

THE VERY BEST OF  
D V O Ř Á K



2 CDs

# ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)

## HIS LIFE

The later nineteenth century brought an increasing consciousness of national identity to various ethnic groups in Europe and elsewhere in the world. Dvořák, born in a Bohemian village, where his father was an inn-keeper and butcher, followed Bedřich Smetana as the leading exponent of Czech musical nationalism, firmly within the classical traditions of Central Europe. His early musical training was followed by employment for some years as a violist, for a time under Smetana, and then, with the positive encouragement of Johannes Brahms, by a life primarily devoted to composition. Dvořák won recognition abroad and rather more grudging acceptance in Vienna. Between 1892 and 1895 he spent some time in the United States of America as director of the new National Conservatory, a period that brought compositions that combine American and Bohemian influence. At home again he was much honoured, resisting invitations from Brahms to move to Vienna in favour of a simple life in his own country. He died in 1904, shortly after the first performances of his last opera, *Armida*.

## HIS MUSIC

### Orchestral Music

Dvořák wrote nine symphonies, of which the best known is *Symphony No. 9, 'From the New World'*, written in 1893 and first performed in New York in the same year. The *New World Symphony* derived some inspiration from a Czech translation of Longfellow's poem *Hiawatha*. Works for solo instrument and orchestra by Dvořák include an important *Cello Concerto*, a *Violin Concerto*, and a slightly less well-known *Piano Concerto*. The *Romance* for solo violin and orchestra, and *Silent Woods* for cello and orchestra make interesting and attractive additions to the solo repertoire for both instruments. Other orchestral works include two sets of *Slavonic Dances*, arrangements of works originally designed for piano duet, and three *Slavonic Rhapsodies*. Overtures include *My Home*, *In Nature's Realm*, *Othello*, *Hussite*, and *Carnival*. To this one may add the *Scherzo capriccioso* of 1883, a *Polonaise*, written four years before, and the splendid *Serenade for Strings* of 1875. The *Symphonic Variations* meet the challenge of an apparently intractable theme and the ten *Legends* were orchestrated by the composer from his original piano duet version. The symphonic poems *The Noonday Witch*, *The Golden Spinning-Wheel* and *The Wild Dove*, with their narrative content, are works that seem to explore new ground.

### Chamber Music

Dvořák left fourteen string quartets, of which the best known is No. 12, the so-called '*American Quartet*', written in 1893, the year of the *New World Symphony*. The composition of Quartets Nos. 13 and 14, in 1895, seems to have taken place over the same period. From the American period comes the *Violin Sonatina*, its second movement sometimes known as the '*Indian Lament*'. Of the four surviving piano trios, the fourth, nicknamed the '*Dumky*' because of its use of a Bohemian national dance-form, is the favourite, but is closely rivalled in popularity by the third. Dvořák's quintets for piano and strings or strings alone offer further pleasure, with the *String Sextet* and the charming *Terzetto* for two violins and viola.

## Piano Music

The best known of all the pieces Dvořák wrote for the piano must be the *Humoresque* in G flat major, the seventh of a set of eight. Close to this come the two sets of *Slavonic Dances* for piano duet.

## Operas

Dvořák wrote nine operas, the first composed in 1870 and the last completed and staged in 1903. *Rusalka*, first produced in 1900, provides a well-known concert aria, 'O silver moon'.

## Songs

Dvořák wrote a number of songs and a popular set of *Moravian Duets* for soprano and contralto. The most popular of the songs is the fourth of *Seven Gypsy Songs, Op. 55*, 'Songs my mother taught me'.

## MUSIC NOTES

### Carnival, Op. 92 (CD 1, track 1)

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra • Stephen Gunzenhauser

The three overtures *In Nature's Realm*, *Carnival* and *Othello* have enjoyed much success. Originally given the titles *Nature*, *Life* and *Love*, these three works were intended as a trilogy of symphonic poems on aspects of life. The cheerful *Carnival* is filled with hustle and bustle, underscored by busy strings and flowing melodies.

### Humoresques, Op. 101: No. 7 in G flat major (CD 1, track 2)

Stefan Veselka, piano

The *Eight Humoresques, Op. 101*, are Dvořák's last great work for piano, and are characterized by strong American influence. The seventh *Humoresque*, in G flat major, exhibits a prominent sense of good humour that is rare in Dvořák's piano works.

### String Quartet No. 12 in F major, Op. 96, 'American': III. Scherzo: Molto vivace (CD 1, track 3)

Vlach Quartet Prague

The '*American*' *Quartet* was written in 1903 while Dvořák was in a Bohemian settlement at Spillville, Iowa. The third-movement *Scherzo* makes use of the insistent song of an intrusive Spillville bird, first heard by the composer during an early morning walk. There are two contrasting trio sections, framed by the scherzo.

### Symphony No. 8 in G major, Op. 88: III. Allegretto grazioso - Molto vivace (CD 1, track 4)

Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra • Stephen Gunzenhauser

In 1889, Dvořák wrote his *Eighth Symphony*, celebrating his admission as a member of the Emperor Franz Josef's Czech Academy of Science, Literature and the Arts. The symphony seems imbued with the spirit of Bohemia. The third movement is in the form of a graceful minor waltz, with a contrasting major trio section from Dvořák's opera *The Stubborn Lovers*.

### Zigeunermelodien (Gypsy Melodies), Op. 55: No. 4. Songs my mother taught me (CD 1, track 5)

Zhou Qian, violin • Edmund Battersby, piano

'Songs my mother taught me', from the *Gypsy Songs, Op. 55*, written in 1880, had an immediate and lasting popularity. The song proved effective both as a vocal work and in the many instrumental arrangements that followed.

**Serenade for Strings in E major, Op. 22: I. Moderato (CD 1, track 6)**

Capella Istropolitana • Jaroslav Kreček

The *Serenade in E major, Op. 22*, was written in the first two weeks of May 1873. The first movement opens with music of delicate charm, breathing something of the spirit of a Schubert quartet, particularly in the middle section of the movement.

**Slavonic Dances, Op. 46: No. 2 in E minor (CD 1, track 7)**

Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra • Zdeněk Košler

Dvořák wrote his first set of *Slavonic Dances* in August, 1878, designing the dances for piano duet, but scoring them for orchestra at the same time. Dvořák offers entirely original melodies, while keeping the *Slavonic Dances* in the musical language of Bohemia and neighbouring regions. He writes music that is utterly characteristic of the folk-music with which he was familiar, without resorting to direct quotation. Not only have the dances the rhythmic and melodic shape of folk-dances but they are also enhanced by subtlety of orchestration and the use of additional musical ideas.

**Piano Trio in F minor, Op. 90 'Dumky': III. Andante - Vivace non troppo (CD 1, track 8)**

Joachim Trio

The *'Dumky' Trio* was completed in 1891 and is based on the Ukrainian lament known as the 'dumka'. The third movement, a gently lyrical A major, is interrupted by a more sprightly section in the minor, before all ends in tranquillity.

**Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Op. 70: III. Scherzo: Vivace - Poco meno mosso (CD 1, track 9)**

Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra • Stephen Gunzenhauser

Dvořák wrote his *Symphony No.7 in D minor* for the London Philharmonic Society, after his successful appearance in London in March, 1884. The third-movement *Scherzo* is highly typical of the composer in its rhythms, its double theme preserving the darker mood of the whole symphony, while the trio section breathes an air of country serenity.

**Violin Sonatina in G major, Op. 100: II. Larghetto (CD 1, track 10)**

Zhou Qian, violin • Edmund Battersby, piano

Dvořák wrote his *Violin Sonatina* during the last two weeks of November 1893, completing it on 3rd December. As in his *New World Symphony* (see **CD 2, track 8**), there are distinct American influences. The second movement, known to many as the 'Indian Lament', uses a theme that had come to the composer as he visited the Minnehaha Falls in Minnesota. After a middle section in a new key, this melody returns.

**Slavonic Dances, Op. 72: No. 2 in E minor (CD 1, track 11)**

Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra • Zdeněk Košler

Dvořák wrote his first set of *Slavonic Dances* in August, 1878 (see **CD1, track 7**). The second series of *Slavonic Dances* was written during the summer of 1886, and orchestrated during the winter. The task took him rather longer than the first series of eight dances had done, but Dvořák succeeded in continuing in the spirit that had informed the earlier set, adding eight dances that are in no way less inspired than the first eight.

**Rusalka, Op. 114: O. Silver moon, 'Song to the Moon' (CD 1, track 12)**

Jana Valášková, soprano • Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, Johannes Wildner

The opera *Rusalka*, written in 1901, was based on Friedrich Heinrich Karl de la Motte-Fouqué's *Undine*, the story of a

water spirit who falls in love with a mortal. Rusalka is helped by a witch to assume mortal shape, but dies when the prince she has married proves unfaithful. 'O silver moon', Rusalka's Romance, occurs in the first act of the opera.

### **The Noon Witch (CD 1, track 13)**

Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra • Stephen Gunzenhauser

*The Noon Witch* has a very precise programme, outlined in the composer's correspondence. In the opening bars a boy plays quietly, turning his attention to a toy cockerel, while his mother prepares dinner. She is cross with the child, who cries. His mother then becomes angrier still and scolds him, threatening him with the noon witch, whose activities are confined to the hour between eleven o'clock and noon. The child grows calmer, as the scene is repeated. In what is the equivalent of a slow movement, the noon witch slowly opens the door and approaches the mother (represented by bass clarinet and muted strings), followed by the witch motif (bassoon and bass clarinet). In livelier music (horns and trombones), the witch demands the child; the mother in desperation holds the child to her while the witch tries to seize him. An *Allegro*, with piccolo, flute and oboe, describes the witch as she dances round. The mother screams and collapses. The noon bell is heard, momentarily deterring the witch. In the following *Andante*, the father opens the door of his house and comes in to find his wife lying without sign of life. He revives her and then becomes more agitated as he finds his son dead. In the final bars the witch vanishes.

### **Slavonic Dances Op. 46: No. 1 in C major (CD 2, track 1)**

Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra • Zdeněk Košler

See **CD 1, track 7**.

### **Stabat Mater, Op. 58: *Fac ut portem Christi mortem* (CD 2, track 2)**

Christine Brewer, soprano • John Aler, tenor • Washington Chorus • Washington Orchestra, Robert Shafer  
Dvořák's setting of the *Stabat Mater* was completed in 1877 and first heard in Prague in 1880. The sixteenth verse, 'Fac ut portem Christi mortem' ('Let me bear Christ's death') is scored for soprano and tenor soloists and introduced by the woodwind and horns in a D major *Larghetto*. The two voices are intertwined in a movement dominated by the opening motif in music of pious optimism.

### **Serenade for Wind, Op. 44: I. Moderato, quasi marcia (CD 2, track 3)**

Oslo Philharmonic Wind Soloists

The *Wind Serenade* dates from 1878 and has a sunny quality, like the *Sixth Symphony* written two years later. The work opens with a march suggesting all the pomp of the local village bands that Dvořák knew so well.

### **Cello Concerto in B minor, Op. 104: II. Adagio ma non troppo (CD 2, track 4)**

Maria Kliegel, cello • Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Michael Halász

Dvořák wrote his *Cello Concerto* in 1895 at the request of his colleague, the cellist Hanuš Wihan. The slow second movement opens with the principal theme played by the clarinet, accompanied by bassoons and oboes. The theme is then taken up by the solo cello. A middle section, in marked dramatic contrast, makes use of the opening phrase of a song written by Dvořák in 1887. The principal theme appears again, played by three French horns, to be followed by a cello cadenza and a brief coda.

**Piano Quintet in A major, Op. 81: III. Scherzo (Furiant) - Molto vivace (CD 1, track 5)**

Ivan Klánský, piano • Vlach Quartet Prague

Dvořák's *Piano Quintet in A major*, Op. 81, was written between August and the beginning of October 1887. The third-movement *Scherzo* is described as a 'furiant', a Bohemian folk-dance. Derived from this dance is a gentler trio section, marked *Poco tranquillo*. The movement is rounded off by the return of the original dance.

**Czech Suite, Op. 39: II. Polka (CD 2, track 6)**

Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra • Antoni Wit

Dvořák started work on his *Czech Suite (Česká Suita)* on 4th March 1879 and it was first performed in Prague on 16th May. The second-movement *Polka* has a contrasting Trio section.

**Legends, Op. 59: No. 2 in G major (CD 2, track 7)**

Christian Kohn, piano • Silke-Thora Matthies, piano

Completely Czech in spirit, the ten *Legends* for piano duet were completed in early 1881. Dvořák later orchestrated them (8.550266 and 8.550267 on Naxos). The second *Legend* is suggestive of meditative resignation and quiet inner joy, tempered with a contrasting central section.

**Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95, 'From the New World': II. Largo (CD 2, track 8)**

Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra • Stephen Gunzenhauser

Dvořák wrote nine symphonies and the last of them carries the title *From the New World*. It was written in the early months of 1893 and was an immediate success. Dvořák was deeply influenced by America and by the Indian and Negro music he heard, as well as by the songs of Stephen Foster. All the themes of the symphony were original, although shaped by the use of particular rhythmic and melodic features of music of the New World. While American in this way, the symphony retains an inevitable air of Bohemia. The slow movement, with its famous cor anglais solo, is described by a note of the composer's as 'Morning, possibly the blessing of the cornfields', a reference to Longfellow's *Hiawatha*.

**Two Waltzes, Op. 54: Waltz No. 1: Moderato (CD 2, track 9)**

Vlach Quartet Prague

Dvořák made the string quartet arrangement of his *Two Waltzes*, Op. 54, in February 1880, basing them on the set of eight waltzes for piano completed in January that year. The first waltz starts with a tenderly lilting melody, used to frame contrasting episodes of greater urgency.

**Romance in F minor, Op. 11 (CD 2, track 10)**

Zhou Qian, violin • Edmund Battersby, piano

The *Romance* was written between 1873 and 1877 for violin and piano. The work makes use of a theme from the slow movement of an earlier composition, the unpublished *String Quartet in F minor* of 1873. The principal theme, heard first on the piano and echoed by the violin, is one of great charm and returns after a contrasting central section of some dramatic tension.

**My Home, Op. 62 (CD 2, track 11)**

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra • Stephen Gunzenhauser

The overture *My Home* was written in 1881 as part of the incidental music for the play *Josef Kajetan Tyl* by the

playwright František Ferdinand Šamberk. The overture makes reference to a song by František Jan Škroup that later became the Czech national anthem (with words by Josef Kajetán Tyl, founder of the Czech Theatre).

**For further exploration of the Bohemian and American worlds of Dvořák, we suggest:**

**Orchestral Works**

Slavonic Dances, Opp. 46 and 72 .....	8.550143
Symphonies No. 1 / Legends Op. 59, Nos. 1–5 .....	8.550266
Symphonies No. 2 / Legends Op. 59, Nos. 6–10 .....	8.550267
Symphonies Nos. 3 and 6 .....	8.550268
Symphonies Nos. 4 and 8 .....	8.550269
Symphonies Nos. 5 and 7 .....	8.550270
Serenade for Strings .....	8.550419
Symphonic Poems .....	8.550598
Overtures .....	8.550600
A Hero's Song / Czech Suite / Hussite Overture .....	8.553005
Symphony No. 9 .....	8.553229
Wind Serenade .....	8.554173
Ballad / Capriccio / Silent Woods .....	8.554730

**Concertos**

Cello Concerto .....	8.550503
Violin Concerto .....	8.550758

**Chamber Music**

Piano Trio in F Minor / Piano Trio in E Minor, 'Dumky' .....	8.550444
Four-Hand Piano Music (Selection) .....	8.553137
String Quartets, Op. 96, 'American' and Op. 106 .....	8.553371
Cypresses / String Quartet Movement in F Major .....	8.553375
Violin Sonata, Op. 57 / Violin Sonatina, Op. 100 .....	8.554413
Piano Quintets Opp. 5 and 81 .....	8.555377
String Quintet Op. 77 / Miniatures .....	8.555378

**Keyboard Music**

Humoresques, Op. 101 / Silhouettes, Op. 8 .....	8.557477
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**Vocal/ Choral Music**

Stabat Mater / Psalm 149 .....	8.555301-02
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## CD1

<b>1</b>	Carnival Overture, Op. 92	9:29
<b>2</b>	Humoresques, Op. 101 No. 7 Poco lento e grazioso in G flat major	2:51
<b>3</b>	String Quartet No. 12 in F major, Op. 96 'American' III. Molto vivace	4:01
<b>4</b>	Symphony No. 8 in G major, Op. 88 III. Allegretto grazioso – Molto vivace	5:45
<b>5</b>	7 Gipsy Melodies 'Zigeunerlieder' – song collection, Op. 55 No. 4 Songs my mother taught me	2:47
<b>6</b>	Serenade for Strings in E major, Op. 22 I. Moderato	4:10
<b>7</b>	Slavonic Dances, Op. 46 No. 2 in E minor	4:40
<b>8</b>	Piano Trio in F minor 'Dumky', Op. 90 III. Andante – Vivace non troppo	5:56
<b>9</b>	Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Op. 70 III. Scherzo: Vivace – Poco meno mosso	7:47
<b>10</b>	Violin Sonatina in G major, Op. 100 II. Larghetto	4:33
<b>11</b>	Slavonic Dances, Op. 72 No. 2 in E minor	5:29
<b>12</b>	Rusalka, Op. 114 O, Silver Moon	5:52
<b>13</b>	The Noon Witch	13:04
	<b>Total Timing</b>	<b>77:10</b>

## CD2

<b>1</b>	Slavonic Dances, Op. 46 No. 1 in C major	3:46
<b>2</b>	Stabat Mater, Op. 58 Fac ut portem Christi mortem	5:13
<b>3</b>	Serenade for Wind, Op. 44 I. Moderato, quasi marcia	3:51
<b>4</b>	Cello Concerto in B minor, Op. 104 II. Adagio ma non troppo	12:29
<b>5</b>	Piano Quintet in A major, Op. 81 III. Scherzo (Furiant) – Molto vivace	4:06
<b>6</b>	Czech Suite, Op. 39 II. Polka	4:49
<b>7</b>	Legends, Op. 59 No. 2 in G major	4:12
<b>8</b>	Symphony No. 9 in E minor 'From the New World', Op. 95 II. Largo	11:58
<b>9</b>	Two Waltzes, Op. 54 Waltz No. 1 Moderato	3:54
<b>10</b>	Romance in F minor, Op. 11	10:38
<b>11</b>	My Home, Op. 62	9:18
	<b>Total Timing</b>	<b>74:52</b>

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# THE VERY BEST OF DVOŘÁK

“... one cannot but envy the man his fresh and fertile imagination.”

(Johannes Brahms on Dvořák)

Antonín Dvořák is considered the greatest of the Czech nationalist composers of the later nineteenth century, and he continues to enjoy the widest international popularity. This 2-CD set features Dvořák's most frequently performed and recorded works, including excerpts from the *New World Symphony*, his *Cello Concerto*, and his light-hearted *Humoresques*.

Compact Disc 1

- 1** Carnival Overture, Op. 92 **2** Humoresques, Op. 101 No. 7 Poco lento e grazioso in G flat major **3** String Quartet No. 12 in F major, Op. 96 'American' III. Molto vivace **4** Symphony No. 8 in G major, Op. 88 III. Allegretto grazioso – Molto vivace **5** 7 Gypsy Melodies 'Zigeunerlieder' – song collection, Op. 55 No. 4 Songs my mother taught me **6** Serenade for Strings in E major, Op. 22 I. Moderato **7** Slavonic Dances, Op. 46 No. 2 in E minor **8** Piano Trio in F minor 'Dumky', Op. 90 III. Andante – Vivace non troppo **9** Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Op. 70 III. Scherzo: Vivace – Poco meno mosso **10** Violin Sonatina in G major, Op. 100 II. Larghetto **11** Slavonic Dances, Op. 72 No. 2 in E minor **12** Rusalka, Op. 114 O, Silver Moon **13** The Noon Witch

Compact Disc 2

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8.552139-40  
ISBN 1-84379-228-1  
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Cartoon: John Minnion  
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