

wedding celebration is taking place; through a nighttime scene of water and wood nymphs; over great rapids; through the great city of Prague; and finally off into the distance, all the while picking up remarkably little in the way of industrial runoff.

Smetana remains immensely popular in his country. On a recent trip to the Czech Republic for the purpose of researching this book (at least that's what we told the IRS), we flew Czech Air. From the moment we boarded the plane in New York, the strains of *The Moldau* poured from the plane's speakers. In the tiny town of Litomišl, we visited Smetana's birth house; there the elderly woman tour guide (a not-too-distant relative of Smetana himself) turned on the stereo as soon as we arrived — yup, the record that happened to be on the turntable was *The Moldau*, which she played over and over until we left. Then, on the flight home, we were treated once again to *The Moldau*. We never want to hear *The Moldau* again.

### *Keeping an ear out for Smetana*

Well, of course you must hear *The Moldau* (also known as *Vltava*), as well as the other five tone poems that make up *Má Vlast* (*My Fatherland*). And then you should hear the overture from his most famous opera, *The Bartered Bride*, which is set — naturally enough — in a Bohemian village.



## *Antonín Dvořák*

Antonín Dvořák (or “Tony,” as he would have been called in Brooklyn) was also a Bohemian. His childhood was filled with country folk music, rustic dances, and merry peasant tunes. His father was the last in a long line of Dvořák butchers, but he played zither on the side for weddings. Young Antonín (1841–1904 — see Figure 2-18) got a lot of his early musical training by playing fiddle next to his father.

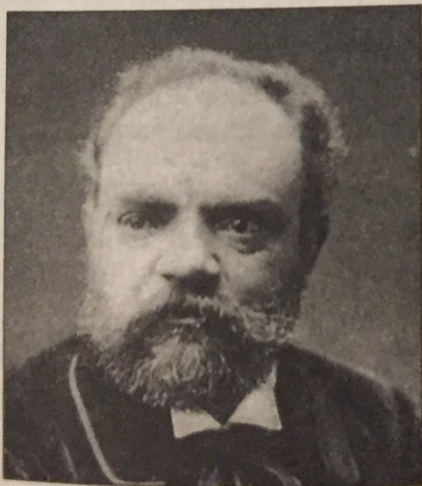


Figure 2-18:  
Antonín  
Dvořák.



At the age of 16, Dvořák moved to Prague, where he first heard some of Bedřich Smetana's stuff. Antonín got all fired up about writing original music based on the folksy Bohemian musical language. With this simple but highly marketable idea, Dvořák eventually became a professor of composition at the Prague Conservatory.

### ***Cheerful success***

By classical music standards, Dvořák (pronounced “d(a)-VOR-zhak”) was something of a freak: He wasn't especially disturbed, tormented, or nuts, as were his more famous brethren (such as Beethoven, Berlioz, and Schumann). He actually had a sunny personality, despite the fact that he looked more like a full-bred bulldog than any other composer in history. That cheery disposition found its way into his music without the aid of Prozac.

Dvořák was also a simple, mild-mannered man, with simple tastes and six children. He loved raising pigeons, watching locomotives, and drinking himself silly. As a cosmic reward for his simple likability, Dvořák became a freak in another way: He was successful without having to die first. His music was immediately popular — he had a great gift for melody, and his Bohemian folk-sounding stuff was instantly familiar to his audiences.



The most important audience member of all was Brahms (remember? the guy who wished he could write more-hummable tunes?), who became a great proponent of Dvořák's music. He introduced the younger composer to his publisher, who accepted Dvořák's music for publication, too. The relationship was more than social: You can actually hear a lot of Brahms' musical influence in some of Dvořák's symphonies, especially no. 7. In fact, you may even hear the musical styles in these pieces bounce crazily back and forth: Germanic, Bohemian, Germanic, Bohemian.

### ***An invitation to America***

At age 51, in 1892, Dvořák was invited to America to take over the newly founded National Conservatory of Music, in New York. He was deeply reluctant, citing his national pride, his rich Bohemian heritage, his family, and his fans. Then he found out that the salary was 25 times what he was earning at the Prague Conservatory. He was on the next boat.

Dvořák stayed in the United States for three years. He was deeply homesick and wound up spending a good deal of his time in a Bohemian colony in Iowa. During his U.S. stint, having been turned on to American Indian and African-American music, Dvořák composed his most well-known piece, his Symphony no. 9 (*From the New World*). The slow, melancholy English horn solo in this symphony's second movement is reminiscent of a Negro spiritual, and the third movement scherzo describes (according to the composer) a great Indian dance feast in the forest.



## 6 Dvořák: Serenade for Strings, Fourth Movement

In the midst of this action-packed CD is an oasis of tranquillity by Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904) — Bohemian-born protégé of Brahms, master of melody, and all-around nice guy. Dvořák's sunny personality radiates throughout most of his gorgeous Serenade for Strings.

When Dvořák wasn't basking in the beauty of his native land, he was feeling nostalgic for it. That feeling comes through very quietly and directly in this movement.

Although this piece has a coherent structure, we don't want to bog you down with a highly detailed analysis of it. Music like this is meant to be enjoyed with your feet up. We'll give you only the barest outline of the movement's form so that you can get your bearings while listening.

Like the movement from Handel's *Water Music* on Track 1 of the CD, this piece is in an expanded A-B-A structure.

**0:00** This opening melody is Theme A, played by the violins. The melody seems to spin on endlessly, one beautiful idea giving birth to the next. The expressive climax of the theme comes at **1:11**; then the music quietly subsides.

At **1:31**, the cellos play the first few notes of Theme A again, echoed by the violins. A tranquil mood seems to prevail. But with a crescendo at **2:02**, Dvořák changes key and brings you into a more agitated world, beginning with an impassioned rendition of Theme A in the cellos at **2:06**.

**2:49** Here, suddenly, is Theme B. With light, quick, short notes, this is the antithesis of Theme A — a little Bohemian two-step. Occasional strong accents punctuate the rhythm. At **3:07**, a high, tranquil violin melody is superimposed over this background, rising to a climax at **3:20**, and settling back into . . .

**3:38** Theme A again, first in the cellos and then echoed in the violins at **4:04**.

**4:45** This is the expressive climax of the movement; then, as before, the music subsides.

**5:07** One last statement of the theme, winding down to nothing.