attended Janáček's lectures in composition. In those years he was already very much interested in the musical avant-garde. He was attracted to Bartók, Hindemith, Milhaud, Stravinsky and Mosolov. He knew the works of the Second Viennese School, and was interested in the work of Roslavec, Alexanderov, Ježek, E.F. Burian and others. He followed the efforts of Alois Haba in microtonality, in the quarter-tone and sixth-tone system, and it is reported that in the thirties he constructed a quarter-tone harmonium. In the years 1922–27 he taught at pedagogical schools, later he led a graduate course at the Hungarian Pedagogical Institute in Bratislava. Dostalík also worked as a reviewer for some Slovak newspapers, writing primarily about performances of choral and contemporary music. In 1929 he reviewed a lec-

ture and concert by Henry Cowell in Bratislava. He devoted himself to musical analysis (Bartók, Hindemith and Janáček), and was occupied by theoretical points concerning harmony and modality.

He wrote five violin sonatas, some piano compositions, congs, choruses, a melodramatic cantata and an opera, *Radúz and Mahuliena*. According to the musicologist Štefan Čurilla, Dostalík sent the opera to a competition held by the Association of American Slovaks. Only a few of his compositions were performed for an audience. His music reveals the striking influences of Janáček's texture, terseness of melodic-rhythmic fragments, and richly structured metrorhythmical elements. His music is considered bold in harmony, but unbalanced in form. It is a pity that a great portion of his work is missing, and that his archives are now considered lost. Some of his books and collections of music, many of them richly annotated, have been dispersed in various private archives. It is quite important for Slovak musicology to settle its debt to this noteworthy personality of our twentieth century musical culture. In the context of the development of Slovak music in the twenties and thirties, Frańo Dostalík—as one of the few people who did not follow in the footsteps of Vítězslav Novák's conception of modern Slovak national music—introduced himself as a enthusiastic proponent of Janáček's music and tried to penetrate into the heart of Slovak musical folklore.

It is a paradox that Josef Grešák (1907–?), a disciple of Frańo Dostalík in composition, had a similar fate in terms of his position in Slovak music in general, and in his relation to Janáček in particular, for in the work of Grešák the balladic tone and seal of individual primitivism that tied Janáček to the Slovak folk song was projected into reality. Josef Grešák was born in north-eastern Slovakia and became involved in Slovak music in an individual way. He began his career by writing music full of vitality and stayed with it throughout his life. He became Dostalík's most loved student and it is evident that he always had a great admiration for Janáček's music and for his uncompromising attitude. On the basis of good reviews in the twenties (Grešák was esteemed by Josef Suk and Václav Talich), he gained a place for himself in Slovak music only decades later; first in the fifties, as a composer with a lasting relationship to national folk music, and later as a composer of rich invention and individual expression. Grešák's distinctive style, which grows out of his individual musical poetics, about which he expressed himself with enthusiasm, is very similar to that of Janáček. Grešák did not speak much about Dostalík—perhaps he was too much marked by the stamp of his personality—and to be quite honest, he was considered

his epigone. Of course this perceived status did not contribute to a proper evaluation of Grešák's work. In terms of his compositional approach, he accentuated the rhythmical-motoric aspect of his works, which was basically related to the East Slovakian dance called Kariči, and which he specified by irregular metric notation. He used this as the basis for his theory of pulsation, which is immediately attractive by virtue of its graceful terminology and the way it discusses the independence of common rhythm and meter. In the sphere of melos and interval construction, Grešák employs serialism and selective modalities, and this gives his works a particularly individual, compact homogeneity, in spite of their structural variability. In his accent on detail, the variability of the fragmentary "cells," and in his use of carefully framed diction in vocal parts of his compositions, Grešák may be considered one of the composers who creatively seized direct inspiration from Janáček's music.

When we speak of Grešák's relation to Janáček, it is necessary to mention one more dimension, a dimension, I am convinced, that plays a most remarkable role. It is his humanism, his deeply human, socio-critical feeling, which is reflected in many of his works, especially in those places where he accentuates his respect for the hard fate of human beings. He was inspired by the strong social motivation in Slovak literature evident in figures such as Vincent Šikula (*Rozárka*), Martin Kukučín (*Neprebudený*, (Unawaken)), Pavel Országh Hviezdoslav (*Zuzanka Hraškovie*). Grešák not only felt both passionate interest in and compassion for human relations, but he also revealed an awareness of its cruel fate, and appealed to contemporary ethical standards. His character types have much in common with Janáček's figures in *Zápisník zmizelého* (The Diary of One Who Vanished), *Jenůfa,* and *Kátya Kabanová*. The balladic mood, which is characteristic of Slovak music in the first half of our century, is quite clear in Grešák's work with naively sincere outlines. His *Panychida* is, for example, a work outside any time. There the *Ballade of an Unborn Child* by the modern Czech poet Jiří Wolker is juxtaposed with the Old Slavic text of funeral cere- monies, reminiscent of Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass*. Grešák's position in Slovak musical culture has not yet been fairly appraised until the present day, and we can see an analogy between his fate and that of Janáček—there is a similar controversy concerning the hegemony of Vítězslav Novák's conception, activities on the periphery of musical events, a similar refining of his own characteristic style independent of topical trends, as well as a similar impulsive mentality and vitality continuing into the extraordinary late creative periods of both Grešák and Janáček.

Despite the fact that in the last few decades we meet Janáček's name only sporadically in connection with Slovak music, we must say that his echo is heard from many works of composers from several generations. The rustic sense, the rhapsodic quality, and the role of the dance movement found in Janáček's works are reflected in some works of Andrej Očenáš, for example in his orchestral suite *Ruralia Slovaca*, and in his symphonic poems, which display a relationship to the instrumentation of Janáček's *Lašské tance* and *Taras Bulba*. Expressivity of detail is found in some of Očenáš's chamber music, e.g. in the First String Quartet, and in the piano phantasy *Pl'úšt'* (The Flurry).

Among the composers who entered Slovak music in the fifties and sixties, it is Juraj Pospíšil who most inclines towards Janáček's approach. Born in Northern Moravia, he was a student at the Janáček Academy of Music Arts in Brno, studying with Vilém Petrželka. Pospíšil has maintained an admiring affinity for Janáček and for Bohuslav Martinů, who especially influenced his early works. He is particularly interested in instrumental music, and is clearly influenced by Janáček's texture (e.g. in the suite of lyrical pictures for strings *In Dreaming*, in the First Symphony, and in the symphonic poem *Mountains and Men*). Signs of Janáček-like fragmentary composition, an accent on details and a rich variability of expression, are first found in Pospíšil's work in connection with rhapsodic and program music. Later there is the very strong influence of Webern's miniatures, and a serial organization of intervalic material. These two impulses, Janáček and Webern, appear in Pospíšil in a particular symbiosis, in which proper dramatic lyricism, economy of material and force of musical idea combine harmoniously.

Expressive lyricism is evidently one of the fundamental characteristics of Moravian musicality. This view is supported by the work of another Moravian-born composer, Hanuš Domanský, who graduated from the Brno Conservatory and from the Academy of Musical Arts in Bratislava where he studied with Dezider Kardoš. Domanský is one of those who were seriously interested in the work of Janáček and Martinů; yet his work reflects a great deal of individuality. He is a composer with an expressively linear kind of musical thinking, known for formal austerity, metrorhythmic ideas, and a sense of dramatic contrast. His music is effective in the way various ideas are joined together (e.g. Dianoia for Violin Solo, the First String Quartet, or a Fragment of a Sonata for Piano). The basis of his composition became a three to five tone motive which was treated as if it were observed from several angles, corresponding to the particular text and in dialogue with contrasting

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