

A Unique Musical Memoir

On an Overgrown Path (Series I & Series II) by Leoš Janáček

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Abstract

The piano cycle *On an Overgrown Path* by Czech composer Leoš Janáček is in two series of 15 pieces and is one of the most frequently performed works. *On an Overgrown Path* is a music memoir that has a narrative theme with distinctive artistic connotations and emotional color that have dual lines of meaning.

My research is an explanation of the distinctiveness of Janáček's *On an Overgrown Path* through systematic analysis. The purpose is to supplement existing resources by studying Janáček's multiple identities as a composer, folklorist and music theorist. Janáček used Moravian and other ethnic elements that are comparable to another Czech composer, Antonin Dvořák. Included in my discussion are changes in style and Janáček's treatment of folklore.

Janáček applied his theoretical concept "speech melody" to *On an Overgrown Path*. My research compares Janáček's use of speech melody to the works of other composers who used similar themes to reflect the original modern musical style and includes Janáček's musical aesthetics. A central concept of my research is an explanation of how Janáček's language affected the way he composed, which led to his treatment of rhythm as being speech like and complex.

Throughout his life, Janáček pursued a musical style that was different than the norms of the day. In the early 20th century, Romanticism still influenced Czech music. Janáček had grown weary of that musical era, which had been under the influence of Wagner and Smetana. *On an Overgrown Path* is a symbol of Janáček's desire for change and represents his musical and philosophical beliefs.

Chang Li is a piano soloist and collaborative pianist from China. He is the recipient of the prestigious Catherine Herrick Cobb Performing Arts Fellowship from Michigan State University and the Steinway Award from Mannes School of Music.



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