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COMPLETE  
SYMPHONIES

Staatskapelle Berlin  
Otmar Suitner

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## Antonín Dvořák 1841-1907

### Complete Symphonies

CD1 43'09

#### Symphony No.1 in C minor (1865)

##### 'The Bells of Zlonice'

- |   |      |                         |       |
|---|------|-------------------------|-------|
| 1 | I.   | Maestoso – Allegro      | 13'18 |
| 2 | II.  | Adagio di molto         | 10'47 |
| 3 | III. | Allegretto              | 8'09  |
| 4 | IV.  | Finale: Allegro animato | 10'53 |

CD2 77'33

#### Symphony No.2 in B flat Op.4

- |   |      |   |       |
|---|------|---|-------|
| 1 | I.   | Allegro con moto                          | 12'12 |
| 2 | II.  | Poco adagio                               | 11'20 |
| 3 | III. | Scherzo: Allegro con brio                 | 11'53 |
| 4 | IV.  | Finale: Allegro con fuoco<br>(alla breve) | 9'56  |

#### Symphony No.3 in E flat Op.10

- |   |     |                                  |       |
|---|-----|----------------------------------|-------|
| 5 | I.  | Allegro moderato                 | 9'52  |
| 6 | II. | Adagio molto, tempo<br>di marcia | 14'03 |
| 7 | II. | Finale: Allegro vivace           | 8'11  |

CD3 75'25

#### Symphony No.4 in D minor Op.13

- |   |      |  |       |
|---|------|--|-------|
| 1 | I.   | Allegro                                | 10'39 |
| 2 | II.  | Andante sostenuto e molto<br>cantabile | 12'56 |
| 3 | III. | Scherzo: Allegro feroce                | 6'19  |
| 4 | IV.  | Finale: Allegro con brio               | 8'37  |

#### Symphony No.5 in F Op.76

- |   |      |                                |       |
|---|------|--------------------------------|-------|
| 5 | I.   | Allegro, ma non troppo         | 9'12  |
| 6 | II.  | Andante con moto               | 7'01  |
| 7 | III. | Scherzo: Allegro<br>scherzando | 8'14  |
| 8 | IV.  | Finale: Allegro molto          | 12'14 |

CD4 78'16

#### Symphony No.6 in D Op.60

- |   |      |                             |       |
|---|------|-----------------------------|-------|
| 1 | I.   | Allegro non tanto           | 12'43 |
| 2 | II.  | Adagio                      | 10'12 |
| 3 | III. | Scherzo (Furiant): Presto   | 8'25  |
| 4 | IV.  | Finale: Allegro con spirito | 9'55  |

#### Symphony No.7 in D minor Op.70

- |   |      |                  |       |
|---|------|------------------|-------|
| 5 | I.   | Allegro maestoso | 10'45 |
| 6 | II.  | Poco adagio      | 9'00  |
| 7 | III. | Scherzo: Vivace  | 7'39  |
| 8 | IV.  | Finale: Allegro  | 9'22  |

CD5 78'17

#### Symphony No.8 in G Op.88

- |   |      |                       |       |
|---|------|-----------------------|-------|
| 1 | I.   | Allegro con brio      | 9'23  |
| 2 | II.  | Adagio                | 10'01 |
| 3 | III. | Allegretto grazioso   | 6'39  |
| 4 | IV.  | Allegro ma non troppo | 10'13 |

#### Symphony No.9 in E minor Op.95

##### 'From the New World'

- |   |      |                        |       |
|---|------|------------------------|-------|
| 5 | I.   | Adagio – Allegro molto | 11'46 |
| 6 | II.  | Largo                  | 11'25 |
| 7 | III. | Scherzo: Molto vivace  | 7'55  |
| 8 | IV.  | Allegro con fuoco      | 10'49 |

Staatskapelle Berlin  
Otmar Suitner *conductor*

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## Antonín Dvořák

### The Nine Symphonies

The symphonies of Antonín Dvořák have never been as popular and beloved as the symphonies of Brahms and Beethoven. Matters of taste play a part, but other motives are just as important. Indeed, some of the works were not performed or published during the composer's lifetime, and since they weren't published in the order in which they were written, there was for many years some confusion as to the precise nature of Dvořák's development. Matters of style are just as important: Dvořák was a great admirer of Beethoven, but he liked his older colleague for his mastery of form, not for his revolutionary zeal. Unlike Beethoven, therefore, Dvořák was no innovator as far as instrumentation was concerned, and he was much more susceptible to elements from his Czech national style. Besides, Dvořák was a very pragmatic musician and definitely not the archetypical Romantic, solitary artist writing music in a cold room, hoping an unknown listener would overhear and like it. He had an audience in mind, but he didn't want to change his style just to please his local listeners.

Dvořák trained as an organ player, worked in Prague in a church, and played the violin and viola in an orchestra in the same city. Although one of the big events in his musical life was a concert in Prague in 1863, in which Wagner conducted some of his own pieces (with Dvořák playing in the orchestra), the intense confrontation with this German composer hardly left a big impression on Dvořák's music, which was able to assimilate many other influences besides just Wagner's. When Dvořák's work eventually achieved popularity, it was not because he made concessions. He did change his style over the years, but he was not modest about his abilities, and he didn't respond well to bad reviews.

The First Symphony has a complex history. Written on the composer's own initiative and submitted for a competition, the work proved unsuccessful and Dvořák temporarily forgot about it. In later years he referred back to it, connecting the

composition with the bells in the Czech town of Zlonice, where Dvořák obtained his musical education – a reason why some now refer to the piece as 'The Bells of Zlonice'. Material from the symphony was used again in his song cycle, *Cypresses*, and in a set of piano compositions, *Silhouettes*. For reasons unknown the score found its way into a second-hand music shop in Leipzig, where it was discovered by accident by Rudolf Dvořák (no relation). After Rudolf's death the music was found by his son, who arranged its publication. The first performance took place in 1936.

Although in later years Dvořák regarded his First Symphony as an experiment, some of the hallmarks of his symphonic personality are already present in this piece. He liked writing beautiful melodies embedded within harmonic patterns not far removed from those used by Schubert, Schumann and Mendelssohn; he is, in fact, more a lyric than a dramatic composer, creating long episodes based on a few melodies and many repetitions. Although he respects the established order of sonata form (exposition, development and recapitulation), the caesuras between these episodes are less rigid than in older symphonies, which give this and his later symphonies a sense of fluidity and mellowness. In the second movement we hear a motif possibly inspired by the Tarnhelm one in Wagner's *Das Rheingold*, but, as with other influences, it doesn't feel like a foreign element, since Dvořák changes Wagner's melody into one of his own.

The third movement, Scherzo, clearly demonstrates Dvořák's approach to classical forms. The beginning is scherzo-like, especially in the rhythm, but the form is far from 'official' and spliced into sections, mainly because the melodies and lyrical development dominate this movement. The brass sections in the finale emphasise the optimistic ending of the symphony, which was standard practice from Haydn until Bruckner.

Just like the First, the Second Symphony was written as an experiment and not as a commission. Dvořák composed it in the same year as the First (1865) and did not see it published during his lifetime, though he was able to hear the work once

(1888) – an occasion for which it was revised and made shorter. A few seeming allusions to the music of Tchaikovsky have caused some people to suggest that Dvořák might have been influenced by this composer, but this seems unlikely, since in 1865 Tchaikovsky was still hardly known inside Russia, let alone outside Russia. Another possible source of inspiration is the music of Brahms: both composers share a love for grace, a broad-minded dealing with motifs in the development section and a beautiful balance between strings and winds. The great climaxes in the finale, too, betray the influence of Wagner's style of instrumentation; also in his opera *Rusalka* would Dvořák use brass to emphasise big dramatic effects. In one sense the Second Symphony does repeat the First: Dvořák likes, following the example of Schubert, to write beautiful melodies and to develop them over a long period of time in such a way that the borders between the episodes get blurred. The Adagio, for example, has three sections but sounds as one continuous line. The Scherzo, furthermore, lacks a clear rhythmic impulse – not surprising for a composer who, like Brahms, weakens the clear distinctions between the genres.

After his first couple of attempts, Dvořák gave the symphony a rest of nine years. His Third was written in 1874 and immediately premiered in Prague by an orchestra conducted by Smetana. The work received favourable reviews and Brahms wrote enthusiastically about the beautiful melodies ('It is pure love, and it does one's heart good!'), but in spite of its successful premiere, the symphony's publication had to wait until 1912. As seen in the previous two works, Dvořák's genius for melodic invention strengthened his wish to create forms without clear sections; the first movement, therefore, is a combination of sonata form and rondo form, and it contains a melody the composer would use again in his opera *The King and the Charcoal Burner*. This new application of mixing one genre with another is further evidence of Dvořák's desire to blur the distinctions between genres.

Like the First and Second Symphonies, the Third is a predominantly lyrical piece. Dvořák's main examples were, not surprisingly, Schumann's 'Rhenish' Symphony

and Mendelssohn's *Die schöne Melusine*, whose influence can be detected in the long, beautiful lines and the inconspicuous harmonic changes. The slow movement, a funeral march in C minor, is cast as a theme with variations, and, as is so often the case with Dvořák's music, new themes are derived from old themes on which new variations are built. This remarkable continuity may also explain the absence in this symphony of a scherzo, a form strongly dependent on clear, articulated rhythms. The theme of the final movement looks like a bohemian version of *Frère Jacques*, with some allusions to *Tannhäuser* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. This Wagnerian influence is no surprise: Dvořák often visited the German theatre in Prague where Wagner's music was frequently performed. He would only borrow other music if he could integrate it into his own, however; unlike many other musicians at the time, he could live with both Brahms and Wagner, but only on his own terms.

The Fourth Symphony was composed in 1873–74 and premiered many years later, in 1892 in Prague with the composer as the conductor. In a sense the Fourth is a continuation of the Third: once again Dvořák likes to build a big form through almost endless repetitions as an alternative to development, a technique which places him closer to Schubert than to Beethoven. He admired the latter for his sense of proportions, but within these proportions his elements are much more fluid. Like Beethoven, Dvořák likes to differentiate between a first and a second theme – in the first movement of the Fourth, for example, the first theme is broad and the second more lyrical. The second movement shows, too, both his admiration for and his independence from Wagner: the main theme has often been compared to Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, but Dvořák transforms it in such a way that the source is difficult to recognise. The third movement is a kind of scherzo, the music of which Dvořák might have taken from that of a village band. Dvořák knew this kind of music very well, since he came from a small town in which street music played a big role. The often-made comparison between the finale and one of Bruckner's symphonies fails to take into account how, probably at the time, Dvořák was not aware of Bruckner's music.

The finale has a grandeur that contrasts with the uncomplicated, simple expression of the first three movements. Nobility and unaffectedness were always characteristics of Dvořák's music, and the symphonic form did not inspire him to create grandiose, let alone pompous, emotional outbursts. From Wagner's music he occasionally borrowed melodic style, but not the urge to impose.

Although the Fifth came only one year after the Fourth, the contrast is striking. Many regard it as his first mature symphony and look in vain for a reason for this unexpected change. What we can be certain about is the fact that this symphony brought the composer recognition from both a wide audience and the specialist listener. Soon after completion of the Fifth, Dvořák received praise from Brahms as well as the Viennese music critic Eduard Hanslick, resulting in the work's publication by the Viennese printer Simrock. Many people have connected the pastoral mood of Brahms' Second Symphony with the first and second movements of Dvořák's Fifth. Equally similar are the style of the orchestration and the treatment of the winds as a mellow addition to the sound of the strings. The oboe melody in the second movement might indeed have been written by Brahms, but the forms in Brahms's works are much more articulated and much less continuous. By contrast the Scherzo is highly classical in nature – not just with melodies less complicated than those in Brahms's scherzos, but, unusually for Dvořák, with clear borders demarcating the episodes. These clear distinctions between the episodes, on the other hand, are entirely absent in the finale – which, as it approaches its end, recalls one of the themes from the opening movement, thus giving rise to the fanfare-laden conclusion. All in all, the Fifth Symphony, more than any of the others, betrays the influence of Dvořák's chamber music, in which dramatic impulse is subsidiary to melody.

If the Fifth was a turning point in terms of stylistic maturity, the Sixth was Dvořák's first symphony to receive widespread attention and positive reviews. The work was written at the request of the conductor of the Vienna Philharmonic, Hans Richter, although the premiere took place in Prague in 1881 (it was Dvořák's first symphony

to be performed outside his native country). What found approval with listeners at the time was the fact that Dvořák devoted more attention to dramatic moments in clear structures and that he partially left behind his old habit of creating forms through melodic and motivic repetition. This sounds like a conscious decision on the composer's part, although it is highly unlikely that it was; Dvořák was, after all, a spontaneous composer, and his unsystematic attitude would have certainly helped him a lot when the symphony was presented in Vienna – where the local, liberal audience rejected German political influence, and where composers seeking inspiration in non-German music thus benefitted. Besides, the Fifth Symphony was admired for its resemblance to the music of the Viennese citizen Johannes Brahms, who saw the score before its publication and was particularly taken with the main theme in the first movement. The third movement is a Furiant, a Czech dance, rather furious in character. The rhythm is very pronounced throughout the piece, not atypical of a Furiant but nevertheless unusual for Dvořák: unlike most of the previous scherzos, this one is lacking in mellowness. The finale shows again the influence of Brahms in the mixture of sonata and rondo form. Unlike previous finales, Dvořák demonstrates his ability to gradually build up the music over an extended period of time, thus preparing for the climax that occurs many bars later.

The Seventh Symphony was written for the London Philharmonic Society and received its premiere in London in 1885 with the composer as conductor. Dvořák was proud of his achievement, not least because he observed that his style was continuing to please growing audiences. In the Seventh, and much more in the Eighth and the Ninth, rhythmic energy becomes an essential characteristic (the third movement is a bohemian scherzo with spiky rhythmic accents). The almost unending repetition of motifs has also disappeared, being replaced by a great variety of motifs and many sudden harmonic changes. Dvořák didn't care much for the proportions between the movements here; the slow movement is the longest in the cycle, even after the cuts he made after the premiere. The most arresting feature of the Seventh is its abundance



of beautiful melodies, with the movements as a whole sounding extremely balanced. The finale, in particular, deserves mention for its preparation of the climax. Indeed, in order to make the last movement more monumental, Dvořák incorporates elements from a Protestant chorale. Many Romantic composers tried to give their music more depth by borrowing from old religious music.

Dvořák's individual approach to classical form also applies to his Eighth Symphony, which he presented to the University of Cambridge after receiving an honorary doctorate. Although the work premiered in England, the composer did not consider it a concession to British taste: 'I wanted to write a work with individual ideas worked out in a new way.' Some observers at the time believed Dvořák had taken as his model Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony – he was, after all, present at its Prague premiere on 30 November 1888 (which Tchaikovsky himself conducted), and shortly afterwards began work on the Eighth. If the Russian had any influence on the Czech, however, it is most likely to be in the third movement, which has a light, waltz-like character. (It is interesting to note that Tchaikovsky was also accused, especially by German authors, of writing formless music.) An essential characteristic of the first movement is the frequent change between major and minor key. Instruments like the horn and viola are also given a far more prominent role than usual. A set of variations in the finale, too, was nothing novel at the time, but here Dvořák introduces changes in tempo (not heard in his earlier symphonies), a Slavonic melodic style (again, the influence of Tchaikovsky?) and operatic style (the flute melody in the third movement resembles a melody from his opera *The Stubborn Lovers*).

Although Dvořák's fame had been steadily growing since Brahms's and Hanslick's recommendations, the success of his Ninth Symphony – which followed immediately after the first performance (in Carnegie Hall in December 1893) – exceeded all expectations. Dvořák, who always worked with an audience in mind, was by this time director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York. After his arrival in the city (1892), he had tried to get the Americans to become more interested in

their own folk music and was pleased when a student of his, Henry Thacker Burleigh, himself a son of free slaves, showed him a collection of transcriptions of melodies by Native Americans. Dvořák used Burleigh's collection when he was asked to write a symphony, and although it is highly unlikely that Dvořák ever heard Native Americans in the flesh, his symphony clearly shows the influence of their music.

Many have regarded Dvořák's attempt in the Ninth Symphony to integrate folk music into art music as an American version of the Czech music he wrote. Dvořák undoubtedly looked on the symphony as partly American, since the famous subtitle 'From the New World' was in fact his idea. The relationship between the 'American' and the 'European' elements in the work, however, remains a matter of controversy. Certainly Dvořák continued his 'spontaneous' approach to form through the creation of countless beautiful melodies, but the music is somewhat more complicated than this: themes return in different contexts, and tempo and key changes within one movement have a strong dramatic function. At the very end, too, there is a coda that comprises all the themes of the previous movements.

Understandably the debate about the 'American' nature of the symphony was more intense in America than it was in Europe. One of Dvořák's American pupils, Rubin Goldmark, became the teacher of Aaron Copland who later, together with Charles Ives, became one of the two fathers of American music. It remains to say that, no matter how 'American' or 'European' the Ninth Symphony is, Dvořák knew how to write music with great rhythmic vitality – and it was this vitality that garnered appreciation from both sides of the Atlantic.

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