

Antonin Leopold Dvořák

(An-TOH-nihn LEO-pold Da-VOR-zhahk)
Romantic Composer

B: 8 September, 1841 Nelahozeves, Austrian Empire (modern Czechia)

D: 1 May, 1904; Prague, Austro-Hungarian Empire (modern Czechia)

Dvořák was the son of a butcher who played the zither at weddings. His father was young Dvořák's first teacher, but by the age of 16, the young musician moved to Prague to become a professional musician.

It was difficult to make ends meet for many years. Like many other musicians, Dvořák gave piano lessons to young women to supplement his income. He even fell in love with one of his students, Josefina, but she didn't love him in return. Shortly thereafter, he fell for Josefina's younger sister Anna, and, following in the steps of Mozart and Haydn, married the younger sister of his first love.

A year later, with a young son, Dvořák was still struggling as a composer, so he entered the Austrian State Prize for composition and won! For the next four years, he applied to the competition, winning three times. One of the judges was Johannes Brahms, who was very impressed with the young man's work, and, like the Schumanns to his younger self, Brahms took Dvořák under his professional wing, and introduced him to Brahms's professional musical contacts. It came just in time: Dvořák and his wife had just lost two of their three surviving children, and needed any good news to brighten their lives.

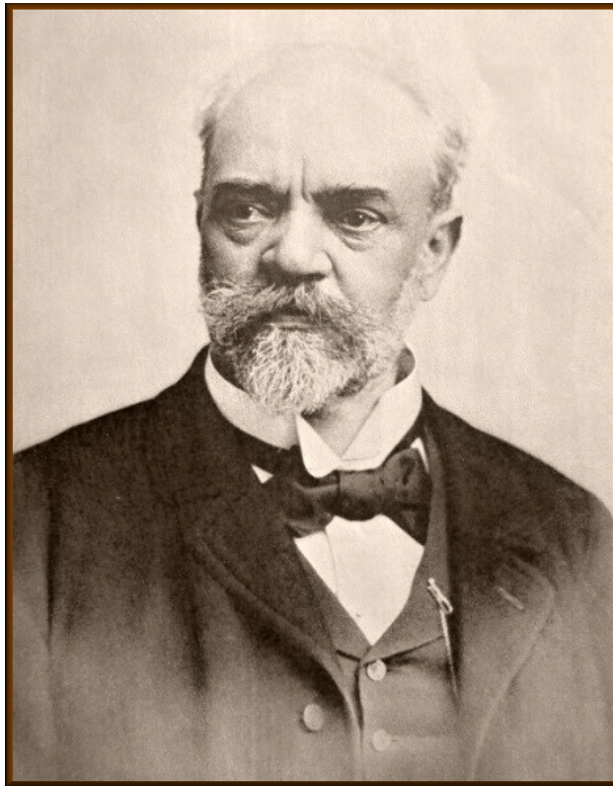
With Brahms's support, Dvořák soon was conducting and composing everywhere: he was so popular in England, he visited nine times, and mastered the English language. He became the headmaster of the Prague conservatory, and then, in 1890, received an offer to become the headmaster of the New York Conservatory. Dvořák nearly turned the offer down. By now, he and his wife were raising six children, and the move would take him away from his beloved Czechia, but with a salary 25 times higher than his current one, Dvořák and Anna decided to take the chance.

They arrived in September 1890, and took over the new National Conservatory in New York City. Among his new staff was his personal assistant, Harry L Burleigh, a young African American man, who loved to sing the spirituals he'd learned from his family. Dvořák quickly fell in love with these rich melodies, and stated that among such music, America's future musical "sound" would be found. Dvořák supported opening the school to African American students, and at the end of his three years, the student body went from 3 African American students, to 150 (out of 600.) Burleigh himself became a well-known composer, and another African American student, Will Marion Cook, worked in musicals in New York, and later mentored a young Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington (1899-1974). Through his students, Dvořák became the "grandfather" of many 20th century American composers like Ellington, Aaron Copeland (1900-1990) and George Gershwin (1898 – 1937). Dvořák also studied the music of the native peoples of America, and mentored many students who went on to be ethnomusicologists (a person who studies the native and folk music of a certain people group or culture) But Dvořák missed his home, and returned in 1895. He died there, a much-loved national hero in 1904.



Antonin Dvořák Quotes:

“Do not wonder that I am religious. An artist who is not could not produce anything like this. I like praying there at the window where I can look out on the green and on the sky. I study with the birds, flowers, God and myself.”



“The music of the people is like a rare and lovely flower growing amidst encroaching weeds. Thousands pass it, while others trample it underfoot, and thus the changes are that it will perish before it is seen by the one discriminating spirit who will prize it above all else. The fact that no one has yet arisen to make the most of it does not prove that nothing is there.”

(Dvořák always wanted to listen to the folk tunes and native tunes of the people around him: in his own home, he listened to the dance and folk music of the country people. In England, he listened to the songs and tunes of the English countryside. In Russia, he did the same with the Russian music of the countryside. In America, he listened to the music of all the different peoples who made up the US: The folk songs, the various immigrant communities, the Native communities (he even purchased, or was gifted, several transcripts of native musicians which he studied avidly) and the African American communities. These he absorbed, and then turned back out into his own music, creating something unique, but something which all these communities would recognize as “theirs.” Different people hear their own melodies woven throughout Dvořák’s music, making him one of the few composers who could reach across and weave cultures together into a harmonious whole.)

Vocab

Serenade: From the Italian “*Serenada*” meaning “*Evening song*,” or literally, “*a calm night sky*.”

Musically, a serenade is written for a small musical ensemble. Culturally, a serenade was music sung to someone who the musician was courting, often (according to tradition) under the lady’s window at night (hence, “night song”)

Tempo Markings:

Tempo is Italian for “*time*,” but a tempo marking is not how long a piece should take, it is how fast the piece should be played. During Dvořák’s time, these markings were the only way to tell the musicians how fast to play a certain piece, but even then, a lot was up to how the conductor or the musician wanted to interpret a piece. Today, we have metronome markings, which help standardize a lot of music—but the conductors and musicians still get to interpret it, which means they may speed up or slow down a piece. Today’s *Serenade for Strings* by Dvořák is marked *Larghetto*. Can you find it in the tempo bar next door?

Metronome:



From the Greek “*Metron-*” meaning “*measure*” and “*nomos*” meaning “*regulating*.” A metronome is a device which keeps regular time. In music, musicians can use it to maintain a regular beat during practice. Because the metronome can keep a standard time (X number of beats/minute) many Tempo markings in music are now notated in terms of “_X_bpm” or “beats per minute.” Older music, like all those studied this

year, still keep the old way of counting time, but will often include a Metronome marking next to it in modern publications.

Interestingly, the metronome’s invention and history is full of idea theft, scheming, and even, a possible trick on Beethoven! Beethoven was gifted a metronome by a friend with whom he had been quarrelling (the friend stole the metronome idea from the inventor and patented it in multiple countries.)

Beethoven soon used it as a tool for playing and composing, even adding a metronome-like beat in his 8th symphony! But many of his marking were illogically fast; so fast his musicians complained it wasn’t possible to be played (Beethoven didn’t believe them). Mathematicians recently studied Beethoven’s metronome and his music and concluded it was possible Beethoven’s metronome kept the wrong time! His metronome ran slowly, so when Beethoven marked something as being *Allegro*, he could play it at HIS metronome’s time, but no one else’s. Consequently, Beethoven’s tempos are, more often than not, ignored outright by modern performers. Now, did the friend do it on purpose? We don’t know.

- **Lento** — slowly (40–60 bpm)
- **Largo** — broadly (40–60 bpm)
- **Larghetto** — rather broadly (60–66 bpm)
- **Adagio** — slow and stately (literally, “at ease”) (66–76 bpm)
- **Adagietto** — rather slow (70–80 bpm)
- **Andante moderato** — a bit slower than andante
- **Andante** — at a walking pace (76–108 bpm)
- **Andantino** — slightly faster than andante
- **Moderato** — moderately (108–120 bpm)
- **Allegretto** — moderately fast (but less so than allegro)
- **Allegro moderato** — moderately quick (112–124 bpm)
- **Allegro** — fast, quickly and bright (120–168 bpm)
- **Vivace** — lively and fast (≈140 bpm) (quicker than allegro)
- **Vivacissimo** — very fast and lively
- **Allegriissimo** — very fast
- **Presto** — very fast (168–200 bpm)
- **Prestissimo** — extremely fast (more than 200bpm)

Other Dvořák Pieces for Your Consideration:

Slavonic Dances (2 Series) *Composed 1878 and 1886*

Dvořák wrote these modeled after Brahms's "Hungarian Dances." Unlike Brahms, however, who wholesale "borrowed" folk melodies, The Slavonic Dance melodies are all original to Dvořák. The first set was the first publication with Simrock, the publisher Brahms used and recommended to the young Dvořák. They were a hit, and Dvořák was on his way to making money with his composing!

"Symphony No 9 "From the New World" *Composed: 10 January – 24 May 1893; possibly altered over the summer: see below. First Performance: 16 December 1893, New York City.*

Dvořák's final (9th) Symphony has been famous ever since its debut. He wrote it during his first year in the United States, and many detect strains of songs from the African American Community within it. Dvořák loved these spirituals, and his student and assistant Harry T. Burleigh, (1866 – 1949) often sang the spirituals he'd learned from his mother, blind grandfather to Dvořák. Additionally, Dvořák may also have been influenced by Native American music: during the summer of 1893, after the bulk of the symphony was finished, but before it was published or presented, he went to Spillville Iowa on summer break. There, according to his youngest son Otakar, Dvořák explored the music and culture of some Native Americans who were living south of town.¹ Dvořák was so intrigued by the Native music, he invited the entire group to perform at the inn where his family was staying multiple times. There is evidence that he overhauled portions of "From the New World" during this stay, and when it debuted, some noticed "Native sounding" tones and motifs in the New World Symphony, especially movement no 2, (which many also note strains of "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" in as well), and the third movement, which was inspired by Longfellow's "Song of Hiawatha."

The Humoresques *Composed summer 1894, published Fall 1894*

During his last summer vacation as the head of the National Conservatory of New York, Dvořák and his family returned to Bohemia, when he composed the Humoresques. The 7th Humoresque quickly became the most popular of the series—so popular, Dvořák wrote a number of variations on that tune, and it has remained popular ever since. The 7th has appeared in over 30 movies, television shows and episodes, including Warner Bros.' "Daffy and the Dinosaur, (1939)" "Tiny Toon Adventures: How I Spent My Summer Vacation (1992)," and as the theme song for Slappy Squirrel in the 1990's animated series "Animaniacs," as well as UPN's "Dilbert (S1: E7)" in 1999.

Rusalka (Opera) *Composed 22 April -November 1900; Premiered 31 March 1901*

One of Dvořák's final works, this opera is based on a Czech fairy tale about a water sprite who falls in love with a human. The aria "Song of the Moon," is one of the most famous portions of the opera and appears as a standalone piece in many concerts and movies.

¹ His son, in 1961, describing that summer, called the Natives people "Iroquois," [a confederation of six peoples of Upper New York, not a tribe] and other records indicate that they were "Kickapoo" [Kiikapoi]. There was a reservation for the Ho-Chunk [Winnebago] peoples south of Spillville at Ft. Atkinson until 1855, when the site was auctioned off, and the Winnebagos were moved to Minnesota. The people living in the Ft. Atkinson Region in the summer of 1893, appear to be from different peoples, though the leader, Big Moon, was apparently a Kiikapoi. The others, based on records, could be from the Algonquin language group [peoples of the eastern woodlands], the Siouan language group [peoples of the American Plains] and possibly, the Caddoan language group [peoples of the Texas/Oklahoma/Louisiana/Arkansas border regions].

Interesting Facts that Didn't fit in the Bio



A Photo of Brahms with a greeting written to Dvorak.

Dvořák became good friends with Johannes Brahms, who took the young composer under his wing in the same way he had been mentored by the Schumanns. After Dvořák won three competitions with his compositions (a competition Brahms didn't really want to sit as a judge for) Brahms was impressed with the quality, consistency, and beauty of Dvořák's music, and reached out to him, offering mentorship, an introduction to his personal publisher, and anything else Dvořák might need. Over the years, the two men kept in touch, and while Dvořák was in America, he sent his compositions to Brahms, who acted as copyeditor, to make sure Dvořák's work was quickly and cleanly published, rather than waiting for one of the publisher's copyeditors to get to it. After Dvořák moved back, Brahms even tried to tempt him to move to Vienna near him, rather than Dvořák's beloved Prague, offering to make Dvořák and his family his sole heirs to his vast estate. The offer was tempting, but ultimately, Dvořák decided to return to Prague and visit his old friend, as always.

In 1897, Dvořák followed in Brahms's footsteps in another way, he mentored younger composers, even sitting on the same jury Brahms had once sat in 1897. One of those mentees, Joseph Suk (1874 – 1935, picture to the right) even became Dvořák's son-in-law, marrying his daughter Ottilie. (Suk later won the 1932 Olympic silver medal in...Music. Because from 1912 to 1948, medaled competitions in Architecture, Town planning, music, painting, sculpture, and literature were part of the Olympic Games.)



Another composer who was friends with Dvořák was Pyotr Tchaikovsky. They met during the same trip when Tchaikovsky met Brahms in Vienna. Dvořák loved Tchaikovsky's music and the two men became fast friends. Tchaikovsky helped secure a tour for Dvořák in Russia, (sadly, they missed each other, as Tchaikovsky was touring Europe when Dvořák arrived in his home country!) and later, they nearly missed meeting again, when Tchaikovsky returned to Prague because the whole Dvořák family had just left for America! Nonetheless, the two composers often wrote to each other, exchanging ideas and encouragement, including a letter Dvořák wrote to tell Tchaikovsky how beautiful and inspiring he found Tchaikovsky's opera Onegin. Four letters remain of their correspondence.

Dvořák was famously adoring of trains! He loved trains, ever since watching the rail line come through his birthplace when he was a boy. He memorized train schedules, watched trains, kept up with all the latest developments in Rail technology. He even famously said, "I'd give all my symphonies if I could have invented the locomotive!" Once, he wanted to know the engine number of the early Vienna Express, and



Suk, wanting to curry favor with his mentor and hopefully soon-to-be father in law, set his alarm, woke up, ran to the rail line, and used his opera glasses (fancy, small binoculars) to find and write down the number of the train as it sped past. He dashed to Dvořák's house, only to discover...he'd written down the number of the tender (caboose) at the BACK of the train, not the engine! Dvořák laughed! (And Suk still managed to marry his daughter, so things turned out all right in the end.)

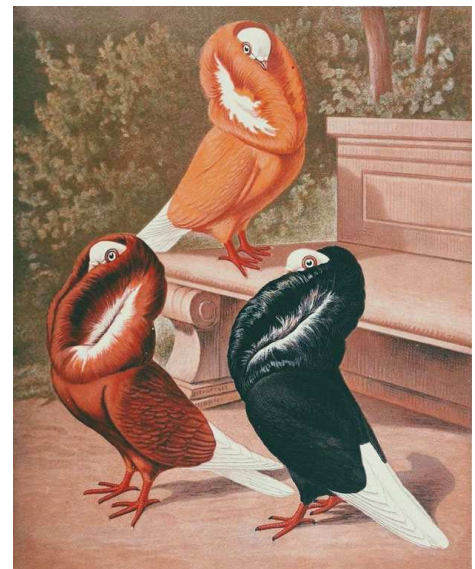
Trains even helped inspire his music: a handwritten note on his 7th symphony states that the theme for the first movement came to him: "...upon the arrival of the ceremonial train from [Buda]Pest in 1884." Whenever a theme or motif would come to him he would jot it down on anything he had handy! No paper? He was known to scribble musical ideas on his shirt cuff!

Visiting the USA gave him a new hobby in addition to steam train engines: Steam ships!



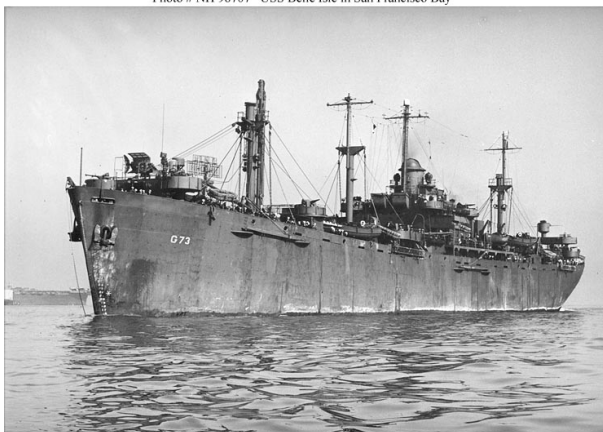
BLUE Pouter.

Another hobby was...pigeon raising. No particular breed, just...pigeons of all kinds. Queen Victoria was so taken with his music she sent a dignitary to ask his wife Anna what Antonin loved best in the world which she could give him. Anna described her husband's pigeon raising passion, and shortly after the couple returned home in Prague, a royal consignment from Queen Victoria was dropped off: two braces (a breeding couple) of



English Pouter Pigeons (left) and four braces of Wig (Jacobean) Pigeons! (right)

Photo # NH 98707 USS Belle Isle in San Francisco Bay



The SS BELLE ISLE, another Liberty ship similar to the DVORAK. There are currently no known photos of the DVORAK.

In 1943, the impact of Dvořák on the United States was still well-known enough that a Liberty Ship (a US-made mass-produced cargo ship to support the war effort) was christened USNS ANTONIN DVOŘÁK in his honor. The USNS ANTONIN DVOŘÁK was built in 17 days, from her keel laying to launch, and served throughout WWII, mostly in the Caribbean and Pacific. On 21 September 1944, she and her fellow Liberty ship JOHN F APPLEBY collided 400 miles off the North Carolina coast. DVORAK sustained minor damage and went to Philadelphia on her own. The APPLEBY took a full day to fix herself well enough to follow. The DVORAK survived the war and was scrapped in 1956. (Source for the accident account: *War Diary of COMEASTSEAFOR (Commander, Eastern Sea Force)*, Sept 1-30, 1944, pg 40.