

JENŮFA, LEOŠ JANÁČEK

EUROPEAN OPERA-DIRECTING PRIZE

2027

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EUROPEAN
OPERA-DIRECTING
PRIZE



Opéra national
de Nancy • Lorraine

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Overview

Composer Leoš Janáček

Librettist Leoš Janáček based on the play *Její Pastorkyna* by Gabriela Preissova

Date of premiere 1904 at Národní divadlo Brno

Original language Czech

Number of acts 3

Orchestra of the Opéra national de Nancy-Lorraine

Chorus of the Opéra national de Nancy-Lorraine (**max 36 artists**)

Characters

CHARACTER	VOICE
Jenůfa	Soprano
Grandmother Buryjovka	Contralto
Laca Klemeň	Tenor
Števa Buryjovka	Tenor
Kostelnička Buryjovka	Soprano
The Foreman / the Mayor	Bass
The Mayor's Wife	Mezzo-soprano
Karolka	Soprano
Barena, a servant	Mezzo-soprano
Jano, a shepherd	Soprano (boy role)
A servant	Mezzo-soprano

Jury and production schedule

EOP Jury Chair : Thomas de Mallet Burgess, Artistic Director of Oopera Balletti, Helsinki, Finland

Host Theater : Matthieu Dussouillez - General Manager and artistic director,
Opéra national de Nancy-Lorraine, France

Jury : Martin Glaser - General Director, National Theater Brno, Czech Republic

Caroline Wielpütz - Casting Director, Deutsche Oper am Rhein, Düsseldorf-Duisburg, Germany

Antonella Zedda - General Manager, Opéra de Dijon, France

Ilaria Lanzino - Stage director, EOP-Winner in 2020

2026

September 23, 10AM : Online information session

2027

May : Semi-finals in Rotterdam

November: Finals in London. Submission and presentation of dramaturgical directions and preliminary scale models to the management team.

November-December: Technical and financial feasibility studies.

2028

March: Submission and presentation of dramaturgical solutions and scale models to the Opera team.

April-July: Finalisation of the budget, validations, and preparation of the tender

September-December: set technical design and construction.

2029

February 1: Start of stage rehearsals in the studio.

February 12–14: Set assembly on stage.

February 15–27: Piano stage rehearsals on stage.

February 28: Piano dress rehearsal.

March 1–2: Orchestral stage rehearsals.

March 5: Pre-general rehearsal.

March 7: General dress rehearsal.

March 9: Opening night.

Subsequent performances: March 11, 13, and 15.

Preliminary note

« *Jenůfa* by Leoš Janáček is a work about how a human community, through its norms, silences, and moral expectations, creates the conditions for its own undoing. Each character—men and women alike—is shaped by an environment that has taught them what is done, what is left unsaid, and what must be sacrificed in order to belong.

At the centre lies the relationship between *Jenůfa* and the Kostelnička: two women bound by love and fear, and by everything one generation passes on to the next—sometimes as a form of confinement. The work asks a question, in both its violence and its tenderness: what do we pass on when we believe we are protecting?

This line of inquiry runs through the entire season devoted to mother–daughter relationships. It also speaks directly to our own time. Although the action unfolds in a Moravian village, the mechanism is universal. It operates wherever reputation matters, where shame governs bodies and lives, where the group exerts a silent and destructive pressure—in other words, everywhere. Our aim is to illuminate complexity, to avoid dogmatic narratives, and to restore the humanity of every character.

What does one generation unknowingly pass on to the next?

How does the silence of the group create tragedy?

Is forgiveness an act of loyalty, or of emancipation?

The project will be stripped back in its aesthetic, strong in its concept; it will challenge representation and open up new narratives. »

Matthieu Dussouillez

General manager and artistic director

Opéra national Nancy-Lorraine

Leoš Janáček: biographical, aesthetic and musical landmarks

Leoš Janáček (1854–1928) was born in Hukvaldy, in Moravia, then a province of the Austrian Empire. He spent most of his life in Brno, the city to which his entire career remained closely tied, as composer, pedagogue, conductor, critic and advocate of a Czech musical culture then in the midst of asserting itself.

Janáček's recognition came late. By generation, he belongs to the folkloric Romanticism of Antonín Dvořák, yet through the language of his maturity he established himself as one of the major figures of early twentieth-century musical modernism. His catalogue encompasses opera, orchestral music, chamber music, choral works and piano music. Opera occupies a central place in his output, as the privileged space where speech, drama and musical invention converge. Among his masterpieces are *Káťa Kabanová*, *The Cunning Little Vixen*, *The Makropulos Affair* and *From the House of the Dead*. Premiered in Brno in 1904, *Jenůfa* marks a decisive turning point. It is the work through which his theatrical language asserted its full singularity and the one that gradually opened his œuvre to broader recognition.

One of the most characteristic features of Janáček's writing lies in the attention he devoted to spoken language. The composer closely observed the inflections, rhythms, accents and contours of everyday speech, which he meticulously noted and analysed. This attention does not result in a naturalistic imitation of speech, but rather in a highly personal way of generating music from the energy of language itself. Janáček's vocal lines are often brief, nervous and seemingly discontinuous, closely shaped by the dramatic situation.

This relationship to speech directly influences musical form. Rather than constructing his operas as a succession of large closed numbers, Janáček develops a continuous and highly mobile dramaturgy based on brief cells, incisive motifs, repetitions, sudden contrasts and extremely precise orchestral writing. This writing gives his scores a particular density, at once taut, fragmented and intensely expressive.

His language is also nourished by his interest in Moravian folk music, which he collected and studied, as well as by his attention to local traditions, songs and dialects. Yet his mature style is never reducible to simple folkloric stylisation. In his work, the popular element participates in a deeper exploration of living rhythm, melodic contour, scansion and the relationship between individual, community and memory.

Janáček's operas are often based on literary or theatrical sources, but they are distinguished above all by their concentration, psychological acuity and the close relationship they establish between music, speech and action. From this point of view, *Jenůfa* occupies an essential place in his artistic trajectory. The work stands at the threshold of the great mature operas and already reveals several of the major characteristics of his theatre: dramatic density, tension, emotional intensity, attention to individuals within their social environment, and an extremely close relationship between musical writing and the truth of the stage.

The plot

The action takes place in a Moravian village in the nineteenth century, within the Buryja family, whose relationships of inheritance, kinship and dependency structure much of the dramatic tension. Jenůfa loves Števa Buryja, heir to the mill, and is expecting his child. Laca, Števa's half-brother, also loves Jenůfa and harbours a long-standing resentment toward his brother, linked both to his position within the family and to the preference enjoyed by Števa.

In the first act, Jenůfa anxiously awaits the return of Števa, who has been summoned before the military recruitment council. If he is not conscripted, the marriage can take place quickly, before her pregnancy becomes visible. Števa does indeed return free, but drunk and surrounded by companions in celebration. In view of his behaviour, the Kostelnička, Jenůfa's stepmother and the village's moral authority, refuses to allow the marriage until Števa has demonstrated restraint. Left alone with Laca, Jenůfa nevertheless defends Števa; in a fit of jealousy, Laca slashes her face with his knife.

The second act takes place several months later, in winter. The child has been born in secret. Jenůfa, living in seclusion, still hopes that Števa will come and acknowledge his responsibility. The Kostelnička summons him and tries to persuade him to marry the young woman. Števa refuses: he agrees to provide financial support, but does not wish either to acknowledge the child publicly or to abandon his plan to marry Karolka, the mayor's daughter. Laca then appears; when he learns of the child's existence, he initially recoils from the idea of assuming responsibility for his brother's fault. Fearing that Jenůfa may be irretrievably lost in the eyes of the community, the Kostelnička falsely tells her that the child has died and then, left alone, decides to get rid of the newborn. When Jenůfa awakens, her stepmother makes her believe that the child died in her sleep. Shortly afterwards, Laca returns, gentler in manner, and asks Jenůfa to share her life with him.

The third act takes place in spring, on the day of Jenůfa and Laca's wedding. The ceremony is being prepared, but an event interrupts the festivities: the child's body is discovered in the stream beneath the melting ice. Jenůfa immediately recognises it as her child. As suspicion falls upon her, the Kostelnička confesses to the crime. She explains that she acted in order to save Jenůfa from dishonour and secure her future. The community hands her over to justice. Left alone, Jenůfa and Laca nevertheless decide to remain together.

At the origins of the work: from Gabriela Preissová to Janáček

Gabriela Preissová's play *Její pastorkyňa*, premiered in Prague in 1890 and performed in Brno in 1892, provided the source for *Jenůfa*. For his opera, Janáček retained the play's original title, generally translated as "*Her Stepdaughter*." The now customary title, *Jenůfa*, became established later, during the international dissemination of the work, through its German translation by Max Brod. This shift is not entirely neutral: whereas the original title emphasised a familial and social relationship (that of the Kostelníčka to her stepdaughter), the title *Jenůfa* focuses attention more directly on the eponymous character.

Janáček already knew Preissová's work, having previously adapted one of her stories for the stage: *Počátek románu* ("*The Beginning of a Romance*", 1891). With *Její pastorkyňa*, he returned to dramatic material centred on family relationships, social pressure and the violence of communal norms. He did not merely set the play to music, but wrote the libretto himself, tightening its structure and transforming its dramatic economy in order to shape it into a more concentrated lyrical form.

The context in which the work emerged was marked, at the end of the nineteenth century, by a strong interest in Moravian realities, spoken language and forms of theatre closer to everyday life than to grand historical opera. Preissová's play belongs to this literary and theatrical moment attentive to social customs and the tensions running through rural communities. Janáček took up this material without turning it into a mere document of local colour. What interested him was not simply a Moravian setting, but the possibility of a concentrated theatre founded upon situations, speech and human conflict.

The genesis of the work extended over several years during the 1890s and was completed at the beginning of 1903, before the premiere in Brno on 21 January 1904. This long process reflects both the slow maturation of Janáček's language and the work of adaptation and revision demanded by so dense a subject. The completion of the opera also coincided with a major personal ordeal: the illness and death of his daughter Olga, to whose memory the work would be dedicated. Without in itself calling for any particular interpretation of the opera, this context nevertheless belongs to its history. *Jenůfa* thus occupies a pivotal place in the composer's career, extending earlier explorations while making the singularity of his musical theatre far more clearly audible.

The operatic adaptation is particularly notable for its treatment of prose. Janáček did not construct the work according to the traditional model of a succession of closed numbers, but rather through a dramatic continuity closely tied to speech. By preserving Preissová's prose, he moved away from the traditional verse libretto and developed a form of musical theatre in which the rhythms, accents and inflections of language play a structuring role. This attention to verbal material contributes to the work's distinctive tension and preserves a palpable proximity to the theatrical origins of the subject while granting the orchestra an essential role in characterising situations and emotional states.

Creation, reception and dissemination

Gabriela Preissová's play caused a scandal at its Prague premiere in 1890, less because of sensationalism than because of the harshness of its subject matter (pregnancy outside marriage, social dishonour, infanticide) and the realism with which it portrayed the moral violence of a rural community. The disturbance also stemmed from the fact that the crime was committed by the Kostelnička, a figure of authority linked to the village's religious and social order, which gave the drama a particularly unsettling dimension. When Janáček adapted this material for opera, he retained its force without provoking the same type of scandal: the issue became less the acceptability of the subject than the institutional recognition and dissemination of the work.

The premiere of *Jenůfa* took place on 21 January 1904 in Brno. Janáček would have preferred the work to be premiered in Prague, on the leading Czech stage, but the National Theatre initially rejected it. The premiere was nevertheless successful, and the work was revived there in the years that followed. This stage remains essential in the opera's history, even though Janáček himself considered the resources of the Brno theatre insufficient fully to serve his score.

The decisive recognition came from Prague. After several refusals, *Jenůfa* finally entered the repertoire of the National Theatre on 26 May 1916 under the direction of Karel Kovařovic. This production marked a major turning point in Janáček's career. It helped establish the work on the Czech stage and brought the composer broader recognition. The reasons for the initial rejection have often been attributed to the poor relationship between Janáček and Kovařovic, whom the composer had once sharply criticised, but they also reflect more generally the reluctance that such a singular work could arouse within the National Theatre. The Prague version also included revisions, particularly in the orchestration, introduced by Kovařovic.

The Prague success played a decisive role in spreading the work beyond the Czech lands. *Jenůfa* then attracted the attention of Max Brod, who contributed to its circulation in the German-speaking world through his translation of the libretto under the title *Jenůfa*. The Vienna premiere in 1918 constituted an essential stage in this expansion. From then on, the opera began to establish itself on other European and international stages, bringing Janáček a reputation that now extended far beyond the national framework.

The international success of the work was nevertheless built for a long time upon a version that was not exactly Janáček's own. The 1916 Prague production prepared by Kovařovic introduced revisions, particularly in the orchestration, as well as certain cuts that left a lasting mark on performance tradition. It was in this form, relayed by Max Brod's German translation and by the editions disseminated in the early twentieth century, that the opera became established on German-speaking and then international stages. The return to a version closer to the original gradually took place during the twentieth century. Much credit belongs to the musicians and editors who worked to rediscover Janáček's text, particularly Joannes Martin Dürr, and above all Sir Charles Mackerras and John Tyrrell, whose editorial work constituted a decisive stage in this reassessment.

The legacy

With *Jenůfa*, Janáček created the work that truly opened the way to lasting recognition for his operatic theatre. Although later mature operas such as *Káťa Kabanová*, *The Cunning Little Vixen* and *The Makropulos Affair* would confirm and expand his place in music history, *Jenůfa* remains the work through which his name became established beyond the Czech sphere.

Jenůfa's place in the history of twentieth-century opera rests on several factors. The work has often been noted for the concentration of its dramatic writing, for its close relationship to prose and spoken language, and for the way it articulates the intimate, the social and the collective without resorting to the inherited models of grand Romantic opera. In this respect, it appears as one of the works through which Janáček revealed a profoundly renewed form of lyric theatre, in which dramatic tension arises less from spectacular display than from the density of situations, the truth of human relationships and the invention of a singular musical language.

The stage success of *Jenůfa* established itself gradually. Initially linked to the dissemination of the work within the Czech and German-speaking worlds after the Prague success of 1916, it subsequently consolidated its place throughout the twentieth century on major European and international stages. Its regular presence in the repertoire of major opera houses, together with the continuous revivals it still inspires today, bears witness to this lasting establishment. *Jenůfa* is no longer merely a milestone in Janáček's history; it has become one of the century's operas regularly reinterpreted by theatres and performers alike.

This legacy also stems from the very nature of the drama. Through its precise social anchoring, its tightly constructed theatrical form and the complexity of its characters, *Jenůfa* has inspired highly diverse stagings. The work has traversed the evolution of modern stage direction without losing its force: at times approached as a rural drama, at others as a social tragedy, a psychological chamber piece or a reflection on communal violence, it has shown a rare capacity to accommodate contrasting aesthetic approaches. This is undoubtedly one of the clearest signs of its vitality within the repertory. The history of its afterlife thus naturally leads to that of its stagings, so much has *Jenůfa* established itself as a privileged field of theatrical interpretation in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Artistic commission

Creative Team

A budget of **€40 000** for fees and a budget of **€20 000** for authors' rights/royalties are allocated to the creative team (employer costs). These amounts may be distributed freely among the various members of the production team. This arrangement allows each candidate to assemble the creative team best suited to their artistic concept and production requirements (set design, costume design, video design, with or without AI, lighting design, choreography, etc.).

Additional Performers

It is possible to engage dancers, children, actors, extras, acrobats, or any other performers justified by the proposed dramaturgical approach. Employer costs associated with such engagements shall be deducted from the Set, Costume and Props Budget and will be considered as part of an overall budgetary assessment in relation to the production's staging choices and artistic approach.

Dramaturgy

As the performance requires at least one intermission, the duration of any such intermission shall not exceed 25 minutes. If additional curtain-drop pauses for scenic changes are required during the performance, they must be discussed with and approved by the General and Artistic Management.

Set, Costume and Props Budget

The artistic commission places particular emphasis on creativity, the dramatic power of the work without unnecessary artifice, and the need to present this repertoire through new forms of expression that are both more economical and more aligned with contemporary sustainability and transition challenges.

Accordingly, a deliberately limited budget of **€150,000** has been allocated for sets, costumes and props. This budget includes:

- materials, supplies and consumables required for the construction of sets, costumes and props;
- labour costs for design development, construction, packing and transportation of the sets from the workshops to the Opera House;
- any additional temporary costume-making staff required for cutting, dyeing, assembly, or specialist crafts such as millinery, feather work, or costume structural work;
- the manufacture of wigs, masks and headpieces;
- additional labour required for the production of props.

Permanent staff costs are provided separately and are not charged against this budget.

For the implementation of the selected project, access to the stock, repertory assets and existing production resources of the Opéra national de Nancy-Lorraine and its co-producing partners will be available and actively encouraged.

Technical Teams of the Opéra national de Nancy-Lorraine

Production and Technical Management:

1 Technical and Production Director
1 Head Stage Technical Manager + 1 Technical Logistics Manager + 1 Touring Stage Manager
1 Set Design and Technical Office Coordinator
Stage Operations:
1 Head Stage Hands + 8 Stage Hands
1 Head Electrician + 4 Stage Electricians
1 Audiovisual Stage Manager
1 Head Props Master + 2 Props Technicians
Costumes, Makeup and Hair:
1 Head of Costumes + 1 Assistant + 1 Cutter + 6 Costume Makers + 2 Dressers + 1 Stock Manager
1 Head of Makeup and Hair

Performance Teams:

1 General Stage Manager
2 Stage Managers
1 Technical Stage Manager
8 Stage Hands
2 Props Technicians
1 Lighting Stage Manager
2 Stage Electricians
1 Audiovisual Stage Manager
(+1 Video Stage Manager if the production includes video elements)
Dressers and Make-up & Hair depending on artistic casting:
4 to 7 Dressers
4 to 10 Makeup and Hair Stylists

Sets, costumes and props

We are a producing opera house operating under the stagione system. This means that the sets and all physical elements of a production are installed before rehearsals begin and remain in place throughout the entire rehearsal period until the final performance.

Occasionally, the theatre may host alternating lightweight events (such as chamber music concerts, recitals, conferences, or other special events). These activities do not generally entail technical implications for the production in residence.

Sets

We do not have an in-house set construction workshop. Sets are built by external contractors selected through public procurement procedures. Our Head of Technical Design and Scenery prepares the tendering process on the basis of the submitted design models and drawings.

The selected creative team will work closely with the Artistic Production Management team throughout the project, from the development of technical specifications through to the supervision of construction and installation.

We have two revolving stages of different configurations:

- The first, available in diameters of 6 and 10 metres, can be operated with two independently moving sections (an inner disc and an outer ring).
- The second, available in diameters of 6, 8 and 12 metres, consists of a single rotating platform.

Technical drawings and specifications are available upon request from the Technical Department.

Following the production's run, sets are stored in our warehouses and retained for a minimum of five years. They may subsequently be reused, in whole or in part, for artistic and cultural education projects, participatory initiatives, community programmes, or audience engagement activities.

Sets, costumes and props

Costumes

Costumes are produced in our in-house costume workshop. In addition to cutting, assembly and fitting facilities, we have a fully equipped dye workshop.

Specialist crafts such as millinery, costume structural work, dyeing and feather work require the engagement of external specialists. However, our permanent team possesses extensive expertise in embroidery, knitwear, costume jewellery, costume accessories, decorative finishing, and the creation of three-dimensional forms using both composite materials and traditional techniques.

Workshop availability will be determined in consultation with the successful candidate, taking into account the workshop's workload for the 2028–2029 season and, in particular, the creation of new productions. As a guideline, a new production typically benefits from approximately twelve weeks of workshop time, covering mock-ups and prototypes, fabric preparation, fittings, cutting, assembly and finishing.

The team includes a senior dressmaker and head of workshop specialising in soft tailoring. For tailored garments, a specialist cutter/tailor is generally engaged, while assembly work can be carried out by the in-house team.

We maintain a substantial costume stock ranging from the fifteenth century to the contemporary period. Whenever possible, priority is given to the reuse, adaptation and transformation of existing costumes.

The production of chorus costume series or certain specialised costume pieces may be outsourced where appropriate.

Props

We have dedicated workshop facilities for the construction, adaptation and preparation of props, as well as storage and preparation areas for both food and non-food consumables.

Our teams are skilled in working with wood, metal and textiles, as well as resin casting, foam, plaster and composite materials. They are also experienced in scenic painting, decorative finishes and ageing techniques.

The teams are additionally trained in the implementation of stage effects and theatrical special effects.

A substantial stock of props and furniture is available and should be considered as a resource within the creative process. Whenever possible, existing stock items are proposed and reused before new pieces are purchased or manufactured.

Commitment to sustainability

Working Differently: Ecological Transformation

Ecological transformation invites us to rethink practices at every level—artistic, technical, logistical and organisational. It reflects the responsibility that a cultural institution must assume while taking into account the specific constraints of artistic creation.

Measurement

The Opera actively participates in several collective initiatives aimed at better understanding and quantifying its environmental impact.

It contributed to the steering committee led by the Association Française des Orchestres, the Réunion des Opéras de France, the Direction Générale de la Création Artistique and BL Evolution in the development of a shared carbon assessment tool dedicated to opera and symphonic institutions.

In 2024, the Opera completed its first environmental impact assessment:

- 1,657 tonnes of CO₂ emissions, equivalent to the average annual emissions of approximately 184 French citizens.

Transformation Practices

Transformation is a long-term process rooted in practical decisions and collective action. Four major workstreams are currently underway:

Audience Mobility

- Encouraging more sustainable travel choices;
- Improving the geographical and temporal accessibility of performances;
- Promoting car-sharing initiatives.

Building and Energy Performance

- Optimisation of technical equipment;
- Energy efficiency and reduced consumption;
- Progressive renovation of facilities.

In 2025, new insulation works were completed and an electric vehicle was added to the Opera's fleet.

Commitment to sustainability

Creative Processes (Sets, Costumes and Props)

- Reuse and repurposing of materials;
- Resource sharing and mutualisation;
- Responsible sourcing practices.

In 2026, the Opera pioneered the transport of the sets for *Les Incrédules* by rail freight, an initiative recognised for both its logistical efficiency and its significantly lower carbon footprint compared with road transport.

Internal Operations

Since March 2025, a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) clause has been incorporated into all public procurement contracts issued by the Opera.

This work is driven by an internal Sustainable Workshop, which serves as a platform for monitoring developments, generating proposals and testing new approaches. The Opera is an active member of several networks engaged in these issues, including ARVIVA, Réditec, Réunion des Opéras de France, Association Française des Orchestres and Opera Europa.

In 2025, the Opera renewed its Destination Innovante Durable certification and contributed to the ARVIVA annual meetings.

Technical rider and plans

Technical Rider is available here in French :

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/upxzxupi70rtslpkv4vn6/OnNL-FICHE_TECHNIQUE_2026_FR.pdf?rlkey=q0hnb66sipmm32andvt0xc6t&st=2sin7nhd&dl=0

Theater plans are available at the following link :

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/8q41sk0fsv2zff6nygf4k/ONL-plan-coupe-th-tre-260527-Standard.zip?rlkey=3qy9a2ct4vsckney1w84c1bc1&st=l90x8djk&dl=0>

Contacts

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