

DVOŘÁK
Symphony No. 5 in E Minor
("From the New World")

Played by
Leopold Stokowski
and the
Philadelphia Orchestra



Musical Masterpiece Series
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ANTONIN DVOŘÁK

(1841-1904)

ANTONIN DVORAK was born on September 8, 1841, the son of an innkeeper of Mülhausen, in Bohemia. His father had destined him to succeed to his estate, but on his own initiative the boy Dvořák persuaded the village schoolmaster to teach him to play the violin and to sing. At twelve he was sent to a nearby town to pursue his musical studies in earnest, and in 1857, after much parental discussion he went to Prague to study with the idea of making music his life work. It was not his intention to become a virtuoso, for composition interested him to a greater extent; and so as time went on, his activities centered more and more around his chosen field. He was thirty-two before he attracted particular attention as a composer, at which time a patriotic cantata written in the national idiom brought him success. From then on he rose from practical obscurity to the cognizance of musicians already established, and before long became known in England and in America.

In 1892 Dvořák was invited to accept the post as director of the National Conservatory of New York. He came to America, and held this position until 1895. Returning to his native Bohemia, he became head of the Conservatory of Prague, where he remained until his sudden death on May 1, 1904.

THE SYMPHONY

Dvořák's symphony in E Minor was written in America during December 1892, and the early months of 1893, with finishing touches in May of that year, at Spillville, Iowa, whither the composer had fled from New York in a period of homesickness. In the following December, the Symphony "From the New World" was given its first performance, in New York City, by the Philharmonic Society of New York, with Anton Seidl conducting and Dr. Dvořák present.

The symphony is scored for two flutes (one interchangeable with piccolo), two oboes (one of which is interchangeable with *cor anglais* or "English horn"), two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, bass tuba, cymbals, kettle drums, and the usual strings — violins, violas, 'cellos, and basses.

FIRST MOVEMENT (ADAGIO, ALLEGRO MOLTO)

The symphony opens with an introduction (*Adagio*) in which lower strings announce and woodwinds repeat the first slow meditative phrase. Strings (*forte*) fling an impatient thought . . . woodwinds glitter in response, and presently a figure in the lower strings utters a syncopated melody which forms the germ of the principal subject. Violins carry over the last note of the introduction and as we come to the *Allegro molto*, the main portion of the movement, the theme is heard in the horns. After a presentation in various guises, there is a transition to a subsidiary theme, first heard in the woodwind and later in the viola over a droning 'cello pizzicato (a little more than one inch from the end of Record One). Familiarity with the music of Cadman

and MacDowell gives color to the suggestion that this little figure is of Indian origin.

A climax is built upon this plaintive melody and then preparations are made for the statement of the second important theme — a subject for which the melody of the Negro song, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, doubtless supplied inspiration. In this connection it is interesting to recall that the Negro musician, Henry T. Burleigh, a student at the National Conservatory during Dvořák's directorship there, has related that, due to the director's interest in Negro music, it was his privilege to sing on many occasions the plantation songs and old spirituals which the Negroes had created during their slave days, and that among these, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, was Dvořák's favorite.

Although Dvořák did not deem formality of primary importance, and had not adhered strictly to the canons of form in the two themes of the movement, in the development of his material he was more meticulous in following the proper style of sonata-form. The themes are assigned to the various instruments, appearing in both major and minor, with the principal ideas preserved by employing fragmentary and rhythmic alteration. The movement ends with a vehement repetition of the two main themes.

SECOND MOVEMENT (LARGO)

Considered as a complete entity, the second movement, or *Largo* of the Symphony "From the New World," is one of the most appealing and best-known pieces of music in all the literature of the orchestra, and its principal melody is generally conceded to be the most beautiful solo for the *cor anglais*, or alto oboe, in all music.

The movement opens with solemn harmonies in the brass and woodwind, brightening in color and expanding in volume as they are thrice repeated. Articulated with the last of this series of chords is a second series, now in all the strings, muted, and in *pianissimo*. Then begins the languishing melody in the *cor anglais*, the strings, still muted, supplying the lovely chorded accompaniment. Presently the solo instrument is joined by the clarinet for a few bars, and later by the bassoon for an equally brief space, but the clarinet alone breathes the echo of the final cadence. A vivid contrast in tonal colors is presented after the conclusion of the "song" with woodwind intoning an imitation, in higher, clearer voices, of the opening chords of the movement, the full orchestra joining in a *sforzando* at the close. An unexpected modulation returns to the major mode and flute and oboe warble swift notes that gleam like sunlight on water (near the end of Record Four). But the movement and brightness of their song is short-lived, for from underneath a sinister note is heard in the bass — a return of the first theme of the first movement. This is repeated vigorously (Record Five) followed soon by the languorous voice of the English horn. A pause — and the music proceeds falteringly as though unable to go on, and then with more firmness the broad opening measures of the movement are heard as they slowly approach the subdued climax that terminates the *Largo*.

THIRD MOVEMENT (SCHERZO; *molto vivace*)

The third movement, which combines the quaint and the grotesque gives to the *Scherzo* a gaiety that is utterly fascinating. It is animated by a rhythm which, whether it engages a large section of the orchestra and thereby becomes

uppermost in the movement, or whether it requires but a small number of instruments, makes itself distinctly felt. And its melodic and rhythmic combinations represent a mixture of sadness on the one hand, and exuberant joy on the other.

Plucked strings establish the rhythm at the beginning while woodwinds flicker above in a phrase that is later taken up by the violins, and leads to an effective *crescendo*. After a repetition, flute and oboe doubled in octaves present a lovely melody, with the darker voice of the bassoon shading their brightness (about one-third through Record Six).

Presently, in the reedy tones of the clarinet and finally in the decisive voice of the 'cello, a new theme is introduced. In the working out of this material there is a fleeting glimpse of the chief theme of the first movement (about one inch from the end of Record Six), which is followed by a lilting melody like a jolly folk song (near the end of Record Six). Development of the material already presented follows, and a *Coda*, in which fragments of themes of the first two movements appear, brings the *Scherzo* to a close.

FOURTH MOVEMENT (ALLEGRO CON FUOCO)

A nine bar introduction quite as vigorous as the theme itself ushers in the *finale*. Horn and trumpet intone this bold march-like melody that advances in pompous style, gathering a throng of instruments as it proceeds. Out of this agitation the clarinet introduces a new melody which engages the other woodwinds and finally involves the strings as the song progresses. The serenity begun by the woodwinds is built to passionate intensity as the violins take up the thought, and almost before we are aware, three notes of the familiarly known nursery rhyme, "Three Blind Mice" are heard in the accompaniment and finally in the texture of the melody itself.

From this point in the *finale* we find reminiscences of motives from preceding movements, and soon flute and oboe state a figure (derived from the three-note subject) ending in a brilliant trill. Then the horn, in contrast to this idea, utters boldly the first important theme of the *finale*. A somewhat subdued repetition follows from which emerges the English horn song of the *Largo*, in altered rhythm (beginning of Record Nine). Where once it was languid it now becomes agitated and loses its original significance. The final portion of the movement is devoted almost entirely to a resumé of the themes of preceding movements, sometimes as originally presented, sometimes in altered form. Searching always for the most eloquent expressions, drawing all together in a mighty web that reaches a climax when the first theme of the *finale* is pronounced with power and decision, this symphony, inspired by and written during the composer's sojourn in the United States, comes to a brilliant close.

THE ARTISTS

The Dvořák Symphony is performed by Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra. Particular attention is called to the magnificent English horn solo by Robert Bloom in the *Largo*, and the exquisite art of Messrs. Kincaid, Tabuteau, and McGinnis who are heard prominently in passages for flute, oboe, and clarinet.

For further information on Dvořák and his music you are referred to the Victor Book of the Symphony by Charles O'Connell.

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