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**Dvořák, Antonín** (Leopold)

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(*b* Nelahozeves, nr Kralupy, Sept 8, 1841; *d* Prague, May 1, 1904). Czech composer. With Smetana, Fibich and Janáček he is regarded as one of the great nationalist Czech composers of the 19th century. Long neglected and dismissed by the German-speaking musical world as a naive Czech musician, he is now considered by both Czech and international musicologists Smetana’s true heir. He earned worldwide admiration and prestige for 19th-century Czech music with his symphonies, chamber music, oratorios, songs and, to a lesser extent, his operas

**1. Early Years, 1841–59.**

Dvořák was born into the unsophisticated cultural and social background of a Czech family. His father, František, was a butcher and innkeeper who played the zither, originally to entertain his guests, in later years professionally. His mother, Anna, came from the family of an estate steward in Uhy. Dvořák was the eldest of their eight children. He received his first musical education in 1847 on entering the village school, where the teacher and Kantor Joseph Spitz taught him singing and gave him violin lessons. He made such good progress on the violin that he soon participated in the musical life of the countryside, playing in church and with the village band, which performed the usual repertory of ceremonial and popular music such as polkas, mazurkas, marches and waltzes. In autumn 1853, after Dvořák had spent six years at the school, his parents sent him to the nearby small town of Zlonice, where he could continue to learn German (essential in Bohemia at that time), besides continuing his musical education with the church choirmaster Joseph Toman and with the Kantor Antonín Liehmann, who taught him the violin, piano, organ and continuo playing, and music theory. In late 20th-century biographies it was still claimed that Dvořák was sent to Zlonice primarily to learn his father’s trade of butchery and was a butcher’s apprentice for more than two years, but it has now been proved (Burghauser, D1993–4) that his supposed certificate of apprenticeship dated 2 November 1856 is a forgery. The story must therefore be seen as a myth obscuring the fact that Dvořák’s parents recognized their son’s musical talent from the first and did all they could to encourage it. After his years with Liehmann, Dvořák was sent in autumn 1856 to the northern Bohemian town of Česká Kamenice, where he attended the German municipal school and was taught the organ and music theory by Franz Hanke. A year later, in autumn 1857, he began to study at the Prague Organ School, where the teachers included Karl Pietsch, Josef Krejčí, František Blažek, Josef Leopold Zvonař and Josef Foerster; his subjects included continuo, harmony, modulation, the playing of chorales, improvising, and counterpoint and fugue. (Some of his exercises have survived.) At the time he attended the Maria Schnee secondary school. From November 1857 he played the viola in the concerts of the Cecilia Society conducted by Anton Apt. The programmes included works by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Spohr, Schumann, Raff and Wagner. Musical life in Prague at the time also gave Dvořák a chance to hear Liszt conducting his own works (in March 1858) and to attend concerts at which Hans von Bülow conducted and Clara Schumann performed (both in March 1859). The extensive collection of scores owned by his fellow student and friend Karel Bendl gave him the opportunity to extend and deepen his knowledge of music. Dvořák finished his studies at the Prague Organ School in July 1859 as the second best student of his year, and he left as a trained organist.

**2. Working as a musician in Prague, 1859–71.**

In late summer 1859 Dvořák joined the dance band of the elder Karel Komzák as a viola player. The band played in restaurants and for balls, and when Dvořák’s application for the post of organist at the church of St Jindřich was rejected he stayed on as a permanent member. When the newly built Provisional Theatre, the first Czech theatre in Prague, opened in November 1862 in the wake of Vienna’s more liberal policy on nationalism (it was constructed at state expense) Komzák’s band formed the nucleus of the theatre orchestra, with Dvořák as principal violist. The first conductor was Johann Nepomuk Maýr, under whom Dvořák played in many German (Mozart, Weber, Lortzing) and French stage works (Auber, Méhul, Halévy, Boieldieu and Offenbach), but above all in Italian operas by Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini and Verdi. After the end of 1866, when Smetana took over as conductor, works by Czech (Smetana, Šebor, Bendl, Blodek) and Slav composers (Glinka, Moniuszko) increasingly began to be included in the repertory. Besides playing at the theatre the orchestra was sometimes called upon for concerts given by the Academic Reading Union and the Artistic Society, or for concerts on Žofín Island. In February and November 1863 Dvořák played in the three concerts conducted by Wagner in the Žofin concert hall which included his *Faust* overture, the overture to *Tannhäuser*, the prelude to *Lohengrin* and extracts from *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Walküre* and *Siegfried*.

At the beginning of 1865 Dvořák began giving piano lessons to the daughters of a Prague goldsmith, Josefína and Anna Čermáková (Anna later became his wife), but he remained a member of the Provisional Theatre orchestra until the summer of 1871, and to all appearances was simply a practical musician. Privately, however, he was composing. The String Quintet in A minor op.1, the String Quartets nos.1–4, the first two symphonies (both 1865), the song cycle *Cypřiše* (‘Cypresses’, B11), the Concerto in A for cello with piano accompaniment (1865, B10) and the opera *Alfred* make up a series of works in which he moved almost systematically from small-scale to larger forms. Setting out from the example of Mozart and middle-period Beethoven, he progressively extended his musical language by way of Mendelssohn, Schumann and Wagner to the state of composition in his own time.

**3. Early years as a Czech composer, 1871–82.**

In June 1871, shortly before he left the orchestra of the Provisional Theatre, Dvořák announced in the journal *Hudební listy* (which informed the musical world of Prague) that he was composing, and working on an opera to a Czech libretto by Bernard J. Lobeský entitled *Král a uhlíř* (‘King and Charcoal Burner’, B21). He showed parts of it to Ludevít Procházka (editor of the journal and a former pupil of Smetana), who thought highly of Dvořák’s talents and began to promote his career at the song recitals he organized in Prague. The first song by Dvořák performed at one of these recitals (10 December 1871) was *Vzpomínáni* (‘Remembrance’, B23/5, to a text by Eliška Krásnohorská), in a concert that also included works by Bendl and Fibich. Two more of his songs were performed in April 1872: *Proto* (‘The Reason’, B23/2, Krásnohorská) and *Sirotek* (‘The Orphan’, B24, text by K.J. Erben). An Adagio from a piano trio (B25 or 26, both lost) was given its première several months later, with Procházka at the piano, and soon afterwards (22 November 1872) the Piano Quintet in A (B28) also received its première.

In the same year Smetana performed the overture to *King and Charcoal Burner* at a concert on Žofín Island (14 April 1872). The first of Dvořák’s works to appear in print, the song *Skřivánek* (‘The Lark’, B30/3), was published in 1873, in the November supplement to the first volume of the journal *Dalibor*. However, the event that established Dvořák among the leading composers of Prague occurred on 9 March 1873when the Prague Hlahol, conducted by Bendl, gave a successful performance of his patriotic cantata for male voices *Hymnus: Dědicové bílé hory* (‘Hymn: the Heirs of the White Mountain’, B27). Encouraged by its reception, Dvořák offered *King and Charcoal Burner* to the management of the Provisional Theatre, which accepted the work and promised to produce it. He was now making his living solely by giving piano lessons and applied to Svatobor, a Prague association for the support of artists, for a stipendium to enable him to visit Liszt in Weimar, so that he could seek his advice and study with him. The application was refused, and to improve his financial situation Dvořák began teaching at Jan August Starý’s private music school. A little earlier, in August 1873, rehearsals had begun under Smetana for *King and Charcoal Burner*. The opera was clearly influenced by Wagnerian principles of declamation, harmony and orchestral treatment. During rehearsals it soon appeared that its almost insuperable demands on soloists, chorus and orchestra were likely to be beyond the capabilities of the Czech stage. Rehearsals were halted in September 1873 and the opera was taken off the programme.

Dvořák did not let this setback shake his belief in himself as a composer, but it caused him to undertake a critical assessment of his work so far and to seek new directions. He destroyed many of the works from what he later described as his ‘mad period’ of 1866–71 and began his opus numbering again. His compositions perceptibly moved away from modern German influence, turning instead to a new classicism of form and content, with elements of Slavonic folklore, of which he made a special study. The first works from this transitional period included the string quartets no.5 in F minor (1873, B37), no.6 in A minor (B40) and no.7 in A minor (B45), and the second version of *King and Charcoal Burner* (B42), which had not a note in common with the first version, was ‘national rather than Wagnerian’, as Dvořák himself said, and was very successful at its première (24 November 1874).

In February 1874 Dvořák, by now married, was appointed organist at the church of St Vojtěch), a post he held until the beginning of 1877. However, the appointment had no influence on his composition, which continued to consist mainly of instrumental music and opera. A few months later, soon after Smetana had performed his Third Symphony (B34) and the scherzo from his Fourth (B41), Dvořák applied for the Austrian State Stipendium granted to artists. His application of July 1874 was accompanied by 15 compositions, including symphonies, overtures and the *Písně z Rukopisu Královédvorského* (‘Songs from the Dvůr Králové Manuscript, B30); in 1875 the jury, consisting of Eduard Hanslick, Johann Herbeck and Otto Dessoff, granted him 400 gulden. Dvořák received this stipendium on four further occasions. When he applied in 1875 the jury (Dessoff’s place had been taken by Brahms) granted another 400 gulden. His application of 1876, accompanied by the Piano Trio in G minor (B56), the String Quartet no.8 in E (B57), the Fifth Symphony (B54) and a version with piano accompaniment of the *Stabat mater* (B71), won him 500 gulden; he received 600 gulden in 1877 and 400 gulden again in 1878.

Apart from the financial considerations, however, Dvořák’s application of 1877 was crucial to his future career. The music he sent included another set of quartets, the Serenade for strings (B52), the Theme with Variations for piano (B65), and the *Moravské dvojzpěvy* (‘Moravian Duets’, B60 and 62), which he had had printed himself. Brahms was so enthusiastic about the duets that in early December 1877 he wrote to his Berlin publisher Fritz Simrock:

As for the state stipendium, for several years I have enjoyed works sent in by Antonín Dvořák (pronounced Dvorschak) of Prague. This year he has sent works including a volume of 10 duets for two sopranos and piano, which seem to me very pretty, and a practical proposition for publishing. … Play them through and you will like them as much as I do. As a publisher, you will be particularly pleased with their piquancy. … Dvořák has written all manner of things: operas (Czech), symphonies, quartets, piano pieces. In any case, he is a very talented man. Moreover, he is poor! I ask you to think about it! The duets will show you what I mean, and could be a ‘good article’.

This letter from Brahms, who soon formed a close friendship with Dvořák, set off a kind of avalanche of publication and performance. Simrock accepted the duets, and in one of his earliest letters to Dvořák commissioned the *Slovanské tance* (‘Slavonic Dances’, for piano four hands, B78, also orchestrated, B83). On 15 November 1878, when they appeared, the critic Louis Ehlert wrote an enthusiastic review in the Berlin *National-Zeitung* which – as Ehlert said to Dvořák – led to ‘a positive assault on the sheet music shops’, and made the previously unknown Czech composer’s name ‘in the course of a day’.

Suddenly illuminated by the bright spotlight of publicity, Dvořák was besieged by requests from German publishers and at the end of 1878 his compositions began to be played in international concert halls. Within a few months the Slavonic Dances were performed in Dresden, Hamburg, Berlin, Nice, London and New York; as soon as the Slavonic Rhapsodies (B86) had been published in 1879 by Simrock (now Dvořák’s principal publisher) they were performed in Dresden, Berlin, Vienna, Budapest, Lugano and Baltimore. Early in November 1879 Joseph Joachim’s quartet performed the String Sextet (B80) in Berlin. Joachim, his wife Amalie, Hans Richter, Hans von Bülow, Jean Becker and Hanslick were important advocates of Dvořák’s music. At the end of 1879Richter asked Dvořák to write a symphony for Vienna (the Sixth, B112), Joseph Hellmesberger asked for a string quartet (op.61, B121) and Simrock suggested the composition of a violin concerto for Joachim (op.53, B96/108).

Dvořák’s success abroad was recognized in Bohemia. In Prague, as early as 1878, he conducted a concert of his own works which was received with great enthusiasm. Shortly afterwards he became an honorary member of the male-voice choral society Hlahol, and like Smetana before him, was later made chairman of the musicians’ section of the Artistic society. Dvořák was now the composer commissioned for special occasions in Prague; he wrote the *Slavostní pochod* (‘Festival March’, B88) for the silver wedding anniversary of the Emperor Franz Joseph and the Empress Elisabeth, the *Pražské valčíky* (‘Prague Waltzes’, B99) for the ball of the Národní Beseda and a Polonaise (B100) for the evening dance given by the Academic Reading Union.

Besides commissioned works and smaller occasional pieces, however, and after completing the orchestral *Legendy* (‘Legends’, B122), he was chiefly occupied with the composition of a historical grand opera, *Dimitrij* (B127), to a libretto by Marie Červinková-Riegrová. The libretto was based on an episode of Russian history forming a sequel to that of *Boris Godunov*, and its dramatic situations, love scenes and crowd scenes appealed strongly to Dvořák. He was unable to finish it, as he had intended, in time for the planned opening of the Czech National Theatre (built with donations from the Czech population of Bohemia and Moravia), expected to take place in September 1881. But when the theatre burnt down (in August 1881) before the official opening there was no more need for haste, and a year later (8 October 1882) *Dimitrij* was given its première at the New Czech Theatre. It was a great success for Dvořák, who regarded opera as very important to his art.

However, in spite of revisions made on the advice of Simrock and Hanslick, he was disappointed in his hopes that *Dimitrij* would make its way into the international musical world like his earlier opera *Šelma sedlák* (‘The Cunning Peasant’, B67), successfully performed in Dresden in 1882 and Hamburg in 1883. A major reason was the increase during the 1880s of political tension which also affected theatres and concert halls. Dvořák had been made aware of anti-Czech feeling at the Viennese performance of his third Slavonic Rhapsody at the end of 1879. Hanslick, reviewing the concert, strongly condemned any intrusion of politics into art in assessing Dvořák’s music, but his adjurations were in vain. Richter had promised to give the first Viennese performance of the Sixth Symphony at the end of 1880, but it was cancelled and then repeatedly postponed. Since it was thought unwise in Vienna to give prominence to works by a Czech composer, the symphony fell victim to the political climate, causing Dvořák to write to Richter in October 1884:

In the Viennese papers yesterday I read the programme of the Philharmonic concerts in Vienna … I am glad you have remembered my humble self again, but I have some misgivings about the choice of the Slavonic Rhapsody, because Viennese audiences seem to be prejudiced against a composition with a Slav flavour, so it may not be as successful as it might in other circumstances. It went very well in London and Berlin, and will do well elsewhere too, but in the national and political conditions prevailing here I am afraid it will not be well received.

In view of these tensions Dvořák – who had once written to Simrock ‘I just wanted to tell you that an artist too has a fatherland in which he must also have a firm faith and which he must love’ – wrote to his publisher several times after 1880 asking for the title-pages of his compositions to be printed in both German and Czech, and for editions of his vocal works to give the texts in both languages. He also wanted his first name to be printed simply as ‘Ant.’, since this ‘would be equally good in both languages’ as a neutral abbreviation for both German ‘Anton’ and Czech ‘Antonín’. At this turbulent period rather ill-timed requests from Vienna such as those made by Franz Jauner in 1882 and Hanslick in 1884, both asking him to write music to a German libretto for Vienna and guaranteeing performance, placed Dvořák, who saw himself as ‘an artist who hopes to be of some significance’, in a difficult personal and artistic situation: a dilemma of whether to choose loyalty to his country or disloyalty in order to achieve success among ‘enemies’ abroad.

It has often been suggested that this situation was directly connected with Dvořák’s adopting a new musical language, less permeated by a Slavonic tone and dramatic, dark and aggressive rather than carefree. He used that language in the works of this period: there are already hints of it in the String Quartet in C op.61 (B121), it is present in the *Scherzo capriccioso* op.66 (B131), and finds clear expression in the Piano Trio in F minor op.65 (B130), the *Husitská* overture op.67 (B132), the Ballad in D minor for violin and piano (B139) and the Seventh Symphony op.70 (B141). The absence from some of the autograph manuscripts (opp.65, 66 and 67) of the comment ‘Bohu díky’ (‘Thanks be to God’) – which Dvořák had regularly added at the end of each work from op.2 onwards and resumed with op.70 – suggests that he was indeed suffering some distress in these years.

**4. On the way to international fame, 1883–92.**

Early in August 1883 Dvořák was invited to London by the Philharmonic Society to conduct orchestral performances of his works in the coming season. A few months later, at the beginning of November 1883, the London music publishing firm of Novello asked him to conduct a performance of his *Stabat mater* during his visit and to compose a work for soloists, chorus and orchestra for the 1885 Birmingham Festival and conduct it himself. Dvořák was already known in London from performances of such works as the Slavonic Dances (conducted in 1879 and 1880 by Manns), the Slavonic Rhapsodies (conducted in 1880 and 1881 by Manns, Richter and Hallé), the String Sextet (given by Joachim in 1880) and the Sixth Symphony (conducted by Manns in 1882), and they had received favourable reviews. However, the performance of the *Stabat mater* under Barnby on 10 March 1883, received enthusiastically by both the audience and the critics, was probably the main reason for the Philharmonic Society’s invitation.

On 5 March 1884 Dvořák travelled to England for the first time and on 13 March conducted the *Stabat mater* in the Albert Hall. A week later he conducted his overture *Husitská*, the Sixth Symphony and the Slavonic Rhapsody no.2 in St James’s Hall, and on 22 March, at the Crystal Palace, he conducted the *Scherzo capriccioso* and the Nocturne in B (B47). The musical world of London regarded his visit as an ‘event of “red letter” significance’, and fêted him as the ‘musical hero of the hour’. The Philharmonic Society made him an honorary member. He promised it a new symphony, and he was expected to write choral works for both the forthcoming Birmingham Festival and the Leeds Festival of 1886.

Dvořák’s great success in England led to eight more visits. In November 1884 he travelled to London and to Worcester (where he gave a performance of the *Stabat mater*); in April 1885 he visited London for the première of the Seventh Symphony; in August 1885 he gave concerts in London and in Birmingham, where he conducted the British première of the cantata *Svatební košile* (‘The Spectre’s Bride’); in October 1886he visited London, Birmingham and Leeds, where he gave the première of the oratorio *Svatá Ludmila* (‘St Ludmilla’); in April 1890 he went to London to give a performance of the Eighth Symphony; in July 1891 he visited London and Cambridge, where he received an honorary doctorate, and in October of the same year he went to Birmingham for the première of the Requiem. His last visit, in March 1896, was to London for the première of the Cello Concerto.

The importance to Dvořák of his success in England can scarcely be overestimated: at a time when political feeling was detrimental to the reception of his work in Germany and Austria, England, far removed from continental bickering, appreciated him properly as an artist and contributed greatly to the growth of his international fame. For English audiences, Dvořák was able to base his commissioned choral works on Czech subjects (a fairy tale in *The Spectre’s Bride*, a legend in *St Ludmilla*) without fearing that his work would meet with prejudice even before it was heard. Dvořák met prominent figures of English musical society who judged his work without arrogance or preconceptions, in contrast to the sometimes tactless conduct of some of his continental friends. He also became friendly with Henry and Alfred Littleton, owners of Novello, who were interested in publishing Dvořák’s works, and this placed him in a better position in his dealings with Simrock. Early in 1884 (probably as a result of Dvořák’s invitation to England) a discordant note had crept into their relationship: Simrock began complaining of the poor quality of Dvořák’s manuscripts and at first tried to prevent the planned London production on 20 March 1884 of the *Husitská*overture, which had not yet been published. A dispute over the fee for the Seventh Symphony almost ended the friendship that had existed for many years. Simrock offered Dvořák 3000 marks, exactly a fifth of the sum he paid Brahms for a symphony, and half what the Czech composer was expecting. However, a rupture was averted when they agreed on a compromise: Dvořák undertook to compose a second set of Slavonic Dances, while Simrock paid what the composer expected for the symphony.

Dvořák’s visits to England also marked the beginning of a period free from financial anxieties, and he was able to fulfil his dream of buying a small country property in Vysoká, a village near the south Bohemian silver-mining town of Příbram. From that time he spent the summer months there with his family, in a retreat where he felt ‘as if cut off from the world’ and ‘cared nothing for all the world’, but instead could ‘enjoy the beauties of God’s nature’. In composition he concentrated first on the works commissioned for England (1884–6), then on the second set of Slavonic Dances (1886) and in 1887 and 1888 he turned his attention mainly to the opera *Jakobín* (‘The Jacobin’), his first stage work since *Dimitrij*. He remarked to his friend Alois Göbl, ‘I believe that this time the doubters will be satisfied with my gift for drama, and even surprised by it!’ During these two years he also revised earlier, unpublished works. They included the Symphonic Variations (B70); the Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Symphonies; the String Quartet no.8 in E (B57); the String Quintet with double bass (B49); and the song cycle *Cypresses* (B11), which he arranged for string quartet (B152) under the title *Ohlas písní* (‘Echo of Songs’) and revised as *Písně milostné* (‘Love Songs’)(B160). Simrock immediately published most of these works, with opus numbers that do not correspond to the chronology of their composition. From 1889, however, Dvořák composed new music, including the *Poetické nálady* (‘Poetic Tone Pictures’) for piano (B161); the Eighth Symphony (B163); the Requiem (B165); the *Dumky* Trio (B166); and the three concert overtures opp.91–3, *V přírodě* (‘In Nature’s Realm’, op. 91, B168), *Karneval* (‘Carnival’, op.92, B169) and *Othello* (op.93, B174). These works show a new side of the composer that he described to his friend Emanuel Chvála, saying ‘Here I am a poet as well as a musician.’

Dvořák’s growing fame brought him many honours and awards. In June 1889 he was awarded the Austrian Order of the Iron Crown and a few months later he went to Vienna to be received by the emperor. In February 1890 the Prague Artistic Society held a banquet in his honour, two months later he received an honorary doctorate from the Czech University of Prague and shortly afterwards he was elected to the Czech Academy of Sciences and Arts. In between receiving these honours, Dvořák went on a spring concert tour to Moscow and St Petersburg as a result of his friendship with Tchaikovsky, who had conducted several concerts in Prague in 1888 and met Dvořák there on a number of occasions. Finally, some months after his return from Russia Dvořák heard that the University of Cambridge wanted to give him an honorary doctorate.

**7. Final years, 1895–1904.**

For the first few months after his return from the USA Dvořák’s time was devoted chiefly to resting and enjoying the company of his family and the pleasant surroundings of Vysoká. However, there were soon official engagements to be met: Dvořák was present when the revision of *Dimitrij* he had undertaken in the USA was performed successfully in Prague; he went to the funeral of his sister-in-law Josefína Kounicová (née Čermáková), whom he commemorated in the second and third movements of the Cello Concerto with a quotation from the song *Lasst mich allein*(op.82 no.1, B157). He went to Karlsbad to meet Simrock and Hanslick again after a gap of some years, and resumed teaching at Prague Conservatory on 1 November 1895. He went to London in March 1896 to conduct the première of the Cello Concerto and to Vienna several times. There he met Richter and Bruckner, visited Brahms, and attended Brahms’s funeral in April 1897.

While Dvořák’s creative work in 1895 followed a familiar path with the completion of a string quartet begun in the USA (op.105, B193) and the composition of the Quartet in G op.106 (B192), in 1896–7 he presented himself in a new and surprising guise as a composer of programme music. Taking his subjects from ballads by the Czech poet K.J. Erben, he wrote the symphonic poems *Vodník* (‘The Water Goblin’, B195), *Polednice*(‘The Noon Witch’, B196), *Zlatý kolovrat* (‘The Golden Spinning-Wheel’, B197) and *Holoubek* (‘The Wild Dove’, B198). The symphonic poem *Píseň bohatýrská* (‘A Hero’s Song’, B199) was not based on a text, and its programme was only roughly outlined later in a letter. However, it is not as surprising as was generally supposed that Dvořák should turn to the symphonic poem at that time: the literary element in his musical language, which began to be heard in the *Poetic Tone pictures* (1889) and marked the *Dumky* Trio and the overtures opp.91–3, was a strong factor in the American works as well. In the sketches for the Ninth Symphony he gave the slow movement the title ‘Legenda’; the String Quartet no.12 in F (‘The American’) had autobiographical features, in its pastoral tone, the quotation of birdsong in the third movement and the echoes of church music in the fourth; and the American sketchbooks contain ideas for a symphony to be entitled *Neptune*. Dvořák planned to give its third and fourth movements the titles ‘Chorale’ and ‘Storm, Calm, and Fortunate Return to Land’.

In October 1897 Dvořák was appointed a member of the jury for the Viennese Artists’ Stipendium, and a year later was awarded a medal ‘litteris et artibus’. Soon afterwards he was elected a member of the committee of experts on copyright in music, and in March 1901 he was made a member of the *Herrenhaus* of the Austrian government (he attended only one session). Several of his operas were produced at the National Theatre to celebrate his 60th birthday, and *St Ludmilla* was performed in a stage version. The Artistic Society organized several concerts for the occasion and gave a banquet in Dvořák’s honour. In November 1901 he was appointed director of the Prague Conservatory. All the compositions from Dvořák’s last years were operas. Shortly before his death, he tried to explain why: ‘Over the last few years I have written nothing but operas. Not out of vanity or the desire for fame, but because I consider opera the most advantageous of genres for the nation too. Large sections of society hear such music, and hear it very often.’ The first of these late operas was *Čert a Káča* (‘The Devil and Kate’, B201), to a libretto based on a Czech fairy tale. It was followed in 1901 by *Rusalka* (B203), a fairy tale opera in three acts taking Fouqué’s *Undine* as its subject, with elements from Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Little Mermaid* and Gerhart Hauptmann’s fairytale play *Die versunkene Glocke*. The première of *Rusalka* was given on 31 March 1901 in Prague, and it was Dvořák’s greatest operatic success. In Vienna, Mahler also expressed interest in it; the fact that the projected Viennese production never took place has long been attributed solely to Mahler. He is known to have had doubts about the opera, but to a great extent the failure was due to the composer himself, who was asking a very high fee (Mahler successfully supported Dvořák in his request to the management), and the time-consuming tactics he employed in the negotiations, which lasted several months. Another contributing factor was an increase in political pressure on opera productions in Vienna, resulting in the staging of fewer works by Czech composers, whose participation in the official musical life of the city had to be reduced.

Dvořák’s last opera, *Armida* (B206), was based on a world-famous literary work, Torquato Tasso’s epic poem *Gerusalemme liberata*. In choosing this subject Dvořák may have been influenced by both his liking for the story and the idea that after the success of *Rusalka* as a Czech national opera, he should write a stage work of an international character and at last succeed as an operatic composer outside Bohemia. However, when the première was given in Prague on 25 March 1904, it was considerably less successful than *Rusalka* had been three years earlier. Dvořák had to leave the first performance of *Armida* early, because of a sudden pain in the region of his hip. After five weeks of illness, he died on 1 May 1904. Four days later he was buried in the Vyšehrad cemetery beside many other famous Czechs.

**8. Artistic character.**

Dvořák’s music, often described as merely ‘spontaneous’ or ‘national’ in character, is in fact marked by its variety, complexity and versatility. His musical career contains sudden breaks and contrasts. In his early period as a composer (1860–65), he himself described the situation as ‘not that I was unable to produce music, but I had not technique enough to express all that was in me. I had ideas but I could not utter them perfectly’. At this stage, in teaching himself, he tried to bring his musical language close to the technical standards of Mozart, Beethoven and Mendelssohn so that he could make use of their formal structures for his own purposes. A particularly important feature of his formal design is a well-developed technique of thematic separation and variation, as well as an awareness of the problems of the cyclical entity: a relationship between the main themes of the four movements of the First String Quartet and a five-note rhythmic motif heard clearly in all four movements of the First Symphony provide coherence.

Dvořák’s style in his ‘New German’ phase (from the late 1860s to 1872) seems to show him turning away from this approach: in instrumental compositions sonata form loses its normal character, notably in the String Quartets nos.2–4 and in the *Tragická ouvertura*. Short thematic units that are constantly changed, shaped and developed determine the melodic structure, which increasingly moves away from phrases of equal length and traditional accented metre. A constant movement to distant tonal regions, tonal ambiguity and the undermining of familiar tonal functions (for example, the E minor quartet, no.4, ends in B major) mark the harmony in this advanced style, which moves between musical extremes going beyond the ‘New German’ examples, and containing a high degree of subjective expressivity.

In 1873 Dvořák began to turn away from this style too and from the influence of Liszt and Wagner, although he was not at that time influenced by Brahms, as is still sometimes claimed (he began taking Brahms as a model no earlier than 1877). Once again melodic invention is expressed in equal phrase lengths and repetition, and themes are highlighted and developed in a traditional manner. Modulations – often reminiscent of Schubert – are more moderate, more conventional and more easily grasped. Boldness of form is susperseded by organization that has links with the style of 1865, but sonata form is now more balanced, logical and more recognizable.

At the same time as Dvořák turned to a new classicism, elements of Slavonic folklore begin to permeate his musical language, a style he had learnt from Smetana and from friends (taking the *dumka*, for example, from Janáček), and through his study of folk collections such as those of František Sušil and K.J. Erben. The absence of an upbeat in the melody – like the Czech language, which always places the emphasis on the first syllable ([ex.1](https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/documentId/omo-9781561592630-e-8000920531)) – some pentatonic phrasing, the sharpened fourth degree in the minor, strongly syncopated rhythm with elements from dances such as the polka, mazurka, *spacirka*, *sousedská* and *furiant* (in the third movement of the Sixth Symphony) and contrasts derived from the *dumka* (as in the second movement of the String Sextet) are characteristics of this musical language, with which Dvořák created something original from traditional elements (although there are some examples of direct quotation). For example, the main theme of the Slavonic Dance op.46 no.7 (B83) refers to the melody of the dance song *Tetka kam dete*? (‘Where are you going, Auntie?’, [ex.2](https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/documentId/omo-9781561592630-e-8000920532)) and the main theme of the *Maličkosti* (‘Bagatelles’, B79) uses the opening of the folksong *Hrály dudy*(‘The bagpipes were playing’, [ex.3](https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/documentId/omo-9781561592630-e-8000920533)). This style reaches a peak in Dvořák’s so-called first Slavonic period, from about the mid-1870s to 1881 (the *Moravian Duets* to the Sixth Symphony).



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Ex.2 a) Tetka kam dete? [Where are you going, Auntie?]; b) U Jamolic na rohu [At Jamolice, at the corner]; c) Slavonic Dance op.46 no.7



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Ex.3 a) Hrály dudy u Popudy (Erben) [The bagpipes were playing at Popuda]; b) Bagatelles op.47 no.1

In the following years, up to 1886, it is superseded by a phase in which the music is considerably more subtle and full of detail; although there is only a slight suggestion of the Slav colouring that dominated preceding works, moments of ‘Czechness’ arise through quotations such as the Hussite hymn in the *Husitská* overture and the 15th-century hymn tune in the Seventh Symphony. The prime feature of this phase, however, is its dramatic quality, producing a hitherto unusual formal dynamism in works ranging from the String Quartet no.11 to the Piano Trio in F minor, the *Husitská*overture and the Seventh Symphony. There are strong contrasts of dynamics and expression, often within a very small area, and the melody frequently contains leaps of large intervals, while rhythm has a strong and forceful effect on the development.

With the *Slavonic Dances* op.72 (B147), however, Dvořák returned to his earlier use of traditional folk colour in a second Slavonic period (1886–92), which from op.85 (1889, B161) onwards contains a fundamentally new element of poetic music, the picturesque, a musical language of association. The previous rigour of the thematic treatment gives way to a more rhapsodic structure; elements of the funeral march, fanfares, pastoral themes, birdcalls in ‘Nature’ passages, or themes of special significance such as the so-called death motif ([ex.4](https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/documentId/omo-9781561592630-e-8000920534)) are all prominent in the works of this period. They include the *Dumky* Trio, the Eighth Symphony and the concert overtures *In Nature’s Realm*, *Carnival*and *Othello* (the overtures were to form a cycle entitled *Nature, Life and Love*). Against the background of this increasingly poetic style, which is still perceptible in the works composed in the USA and which led (in the finale of the String Quartet no.13, written in 1895 after Dvořák had returned to Bohemia) to music entirely of expressive language, it seems logical and almost inevitable that Dvořák should have begun writing programme music in 1896. In taking that step he made use of the general picturesque nature of his previous poetic composition to represent concrete subjects and characters.

Dvořák’s music is notable for a wide variety of genres; few of his contemporaries wrote in so many. Almost all the genres of his time are represented: opera, oratorio, cantata and mass; symphony, symphonic poem, concert overture, serenade, suite, dance and march; concert piece and solo concerto; chamber music ranging from the solo sonata to the sextet; piano music; and secular choral works and songs. This variety was largely the result of commissions, including works for specific occasions, and it contributed a good deal to his image as a composer who spontaneously wrote prolifically and fast and who, as Simrock described him, could ‘pull melodies out of his sleeve’. But although Dvořák always retained something of the attitude of the Bohemian Kantor ready to write occasional music, as inculcated into him by Liehmann, what mattered to him was not just ‘artistic integrity’ and the general fulfilment of the ‘main conditions to be required of a work of art’, but first and foremost enthusiasm for the task he had set himself or to which some external stimulus had moved him. This enthusiasm or, as Dvořák once called it, ‘stimulation of the imagination’ could be kindled by various factors: by the poetry of a text (as in the cantata *The American Flag*); by an intriguing problem of composition (for example, the simple music in folk idiom that had to be written for the String Quartet no.10, or the ‘very small means’ of the *Drobností*‘Miniatures’, for two violins and viola); by peculiarities in the forces available (as in the Bagatelles for two violins, cello and harmonium, or in the Mass in D, accompanied solely by organ in its original version); or by certain musical ideas (as in the combination of rhapsodic freedom and sonata form in the Slavonic Rhapsody op.45 no.1, or the ironic alienation effect of the national colouring required in *Mazurek* for violin and piano/orchestra, B89 and 90). Broadly speaking, Dvořák was a craftsman in his musical thinking; his aim was to go ‘a step further’ with every work, and to write works that would ‘move the world’. Like his friend Brahms, Dvořák’s artistic attitude was pledged to the aesthetic premise that gives the treatment of an idea precedence over the idea itself:

To have a fine idea is nothing special. The idea comes of itself, and if it is fine and great, then that is not because of the person who has it. But to develop the idea well and make something great of it, that is the hardest part – that is art!

A glance at the sketches and autograph manuscripts shows that there were four stages to Dvořák’s method of composition. First there are sketches above which he wrote ‘motivy’, motifs merely recording the melody of a ‘fine idea’, as yet unconnected with any definite project (see [fig.3](https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/documentId/omo-9781561592630-e-8000011012)). Second are sketches of rough musical outlines of the whole or part of planned work. Third is a continuity sketch in which the melodic and thematic plan for the work is written out section by section with many indications of harmony, dynamics and instrumentation, and which shows the rejection of a way previously taken, the search for new solutions and the disentangling of problems (or ‘knots’, as Dvořák called them). Finally there is a fair copy of the score, with the definitive refinement of details that were outlined in the continuity sketch. This fourth version shows the counterparts, subsidiary parts and accompanying figures; musical second thoughts about the sketch, improvements on it and clarifications; and the conversion of the sketched material to orchestral sound, in which Dvořák aimed to have ‘no instrument demoted to a part that is merely filling in’, but to ensure that every instrument ‘speaks an eloquent language of its own’ (H. Krigar, D1880). The music itself, however, betrays nothing of this process of development: Dvořák, like Schubert, had the ability to give the density, complexity and richness of his music – often achieved by much hard work – the appearance of being uncomplicated and spontaneous, and expressing the simple pleasure of making music.



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‘Motivy New York’: autograph sketches from Dvořák’s ‘American Sketchbook 1’

**9. Operas.**

As Dvořák emphasized in the first interview he gave in London in 1885, from the beginning of his creative career he regarded opera as central to his work. Born at a period when the idea of a Czech national opera was being formulated, he was familiar with the discussions set off by the competition initiated in 1861 by Count Jan Harrach for the best Czech historical and comic operas. Debate centred chiefly on the fundamental nature of Czech nationalism and how it could be incorporated into music drama. As a viola player at the Provisional Theatre (where he acquired a comprehensive knowledge of the international opera of the time) Dvořák saw the works of his colleagues Bendl, Šebor, Blodek, Rozkošný and Skuherský, and the premières of Smetanas’s *The Brandenburgers in Bohemia*, *The Bartered Bride* and *Dalibor*. He adopted the three subjects found in these Czech operas for his own works: they were rural Czech village life with its typical characters in *Turdé palice* (‘The Stubborn Lovers’), *The Jacobin* and *The Cunning Peasant*; Czech stories and fairytales in *King and Charcoal Burner*, *The Devil and Kate* and *Rusalka*; and subjects from Slavonic history in *Vanda* (on a Polish subject) and *Dimitrij* (on an episode in Russian history). An exception was *Alfred*, Dvořák’s first opera, to German libretto, although its subject (the liberation of the Anglo-Saxons from Danish rule) is in the tradition of Šebor’s *Templáři na Moravě*(‘The Templars in Moravia’) and Smetana’s *The Brandenburgers in Bohemia*. Another exception was *Armida*, Dvořák’s last opera, with an international subject that had often been set before.

Dvořák drew on existing traditions, often aiming to adapt them in a unique and individual way. His first two operas, *Alfred* (1870) and the first version of *King and Charcoal Burner* (1871), resemble Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin* and *Die Meistersinger*in harmony, declamation and the symphonic style of orchestration; in general concept, employing large formal scenes in which the influence of the number opera still lingers; and in a network of motifs signifying personal characteristics and reminiscences. His abandonment of Wagnerian style as he turned to comic opera in the second version of *King and Charcoal Burner* (1874, revised 1880–81 and 1887), *The Stubborn Lovers* (1874) and the *The Cunning Peasant* (1877) led to changes in his concept of opera; these works were in the tradition of composers such as Lortzing and above all Smetana’s *The Bartered Bride*. However, these changes did not entail simplification of his musical methods. Dvořák was still employing extended structures and through-composition to achieve seamless transition from one scene to another, with orchestral references involving reminiscent themes and motifs and the development of theatrical contrasts and effects, as in the cumulative finale of *The Cunning Peasant*, into which all eight soloists are gradually drawn one by one.

Dvořák turned to historical subjects in 1875 with the five-act *Vanda*, which clearly shows the influence of grand opera in its tableaux and ensembles and in the use of the chorus. His greatest achievement in this genre is *Dimitrij* (1881–2, revised 1894). This opera and the lyric **fairytale *Rusalka* are Dvořák’s most important stage works**. In *Dimitrij* he succeeded in combining the tradition of Meyerbeer with elements of Wagnerian music drama. Besides employing local colour (mazurka rhythms for the Poles, suggestions of modal Russian folk music for the Russians), large ensemble scenes with eight-part double choruses and solo scenes included in tableaux rich in contrasts, the orchestral language uses a leitmotif effect to comment on the action, thereby taking part in the drama itself. Another notable feature of *Dimitrij* is the principle of the contemplative ensemble: dramatic incident shifts to the minds of the characters and groups involved and balances the turbulent events on stage, so that the music describes feelings and emotional situations, illustrating the motivation of the characters beyond the words they sing (for example, in a ‘resonant silence’ in the finale of the last act Marfa, who is expected to swear that Dimitrij is her son and thus the legitimate tsar, says nothing).

*The Jacobin* (1887–8, revised 1897) is considerably less tightly constructed and more varied in its internal structure, which again is reminiscent of the number opera. Its libretto, like that of *Dimitrij*, was by Marie Červinková-Riegrová, and the character of the village Kantor Benda suggests nostalgic memories of Dvořák’s former teacher Liehmann. Elements of comedy and merriment on the one hand and tragedy and melancholy on the other are brought out by motifs that are readily associated with, for example, a lullaby, a mocking song, or a eulogy, and are interlinked in variations, so that different points of time in the action are symbolized in musical terms, giving an effect of epic drama.

Dvořák’s last three operas are like a survey or concentrated résumé of his earlier career as an operatic composer. In *The Devil and Kate* (1898–9) he reverted to Wagnerian principles**. Its large formal structure is permeated by thematic-motivic reminiscences and is dominated by a symphonic orchestral language that draws musical contrasts** between earth and hell and, in the preludes to the second and the third acts, **comments on the action**. **The libretto provided no occasion for lyrical duets and there are none of the large ensembles as in the earlier operas**. **Dances** (at an inn and in hell) **give structure to the dramatic action**; their themes derive from musical accounts of a place (a theme for hell) or motifs that suit the characters (Kate’s bagpipe melody).

**A similar kind of structure is perceptible in *Rusalka* (1900), but here it is much more dense and concentrated. There is a strong contrast between the world of the Nature spirits, whose music includes augmented triads, unusual progressions and highly coloured instrumentation, and the world of men, whose harmonies and orchestration are traditional. A dense network of leitmotifs (referring to Nature, a lament, a curse, fate) is typical of the symphonic orchestral language, and by combining these motifs Dvořák related all elements of the action to each other in terms of music drama. Rusalka’s personal motif, with its many variants of expression, is put to the service of contemplative meditation, the musical depiction of a state of mind that has less to do with the dramatic action than with musical analysis of a psychological situation.**

In his last opera, *Armida* (1902–3), Dvořák changed to a different genre; his point of departure was late grand opera in the style of Massenet. The elaborate and often fantastic course of the action is marked by a series of tableaux; the motifs are less densely interwoven, so that in many passages the orchestra indicates a general atmosphere rather than individual characterization; and older formal traditions are sometimes introduced, including a return to the contrast between recitative and aria. All this is done not in a reactionary manner but as **a successful extension of the possibilities for post-Wagnerian operatic composition around 1900**.