

Antonin Dvořák (1841 – 1904)



FAST FACTS

- Studied violin, viola, piano, and organ
- Played in orchestras directed by Smetana & Wagner
- Moved to America in 1892 to direct the National Conservatory of Music and to explore American cultural music
- Honored for his service to music by his country

Born: 1841 (Prague, Czech Republic)

Died: 1904 (Prague, Czech Republic)

Antonin Dvořák is renowned for his masterful orchestra music that is rich with nationalistic sound, inspired by his Czech heritage. Dvořák grew up in a poor family in the village Nelahozeves, but learned violin, viola, piano, and organ while at school. When he was 18, he joined the Bohemian Provisional Theater Orchestra, which was conducted by famous composer Bedrich Smetana. Dvořák also performed in a concert of excerpts (parts of larger orchestra works) of Richard Wagner's music, conducted by Wagner himself. These experiences immersed Dvořák in the way orchestral music is scored (how the parts are assigned to each instrument) and how it sounds, and they directly influenced his own composition style.

Dvořák developed a friendship with another famous composer, Johannes Brahms, who was judging a composing competition that Dvořák won three separate times. Brahms and Dvořák connected over their common aim to compose music true to the Romantic style, but that retained the Classical traditions. By Dvořák and Brahms' time, industrialization was causing societies to become like the machines they began to rely on: they fell into a routine, and the beauty of a simple life was disappearing. Composers, in response to this, wanted to return societies to the beauty and simplicity of the natural world and the fantasy world. Composers were drawn to these stories of heroes, imaginary tales, legends, love stories, nature, and any other themes that represented a far-off life different from their everyday reality. Dvořák used elements of his own heritage, Czech rhythms and folk tales, as inspiration for his own music.

Dvořák took a position as professor of composition and instrumentation at the Prague Conservatory, and was later named director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York City. Dvořák wrote some of his most famous and beautiful music during the three years he and his family lived in New York, including his Symphony No. 9, subtitled "From the New World". This symphony in particular reveals Dvořák's struggle in wanting to explore and promote Native American music and African-American spirituals, but also maintaining his cultural roots and love for his homeland. It features a movement called "Going Home", which contains a melody inspired by an African-American spiritual. As a result, he returned home to Prague, where he was honored and celebrated for his service to music both at home and in other countries.



Let's Listen!

- Watch the Dublin Philharmonic perform the 4th Movement of Dvořák's *Symphony No. 9*: [click here](#).
- Yo-Yo Ma performs Dvořák's *Cello Concerto in B minor* with the New York Philharmonic: [click here](#).