

# JANÁČEK

## Orchestral Suites from the Operas • 3

The Cunning Little Vixen

From the House of the Dead

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra

Peter Breiner



**Leoš Janáček (1854–1928)**  
**Orchestral Suites from the Operas • 3**

<b>Příhody Lišky Bystroušky (The Cunning Little Vixen)</b>		<b>Z mrtvého domu (From the House of the Dead)</b>	
<b>– Suite arr. Peter Breiner</b>		<b>– Suite arr. Peter Breiner</b>	
<b>1</b>	I. Modrá vážka (The Blue Dragonfly)	<b>7</b>	I. Overture
	8:52		6:15
<b>2</b>	II. U revírnicka (At the Gamekeeper's Yard)	<b>8</b>	II. Sto (One Hundred)
	8:40		6:05
<b>3</b>	III. Jsem opravdu tak krásná? (Am I Really that Beautiful?)	<b>9</b>	III. Bude prázdník (Holiday is coming)
	8:54		5:54
<b>4</b>	IV. Svatba (The Wedding)	<b>10</b>	IV. Drahý, drahý Aljejo (Dear, dear Alyeyya)
	3:10		1:44
<b>5</b>	V. Tuláková píseň (Wanderer's Song)	<b>11</b>	V. Hra a pantomima (The Play and the Pantomime)
	6:44		11:23
<b>6</b>	VI. Běží liška k Táboru (Vixen is Running)	<b>12</b>	VI. Isaj, prorok boží (Jesus, God's Prophet)
	2:30		4:06

Leoš Janáček was a born dramatist. Although many of his works were based on pre-existing works (*Jenůfa*, *Káťa Kabanová* and *The Makropulos Case* are all derived from popular contemporary plays), over the course of his career Janáček became more confident and created his own librettos. This third volume of Peter Breiner's suites from Janáček's operas focuses on two of his mature masterpieces, *The Cunning Little Vixen* (1924) and *From the House of the Dead* (posthumous première in 1930), neither of which is based on a conventional dramatic text. *The Cunning Little Vixen* is derived from a series of cartoons, while *From the House of the Dead* is taken from Fyodr Dostoevsky's reportage memoirs of his time in a Siberian prison camp.

In 1920 the popular Brno newspaper *Lidové noviny* serialised *Vixen Bystrouška*, a joyful and quixotic tale by Rudolf Těsnohlídek (based on pictures by Stanislav Lulek). Těsnohlídek originally suggested that the Vixen (and his story) was rather unsophisticated material for an opera, which certainly showed how unaware he was of the refined work that Janáček would tease out of a simple newspaper story. *The Cunning Little Vixen*, although thoroughly imbued with the humour and spirit of the original cartoons, is a more serious work. Over the course of the drama (and particularly after the death of the eponymous heroine) it becomes clear that through this charming little story Janáček is uncovering a more fundamental truth about the natural world.

The suite begins in the late afternoon sun of the forest. The chattering of the animals can be heard against the lull of the heat as the Forester begins his journey home. Of particular note here is a dragonfly, heard flying around the forest. Although it meets its end during the course of the overture, its brief life hints at the pervasive mortality and cycle of nature at the heart of the opera. In the second movement we join the Vixen after the Forester has captured her, at first stymied by her domestication and then, in a numinous interlude, dreaming of escape. This break-out is realised in the final moments of the movement, as she kills the entire chicken coup, breaks

her leash and bolts over the fence back into the forest. Back in her natural habitat, the Vixen meets a dashing young fox and the third movement is based on music from their lush courtship duet at the close of Act Two. Recalling the late summer heat in Act Two of *Káťa Kabanová*, there is a heavy sense of melancholy about the musical language, with pining woodwind solos overlapping as the harmonies become more heightened. Moving back with the tap of xylophone we hear the Vixen's triumphal dance as she evicts the Badger from his set. Taking possession of his former home, the Vixen stamps out a vicious Charleston, before the music returns to the string-based love music of before. The fourth movement is a further development of themes from the second act, ending in the Vixen and Fox's sunny wedding celebrations.

After the heady second act, the fifth movement returns us to the brutality of nature, heard first in the depiction of winter in the forest. The Vixen is desperately searching out food for her burgeoning young family and the Entr'acte to the third act depicts the capture and death of a small hare. The poacher Harašta can be heard stalking through the forest, singing a lilting folk-song. A second section recalls the music that sounds after the death of the Vixen by Harašta's hand. Ethereal woodwind and strings ululate as plangent clarinet and oboe solos alternate, beautifully describing the tragedy of the piece. The final movement moves towards more hopeful morals, with the vivacious chorus of the fox cubs, the rattle of percussion picking out their simple ditty, before the full orchestra (with the shimmer of cymbals) rings out the final hymn to the glories of nature, which sounds after the Forester realises that nature has an eternal cycle, if we could only look after it.

Although much bleaker in origin, Dostoevsky's fictionalised account of his time in a remote Siberian prison shares with Těsnohlídek's Vixen a preoccupation with freedom and mortality. In an 'open letter' from 12th February 1927 Janáček expressed his need to 'go right to the truth' in his next work. For a man who plundered his

local newspaper for possible subjects for operas and song cycles, Janáček's choice of Dostoevsky's fictionalised account of his prison life in Siberia is not uncharacteristic. Dostoevsky was exiled there as a result of his involvement in a politically liberal organization and his subsequent memoirs are a precursor of reportage. The text itself is a mixture of vignettes, where no individual, even the prisoner Gorjančíkov who arrives at the beginning of the drama, has centre stage. Not following a direct narrative line, this opera is markedly different from Janáček's previous works; these are only representative scenes from a much larger drama. As with *The Cunning Little Vixen*, however, Janáček approaches this world with a richly symphonic language, more sparse than the bucolic romanticism of *The Vixen*, but equally redolent in its use of telling motifs and descriptive language.

The caustic sound world of Janáček's final opera is immediately apparent in the bitter overture, which forms the first movement of the suite. Originally conceived as a violin concerto (and initially entitled 'The pilgrimage of a little soul'), this strident opening theme, replete with the sounds of chains, is an immediate entry into the bleak world of the Siberian penal system. The second movement follows the music as the curtain rises, with the prisoners arriving from the barracks, washing and eating. Despite the cruelty of their situation (with the omnipresent sound of the chains), a rising 'motto' theme portends freedom (or at least some spiritual release). Again following the topic of liberty, the third movement is based around music in the second act, when the

prisoners celebrate a religious feast. The jangle of bells and the dancing nature of the music create a dialogue with the unpleasant growl of the lower brass. The next two movements describe two important scenes in the drama, the first where a vindictive prisoner wounds a young tartar boy Alyeya, who is very dear to many of the prisoners. The second when the prisoners perform two plays on a makeshift stage, one called *Kedril and Don Juan*, the other *The Miller's Beautiful Wife*. This ribald drama represents another false dawn of freedom for the prisoners, one of whom goes off with a prostitute after the festivities are finished. The last movement is based around the third and final act. Beginning with Alyeya's recovery in the prison hospital, we hear a poignant exchange between him and Gorjančíkov. While Alyeya recovers fully and Gorjančíkov is released (mirrored in the flight of an eagle with a broken wing that the prisoners have been helping to heal), any sense of resolution is brief as the remaining inmates are ordered back to their work. As a final statement on the human condition, *From the House of the Dead* is a distinctly pessimistic contradiction of the glorious pantheistic message of *The Cunning Little Vixen*. Facing old age, and probably coming to the realisation that he was facing the end himself, Janáček was unwilling to leave behind a glib and clear-cut moral message.

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Gavin Plumley has written, broadcast and lectured widely about the life and works of Janáček and created [www.leosjanacek.com](http://www.leosjanacek.com)

## New Zealand Symphony Orchestra

The New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, founded in 1946, is the country's leading professional orchestra. It has an establishment of ninety players and performs over a hundred concerts annually, touring within New Zealand and offering its main symphonic programmes in Auckland and Wellington. Tours abroad have included concerts for the Beijing Olympic Cultural Festival, and earlier appearances at the BBC Proms, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, and the Snape Maltings in England, and at the World Expo at Aichi in Japan. Pietari Inkinen was appointed Music Director from January 2008, succeeding James Judd, who held the position from 1999 to 2007 and is now Music Director Emeritus. Other conductors who have worked with the NZSO include Xian Zhang, Alexander Lazarev, Dmitry Sitkovetsky, David Atherton, Yan Pascal Tortelier and Edo de Waart. Soloists who have appeared with the orchestra recently include Lang Lang, Sa Chen, Lynn Harrell, Cho Liang Lin, Hilary Hahn, Vadim Repin, Yefim Bronfman, Simon O' Neill, Steven Isserlis, Jonathan Lemalu and Dame Kiri Te Kanawa. The NZSO has an extensive catalogue of CD recordings, mostly on the Naxos label. Over one million of these CDs have been sold internationally in the last decade and they have received critical acclaim. [www.nzso.co.nz](http://www.nzso.co.nz)

Photo: Robert Catto





### **Peter Breiner**

Born in 1957, Peter Breiner is known as a composer, conductor, pianist and arranger. He began to study the piano at the age of four and his exceptional results led to his early acceptance at the Conservatory in Košice. He studied piano, composition, conducting and percussion, later studying composition with Alexander Moyzes, one of the most significant figures in modern Slovak music. Peter Breiner lived in Toronto, Canada from 1992 and has been a U.S. resident living in New York since 2007. As a Naxos in-house arranger and conductor, he is perhaps best known for his numerous orchestral arrangements, including award-winning Baroque versions of the Beatles. Breiner's distinctive arrangements of all national anthems were used during the Olympic Games in Athens 2004. With over 150 CDs in the last ten years Breiner has conducted, often doubling as a pianist, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, Moscow Symphony Orchestra, Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Ukrainian State Symphony Orchestra, Queensland Symphony Orchestra, and the Orchestre National de Lille, among many others.



### **Vesa-Matti Leppänen**

Vesa-Matti Leppänen was born in Turku, Finland. He began violin lessons at the age of five and studied at the Sibelius Academy of Music in Helsinki before joining the Turku Philharmonic Orchestra, one of the oldest orchestras in Europe. At sixteen years of age, he won the National Violin Competition for young Finnish violinists and has been the Concertmaster of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra since 2003.



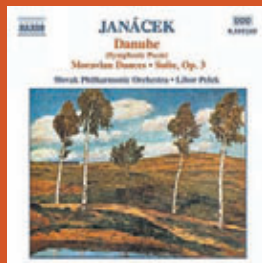
### **Bridget Douglas**

Dunedin born, Bridget Douglas is the Principal Flute of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. After completing studies at Victoria University, she went to New York and Chicago for further studies. In the United States she won several competitions, including the Artists International Award, resulting in a début recital at Carnegie Hall. Bridget Douglas is also a member of the harp/flute duo *Flight*, with Carolyn Mills, the orchestra's Principal Harp, and of the contemporary ensemble *Stroma*. She has released two CDs performing with pianist Rachel Thomson, *Syrinx*, French music for flute and piano, and *Taurangi*, music by New Zealand composers.

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With this disc Naxos completes its acclaimed recordings of Peter Breiner's powerful and evocative orchestral suites from Janáček's operas. In very different ways, *The Cunning Little Vixen* and *From the House of the Dead* both reflect on love and loneliness, life and death, good, evil and the human condition, with some of the composer's most effective music. Warmly welcomed as 'refreshingly new', Vol. 1: *Jenůfa, The Excursions of Mr Brouček* (8.570555) and Vol. 2: *Káťa Kabanová* and *The Makropulos Affair* (8.570556) are also available.

Leoš  
**JANÁČEK**  
(1854–1928)

**Orchestral Suites from the Operas • 3**

**The Cunning Little Vixen**

– Suite (arr. Peter Breiner) 39:01

- |   |                                  |      |
|---|----------------------------------|------|
| 1 | I. The Blue Dragonfly*†          | 8:56 |
| 2 | II. At the Gamekeeper's Yard     | 8:38 |
| 3 | III. Am I Really that Beautiful? | 8:51 |
| 4 | IV. The Wedding                  | 3:10 |
| 5 | V. Wanderer's Song               | 6:45 |
| 6 | VI. Vixen is Running             | 2:27 |

**From the House of the Dead**

– Suite (arr. Peter Breiner) 35:42

- |    |                               |       |
|----|-------------------------------|-------|
| 7  | I. Overture*                  | 6:16  |
| 8  | II. One Hundred               | 6:04  |
| 9  | III. Holiday is coming        | 5:55  |
| 10 | IV. Dear, dear Alyeya         | 1:45  |
| 11 | V. The Play and the Pantomime | 11:25 |
| 12 | VI. Jesus, God's Prophet      | 4:09  |

**New Zealand Symphony Orchestra**  
**Peter Breiner**

**Vesa-Matti Leppänen, Violin \***  
**Bridget Douglas, Flute †**



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