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MARCH 2020

Prelude



MASTERWORKS #6:

DVOŘÁK'S EIGHTH MARCH 13 - 15, 2020

Though Dvořák began as an impoverished composer who recalled being tempted to steal bread to feed his family, he ultimately found fame and fortune as one of the greatest living composers of his time.¹



Antonín Dvořák

Antonín Dvořák is known as the Czech composer who achieved worldwide recognition for transforming his culture's folk tunes into some of the greatest 19th century Romantic music.ⁱ Today, Dvořák's works hold a place among the greatest music of all time.ⁱⁱ

But for the first 37 years of his life, Dvořák balanced precariously on the brink of poverty.

Born on September 8, 1841, Antonín was the oldest of nine children.ⁱⁱⁱ Antonín's large family was crammed into miniscule living quarters within the tavern his parents operated. His father, a zither player who devoted most of his time to his music, barely supported the family despite his "occupation" as a butcher and innkeeper.^{iv} The village bands that performed at the family's tavern afforded young Dvořák a wide range of musical experiences.^v Until the age of 12 Antonín attended a one-room school, which offered a limited curriculum for the lower classes, but the schoolteacher, Josef Spitz, was a skilled musician who instructed the boy in violin and voice.^{vi} As a child, Antonín ably contributed to the music-making scene in his father's tavern.^{vii}



Dvořák's Family

Antonín's early and unmistakable talent for music was recognized and encouraged by his parents.^{viii} At the age of 12, his parents sent him to live with an aunt and uncle so Dvořák could attend a higher caliber school and continue his musical studies.^{ix} The youngster added piano and organ to his musical repertoire and undertook his first attempts at composition.^x Dvořák changed schools again at age 16 to continue his musical studies at the Institute for Church Music in Prague, then the second-largest city (after Vienna) in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.^{xi} Upon graduation, however, Dvořák's employment opportunities were limited. He found work as a violist with an entertainment

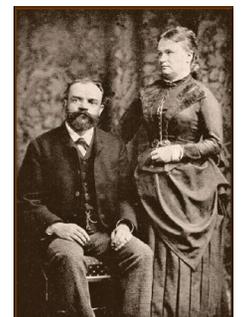


Provisional Czech Theater

orchestra that performed in coffee houses and restaurants and also worked as the principal violist for the Provisional Czech Theater, playing in performances nearly every evening year-round.^{xii} Struggling to make ends meet, he supplemented his meager income by teaching.^{xiii}

While Dvořák composed prolifically throughout the 1860's and early 1870's, his works were never performed nor could he find anyone to publish his music.^{xiv} He lacked the connections and social skills to successfully promote himself, but, undoubtedly, another factor was the difficulty and highly experimental style of his compositions.^{xv} In 1873, Dvořák resigned his position with the theater orchestra when one of his operas, *King and Collier*, was scheduled for performance, but no sooner did rehearsals begin than the opera was pronounced unperformable, crushing his dream of earning income as a composer.^{xvi}

In 1873, the struggling 32-year old Dvořák married one of his former piano students, 19-year old Anna Čermáková.^{xvii} In 1874, having relinquished his position with the theater orchestra and with a baby on the way, Dvořák accepted a low-paying position as church organist and simultaneously applied for a grant offered by the Austrian government to help support poor but talented artists.^{xviii} Starting in early 1875, Dvořák received the first of five such annual grants, and with that award, his luck started to change.^{xix} The grant's judging committee included Johannes Brahms, who, impressed by the young composer's ability, became instrumental in promoting Dvořák's works.^{xx} Brahms sent one of Dvořák's compositions to his own publisher in Berlin, Fritz Simrock, and for



Anna and Antonín

continued on next page...





Antonín, Anna and children

the first time, Dvořák's music was published.^{xxi} But it was not until 1879 that Dvořák finally received an income from the publication of his compositions.^{xxii} Until that time, he struggled not only financially, but emotionally, as not even one of the couple's first three children survived infancy.^{xxiii} (Ultimately, he and Anna had six other children, all of whom survived.^{xxiv})

With an endorsement from Brahms, Dvořák's finally garnered international recognition, and from 1883 to the end of 1886 he composed works in response to requests from abroad, mainly from Brahms's friend, Simrock, the Berlin-based publisher.^{xxv} Between 1884 and 1886, Dvořák received multiple international invitations to conduct his music.^{xxvi} He made five extended trips to England to conduct, reaping unprecedented ovations as one of the great composers of the time.^{xxvii} In 1890, at the invitation of his friend, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Dvořák conducted his own orchestral works in Moscow and St. Petersburg.^{xxviii} In 1891, he returned to England to conduct and received an honorary doctorate from Cambridge.^{xxix} In the span of about 10 years, the impoverished theater musician who could not feed his family had become a composer of international renown, and his adventures in America were about to begin.



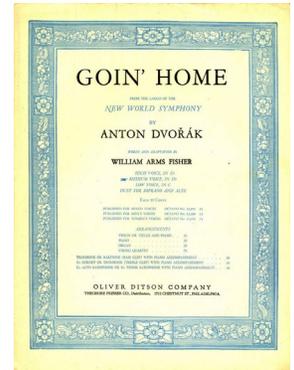
Dvořák at Cambridge

In June of 1891, Dvořák was offered the position of composition teacher and director of the newly-created National Conservatory of Music of America located in New York City.^{xxx} The Conservatory offer included four months' annual vacation and the astonishing salary of \$15,000 per year, more than 30 times his income from the conservatory in Prague, and worth roughly \$650,000 today.^{xxxi} While Dvořák deliberated whether he should accept the job, Anna had no reservations whatsoever, and at her urging, the entire family moved to New York City, occupying a five-room apartment on East 17th Street near Stuyvesant Square Park in New York.^{xxxii} The family lived in America for almost three years, from September of 1892 through April 1895 and traveled to Iowa, Omaha, Minnesota, Chicago and even Niagara Falls.^{xxxiii}

It was during this time that Dvořák became fascinated with African-American spirituals, thanks to an introduction to the art form by Harry T. Burleigh, his assistant at the Conservatory.^{xxxiv} Dvořák was greatly moved by the music he found in the black community and argued that it should inform the future sound of American music: "In the Negro melodies of America,

I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music."^{xxxv} Dvořák challenged American composers to make better use of the "negro melodies of America" and to look to American folk music as the basis for "any serious and original school of composition" in America.^{xxxvi}

Dvořák's *New World Symphony* was composed during his years in the United States and premiered at Carnegie Hall in New York in December of 1893.^{xxxvii} In 1922, almost 20 years after his death, one of his students at the Conservatory, William Arms Fisher, composed "Goin' Home," adding lyrics to the Largo melody from the *Symphony* that expressed universal themes of longing and nostalgia.^{xxxviii}



"Goin' Home"

His salary from the Conservatory in arrears, and somewhat homesick for his native country, Dvořák returned to Czechoslovakia in 1896 to resume his teaching position at the conservatory in Prague, where he was named artistic director in 1901.^{xxxix} His unexpected death in 1904, likely from a stroke resulting from complications of influenza and a kidney ailment, came as a shock to the musical world.^{xl} To this day, his powerful influence on music continues to encourage all composers to find their own voice and draw inspiration from their own heritage.

Join us!

Please join the Hartford Symphony Orchestra for ***Dvořák's Eighth, March 13 - 15, 2020***, with HSO's Concertmaster, Leonid Sigal, performing Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole*, and Dvořák's riveting *Symphony No. 8*.



WONDERING HOW THE MUSIC WILL SOUND?

Try HSO'S Listening Guide, with links to the pieces you'll hear on our concert stage – and more!

Enjoy a performance of Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* with soloist Vadim Repin:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVDAPPwy984>

Listen to Dvořák's *Symphony No. 8* performed by the Vienna Philharmonic, conducted by Herbert Von Karajan:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIBtWyKj-vAo>

Interested in hearing more music by Dvořák and other Czech composers?

Try this stellar performance of Dvořák's *New World Symphony*, by the New York Philharmonic, conducted by Alan Gilbert:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HCIX2s8A9IE>

Listen to Jacqueline Du Pré performing Dvořák's *Cello Concerto* with the London Symphony, conducted by Daniel Barenboim:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_yxtaeFuEQ

Or try this timeless classic, Smetana's *The Moldau*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6kqu2mk-Kw>



The Dvořák Museum



Dvořák's *New World* Manuscript



Dvořák Statue at Stuyvesant Square

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Casey's
Classics

Want the best recordings of the pieces you'll experience on the concert program? Coleman Casey, HSO's dear friend, Director Emeritus and beloved in-house audiophile, offers his recording recommendations of selections featured in our upcoming Masterworks Concert.

Lalo's charming and picturesque *Symphonie Espagnole* is superlatively well played by Itzhak Perlman with Daniel Barenboim conducting l'Orchestre de Paris (DG).

Dvořák's sunniest symphony, the No. 8 in G Major, is unforgettablely interpreted by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra under the great Czech conductor, Rafael Kubelik (DG).



REFERENCES

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- ii. <https://www.dvoraknyc.org/bio>
- iii. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Antonin-Dvorak>. There is dispute as to the number of his siblings. Some sources report that he was the oldest of 14 children. <https://www.classicfm.com/composers/dvorak/guides/dvorak-facts/>
- iv. <https://www.dvoraknyc.org/bio>
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- xxxiv. Ibid. At the conservatory, Dvořák taught violinist Will Marion Cook, who became a celebrated Broadway composer and conductor, and the future mentor of Duke Ellington.
- xxxv. Ibid
- xxxvi. <http://www.americanmusicpreservation.com/GoInHome.htm>
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