

DVOŘÁK Symphony No.2

Monteux/London Symphony Orchestra

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Dvořák: Symphony No. 2 in D Minor, Op. 70

Pierre Monteux/London Symphony Orchestra

Almost everyone who has heard a symphony orchestra — and many who have not — is acquainted with Dvořák's "New World" Symphony. Some people know it as *Symphony No. 5*; most know it as his greatest and his last; and so it is generally assumed that he composed but five symphonies. Actually he wrote nine. Some of them have been judiciously consigned to "the limbo of forgotten things," not through malice, but by the composer himself in two instances, and by the natural processes of time, taste and judgment. As finally edited, Dvořák's sixth symphony is catalogued and programed as No. 1, in D; his seventh as No. 2, in D Minor; the fifth as No. 3, in F; the eighth as No. 4, in G; and the ninth as No. 5, in E Minor, "From the New World."

The foregoing will indicate, and the magnificent performance by Pierre Monteux and the London Symphony Orchestra will demonstrate, that the *Symphony in D Minor* was composed when Dvořák's gifts were in full flower. Like most of his music, it glows with incandescent passion, sings with appealing melody, moves with vitality, and is invested with a spirit that is touched with nobility and moved by sincerity and conviction. The audience at the first performance, in London, April 22, 1885, thought so and made their response emphatic. "The enthusiasm," said the *London Athenaeum*, "was such as is rarely seen at a Philharmonic concert." The American première, in New York in 1886, was equally successful. Dvořák evidently thought well of the work too, for he gently but firmly demanded—and received—from his publisher six thousand marks instead of his customary three thousand.

The Slavonic flavor is always discernible in Dvořák's music, and here it is pronounced — in the bright orchestral colors, in the vigorous and often syncopated rhythms, in the emotional tension. Laughter and tears are never very far apart in Dvořák's music, and the D Minor Symphony, while it generally moves in an atmosphere of rather deep introspection, has its contrasts of emotions.

Each of the four movements has a gracious symmetry of form which arises in part from the composer's reminding us of thematic material that has gone before, often ending a movement with a direct reference to the phrases that began it.

The first movement is rather formal in contour, but within the framework of the sonata form the irrepressible Dvořák manages a considerable degree of freedom. The second movement, centering around a courtly, songlike melody, is noteworthy for a wealth and beauty of melodic invention and a richness of orchestration. The Scherzo is obediently vigorous and jolly.

The finale is an ingratiating example of a quality that is always present in Dvořák's music which can be described, perhaps, as dynamism, or the power of motion. No, it is not necessarily associated with the sonorous powers of the orchestra but rather with an indefinable and inexplicable feeling of life and movement which rhythms can communicate independently of the intensity of sound. As the noted critic Tovey has written, this music "is admirably endowed with that quality which is the rarest of all in post-classical finales — the power of movement. . . . Dvořák had the classical

secret of movement, which is not a power that can be obtained at the expense of higher qualities, for it is one of the highest." It is a movement with a particular sort of brilliance, a brilliance achieved by the shrewd orchestration and natural thematic development that we have come to associate with the music of the great Czech composer.

Notes by CHARLES O'CONNELL

(Recorded in England)

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