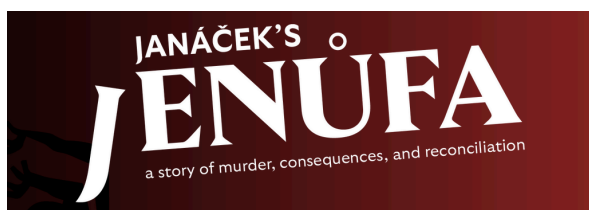


The Cleveland Orchestra: *Jenůfa*, an opera about reconciliation

by Mike Telin



The 2025 edition of The Cleveland Orchestra's Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel Opera and Humanities Festival has adopted Reconciliation as its theme.

No opera treats the power of forgiveness and reconciliation better than Leoš Janáček's *Jenůfa*. Set in a rural Moravian village, its intense drama centers around Jenůfa, who gives birth to an illegitimate child, and her stepmother the Kostelnička (the church sacristan), who kills the baby in order to protect Jenůfa's honor and more importantly, her future.

On Saturday, May 17 at 7:00 pm in Mandel Concert Hall at Severance Music Center Franz Welser-Möst will lead The Cleveland Orchestra in Janáček's 1904 opera based on Gabriela Preissová's play *Její pastorkyňa* (Her Stepdaughter).

The cast features sopranos Latonia Moore (*Jenůfa*) and Nina Stemme (*Kostelnička*) and tenors Samuel Levine (*Laca*) and Miles Mykkanen (*Števa*). The production will be repeated on Thursday, May 22 at 7:00 pm and Sunday, May 25 at 3:00 pm Tickets are available [online](#).

Preissová's play is based on two real life events in a small rural community: a man who slashed the face of his brother's fiancée with whom he was also in love, and a woman who helped her stepdaughter kill her illegitimate baby.



During a telephone call Nina Stemme said that in order to truly understand her character you need to know her backstory. Kostelnička is the second wife and widow of a mill owner who drank himself to death, leaving her destitute

along with Jenůfa, his daughter from his first marriage.

Stemme said that Kostelnička is a complex character. “She is a strong woman who holds a high position in the church, and has been designated as the moral authority of her community. What we don’t find out in the opera is that she was married to a man who was a drunkard and beat her. She does not want the same thing to happen to her stepdaughter. She does not want Jenůfa to be stuck with old rules and traditions.”

As Franz Welser-Möst writes in his program notes: “At the very end of the opera, as the Kostelnička is taken away by the officials, the emotional climax is really when Jenůfa, forgives her stepmother. This is the key to the entire opera: that Jenůfa, after all the bad things that have happened to her — after Laca disfigures her, Števa abandons her and his unborn child, and the Kostelnička rips that child from her — has the human greatness to be able to forgive each of them. With that forgiveness, she can recognize deep love with Laca and, for once in opera, there is a happy ending.”

Nina Stemme, who sang the role at Chicago Lyric Opera in 2023, noted that the music of the opera is all based on the special rhythm of the Czech language. “I’m looking forward to working with Franz, the Orchestra, and my colleagues, to put that across.”

Click [here](#) for a complete list of Festival events which runs through May 25.

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