

# Dvořák: Complete Works for solo Piano – Vol 1

Volume 1 (Early Works, 1855-79):

*Polka in E Major, B. 3 Two Minuets, Op. 28 Dumka in D Minor, Op. 35  
Theme with Variations in A-flat Major, Op. 36 Twelve Silhouettes, Op. 8*

History has not been kind to Dvořák’s solo-piano music – or, more accurately, has never paid it much mind. Overshadowed by the great symphonies and other orchestral works, the operas and oratorios, the chamber music, and even the fourhand piano pieces, the solo-piano works have been considered an important part of the Dvořák oeuvre. (It is one of history’s jokes that perhaps the best-known of all his works happens to have been written for solo piano: the Humoresque in G-flat major.) There is no doubt that his piano music is uneven, and includes a little hackwork, that he did not turn to the piano to do his best and most innovative work, that no one of his piano pieces rises to the level of Beethoven or Chopin or Brahms. Yet, the best of his piano works are at his highest level of inspiration, craftsmanship, and personality, and there are a few minor masterpieces in the bunch whose relative neglect by publishers, concert artists, and record companies is difficult to understand.

Dvořák was not really a pianist. His training and early performing experience were largely as a string player, and he never claimed to be a pianist of more than average competence. Still, solo-piano music can claim pride of place in his oeuvre in at least one respect: his very first surviving composition was for the piano, the Forget-me-not Polka in C Major, B.1, composed around 1855-6, when he was in his early teens. (Antonin Liehmann, his teacher at the Prague Organ School, contributed the polka’s Trio).

A second Polka for piano, in E major, dates from February 1860, a time when Dvořák occasionally composed dance music for a band he had joined after graduating from the Organ School. Assuming its authenticity (which some scholars doubt), the E-major polka offers an early glimpse into that mixing of Austro-German and Slavonic idioms that would characterize Dvořák’s music throughout his career.

After these modest youthful essays, Dvořák wrote no more solo-piano music for years, and when he turned to it again it was largely out of convenience. In 1873 and 1875, he published two Potpourris for piano, one from each of the two versions of his comic opera King and Charcoal Burner. The first of them, indeed, was one of his very first publications, and it appeared at a turning point in his life. Now in his early thirties, he had quit working as an orchestral musician, earning

treble to inner voices, becoming accompaniments to new themes. Dvořák returns, in the Humoresques, to the short forms in which he usually did his best work at the piano – simple ternary or rondo forms that he enlivens with subtle but telling variations, transitions, and codas (he returns to his favourite device of closing with a hint of a secondary theme, in the tonic key), but now, at this mature stage in his compositional career, he shows a much greater gift for continuous variation and development of his material. Dvořák brings his American style home in the Humoresques, back to the forms and proportions with which he was most comfortable, albeit with a new wisdom, confidence, and assurance.

Working on the Humoresques obviously inspired Dvořák: he no sooner completed the set than he began to work on another, in August and September of 1894. But he completed only two pieces, B. 188, before dropping the project. (He soon turned his attention to the Cello Concerto in B Minor, Op. 104.) These two pieces would prove to be his last works for solo piano, and, save a couple of songs and a polka arrangement, were his last works to feature the piano in any way. They were published, under the titles “Lullaby” and “Capriccio,” in Berlin. In 1911, as Op. posth. The second piece, incidentally, was marked only “Allegretto” scherzando; “Capriccio” was a title added by the publisher, with the consent of Dvořák’s former pupil (and son-in-law) Josef Suk, who prepared them for publication.

The two pieces maintain the high standards Dvořák set in the Humoresques – and, moreover, reflect a return to his Slavonic roots and away from the American idiom, which he had probably exhausted. The evocative harmonic ambiguities in the “Lullaby,” the subtle transitions and variations of thematic detail in the “Capriccio,” the imagination and technical security demonstrated in both – these suggest what could have been a worthy companion set, a sort of “Slavonic Humoresques.” Whatever the reason Dvořák abandoned the idea, he missed – regrettably, for us – a last change to contribute a major piano work that returned to his native musical idiom.

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Humoresques, for all eight are steeped in American folk music. As in the Suite, there is a Fixation with pentatonic melodies – sometimes rigorously, as in No. 3, other times suggestively through an emphasis on the second and sixth scale degrees. There are hints of non-diatonic modes, like the Aeolian (with its flattened seventh) and they Lydian (with its sharpened fourth). There is an almost tiresome regularity of phrasing, along with short repeated themes and strongly marked rhythms evocative of folk music. There are pedal points and drone-like accompaniments, of the kind associated with folk instruments (see Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 8), even a little melodic ornamentation here and there that seems to mimic folk practice. Several Humoresques feature once again the crude melodies, hammered repeated notes, and swirling figuration of Dvořák in his “Hiawatha” mode – most obviously No. 5, in A minor, which opens with a short, modal theme with five repeated notes, a theme heard more than thirty times, in many different keys, in less than two hundred measures. The gentle No. 4 was based on a theme representing Hiawatha as a child, borrowed from the abandoned opera sketches. More so than the Suite, the Humoresques evoke the Negro spiritual (there are “blue” notes in several pieces), as well as the popular songs of white America – both antiquated songs like “Barbara Allen” and later songs like those of Stephen Foster.

No. 7 in G-flat major, of course, went on to acquire a special renown of its own. It is the piece everyone knows simply as “Dvořák’s Humoresque,” the one that would appear in countless piano recitals and on countless parlor pianos, the one that would be popularised in arrangements by everyone from Fritz Kreisler to Art Tatum, the one that lent its title to a bad Joan Crawford movie in 1946, the one whose popularity is undimmed today, even if tinged with a little irony. It is in fact one of the simpler, less sophisticated Humoresques, but with endearing, sentimental melodies and dotted rhythms that suggest a gentle cakewalk, though legend has it that the rhythm imitates the train on which Dvořák supposedly penned the piece.

The out-sized fame of No. 7 should not obscure the fact that all of the Humoresques are beautiful, attractively set pieces of high quality, conceived during a period of particularly fertile creativity. Even more so than the Suite, the Humoresques are a concise, stylised portrait – almost a travelogue – of Dvořák’s musical experience of America. The pieces are all strongly individual (though, interestingly, all are in 2/4 time). Some of the features we associate with Dvořák’s Slavonic style – fluctuation between major and minor modes, sudden modulations, chromatically coloured cadences – are here perfectly adapted to the American idiom. The piano writing is more sophisticated than in most of his earlier music: the textures are richer, frequently contrapuntal (there is even some imitation and invertible counterpoint), and themes are sometimes transferred from

some income from private pupils but determined to pursue a calling as a serious composer. The successful première of his patriotic cantata *Hymnus : The Heirs of the White Mountain*, in March 1873, and then his first publication later that year, brought him his first real public attention, and gave him new confidence as a composer. The solo piano did not figure much in his work at this time, but he was not ignoring the instrument. Between 1871 and 1873, he wrote two piano trios, the Op. 5 piano quintet, and several other chamber works with piano: cello and violin sonatas, an Octet, a Romance. Most of these were later destroyed, but in 1875 and early 1876 he featured the piano in a new series of more sophisticated works that were later published: the Op. 40 Nocturne, the Opp. 21 and 26 piano trios, and the Op. 23 piano quartet.

These works seem to have awakened Dvořák to the potential of the piano, for around February of 1876, he produced the two Minuets, Op. 28, his first adult piano compositions (There are indications of instrumentation in the first edition, published in 1879, suggesting that they may originally have been composed for orchestra). These are not true minuets in the Baroque or Classical sense, but moderately paced waltzes, in the familiar Viennese form: series of short waltzes in different keys, with the opening theme returning at the end to form a coda. The first Minuet, which opens with a tune from King and Charcoal Burner, is clearly the superior of the two, but in both Dvořák’s distinctive musical personality is already apparent: the Austro-German form is imbued with melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic details unmistakably Slavonic in flavour.

Dvořák turned much more ambitiously to the piano a few months later, in the fall of 1876, when he began work on the Piano Concerto in G Minor, Op. 33. Though completed and performed and published, the work never entered the mainstream concerto repertory, due largely to a solo part that most pianists find awkward and unrewarding. Dvořák’s lack of professional polish as a pianist shows: the solo part is unusually modest, integrated with the orchestra and giving the pianist few opportunities to shine, and the technical passages are often ungainly, poorly laid out for the hands. Dvořák found much of the musical material attractive, but was unhappy with his piano writing. He never got around to revising it, and today the concerto is often heard – when it is heard at all – in a later revised edition that features a more brilliant piano part. But his work on the concerto had the salutary effect of inspiring him to make a serious foray into solo-piano music, in two works composed in December of 1876: the Dumka in D Minor, Op. 35; and the Theme with Variations in A-flat Major, Op. 36, his first substantial piano piece, and possibly his greatest.

Op. 35 was the first of many works and movements by Dvořák to bear the label “dumka”; there are other important examples in the Slavonic Dances, the Op. 81 piano quintet, and the Dumky

Trio, Op. 90. The dumka was originally a type of Ukrainian folk music, but by the nineteenth century the term was more loosely adopted by Slavonic composers to refer to a sung or instrumental lament, slow in tempo, melancholy and ruminative in character, though often interspersed with faster sections that are cheerful or jubilant. (The word “dumka” derives from the Czech and Polish words meaning “to ponder”; the plural form is “dumky.”) Many nineteenth-century Polish, Ukrainian, and Russian composers, including Musorgsky, Tchaikovsky, and Balakirev, wrote dumky, but the genre came to be associated most closely with Bohemians – Dvořák most prominent among them. For a composer whose nationalism was so insistently pan-Slavonic as Dvořák’s – he borrowed generously from all Slavic cultures – the dumka was an ideal genre. In his Op. 35, Dvořák’s gift for creating a stylized synthesis of folk and art musics is now matched by a new level of skill in piano writing: the melancholy mood of the opening section is enhanced by the unobtrusive canonic textures, and the secure handling of chromatic harmony. The piece is in a simple rondo form, the secondary themes offering relief from the prevailing melancholy with faster-paced music in major keys, though the second of these interpolations, in G major, has its own darker core in the minor mode. Dvořák subjects the main theme to melodic variation each time it is reprised (this is typical of dumky, and may mimic folk practice); the final appearance of the theme is particularly ornate and grandiose, though the work ends in with a long tonic pedal sprinkled with dissonances that create an exotic haze, before finally dissolving into the clear light of D major.

Dvořák must have been pleased and inspired by his Dumka, since he immediately embarked on a much more ambitious piano project: the Theme with Variations in A-flat Major, Op. 36. It is important in many respects, not least because it is Dvořák’s only solo-piano work that is neither a short piece nor a set of short pieces: the extended theme and its eight variations are molded into a continuous dramatic structure some twenty minutes in length. The work had a model: Beethoven’s Piano Sonata in A-flat Major, Op. 26 – the so-called “Funeral March” sonata – the first movement of which is, unusually, a theme with (five) variations. Dvořák never explicitly cited Beethoven, but the resemblances between his Op. 36 and the first movement of Beethoven’s Op. 26 are too numerous and too fundamental to be coincidental. Both are in the same key; both have a long theme in a moderate 3/8 (the two themes even have a few motivic resemblances); and both feature a similar rhythmic pattern in Variation 1. But the closest point of contact is Variation 3, which in both works is in A-flat minor, with diversions to other flat keys, with a syncopated melody and a similar accompanimental texture. Like every other nineteenth-century composer, Dvořák was keenly aware that he stood in Beethoven’s very long shadow; we can

repeated-note motive (the note is usually the dominant), accompanied by busy – sometimes wildly swirling – figuration, usually in a minor key with strong modal inflections. (Listen to the contrasting middle sections of the first and third movements, and to the wilder principal themes in the second and fifth.) even the slow movement has been hard, plausibly, as an Indian lullaby, and interpretation consistent with its hauntingly repetitive melody, its modal inflections, and its persistent alteration of major and minor modes. The Suite opens with a grand pentatonic tune that announces its American character, and throughout the work the melodies gravitate toward the pentatonic, the harmonies toward the Aeolian and other non-diatonic modes. Even where a melody is not rigorously pentatonic, it often still has that flavour, usually through a special emphasis on the second and sixth degrees of the scale. The result is a consistent patina of American style.

Critics have long denigrated the A-major Suite; “commonplace and lazily written” is one of the franker descriptions. To be sure, it is a curious piece, in form and style. Yet, the more one listens to it, the more apparent it becomes that the music’s undeniable primitivism was intentional. The sometimes crude, graceless melodies, the perfunctory harmonic progressions, the odd modulations, the want of sophisticated development – all seem calculated to convey a stylised interpretation of an unpolished, sometimes awkward American folk idiom. Dvořák in 1894 was, after all, a celebrated and accomplished composer in his fifties who, the year before, had declared that he would now compose only for his own pleasure, and who had no need to churn out potboilers that did not meet his standards. As it turns out, he was fond enough to the Suite to offer it to his “official” publisher, Simrock, and to orchestrate it a year later, though that version, which many listeners now prefer, was not published until 1911, seven years after his death.

While still in America, Dvořák had begun jotting down ideas for what he thought would be a set of “New Scottish Dances,” as he called them, but he found that his musical ideas were too varied in character for such a project, so he adopted instead the title Humoresques, a term that implies caprice or fantasy or geniality more than outright humour. (It is interesting to recall that in 1880 he had also begun work on a projected new series of Scottish Dances, which eventually evolved into the Op. 56 mazurkas. Considering how modest were his original Scottish Dances, Op. 41 composed in 1877, his apparent attachment to them is surprising.) To his “Scottish” sketches Dvořák incorporated others – one for a funeral march (which evolved into No. 1), another for the scherzo of an unfinished symphony in B minor (which evolved into No. 8) – when he returned home for his summer holiday in 1894, completing eight Humoresques by the end of August .

It is difficult to see what Dvořák could possibly have considered Scottish about these

York, in October of 1892. Dvořák was lionized in America, where his music had been popular since the time of his first set of Slavonic Dances, in 1878, and he travelled widely outside of New York – to Boston, Chicago, Iowa, Omaha, St. Paul, Buffalo, Niagara Falls. He was inspired creatively by his contact with the United States; the Negro, native-Indian, and other folk and popular music he heard there appealed to him, and were absorbed into his compositional arsenal, manifested famously in subsequent works like the Symphony No. 9 (From the New World); the String Quartet, Op. 96, and the String Quintet, Op. 97, both nicknamed “The American”; and the Sonatina for violin and piano, Op. 100. Mrs. Thurber urged him to write an opera on the traditional American subject of Hiawatha, the enlightened fifteenth-century Onondaga tribal chief celebrated in Longfellow’s long poem *Song of Hiawatha* (1855); Dvořák got no farther than making some preliminary sketches, however. In April 1894, he signed a new two-year contract with Mrs. Thurber before leaving for a summer holiday in Bohemia. He returned to America in November, but a decline in his patron’s financial fortunes nullified their contract, and after a few months he returned home.

The Suite and the Humoresques, both of which he worked on before leaving New York in the spring of 1894, are imbued throughout with the melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic features of his highly personal and stylised conception of musical Americanism, so distinct from his usual Slavonic style. The Suite, composed in February and March, is the closest equivalent in Dvořák’s piano music to a multi-movement sonata-type work. (In fact, while in America he had sketched a theme that he thought appropriate for a piano sonata, but he abandoned the idea.) More than even his programmatically unified sets of short pieces, or the Op. 52 pieces, the Suite is a coherent cycle of movements; a fast movement, a scherzo, an easygoing march, a slow movement, and a boisterous finale. The last movement even ends with a grandiose restatement of the theme with which the first movement began, making the cycle explicit. Unlike the simpler sets aimed at the amateur market, the Suite seems intended for concert performance by a professional virtuoso.

Trademark features of Dvořák’s “American style” recur in all five movements. Curiously there is little evocation of the Negro music that he loved, and that he drew on so memorably in the New World Symphony. Only in the last movement, in the second theme in A major, do we here a melody (albeit a fairly fast one) with some of the character of a spiritual, though in the third movement we might also hear the tongue-in-cheek strut of the cakewalk, a popular dance in America in the 1890s. For the most part, however, Dvořák dwells on his “Indian style,” used most famously in the scherzo of the New World Symphony. (Is the “Indian” character of the Suite a holdover from his tentative work on the Hiawatha opera?) All four of the faster movements feature a distinctive, hammered

detect this awareness time and again in the symphonies and other works in which he tackled the Classical forms Beethoven bequeathed. In Op. 36, at the age of thirty-five, he chose to address Beethoven directly. The special attention he gave to it – and its special success – make it clear that it was an important creative task for him, and it resulted in his only piano work to attempt a form and rhetoric Beethovenian in scale.

Dvořák’s forty-five measure theme is longer than Beethoven’s is bolder in its chromaticism, and features enough development of motives to constitute a kind of variation in itself. Dvořák immediately develops the chromaticism of the theme by hinting, three times, at the key a third below, F-flat (that is, E) major – fleeting harmonic details that he seizes on and develops further in the variations, with singular imagination and logic. In Variations 1 and 2, he expands these passing references to E major into full-fledged modulations that challenge the principal key. In Variation 2 he goes farther: the interjection of E major is decorated with its own modulation down a third, to C major – in harmonic terms, a parenthesis within a parenthesis. Variation 4 further explores the relationship of E major to A-flat major and minor, in the guise of a Moravian scherzo, while Variation 5 does so in a virtuosic setting, in a flurry of double octaves. (This variation was too much for Dvořák’s modest piano skills, and he later marked it as optional. Beethoven’s Variation 5, incidentally, also features octaves.)

Variation 6 is set largely in the distant key of G-flat major; the home key of A-flat major is never reached until the very end. It is an extraordinary conception, yet one that makes beautiful sense in the context of the work as a whole: Dvořák takes the idea of the flatward sideslip to its logical conclusion, writing a whole variation that serves as a harmonic digression demanding resolution. It is an eminently Beethovenian way of thinking, drawing from an unpretentious detail of the theme tonal and formal implications that influence the overall structure. The extended Variation 8 brings the work to an end that is both grand and delicate, triumphant and intimate, with the theme dressed up ornately but also brought back one last time in its most basic form.

The Theme with Variations was a brilliant success; arguably, Dvořák never wrote anything quite so accomplished for the piano again. It is a richly fertile work that perfectly balances variety and unity. The variations are strongly characterized, and often stray far from the theme, even as they mine its possibilities, yet the continuous development of musical ideas is so logically organized that the work as a whole is perceived as a coherent drama in which everything note seems to be in the right place. Dvořák’s work on Op. 36 paid immediate dividends the next year, in his Symphonic Variations, Op. 78, but the earlier work is too good to be considered merely a study for larger orchestral canvas. All the more curious that Dvořák so rarely used the theme-and-variations form.

He may have used it in Op. 36 only because he was influenced by his Beethoven model, and in Op. 78 only because he had used it in Op. 36. Yet it was clearly a form that he had mastered.

Then Dvořák next turned to the piano in a serious way it was with immense consequences for his career: in the spring of 1878, he produced his first set of Slavonic Dances, for four-hand piano (his orchestral version followed soon after). The Dances were a hit, and earned him – and the strain of Bohemian nationalism he presented – a new and enthusiastic international audience. It was a dream come true for his publishers, who were now eager to bring out all of his music, old and new, particularly music – like piano solos – that would appeal to the amateur market. In fact, the two Minuets, the Dumka, and the Theme with Variations, all from 1876, were published only in 1879, after the success of the Slavonic Dances, as were two other earlier works: the Scottish Dances, Op. 41, and the two Furianty, Op. 42.

The first piano music that Dvořák wrote especially to satisfy this new demand was the set of twelve short pieces he called *Silhouettes*, Op. 8 composed in the fall of 1879. The artificially low opus number reveals a slight deception on Dvořák's part. The *Silhouettes* were not written for his principal publisher of major new works, Simrock of Berlin, but for a publisher in Leipzig, who wanted to bring out his older music. Dvořák had no more old piano music to offer, so passed off the *Silhouettes* as early works by giving them a low opus number. In his defence, the first drafts for the *Silhouettes* do date back to an earlier creative period, around 1870-72, and some of the themes are even older, taken from three works of 1865: the Symphony No. 1 in C Minor, called *The Bells of Zlonice*, the Symphony No. 2 in B-flat Major, Op. 4; and the song cycle *Cypresses*. All three works were unpublished, and when Dvořák first drafted the *Silhouettes* he may have been seeking an opportunity to salvage some of the better themes from those works. In any event, the drafts were completely revised, and new pieces added, to create the final version of the *Silhouettes*.

Dvořák did not explain what he meant by his title; “silhouette” may simply be another generic Romantic title, like “poème” or “impromptu.” A more accurate title would be “Slavonic bagatelles.” Anxious to repeat the success of his Slavonic Dances, Dvořák returned to the same infectious melodies and rhythms, the same folk-inspired dance types, the same harmonic sideslips and modal inflections, in pieces of modest proportions and ambitions that do not develop ideas or mold dramas, but merely set a scene, establish a mood, evoke and image. At their most complex they contrast two ideas, usually in simple ternary (ABA) form. They range from polkas to sentimental Romantic mood pieces, but are all simple and unpretentious, clearly aimed at the amateur market.

Neither work represent Dvořák at his highest level of inspiration, and he seems to have thought so himself. He gave the pair an artificially low opus number, passing it off as an early work, and withheld it from Simrock of Berlin, the publisher to whom he assigned the new music he thought most worthy. The *dumka* is rather perfunctory and prosaic in material and form, with relatively unvaried repetitions of its recurring main theme – always a sign that Dvořák was not fully engaged. Whereas the two *Furianty*, Op. 42, had mostly avoided the characteristic alternations of duple and triple meter, the Op. 12 *furiant* features clashes of two against three almost obsessively, even in the gentler G-major coda, to the point that the notated meter of ? is often scarcely apparent. The piece has received some unflattering press. One Dvořák scholar referred to it as “an example of how thoroughly bad Dvořák's writing for the piano could be. As a realistic picture of an indifferent village band, thumping bass and squeaking treble, it is a success: from any other point of view it is a failure.”

The isolated *Humoresque* in F-sharp Major, B. 138, should not be confused with the later, more famous *Humoresque* Op. 101/No. 7, which was written in G-flat major but which, in some editions, has been notated in F-sharp. Dvořák wrote the F-sharp-major *Humoresque* in 1884, for the first volume of a collection of pieces published that same year, in Prague, by F.A. Urbánek. It is not a sophisticated piece, and its unprepared shifts between themes and keys are hardly subtle, though it has a lovely principal theme, simply but attractively set. The *Two Little Pears*, B. 156, are easy, crudely descriptive dance pieces, composed, probably in December of 1887, for *The Young Czech Pianist*, another Urbánek collection, published in Prague in 1888.

The *Album Leaf* in E-flat Major, B. 158 was composed on 21 July 1888, written into the autograph album of a certain “K.H.,” at Pisek, and was not published until *Editio Supraphon's* critical edition of the complete works of Dvořák, begun in 1955. Around 1891, Dvořák composed a theme, B. 303, apparently intended to serve as the subject of variations. It is a tantalizing suggestion that, at the height of his creative powers, he considered making another rare foray into a form he had used with such singular success fifteen years before, in his *Theme with Variations* in F-flat Major, Op. 36. But it was not to be, and the theme was published alone, in Prague, in 1894.

Dvořák's last two substantial piano works – the *Suite in A Major*, Op. 98, and the *Humoresques*, Op. 101 – were among the last products of his busy, fertile few years in the United States. In June of 1891, he had been invited by a wealthy American woman, Mrs. Jeannette Thurber, to become director of the National Conservatory of Music, in New York. After some negotiation, he agreed. For most of the early months of 1892, he made a farewell tour of Bohemia and Moravia, appearing as a pianist in some forty chamber-music concerts, the featured work being his new post in New

favoured is expanded with great skill and imagination into a seamless drama of more than three hundred measures, one that never wears out its welcome or betrays a moment's drop in inspiration. Listen, in the first hundred measures, to how Dvořák builds up his main theme from the stark timpani strokes of the opening measures, then extends and develops that theme with new motives and every-changing textures, harmonic sideslips and cross-rhythms, before allowing the theme to dissolve as mysteriously as it began, and lead seamlessly into the C-major trio. The music of the trio he builds up and develops no less skilfully, no less seamlessly, for more than a hundred measures, and the return of the opening section is almost Haydnesque in its clever reinterpretation of material. The best of Poetic Tone Pictures, like the "Bacchanalia," show the mature Dvořák reinterpreting his cherished short forms in light of his experience in larger instrumental forms, the proportions and keyboard settings growing correspondingly more ambitious in order to contain the wealth of ideas. Dvořák, in 1889, was no longer under a compulsion to produce piano music for the domestic market, and his turn here to a more ambitious kind of programmatic piano music, after an unusual creative dry spell, can only be explained by personal creative desire. The result was some of his most impressive music for the piano.

Kevin Bazzana

#### The Complete Works for Solo Piano - Volume 5 Volume 5 (late Works, 1884-94):

*Dumka and Furiant, Op. 12 Humoresque in F# Major, B. 138*

*Two Little Pearls, B. 156 Album Leaf in E-flat Major, B. 158*

*Theme, for variations, B. 303 Suite in A Major, Op. 98*

*Eight Humoresques, Op. 101 Two Pieces, B. 188*

The last decade of Dvořák's piano writing included major sets but also isolated short works, some written for particular occasions. The *Dumka* in C Minor and the *Furiant* in G Minor, both probably composed in September 1884, around the time of his second visit to England, were published together the next year, in Prague, as Op. 12. The pairing of these two contrasting folk-music forms—melancholy *dumka* and ebullient *furiant*—was a common practice (see, for example, the slow movement and scherzo of Dvořák's Op. 81 piano quintet), though these two particular pieces may not have been conceived as a set. The *furiant* was in fact first published alone, in London, in the Christmas 1884 supplement of the *Magazine of Music*.

They may qualify as bagatelles for another reason. The first *Silhouette*, with a tender middle section framed by short, fast, turbulent bursts of music, unmistakably calls to mind the last bagatelle of Beethoven: Op. 126/No. 6, in E-flat major. This was, after all, Dvořák's first set of short pieces, and perhaps he intended, in the opening piece, to acknowledge his illustrious predecessor, and so to take his place within a tradition. Perhaps, too, he intended to take up Beethoven's idea of the bagatelle set as a musical cycle—in this case, a less abstract, more programmatic cycle, for the themes he chose for the *Silhouettes* must have reminded him of his unrequited love, years earlier, for his pupil Josefina Cermáková, which had inspired the *Cypresses* cycle. It is tempting to interpret the first *Silhouette* as representing the dejected lover, and tempting to find programmatic explanations for Dvořák's use of the two themes of that first piece later on (as in No. 5), and especially for his inspired idea of developing, in the last *Silhouette*, the turbulent theme so harshly abbreviated in No. 1. But Dvořák left no clues to any intended programme—or, for that matter, to any intended reference to Beethoven—so he must have intended the cycle to stand alone as "pure music."

There are interesting ideas here, and the simplicity of the music is often charming, but the *Silhouettes* as a whole do not show off the best of Dvořák at the piano, and it is not too cynical to attribute their weaknesses to the rush to appease demanding publishers. No. 4, for example, is a kind of *furiant* followed by what sounds like a contrasting Trio in the relative major, but in lieu of an expected reprise of the main theme, or some kind of development of the material, the piece simply ends—or rather stops—with a perfunctory return to the main key, F-sharp minor.

Yes there are gems here, too, like the tender No. 2, just fifteen measures long yet a perfect little drama complete with modulation, variation, recapitulation, and even a brief wisp of Chopinesque cadenza. In the end, the *Silhouettes* are perhaps less important in themselves than in marking the beginning of an upsurge in Dvořák's interest in the solo piano—an upsurge inspired, perhaps, by practical demands, but one that, in the next few years, in sets like the Op. 52 pieces and the Op. 54 waltzes and the Op. 56 mazurkas, resulted in some piano works of undisputed successes.

**The Complete Works for Solo Piano - Volume 2  
Volume 2 (Middle Period Works, 1877-80):**

*Two Furiantes, Op. 42 Eight Waltzes, Op. 54  
Four Eclogues, Op. 56 Scottish Dances, Op. 41*

The two minor works on this program date from just before Dvořák's breakthrough to international fame in 1878, with his first series of Slavonic Dances for four-hand piano (later orchestrated). The Scottish Dances, Op. 41, were composed around the end 1877, at a turning point in his career. In November, he won an Austrian State Stipendium, worth 600 gulden (he had been entering compositions in this competition, usually successfully, since 1874). More important than the money, the attracted the attention of Johannes Brahms, who was so impressed with Dvořák's Moravian Duets for voices and piano that he recommended them – and Dvořák – to his own publisher, Simrock of Berlin. As a result, Simrock, hoping to repeat the success of Brahms's own Hungarian Dances for four-hand piano, commissioned Dvořák to write the Slavonic Dances.

Though the Scottish Dances date from this heady period, they are not nearly so ambitious or inspired as the Slavonic Dances. Op 41 is a series of fifteen simple, stylised contredanses in 2/4 time, in the ecossaise style of Beethoven or Schubert, each in a different key and consisting of two repeated eight-measure strains, played one after the other at the same tempo to form a single extended movement. A few tunes are repeated; most notably, the first and last dances use the same theme in the same key. D minor, though the piece cannot be said to be “in D minor” in any meaningful sense. The title is mere convention, and there is little in the music that sounds authentically Scottish. The melodies and rhythms, the harmonic sideslips and modal inflections – this is all pure Dvořák in his simple Slavonic style, in rehearsal for the Slavonic Dances.

The two Furiantes, Op. 42, from 1878, were written shortly after the completion of the Slavonic Dances. (Do they perhaps recycle ideas considered but rejected for the Dances?) The furiant, an exuberant, whirling Bohemian “swaggerer's dance,” was one of Dvořák's favourite genres – like the dumka, with which it was often paired and contrasted. (The middle movements – the slow movement and scherzo – of the Op. 81 piano quintet are a dumka and furiant.) The Op. 42 Furiantes are less characteristic than most: they are rather virtuosic in character, obviously meant for concert performance, and they do not make much use of alternating duple and triple meters, so typical of the furiant, though accented weak beats in some phrases do hint at cross-rhythms. The first furiant is much superior of the two. Both its principal idea and contrasting middle section are well developed, through different keys and textures; the second furiant, by contrast, closes with a literal repeat of the opening section – including its unusual introduction, which sounds much less

Simrock liked some of the pieces, but admitted that he did not expect them to be very accessible or popular; to be sure, they are more extensively developed than Dvořák's earlier miniatures, and more difficult technically – probably too difficult for most amateur pianists. They offer a rare example of Dvořák transcending his usually modest pianistic limits and writing piano music that flirts with professional virtuosity – with the techniques, textures, and rhetoric of the great pianist-composers. Some pianists have found the Poetic Tone Pictures unconvincing in this respect – overwritten, only superficially virtuosic, or even in questionable taste, and awkwardly laid out for the hands, much like the Op. 33 piano concerto. (One writer compared the piano writing to a transcription of an orchestral original.) Yet, the more massive piano writing in the Poetic Tone Pictures seems to have been a direct result of the unusual ambitiousness of Dvořák's musical conceptions, which at times threaten to burst the bounds of the miniature form.

The expanded dimensions of these pieces are the result of the mature and experienced Dvořák's much more sophisticated grasp of musical variation, extension, and development, his ability, at this point in his career, to take what might earlier have been a simple bagatelle evoking a simple and to round out the musical portrait, adding subtleties and layers of expression and depiction; the Dvořák in 1889 knew how to flesh out a programmatic miniature in ways that the Dvořák of 1880 could not imagine. The opening piece, “Twilight Way,” sets the tone for the whole set. Nothing on the opening page would lead the listener to expect more than a typically concise Dvořák miniature, yet the composer manages to spin out new ideas, and to extend, develop, and link those ideas, with remarkable fertility, musically as well as pianistically. The overall form remains relatively simple in outline, though shaded and enlivened and supplemented in countless subtle ways.

Dvořák maintains that standard throughout the set, notwithstanding an impressive range of ideas, textures, moods, and topics – everything from an earthy furiant to sentimental salon pieces, from a bacchanalia to a reverie, from the chatty to the liturgical, heroic to spectral. All of the pieces are strongly Slavonic in character, though in very different ways, only most explicitly in pieces like the brilliant furiant (No. 7, in the unusual key of A-flat minor), or the delightful “Goblins' Dance” (No. 8). But there seems to be evocations, too, of some of Dvořák's predecessors, though none made explicit. There is something of Grieg “In the Old Castle” (No. 3), of Mendelssohn in the “Spring Song” (No. 4), of Chopin in the “Reverie” (No. 6), of Bellini in the “Serenade” (No. 9), of both Chopin and Brahms in the last piece, “On the Holy Mount,” which closes the set evocatively with the chiming of a church bell.

One good case study can show the new level of musical sophistication Dvořák attains in the Poetic Tone Pictures. The vigorous “Bacchanalia” (No. 10), which has some of the character of a furiant, is a masterpiece of extended-miniature form, in which the simple ternary form that Dvořák

rich in four-hand piano music: the ten Legends, Op. 59, from 1880-81, which Dvořák wrote with “special affection”; the six programmatic pieces under the title *From the Bohemian Forest*, Op. 68, from 1883-4; and the second series of eight Slavonic Dances, Op. 72, from 1886. But in the years between the Mazurkas of 1880 and the Poetic Tone Pictures of 1889, he composed only nine minor works for solo piano, some of them published, though significantly none by his principal publisher, Simrock of Berlin, and only two of them assigned an opus number: the *Dumka in C Minor* and the *Furiant G Minor*, both composed around September of 1884 and published together, in 1885, as Op. 12. All of which says something about the relative importance of the piano to Dvořák the composer: once the first flush of success after the Slavonic Dances had passed, once he had offered several piano works to appease his publishers, once he had enough authority to set his own agenda, he longer seemed interested in the piano.

This means, however, that when he did return to solo-piano music, it was because he wanted to, because he had something he wanted to say at the piano. When he turned to the piano in the spring of 1889, in fact, it was to break an uncharacteristic creative lull that had lasted several months (around this time he was involved in rehearsals for the première of his opera *The Jacobin*, Op. 84). The result would prove to be his largest single piano work: an hour-long set of thirteen titled descriptive pieces called *Poetic Tone Pictures*, Op. 85, composed from April to June of 1889, and published later that year by Simrock. The work represents a kind of apotheosis for Dvořák as a composer for the piano: though it is an anthology of short pieces, the individual pieces are of a size and depth greater than those of his earlier or later sets, and the piano writing, while lacking the mastery – the insiders’s insight – of a Chopin or a Liszt, is of a significantly higher order.

Dvořák was undoubtedly inspired by the programmatic subject of the *Poetic Tone Pictures*, one of profound personal meaning for him: his beloved Bohemia. As in *From the Bohemian Forest*, give years earlier, he sought to depict the Bohemian countryside and its inhabitants from many different angles, and he worked hard at it. In a letter to Simrock, he wrote, “I imagine the pieces will be sure to please you, because I took great pains when working on them. ...Every piece will have a title and will express something, in some respects like programme music, but in the Schumann sense; still I must point out at once that they don’t sound Schumannesque..” By programme music “in the Schumann sense,” Dvořák was alluding to Schumann’s practice of giving titles to descriptive pieces only after they had been composed. In other words, Dvořák, though he undoubtedly had some general idea of subject matter in mind, was not writing to a detailed, pre-established programme. Rather, he looked at what he had written and titled it based on what images and feelings about Bohemian life is evoked in him.

effective the second time around.

After the great experiment of the *Theme with Variations in A-flat Major*, Op. 36, Dvořák never again wrote a solo-piano work on such a scale. The commercial success of the Slavonic Dances must have encouraged him to continue in that vein when writing for the popular market; all of the important piano works that followed would be sets of short pieces relatively simple in form but with a strong Slavonic character. Oscar Wilde once referred to Dvořák’s piano pieces, rather mysteriously, as “curiously coloured scarlet music,” and it does seem to be the case that Dvořák – at the piano, at least – was more comfortable writing characteristic pieces than intensely worked out structures in the manner of, say, Brahms. He had a special talent for writing fetching melodies, with pointed folk-inspired rhythms and inventive harmonizations, for making subtle variations and developments within deceptively simple forms and textures, for conveying sentiments and moods and pictures in a direct, unaffected way, on an intimate scale, drawing on characteristic musical tropes from various Slavic cultures.

When his publishers encouraged Dvořák to bring out new works for piano, to capitalize on the fame of the Slavonic Dances and to satisfy the large amateur market, he responded with the *Silhouettes*, Op. 8, in 1879, his first set of short pieces. It was an uneven work, but it inspired in him an upsurge of creative interest in the piano. The result, around 1880, was a fertile period in which he produced several outstanding sets for both solo and four-hand piano. Writing for amateur pianists in no way compromised Dvořák’s art. He was relatively unconvincing as a composer of virtuoso piano music; his *Piano Concerto*, Op. 33, from 1876, had taught him that. But when asked to write music for modest talents and domestic performance, he could work on the intimate scale in which his particular talents as a piano composer shone brightest. Indeed, since we no longer enjoy the tradition of domestic music-making that existed in Dvořák’s day, we might argue that a recording project like the present one, rather than a concert performance, offers the most appropriate setting for this music, returning it to the scale and milieu for which it was conceived.

The *Waltzes*, Op. 54, helped Dvořák to satisfy his hungry publishers, but the work in fact grew out of a rather mundane commission from the Ball Committee of a patriotic association known as the National Society. The Committee asked Dvořák and other leading Czech composers to contribute orchestral dances for their jubilee ball in December of 1879. He had sketched only one before he realized that what he had in mind were stylised waltzes more appropriate to the drawing room than the ballroom. He set aside these first sketches and returned afresh to the commission, producing his *Prague Waltzes*, B. 99, in time for the December ball. (They were published, in 1880, in a piano arrangement, like other of his minor orchestral dances, obviously to increase their commercial value.) Dvořák did not forget his first sketches, however; in fact, he seems to have been



inspired by his original conception of stylised waltzes. Reconceiving his sketches for the solo piano, he composed, between December 1879 and January 1880, a set of eight waltzes, which were quickly published by Simrock.

There was a pattern to Dvořák's publishing practices in these first years of new celebrity. His best piano works – the Dumka, the Theme with Variations, the two Furiant, the Op. 54 waltzes, the Op. 56 mazurkas – were offered to Simrock, his principal publisher of new works. To other publishers, in Leipzig and Prague, he offered piano works of lesser quality – the two Minuets, the Scottish Dances, the Silhouettes, the Op. 52 pieces, the Impromptu in D Minor, the arrangements of orchestral pieces – sometimes passing them off as older works with low opus numbers. We can assess Dvořák's opinion of a work by the publisher to whom he offered it; he seems to have distinguished between piano music inspired by his own creative desires and that which was grist for the marketing mill. The Op. 54 waltzes, uncommissioned works of high quality, clearly belong in the first category.

In a letter to Simrock dated 2 February 1880, Dvořák wrote, "I expect the Waltzes to be quite a success." Simrock thought so, too, and eager to capitalize on the popularity of Czech music, he wanted to call them "Czech Waltzes," or "Slavonic Waltzes." Dvořák declined, pointing to the Germanic origin of the genre. And it is true that, in his piano music, he seems to have drawn more inspiration from his Austro-German predecessors than from, say, Chopin or Liszt, in technique and texture as well as in form. In the Waltzes, and in contemporary works like the Mazurkas, we hear relatively little of the urbanity, sophisticated stylization, and salon style of Chopin, but rather the forms and sentiments of Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms. Still, we cannot make a hard and fast distinction, for the Waltzes reveal a mishmash of influences. No. 5, for example, seems Brahmsian in carriage, but also recalls Schubert in his Viennese mode, not to mention the cross-rhythms that Chopin explored in his so-called "2/4 Waltz" in A-flat major, Op. 42 (No. 8 features cross-rhythms, too, in an even more Chopinesque setting.) And at least one of the Waltzes seems to have been intended as a nod to Chopin. No. 4, in the key of D-flat major and at a fast tempo, begins, with the right hand alone, with a hint of a trill and figuration turning around the dominant note A-flat, before the oom-pah left hand enters – and if this all sounds familiar it is because I have just described the opening of Chopin's "Minute" Waltz.

Still, Simrock may have been right: "Slavonic Waltzes" would have been an appropriate title. In the end, all of the influences Dvořák absorbed were subsumed by the unmistakable pan-Slavonic character that informs every measure of the music. Those cross-rhythms are as much Slavonic as Chopinesque (just listen to a typical Dvořák furiant); there are hints of stomps and twirls and other elements of folk dance; there are even some fleeting evocations of specific folk dances – sousedská,

#### The Complete Works for Solo Piano - Volume 4 Volume 4 (later Works, 1889):

##### *Thirteen Poetic Tone Pictures, Op. 85*

Part of the reason why Dvořák's solo-piano music has been relatively neglected is undoubtedly that he was not really a pianist, and there has never really been a great piano composer who wasn't. Pianists have always naturally gravitated toward the music of the great pianist-composers – Mozart, Chopin, Liszt, Brahms, Rachmaninov – because this is the music that best flatters the instrument and the player, that most imaginatively and innovatively exploits the instrument's resources. Dvořák's piano music is certainly imbued with his unique musical personality, but, to a professional pianist at least, hardly challenging compared with that of, say, Chopin. Dvořák was basically a string player. Growing up in Nelahozeves, near Prague, he received his first musical instruction on the violin, from a local schoolmaster, and as a boy he played at his father's inn, in the village band, and in churches. After graduating from the Prague Organ School in 1859, he played viola in a small band that performed at local balls and restaurants, and even in a few classical concerts. (That band became, in 1862, the core of the Provisional Theatre orchestra.) Dvořák had organ lessons during his student days (he wrote a set competently – at least, well enough to participate in concerts of his own chamber music. But he was never a virtuoso, and claimed only average abilities as a pianist.

So it is not surprising that some of Dvořák's best piano music can be found precisely where there was not need for him to flatter the expectations of a virtuoso soloist. He seems to have found it more rewarding to write for four hands than for two: he could think more like a symphonist than a pianist. And some of his most attractive piano writing is found in his chamber music, where he could indulge in his gift for orchestration, weaving the piano in and out of the strings in colourful and innovative ways. What one critic called Dvořák's "almost pathological attraction to the upper register of the keyboard," for example, could be tiresome in solo works, yet often paid big dividends in chamber music, as in the delightful Scherzo of his Op. 81 piano quintet. In any event, Dvořák's modesty as a pianist and piano composer were pronounced enough that his few forays into larger, more virtuosic textures – most impressively, in the thirteen Poetic Tone Pictures, Op. 85 – are worthy of special note.

The composition of the Op. 56 Mazurkas marked the end of Dvořák's great upsurge of piano writing around 1880 – and upsurge initially spawned by commercial concerns, to be sure, but one that nonetheless inspired him to create several sets of pieces of high quality. The next few years were

with modal and rhythmic inflections that seems more authentically folk-based. If the textures are less saturated with chromatic spice than Chopin's, we still find Dvořák's trademark harmonic sideslips, usually sudden shifts between keys a third apart (from A-flat to E major in the first part of No. 1, from C to A major in the first part of No. 2). His interpretation of mazurka rhythm is generally less ambiguous than Chopin's. In No. 2, for example, which has perhaps the strongest mazurka flavour, the accented weak beat is invariably the second; Chopin was less predictable. Dvořák's Mazurkas are more reflective than virtuosic, relatively simple settings in which subtle variations and developments have great meaning. Schubert seems like a more relevant predecessor than Chopin: a mazurka like No. 3, with its gentle, waltz-like carriage and sweet hints of melancholy, recalls the Schubert of the Moments musicaux, tapping deep feelings through deceptively modest means.

Dvořák produced a few other isolated piano pieces around this time, some of them perhaps attempts at sets that went nowhere. The four untitled Album Leaves, B. 109, from 1880, were never published in his lifetime – again, presumably, due to his strong self-editing instinct. The first and third Album Leaves, in D major and F major, testify to his fondness for frequent and sudden modulations to distant keys; the second, in F-sharp minor, is a simple, lovely bagatelle in F-sharp minor. The fourth, marked Allegretto, is equal in quality to any of his short pieces. It is curiously ambivalent, both tonally and rhythmically: nominally in G major, it insistently pivots towards E major, closing in that key, and the rhythm is frequently syncopated; the result is a strangely elusive miniature.

Dvořák wrote an untitled piece in 1881, B.116 that is usually referred to as the Moderato in A Major, but while it opens in that tempo and key, both soon change, and the bulk of the piece is a fast peasant dance in D minor. (Dvořák left it unpublished.) The Impromptu in D Minor, B. 129, was composed on 16 January 1883 and published that same year in Prague, in a musical supplement to the magazine *Humoristické listy*. It is a more substantial work musically, richer and more varied in harmony and texture, with a lovely central episode in D major. Question was an album leaf jotted down for a friend on 13 December 1882.

Just eight measures long, it is Dvořák's shortest composition. The title is explained by the fragment's harmonic open-endedness: it ends with an unresolved half cadence on the dominant, and sounds like an introduction to a piece that never follows.

Notes by Kevin Bazzana (June 1998)

or Ländler, or mazur. There are drone effects, and melodic ornamentation and figuration – in No. 2, for instance – that suggest some kind of folk instrument. A few measures into that homage to the “Minute” Waltz, Dvořák is outlining a pentatonic scale that immediately shifts the listener's ear from away from Chopin's salon and toward the Bohemian countryside. Indeed, those opening measures of No. 4 perfectly capture the stylistic dichotomy that gives so much of Dvořák's music its distinctive flavour.

From the gorgeous, elegant opening waltz, Op. 54 offers some of Dvořák's best piano music. Everything works; everything is calculated and considered, yet the pieces seem artless, fresh and spontaneous, never awkward or banal, never wearing out their welcome. The fertility of ideas is impressive, and the piano writing, though never virtuosic, can be picturesque. As in the Slavonic Dances, Dvořák makes imaginative use of transitions, interpolations, and codas, of harmonic digressions, of subtle but telling variations of melody and texture, all to enliven relatively simple forms. Each of the waltzes has such a distinctive personality that you almost don't notice that they all make use of the same form: rondo, in three parts (ABA) or five parts (ABABA, or ABACA), with the secondary thematic idea – the B section – brought back at the very end, transposed to the tonic key, to provide a coda. It was one of Dvořák's favourite forms in short pieces: its first appearance in a piano work seems to have been the first of the Furiant. Op. 42, and he employed it most famously in the popular Humoresque. He may have taken the idea from Beethoven. In many of his later Scherzo movements, especially the longer ones in five parts, Beethoven liked to bring back one last wisp of the Trio just before the end, teasing the listener into thinking that the Trio would be heard yet one more time. Only the last of the Op. 54 waltzes eschews this form, in favour of a coda that allows the set to finish with a bang.

The term “eclogue” originated in literature, and dates back to the ancient Greeks, but in music it was first used by the Bohemian composer Václav Tomásek (1774-1850), to describe a piano miniature of moderate difficulty that was rustic or pastoral in nature, whether robust or lyrical. Dvořák's composed his four Eclogues in January and February of 1880, and assigned them the opus number 56, but they were never published in his lifetime – not until 1921, years after his death. When he published his Mazurkas in 1880, he gave them the opus number 56, since the Eclogues remained in manuscript and he had no intention of publishing them. He left to future generations the task of sorting out two works with the same opus number.

Though Dvořák would assign less important pieces to less important publishers, there were limits to his willingness to bend to his publishers' pleas: he would not publish anything, though undoubtedly his publishers, in those heady first years after the Slavonic Dances, would have brought out almost anything with his name on it. He withheld the Eclogues because he simply did not consider

them worthy of publication. He may have been right about the set as a whole, but the first two pieces, at least are accomplished and beautiful, and nicely laid out for the piano, if hardly innovative or well developed. We know he liked the first Eclogue: he reused it as the fifth of his Mazurkas, beautifully recasting it from a lively and rather virtuosic piece in duple time to a gentler dance in triple time. His inspiration seems to have dropped somewhat in the last two Eclogues, though he liked two themes in the fourth well enough to reuse them prominently more than six years later, in the first piece of his second cycle of Slavonic Dances. All four Eclogues are unpretentious miniatures in simple ternary form, closing with a literal repeat of the opening section, rather than a subtly varied repeat of the kind that Dvořák usually preferred when he was feeling more inspired.

### The Complete Works for Solo Piano - Volume 3 Volume 3 (Middle Period Works, 1880-83):

*Four Album Leaves, B. 109*    *Six Piano Pieces, Op. 52*  
*Six Mazurkas, Op. 56*        *Moderato in A Major, B. 116*  
*Question, B. 128a*         *Impromptu in D Minor, B. 129*

After the huge success of the Slavonic Dances, in 1878, Dvořák's publishers were willing and able to sell just about anything that bore his name, though his refusal to publish his four eclogues shows that he would not be pressured into releasing works that he did not think worthy. We can see that same self-critical attitude at work with the set of Piano Pieces. Op 52, that he wrote around June of 1880, a few months after the Eclogues. This time, his effort to produce music on demand without sacrificing his standards was at least partially successful. He wrote six pieces in all, but permitted only four to be published in 1881, under the title "Impromptu, Intermezzo, Gigue, and Eclogue." (They were published in Leipzig, not by Simrock of Berlin, to whom he invariably sent the works he considered most successful, like the Waltzes and Mazurkas.) The untitled Allegro molto in G minor does seem to be up to the standards of the four published pieces, but Dvořák probably omitted it from the first edition only because it was too similar in key and mood to the Impromptu; it was published only long after his death, in 1921. The untitled Tempo di Marcia in E-flat major, however, is clearly inferior to the other pieces, simpler and less expressive; it languished unpublished until the middle of this century, when it appeared for the first time in Editio Supraphon's critical edition of the complete works of Dvořák, begun in 1955. The four pieces that Dvořák published make an attractive four-movement set, outwardly a kind of suite or sonata, with lively outer movements framing a slow movement and scherzo; the catch-all published title, however, seems to

deny that the work was to be heard as an integrated cycle.

The Op. 52 pieces are all highly characteristic, and feature some of Dvořák's better piano writing. The Impromptu is certainly Slavonic in temperament – the insistent cross-rhythms within a fast triple meter recall the furiant – but the piece also seems to be a nod to Schumann: the syncopated bass, the cross-rhythms, the turbulent, rising triadic figuration in the right hand, notated across the barlines, the ternary form with contrasting lyrical episode – all unmistakably call to mind the first piece of Schumann's Kreisleriana. (Dvořák, however, characteristically hints at a return of that lyrical episode just before the end.) The lovely Intermezzo, just thirty-three measures long, is a small marvel of musical architecture. Out of slow vamp in C minor emerges a melody that grows even richer and more chromatic as it progresses, hovering (as Dvořák liked to do) between relative major and minor keys, approaching but never quite reaching E-flat major. An expected cadence in E-flat is deferred; instead, Dvořák shifts suddenly to the distant key of C-flat major for some eight measures of variation on the opening theme, before returning to the music of the opening, finally granting the long denied cadence in E-flat major at the very end. That shift to C-flat seems more than colourful: it is a logical outcome of the progressive chromaticism that preceded it, a projection of melodic detail onto the tonal plan. The final two pieces are both attractive and imaginatively developed, particularly the extended Eclogue, with its melancholy and somewhat exotic-sounding improvisational main theme. The Gigue, though it features dotted 6/8 rhythms and some imitation, is only loosely related to the French Baroque dance of the same name.

The six Mazurkas, Op. 56, composed in June of 1880, belong with the Waltzes among Dvořák's best and most inspired piano works form this period. According to the first draft, they were originally destined to be a second series of Scottish Dances. (That *écosais* and mazurkas could be considered almost interchangeable says something about the stylisation of folk idioms by Western composers.) After only a few weeks of composition and selection – including the appropriation of the first of his unpublished Eclogues, composed a few months earlier and beautifully recast here, in a gentle triple meter, as No. 5 – Dvořák had a set of six dances that he considered worthy of being published immediately by Simrock of Berlin.

Comparison to the great mazurkas of Chopin was and is inevitable, and Dvořák's efforts, by this yardstick, seem like less in many respects – less ambitious, less stylised, less intensely developed, less interesting in their accompaniments, less pervasively chromatic, less demanding technically, less evocative pianistically, less profound expressively. Yet the comparison misses the point, for Dvořák was not aiming at the sophistication of the concert hall or the urbane salon; he intended a simpler stylisation of the mazurka that stayed closer to its folk roots, and was more accessible to the amateur market. Dvořák's melodic and harmonic vocabulary here is much simpler and more direct,