

Antonin Dvorák

BORN 1841, Nelahozeves, Bohemia. **DIED** 1904, Prague, Bohemia.



HIGHLIGHTS

1. Antonin Leopold Dvorák was born on September 8, 1841, in Nelahozeves, Bohemia, 50 miles north of what is now Prague, Czechoslovakia.
2. As a young boy, Dvorák showed so much musical ability that his father consented to give him piano and violin lessons with a local musician. At age 16, he had exhibited such great musical talent he was sent to Prague to enroll in organ school.
3. In his 20s, he worked as a violinist, first in a small band and later in the National Opera Orchestra.
4. Dvorák left the orchestra in his 30s, married Anna Cermáková and began to compose.
5. When he was 38, Dvorák composed *Slavonic Dances* which propelled his name from Germany to England.
6. Dvorák came to America and composed some of his finest works including the *New World Symphony*.

BACKGROUND & TIMES

1. One of the characteristics of the Romantic period in which Dvorák

flourished was a move toward composing more nationalistic music.

2. Dvorák won the Austrian State prize for composing for four years in a row partly through the efforts of his friend and staunch supporter, Johannes Brahms. Dvorák was known mostly in Prague, so Brahms became determined to spread Dvorák's music throughout the continent.
3. So easy and friendly is his music that 50 years ago critics were saying it was too enjoyable to be really good and that his popularity couldn't last.

INNOVATIONS IN STYLE

1. Dvorák produced simple, sweet, and appealing music and also some of the most skillful works ever written.
2. His *Symphony No. 6 in D Major* was considered at the time to be one of the finest since Beethoven and is full of breadth and power, while still retaining the naturalness that has become Dvorák's trademark.
3. Each of the four movements in the *New World Symphony (No. 9 in E Minor)* is filled with infectious

tunes and rhythms that combine the best of Bohemia and the best of 19th-century America. The themes come from Bohemian folk tunes but the flavor from American folk tunes, with a blending of Native American melodies, plantation songs, and American literature.

UNIQUE INFLUENCE

1. It was Dvorák, along with a few others, who helped establish a musical identity for Czechoslovakia by using its folk songs and ethnic tunes in their work.
2. He was loved in Prague, as well as in New York, and the people in both cities saw him as an artist who captured the true spirit of their countries.
3. The *New World Symphony* and the *String Quartet* were only two of many masterpieces Dvorák wrote in America. Another masterpiece was his *Cello Concerto in B Minor*; written in New York but not performed until two years later in England.
4. Today, the *New World Symphony* is one of the most performed symphonies in the world.

MAJOR WORKS

SYMPHONIES

No. 9 in E Minor (New World); *No. 6 in D Major*; *No. 7 in D Minor*; *No. 8 in G Major*.

OTHER ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

Cello Concerto in B Minor; *Violin Concerto in A Minor*; *Serenade in E for Strings*; *Romance for Violin and Orchestra*; *The Noonday Witch*;

The Golden Spinning Wheel; *The Wood Dove*.

CHAMBER MUSIC

String Quartet No. 12 in F (American); *Piano Quintet in A*; *Viola Quintet No. 3 in E-flat*.

PIANO

Slavonic Dances; *Eight Humoresques*.

OPERA

Armida; *The Peasant a Rogue*; *The Devil and Kate*; *Rusalka*.