Dvořák, Antonín Anton Dvořák (1841 – 1904)

Czech composer. His Romantic music extends the classical tradition of Ludwig van Beethoven and Johannes Brahms and displays the influence of Czech folk music. He wrote nine symphonies; tone poems; operas, including Rusalka (1900); large-scale choral works; the Carnival (1891–92) and other overtures; violin and cello concertos; chamber music; piano pieces; and songs. International recognition came with two sets of Slavonic Dances (1878 and 1886). Works such as his New World Symphony (1893) reflect his interest in American folk themes, including black and American Indian music. He was director of the National Conservatory, New York, in 1892–95.

Dvořák was the son of a village innkeeper and butcher. He heard only popular and simple church music as a child, but developed remarkable gifts. He was sent to the organ school at Prague in 1857, began to compose two years later, and joined an orchestra as violinist. He later played viola in the orchestra of the Bohemian Provisional Theatre at Prague, conducted by Richard Wagner from 1862, and from 1866 by Bedrich Smetana. Eleven years later he became organist of the church of St Adalbert, Prague. In 1865 he wrote the song cycle Cypresses, inspired by his hopeless love of his pupil, Josefina Čermaková. In 1873 he married Anna, Josefina’s sister, and produced his first compositions to receive attention, including the 3rd symphony; earlier works had been strongly influenced by Wagner. During this period he wrote many songs, overtures, and symphonies, and in 1874 produced his opera King and Charcoal-Burner, which was not a success. The same year he received for the first time the Austrian state prize for composition. One member of the committee was the composer Johannes Brahms, who befriended Dvořák and introduced him to his publisher, Fritz Simrock. The Slavonic Rhapsodies and Dances of 1878 show a nationalist character to his music, and their publication brought him international fame. They were followed by the first of his great string quartets, the E♭ Op. 51, and the powerful 6th symphony (1880); the former work contains folk elements, and in the latter the influence of Brahms can be heard.

Dvořák first visited England in 1884 to conduct the Stabat Mater in London. In 1885 he bought the country estate of Vysoká, which remained his home. In 1891 he received an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University, and was appointed professor at Prague Conservatory, where he became director in 1901. In 1892–95 he was director of the new National Conservatory in New York, and spent some holidays at the Czech community of Spillville, Iowa. The premiere of the New World Symphony at Carnegie Hall in 1893 was one of his greatest successes.

In 1896 he paid the last of his many visits to England, where he had produced several works at the music festivals. The mighty and classically modelled 7th symphony was premiered in London in 1885, and the cello concerto followed ten years later; Josefina, his first love, died during its composition, and in memory of her the slow section of the finale quotes her favourite song from Cypresses.

Works

Opera 10 operas, including Dimitrij (1882), The Jacobin (1889), The Devil and Kate (Čert a Káča, 1899), Rusalka (1900), Armida (1904).

Choral with orchestra (some with solo voices): Stabat Mater (1877), Requiem (1890); Te Deum; four sets of vocal duets; 68 songs.
Orchestral nine symphonies, including no. 5 in F, Op. 76 (1875); no. 6 in D, Op. 60 (1880); no. 7 in D minor, Op. 70 (1885); no. 8 in G, Op. 88 (1889); no. 9 in E minor, 'From the New World', Op. 95 (1893). Five symphonic poems The Water-Sprite (1896), The Noon-day Witch (1896), The Golden Spinning-Wheel (1896), The Wood-Dove (1896), Hero's Song (1897); seven concert overtures; orchestral works including Serenade in D minor for wind, cello, and bass (1878); Scherzo capriccioso (1883), Symphonic Variations (1877); two sets of Slavonic Dances (1878, 1886); Serenade for string orchestra; concertos for piano, violin, and cello (1876, 1880, 1895).


Piano 14 Op. nos. of piano pieces, including Theme and Variations; six sets of piano duets, including Slavonic Dances (1878).

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Dvořák, Antonín Ninth Symphony
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