

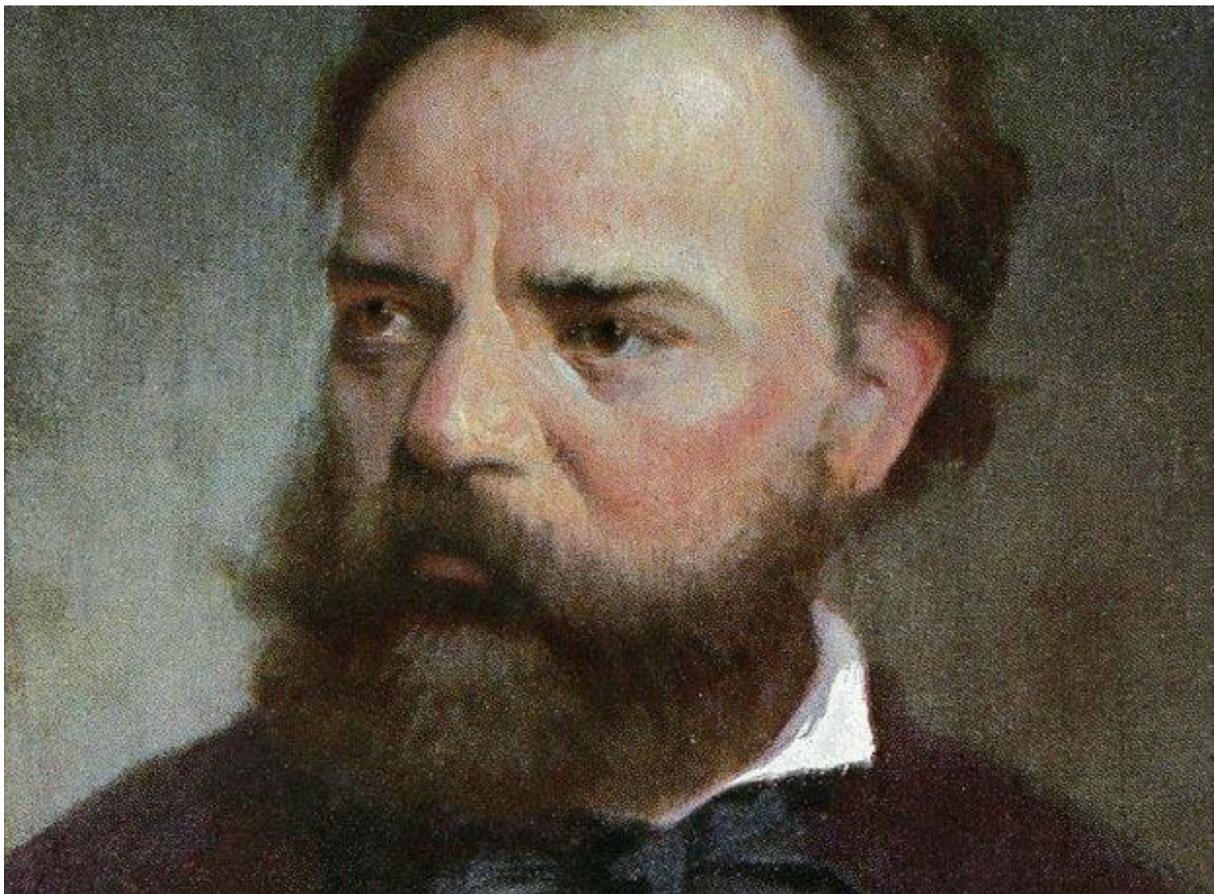


UNIVERSITY OF  
THE THIRD AGE

Benalla & District Inc.



*Programme Notes 25<sup>th</sup> October, 2019*



*Antonin Dvořák*

*1841 - 1904*

# Dvořák - The Great Composer



Born on 8 September 1841 in a small village north of Prague, Antonin Leopold Dvořák was the eldest of 14 children. His father was a professional zither player, an innkeeper and a butcher. Folk music accompanied every family occasion, and young Antonin soon joined his father in the local band – and served as an apprentice butcher. (Picture: Dvořák's birthplace at Nelahozeves).

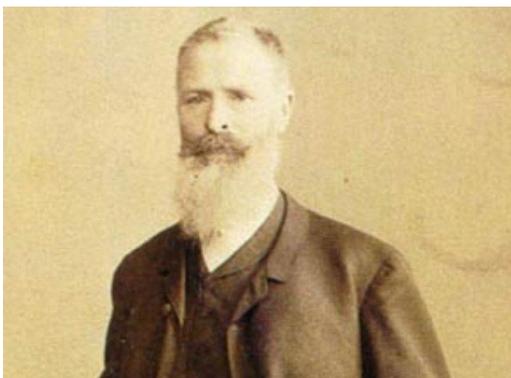
The youthful Dvořák studied organ, violin, piano and – less successfully – the German language. He played viola in the Bohemian Provisional Theatre Orchestra, performing in restaurants and at balls. In 1871, he resigned from the orchestra to concentrate on composing, scraping a living by teaching the piano.

In 1873 Dvořák married his wife Anna Čermáková, after courting and being turned down by her sister, Josefina. Dvořák and his wife had nine children in total – six survived infancy. After his marriage, he became a church organist which guaranteed better income, greater social status and more time to compose.



Dvořák's first composing efforts received no critical reception or public performance. The self-critical composer even burned some of his early works. But his music did begin to attract the interest of the critic Eduard Hanslick and the composer Johannes Brahms, who gave Dvořák's career a boost.

In 1877, on Brahms' recommendation, the publisher Simrock commissioned Dvořák to write some Slavonic Dances for piano duet. Aimed at the lucrative domestic market, the sheet music for the eight dances sold out in one day.



When Dvořák's publisher Simrock, pictured, failed to send him an advance for his Symphony No.7, the composer complained that he had endured a bad potato harvest and needed some money upfront. Simrock then refused to print Dvořák's correct first name on the cover, insisting on Germanising it (Anton).



Away from music Dvořák was a committed train spotter, spending hours at the Franz Josef railway station in Prague. It's said he knew the timetable off by heart. And when teaching, he would always ask his pupils to describe in detail any train journeys that they had recently made.

Dvořák was particularly popular in Britain. He visited nine times and some of his major works received their world premieres in Birmingham, London and Leeds. On one occasion, when Dvořák was in London to oversee a performance of his Piano Concerto at Crystal Palace, he was thrown out of the Athenaeum Club. He'd mistaken it for a coffee house and was immediately evicted.



Dvořák and his wife enjoyed getting up very early indeed. When they stayed in Cambridge with the composer and organist Charles Villiers Stanford, pictured, the Englishman was more than surprised that when he awoke at 6 a.m., the Dvořáks were already to be found sitting under a tree in his garden.

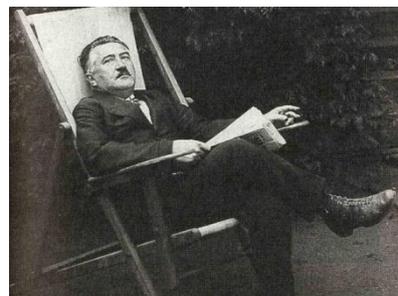
It was the lure of an amazing fee that persuaded Dvořák to venture to New York. For a little teaching and conducting, with four month's vacation, he was promised the unimaginable salary of \$15,000 - 25 times what he was paid in Prague, and worth about £500,000 in today's terms. While there, he developed a new passion for steam ships - and pigeons.

During his time in America, Dvořák produced three of his most famous works - the String Quartet No.12, known as the 'American', the Cello Concerto in B minor, and the 'New World' Symphony. When he premiered the symphony, critics disagreed over whether it was an all-American symphony or just more of Dvořák's usual Bohemian fare.

While in the U.S.A. Dvořák, pictured far right, appeared to spend a lot of time longing for home, rarely going out, and even spent his summer with a Czech community in Iowa. In 1895, problems came to head over his salary, and he decided to return to Bohemia. The Dvořáks left New York before the end of the spring term with no intention of returning.



Dvořák launched the careers of other Czech composers such as Josef Suk, pictured, and Vítězslav Novák. In 1897 Dvořák's daughter Otilie married Suk. In the same year, Dvořák was appointed a member of the jury for the Viennese Artist's Stipendium, and was later honoured with a medal.



Dvořák died aged 62 from a stroke on 1 May 1904, following five weeks of illness. He left behind many unfinished works. In 1943, an American Liberty ship of the U.S. Navy was named USNS Antonín Dvořák in his honour. (Acknowledgement: classicfm.com)

## Today's Music

### The Devil and Kate Opus 112 B 201 - Overture



Sometimes great opera is inspired by the scenario chosen by its composer; at other times, the quality of the music seems almost too good for the tale it accompanies. That's the impression one has when first encountering Antonín Dvořák's *The Devil and Kate*.

A work that is light-hearted and inconsequential, even the demons (there's more than one) in *The Devil and Kate* are neither sinister nor scary. Lucifer has sent one of them, Marbuel, to drag a princess down to his domain. Instead he is landed with Kate whose incessant chatter and love of dance drives them both to distraction.

(Acknowledgement: pragueoperatickets.com)

#### Story:

The opera opens in a tavern, where a village celebration is taking place. Music is playing and everybody is dancing, but Jirka, the shepherd, has to go to work, or his master would fire him. Before he leaves, Kate and her mother turn up. Kate would like to find a husband, but nobody wants to dance with her, because she's cheeky and sharp-tongued. She says that she would marry even a devil. At that moment, the devil Marbuel enters the tavern, disguised as a huntsman. He had been sent by the lord of hell Lucifer to investigate whether the princess and steward have committed enough sins to be taken to hell. He wants to tease Kate and punish her a little for her sharp tongue, so he asks her to dance and proposes her to leave with him. When she agrees, he takes her to hell. Then Jirka returns, saying that his master had sent him to hell. When he hears what happened, he decides to save Kate.

The second act takes place in hell. Marbuel wanted to play a joke on Kate, but he made a terrible mistake; Kate refuses to get off his back, and with her temperament she turns all hell upside down. Jirka comes to rescue her, but in fact he's rescuing hell from Kate.

The princess has learnt that the devil is coming to take her to hell and she is sorry about the sins that she's committed. She begs Jirka to save her, so he tells Kate to hide in the palace to wait for the devil and catch him. When Marbuel comes, Jirka tells him that Kate is hiding there, and the devil flees in terror. The princess is immensely grateful to Jirka, promises to rule justly and abolish serfdom, rewards Kate, and appoints Jirka her councillor.

The overall musical style is dramatic, almost Wagnerian – there are not many arias, most of the time is filled with dialogues. The story flows quickly, it's not slowed down by many repetitions. (frufrijblogspot.com)

We listen to the Overture played as an overture to a performance of the opera in the National Theatre of Prague in 2011. The conductor is Jan Chalupěcký.

The link to YouTube is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALIQHLw5ZYg>

### **Romance in F Minor for Solo Violin and Piano, Op. 11 B 38**



Dvořák originally composed this music in September and October 1873 as the slow movement of a string quartet in F minor. When no one would play the F minor string quartet, he salvaged the lyrical slow movement and rescored it for violin solo and

piano as a perfect miniature for the home parlour.

He also made a version for violin and orchestra, confident—despite the evidence—that symphony orchestras would be eager to play his music.

In Dvořák's original movement, marked *Andante con moto*, a lovely, virtually seamless violin melody rides over gentle chords and rocking arpeggios. In the Romance, Dvořák expanded its gracious dimensions, adding a generous introduction, and coloured the accompaniment with the warm tones of winds and horns. It's still a small work in scale and intention, but it's without doubt one of his most glorious melodic creations.

*(Acknowledgement: cso.org).*

The performance we hear is by violinist Barbora Valečková accompanied by pianist Stanislav Bogunia, both from Czechoslovakia.

The YouTube link is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCBUfIHFTi8>

## ***Serenade for Strings in E flat major Opus 22 B 52***

In the summer of 1874, the 32-year-old Dvořák applied for a new scholarship offered by the Austrian Ministry of Education to young, poor, and talented artists living in the western portion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Fortunately for Dvořák, the committee adjudicating the music applications included his mentor Johannes Brahms, along with the influential critic Eduard Hanslick. Upon awarding Dvořák the scholarship, the committee noted his “undoubted talent,” the fact that he could not afford a piano of his own, and stated that he deserved the scholarship in order to “free him from anxiety in his creative work.”

The *Serenade for Strings in E Major* emerges from a period of heightened self-confidence and optimism, just after Dvořák had won the scholarship. The financial cushion the scholarship released Dvořák from financial worries, and for the first time he could devote himself wholeheartedly to composition.

The *Serenade's* five short movements reflect Dvořák's sunny mood. Four of the movements use a straightforward three-part structure known as ABA: a central section contrasting with an opening movement whose melodic theme returns in the third section. The minuet contains all the grace and refinement one would expect, and its lilting melody conjures up elegant dancers whirling around a candlelit ballroom. The playful Scherzo bubbles with mirth, while its accompanying trio features a gentle melody. The *Larghetto* presents an interlude of dreamy quietude, in sharp contrast with the animated finale, which reprises both the *Larghetto's* main theme and, in the closing bars, the primary melody of the opening *Moderato*.



We listen to the fifth and final movement which begins with rousing music that evokes the vigorous fiddling of peasant dances. As in previous movements, this one works through two main sections, but the form is extended by the inclusion of themes from the fourth movement and, closer to the end, the first movement. The effect is similar to the moments of reminiscence in the earlier movements, except that the glance backward now encompasses the entire piece.

(Acknowledgement: Chamber Music Northwest – [cmnw.org](http://cmnw.org))

The performance is by the Netherlands Chamber Orchestra. The YouTube link (to the complete work) is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRcbDMg56yg&t=446s>

## Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in G minor - Opus 33 B 53



Initially composed within a few weeks in August–September 1876, first performed in 1878, and then revised again before its eventual publication, after much rejection, in 1883, the concerto has all too often been criticized for its supposedly ungrateful piano-writing.

One of the publishers who refused it wrote: “‘you choose to merge the piano closely with the orchestra, and this may not appeal to today’s concert artists’. But Dvořák never intended the concerto to be the sort of pianistic tour de force for which the publisher was evidently hankering. A competent but no means brilliant pianist himself (viola and organ being the instruments with which he had earned a living before his composing career took off), Dvořák chose a different path for this work, confiding in a friend while composing it that: ‘I am unable to write a concerto for a virtuoso; I must think of other things.’

It must be admitted, though, that the solo-writing is anything but pianistic; it is hideously difficult to play, and yet must sound effortless—the exact opposite of the virtuoso’s dream! So pianists grumbled; and the result of their grumblings was that after Dvořák’s death the piano part was issued in a new, heavily revised version by the Czech pianist Vilém Kurz (1872–1945). No doubt Kurz had the best intentions, seeking to popularize the piece; but the trouble is that his version, with its reinforced harmonies and smoothed-out rhythms, generally muddies the lightness and clarity that are such essential components of Dvořák’s style.

Nevertheless, Kurz’s version became standard until Sviatoslav Richter, who loved the concerto, went back to Dvořák’s original and, despite the difficulties of the solo part, apparently found nothing lacking musically, or even pianistically. Other pianists started to follow his example, and so the original edition has gradually taken its rightful place as the version of choice.

That controversy aside, it is a mystery why this concerto has not found a more regular niche in the repertoire; how could one not love it for its glorious melodies, its warm-heartedness, its infectious celebration of life?

The pastoral tranquillity (of the first two movements) is swept away by the solo piano launching the finale with an introductory figure that lands us firmly back in the world of folk-dance—as does the main theme - a twisting, turning dervish of a melody that has its roots deep in Czech soil. Only with the third subject do we get a taste of melancholy; even here, though, the irresistible dance soon inveigles itself into the accompaniment—as if the jilted Slavic lover finds his feet moving, in spite of himself, and is forced to join the party.

The finale as a whole – a mixture of rondo and sonata form – conveys above all a spirit of celebration; and it is no surprise that the long coda — with quite enough pianistic excitement to satisfy even the sulking virtuoso — ends in a stomping, festive G major. Life is good!  
(Extracted from CD notes by Steven Isserlis writing for Hyperion records)



The concerto was championed for many years by the noted Czech pianist Rudolf Firkušný, who played it with many different conductors and orchestras around the world before his death in 1994. Firkušný was a pupil of Czech composer Leoš Janáček.

We listen to the final movement played by American pianist Sara Davis Buechner a one-time pupil of Firkušný. She is accompanied by the Victoria Symphony conducted by Bernhard Queller, live at the Royal Theatre in Victoria, B.C., Canada.

The YouTube link (for the complete concerto) is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYW6fjvpuNw>

## **Slavonic Dances Opus 46/72 B78/83**

The Slavonic Dances are a series of 16 orchestral pieces composed by Antonín Dvořák in 1878 and 1886 and published in two sets as Opus 46 and Opus 72 respectively. Originally written for piano four hands, the Slavonic Dances were inspired by Johannes Brahms's own Hungarian Dances and were orchestrated at the request of Dvořák's publisher soon after composition. The pieces, lively and overtly nationalistic, were well received at the time and today are among the composer's most memorable works, occasionally making appearances in popular culture.



Unsure how to begin, Dvořák used Brahms's Hungarian Dances as a model—but only as a model; there are a number of important differences between the two works. For example, whereas Brahms made use of actual Hungarian folk melodies, Dvořák only made use of the characteristic rhythms of Slavic folk music: the melodies are entirely his own.  
(lumen learning.com)

The Slavonic Dances also happen to be more ambitious in their proportions than the Hungarian Dances (the last five of which, incidentally, Dvořák arranged for orchestra). Brahms sought to do no more than present his engaging Hungarian tunes in the form of attractive miniatures; Dvořák, however, approached the writing of his dances with a broader objective in mind, so that each of them, and particularly in the orchestral setting, may well strike the listener as a concise ethnic rhapsody in the guise of an idealized dance form.

The Dance we hear is No. 8. It is in the form of a “*furiant*”. The name of this characteristic Czech dance, we are advised, has no etymological connection with the English word “*fury*”; its character is fiery and impulsive, but in a cheerful, exuberant frame.

(kennedy-center.org)

The Orchestra is the Berlin Philharmonic under the baton of Sir Simon Rattle.

The link to YouTube is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WlywT8fKVZA>

## Piano Quintet No. 2 in A major, Op. 81, B. 155,



The work was actually composed as the result of the composer’s attempt to revise an earlier work, Piano Quintet in A major, Op. 5. Dvořák was dissatisfied with the Op. 5 quintet and destroyed the manuscript not long after its premiere.

Janine Jansen

Fifteen years later, he reconsidered and retrieved a copy of the score from a friend and started making revisions. However, he decided that rather than submitting the revised work for publication, he would compose an entirely new work. The new quintet is a mixture of Dvořák’s personal form of expressive lyricism as well as a utilization of elements from Czech folk music. Characteristically those elements include styles and forms of song and dance, but not actual folk tunes; Dvořák created original melodies in the authentic folk style.



Boris Brovtsyn

The work has four *movements*:

1. *Allegro, ma non tanto*
2. *Dumka: Andante con moto*
3. *Scherzo (Furiant): molto vivace*
4. *Finale: Allegro.*



Polina Leschenko

The first movement opens quietly with lyrical cello theme over piano accompaniment which is followed by a series of elaborate transformations. The viola introduces the second subject which is another lyrical melody, but much busier than the cello’s stately line. Both themes are developed extensively by the first and second violins and the movement closes with a free recapitulation and an exuberant *coda*.

The second movement is labelled ‘*Dumka*’ which is a form that Dvořák famously used in his *Dumky piano trio* and features a melancholy theme on the piano separated by fast, happy interludes. It follows a seven-part *rondo* pattern, ABACABA, where A, in *F# minor*, is the slow elegiac refrain on piano with variations, B is a bright *D major* section on violins, and C is a quick and vigorous section derived from the opening refrain. Each time the *Dumka* (A) section returns its texture is enriched.



Mischa Maisky



Julian Rachlin

The third movement is marked as a *Furiant* which is a fast Bohemian folk dance. The cello and viola alternate a rhythmic pizzicato underneath the main tune of the first violin. The slower trio section of the scherzo is also derived from the *furiant* theme, with the piano and violin alternating between the main melodies. The fast Bohemian folk dance returns and the movement finishes aggressively, setting up for the polka in the last movement.

The *Finale* is light-hearted and spirited. The second violin leads the theme into a *fugue* in the *development* section. In the coda, Dvořák writes *tranquillo* for a chorale-like section, which features the theme of the movement this time in *augmentation* and played *pianissimo*, before the pace quickens with an *accelerando*, and the quintet rushes to the finish. (Source: Wikipedia)

We hear a live performance of the fourth and final movement of Dvořák's masterpiece by an all-star ensemble of musicians – Polina Leschenko (piano), Janine Jansen (violin), Boris Brovtsyn (violin), Julian Rachlin (viola), Mischa Maisky (violoncello) – all pictured – at Utrecht, Janine Jansen Chamber Music Festival, 28 December 2007)

The YouTube link (to the complete quintet) is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnarQ7fh1w4&t=936s>

## Symphony No. 9 in E Minor, Op. 95 B 178: From the New World



In 1891 the noted American patron of the arts Jeannette Meyer Thurber embarked on a mission to find a director for the National Conservatory of Music, the school that she had founded in New York City. Determined to fill the position with a person of global reputation whose own prestige would boost that of the conservatory, she offered the attractive annual salary of \$15,000. Although many Americans would have leapt at the opportunity, there were no suitably qualified candidates, largely because classical music was still in its adolescence in the United States.

Thurber ultimately offered the job to Dvořák, who at that time was a music professor at the Prague Conservatory in Austria-Hungary (now in the Czech Republic). As a skilled composer of international renown— a conservative late romantic who specialized in lush symphonic works and chamber music rather like that of his mentor Johannes Brahms—Dvořák had much to share with aspiring musicians. Moreover, according to his colleagues, he had a flair for teaching.

Dvořák accepted Thurber's offer and moved to the United States in 1892, but he was uncomfortable in the urban American setting, and he disliked being absent from his homeland.

His new address of 327 East 17th Street in New York City seemed a poor substitute for the rolling hills of Bohemia. Thus, Dvořák terminated his contract after three years to return to Prague.

Dvořák's American sojourn was brief but productive, and it yielded the piece that widely became regarded as his signature work—the four-movement Symphony No. 9 in E Minor, better known as the New World Symphony. Written while Dvořák was living and working in New York City, the symphony purportedly incorporated the composer's reflections on his American setting. The piece premiered with the New York Philharmonic in a program shared with Brahms's Violin Concerto in D Major and Felix Mendelssohn's incidental music for A Midsummer Night's Dream. A reporter for the New York Herald who had attended the last rehearsal before the premiere observed that the new symphony was “a noble composition...of heroic proportions” and compared the work favourably to the compositions of Ludwig van Beethoven, Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, Mendelssohn, and Brahms.

Dvořák's writings reveal that he admired the beauty of African American spirituals and plantation songs of the American South and that he advised other composers also to study them for inspiration. Many musicologists have speculated that, at least in part, the melodies of the New World Symphony were based on such spirituals. The second theme in the first movement, for instance, is to some ears reminiscent of the spiritual “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” and the gently lyrical second movement is popularly perceived as an orchestral setting of the spiritual “Goin' Home.” However, “Goin' Home” has no organic tie to the South or to plantation life; it is Dvořák's own melody, written specifically for the New World Symphony and later given words by one of his students.

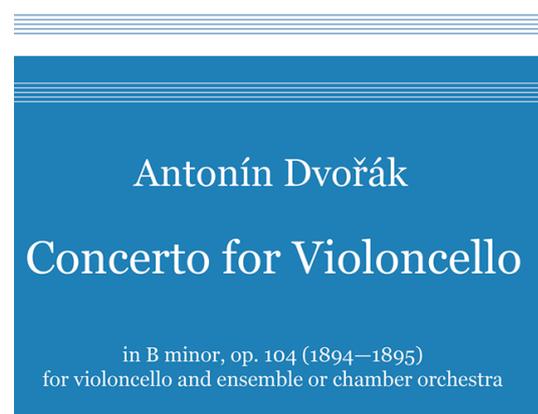
(Encyclopaedia Britannica).

We listen to the second movement as performed by the Danish National Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Joshua Wellerstein.

The YouTube link (complete Symphony) is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEpe5Sm0mfU&t=1433s>

## Cello Concerto in B minor Opus 104 B 191



This is one of the two most performed cello concertos in the world (the other being by Elgar) and with such a story to tell that it would make a great weepy all on its own. Like the New World Symphony, it is another work hailing from the composer's American period and is therefore infused with the same sense of homesick longing that pervades the symphony.

Yet there is far more to the Cello Concerto than initially meets the ear. Homesickness tells only half the tale. With Dvořák in America was his wife, Anna, whom he had married only after courting and being turned down by her elder sister, Josefina.

At that time, he had started but not finished an early cello concerto, an expression of his love. Now, in America, he learned that Josefina was seriously ill – and began another cello concerto. Into it, he wove Josefina's favourite of his songs, called 'Leave Me Alone'. It is heard most achingly in the wonderful slow movement. Intended originally for his friend Hanus (who played alongside composer Josef Suk in the Czech string Quartet) it was eventually premiered in England by British cellist Leo Stern, whom Dvořák had befriended in Prague.

(Acknowledgement: classicfm.com)

We listen to the slow movement from a recently re-discovered recording of a concert held in tribute to the people of Czechoslovakia days after the Soviet Union invaded. Filmed live at the Royal Albert Hall in September 1968. The cellist is Jacqueline du Pré accompanied by the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Daniel Barenboim.



The recording of the complete concerto can be found on YouTube at:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U\\_yxtaeFuEQ&t=1073s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_yxtaeFuEQ&t=1073s)

## Rusalka Opus 114 B 203



The most popular and successful Czech opera, *Rusalka*, tells the story of an immortal water nymph from Slavic Mythology who falls in love with a prince and yearns to become human. It is a sad and touching fairy tale which contains many similarities to *Undine* by German poet Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué and *The Little Mermaid* by Danish writer Hans Christian Anderson.

The opera *Rusalka* is based on the fairy tales of the folklorist Karel Jaromír Erben and the Czech writer, Božena Němcová.

The libretto was written by the Czech poet and librettist, Jaroslav Kvapil. The composition of the libretto began before the poet ever met or had any contact with Dvořák. In fact, at the time when he wrote the libretto, he was uncertain who would compose it.

It was not until 1899, when the libretto was complete, that Kvapil began searching for composers to set his text. He offered it to a few other composer before Dvořák, none of whom showed any interest in the text. During this time, Dvořák was looking for a new project and issued an advertisement through the National Theatre. It was not until Kvapil saw the advertisement that Dvořák was looking for a libretto that he offered it to Dvořák through the theatre's director.

Dvořák composed the opera quite quickly. The composition of the first draft began on April 22, 1900 and was completed by the end of November. Dvořák had always been interested in the stories of Erben and was very enthusiastic about the work.

The famous aria from Act I of the opera, entitled "Song to the Moon" is sung by the title character, Rusalka, and is considered the most popular excerpt from the opera.

In "Song to the Moon" Rusalka asks the moon to tell the prince of her love for him.

Dvořák composed Rusalka when he was 60 years old, just three years before he died. It was the ninth opera he composed in his lifetime.

In the spring of 1901, Rusalka premiered at the National Theatre in Prague where Dvořák had once played as a young musician many years prior.



Our programme concludes with the "Song to the Moon" sung by Renée Fleming. The BBC Symphony Orchestra is conducted by the former conductor of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, the late Jiri Belohlavek. You can hear it again on YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHM3zMBQxTQ>