



DVOŘÁK

Symphony No. 8
In G Major, Op. 88

Symphony No. 9
In E Minor, Op. 95
"From The
New World"

**GEORGE
SZELL**

THE
CLEVELAND
ORCHESTRA

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)

SYMPHONY NO. 8 IN G MAJOR, OP. 88

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|---|---|-------|
| 1 | I. Allegro con brio | 10'03 |
| 2 | II. Adagio | 10'09 |
| 3 | III. Allegretto grazioso – Molto vivace | 6'22 |
| 4 | IV. Allegro ma non troppo | 9'03 |

(Recorded at Severance Hall, Cleveland, Ohio, October 24–25, 31 and November 1, 1958.)

SYMPHONY NO. 9 IN E MINOR, OP. 95 "FROM THE NEW WORLD"

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| 5 | I. Adagio – Allegro molto | 8'39 |
| 6 | II. Largo | 12'10 |
| 7 | III. Scherzo: Molto vivace | 7'54 |
| 8 | IV. Allegro con fuoco | 10'56 |

(Recorded at Severance Hall, Cleveland, Ohio, March 20–21, 1959.)

Total Time: 75'25

The Cleveland Orchestra
GEORGE SZELL


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DVOŘÁK: SYMPHONY NO. 8 IN G MAJOR, OP. 88

There is no question that the first long and elegiac G Minor melody in this symphony, played by the cellos, must simply be called "beautiful." This is an inspired theme. And when the composer has spoken it, he stops and proceeds to say something else: a tune for the flute – high, distant, a little mysterious, yet with a kindly G Major twinkle. The quickening motion leads – as the annotators say – to another idea: a rather solemn statement, above which disports at once the little flute melody, suddenly breaking forth in unexpected grandeur. How peculiar all this is, how unconventional, and how right! The composer's inventiveness seems hardly to have been tapped, for there comes – propelled by its upbeat – another lovely idea, a Schubertian dance motive of immense charm. The composer likes it too, for he stays with it a while. And then, another idea! Grandiose, in a radiant B Major, soon combined with the statement we called "rather solemn." Without warning, we are back in G Minor, and the opening subject sings once more, newly harmonized. From somewhere appears the flute melody... but above the *tremolando* strings ensues a genuine Bruckner sequence, perfect to the finest detail of scoring. In a moment, we are thrown into an absolutely Tchaikovskian alternation of string and wind choirs. With these surprises, the development section has engulfed us; the composer works primarily with the "rather solemn" theme, but in a rhythmic diminution the recognition of which deserves no honorary degree. Nor will it escape anyone that, at the climax of it, the G Minor opening theme returns in the trumpets, a moment of potent oratory. The recapitulation, if it can be called that, is brief and ingenious. Dvořák was not one to bore the listener with unnecessary padding or strict adherence to traditional design; he must have known of the admonition of Alice (we hope the quote, from memory, is correct), who said "start at the beginning, go on until you come to the end, then stop."

It is usually an "unsymphonic" procedure to invent themes of such beauty that one can virtually do nothing more than to state them again. That was, sometimes, Tchaikovsky's

problem. Dvořák – once more like Schubert – was prodigal with his ideas, and there was a charm in his thematic generosity which managed to climb over formal roadblocks with disarming ease. The second movement yet outdoes the first in variety, preventing juxtapositions of the most serious ideas with the most playful; only rarely is a conventional transition bothered with. The first subject, for instance, a sort of Bohemian funeral march after Beethoven, has hardly a chance to settle on C Minor when the woodwinds bring up a highly “coquettish” phrase (the term is by Hoffmeister, Dvořák’s biographer). The two take turns, before C Minor holds the day. Then – an enchanting little dance in C Major, sensitively scored. Where does it go? Directly into a grandiloquent passage from *Die Meistersinger*, though of course, it comes to a different conclusion. The first material now returns, briefly, before the composer apologizes for his attention to Wagner by reminding the listener of the opening of the finale from the First Symphony of his friend and mentor, Brahms. A piece of drama borrowed from Tchaikovsky appears next, and the little dance comes back with new and delightful scoring. All this is told not to make fun of the music in the slightest, but in sheer admiration for Dvořák’s feat in making it all so decisively his own! Among the most memorable moments is one in which the orchestration assumes a transparency of classic grace (letter M of the score): violins descending from on high, cellos and basses rising from deep below, a counter-melody in the flutes and clarinets, bassoons and horns gently knocking in the middle. The ending wavers entrancingly between rhetoric and reflection, finally agreeing with the trumpets that C Major is home.

The third movement is neither scherzo nor minuet, neither waltz nor folk dance. Its flowing *grazioso* style and sensitive scoring has perhaps the closest affinity to its counterpart in Mendelssohn’s “Italian” Symphony, or later symphonic movements by Brahms which are similarly indefinable. In the Trio section, we do get a more folkish piece, perhaps the Czech equivalent of a *laendler*. Most pleasing it is to hear the wind and string choirs take turns in singing that G Major theme, each with its own contrasting expression. After the first part has recurred, the *molto vivace* coda adopts the effective technique of the third movement in Brahms’ Second Symphony: to transform a moderate triple time into a fast

duple. The result of changing the comfortable *laendler* into such lively motion is akin to that of the Austrian “Kehraus” – a “sweep-out” – to close the dance; Mozart had found this idea useful too, as, for instance, in the finale of his G Major Piano Concerto, K. 453.

The commanding statement of the trumpets which opens the last movement is quietly echoed by the kettledrum. It turns out to be a hint of the theme which is straightway sung by the cellos, a full-blown Schumannesque tune of expansive cast. (Yet, perhaps unconsciously, the theme is also a close relative of the little flute melody in the first movement; the melodic correspondence is too close for accidental resemblance.) In a moment, we notice that the composer is setting out to offer a group of variations on that fine melody, each strain symmetrically repeated. The fourth variation may be heard as a little scherzo and trio, in a faster tempo, and quite in the style of Dvořák’s *Slavonic Dances*. Quite surprising, and with a sonority that the composer owed to no one else, is a mock-serious march in C Minor, in which bassoons and cellos rumble menacingly. The sequential modulations or harmonic shifts that come forth from this are wonderfully square and rural, a sound one can mentally reproduce with the greatest of ease. After the variation subject has been developed a little, it proceeds directly into the trumpet theme which is now fully harmonized.

The composer is understandably fond of his cello melody, and he brings it back as at the beginning; but this time he allows it to unfold and sing at leisure, with its great melodic branches spreading wide and unobstructed. *Poco a poco ritardando*, the flutes, clarinets and violins hold back as if in expectation – and out breaks the wild Czech dance once more, accumulating momentum as it rushes toward the close. The brasses slide and swirl right along with the other and naturally more mobile instruments. The commotion reaches utter abandon, and as the horns collapse in a heap of triplets (their only ones in the movement), the drum crashes the music to its close with the sharp dotted rhythm we recall from the opening trumpet statement. If the piece thus ends on the weak beat of the bar, there is at least a full measure of rest after it, in the score!

Klaus George Roy

From the notes to the original LP, BC 1015, released in 1959.

DVOŘÁK: SYMPHONY NO. 9 IN E MINOR, OP. 95 "FROM THE NEW WORLD"

No individual composer, however significant, was able to "create" a national style, least of all for a country not his own. Even the influence of a central European master at the height of his maturity would have its limitations. It is clear to us now that no single American style or school has, in fact, ever come about. Just as the country is a gigantic melting-pot, so does its music show a multiplicity of styles, a healthy interaction of characteristics drawn from many sources – in art music and folk music, European technique and native spirit. This country no longer needs to imitate the exact methods of Western Europe; but it has irrevocably joined the main stream of Western music.

The "New World" Symphony has a great deal to do not only with America, but with what Dvořák knew as American music. Yet the composer disposed rather sharply (and, as we shall see, perhaps not quite fairly) of the view by some writers that he had written a kind of rhapsody on African-American and Indian themes. Eight years after the premiere, at which time certain memories may have lost their sharp focus for him, Dvořák wrote to his friend, the conductor Nedbal: "I send you Kretzschmar's analysis of the symphony, but omit that nonsense about my having made use of 'Indian' and 'Negro' themes – that is a lie. I tried only to write in the spirit of those American folk melodies." But how close he had really come to the actual sources was made very clear by the notable composer H. T. Burleigh, who had studied with Dvořák. "There is no doubt at all," he stated, "that Dr. Dvořák was very deeply impressed by the old Negro spirituals and also by the Foster songs. It was my privilege repeatedly to sing some of the old plantation songs for him at his home... He just saturated himself in the spirit of those old tunes and then invented his own themes."

Now the themes Dvořák invented, here as elsewhere, were usually folk-like in the first place, inspired by native dance and song. Whether these were Czech or American,

Austrian by way of Schubert and Brahms or Negro-Indian-modal, what counted was always the individual way in which he utilized and developed them in the symphonic framework. Whatever the motives chosen, the composer imprinted them with his own and unmistakable personality – in shape, in phrase, in rhythm, in tone-color and orchestration. And he knew well which ones he could put to use symphonically and dramatically, and which he had to retain as interludes or subsidiary subjects. Among the many blessings that were Dvořák's was the wisdom of the simple man; such wisdom often transcends the brilliance of others. Composers then and now respect him for that, and they envy him for two other qualities that have deepened the public's love for his work: utter honesty, and unquestionable sincerity. There are many kinds of masterpieces; but when those attributes are combined with genius of a high order, we have a music that is genuine to the core.

In the mysterious introduction to the first movement, the characteristic shape of the main subject is announced by inference. The composer was fond of these "hints," these intimations of things to come, these transformations in advance. The *Allegro molto* subject which results is a vigorous one, and its striking rhythm is worth remembering as clearly as its outline. A lovely transition brings a subsidiary theme in G Minor, played first by flutes and oboes. It is in a kind of Dorian mode, with the flatted seventh degree of the scale (F natural). "I feel sure," Burleigh wrote, "that the Doctor caught this peculiarity... from some of the slave songs that I sang for him; for he used to stop me and ask if that was the way the slaves sang." But as the melody shifts upward to the Major mode, it acquires a much more Bohemian cast. The rhythmical device of the "Scotch snap" (yet another nationality!) here performs the double duty of linking it with the second subject proper, as well as recalling the rhythm of the first. The second main theme in G Major, played by the solo flute in its low register, is of course an unmistakable derivation of one of the tunes Burleigh sang: the memorable "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." The movement is especially kept from becoming diffuse in all its variety by the rhythmic relationships of the themes. The development is filled with variants of this promising material, and a number of remarkable modulations occur in the recapitulation.

The beginning of the slow movement, the famous *Largo*, is in fact a modulation from E Major to D-flat Major. These four measures are unique in their rich scoring for clarinets, bassoons, and brass, of chords played very softly, with their destination held in doubt until the last. Then enters one of the most famous melodies in music: everyone knows it now, for better or worse, as "Goin' Home." Dvořák supposedly considered Longfellow's *Hiawatha* as the subject for an opera, and here he is believed to have suggested the mood of Hiawatha's wooing. The melody is surely a haunting one as played by the English horn. A theme that to many is even more beautiful (because, for one thing, it has not been "played to death") is the longing C-sharp Minor melody (again modal, actually), played by flutes and oboes *un poco più mosso*, a little faster. The main subject, in time, is offered with a certain haste, and to our surprise we find both the first and second subjects of the first movement combined with it. This is indeed strange and has led many a hearer to musing on programmatic implications. The movement rounds itself out recognizably, but the close is a little eerie – with that final chord played pianissimo by four double basses.

Rhythmically, the third movement is the most interesting of the four. The *Scherzo* theme is quite elusive, with its off-beat canonic entrances and sudden kettledrum crashes. But the music is not really *scherzando*; it tends toward a hectic nervousness and grim determination, if we interpret the mood correctly. (Could it be related to the G Minor theme from the first movement?) A fine sweeping theme in E Major is sung by the woodwinds, *poco sostenuto*. Donald Tovey has quipped that Dvořák considered leading into the Trio "serious business. The ghost of the first movement must first be summoned." This done (in the low strings), the Trio takes on the cast of Schubertian *laendler*, with a decidedly rural sonority. During the coda, the motto theme appears again, with threatening mien. We must expect to hear it again, now that the symphony has committed itself so firmly to "cyclical form" (a method of unifying a design).

The finale opens with a distorted image of the chords from the *Largo*. The theme itself is proclaimed by the horns, with the flattened seventh degree of the scale again prominent.

An almost narrative lyricism infuses the second subject, with "chuckling" asides from the cellos; and a third melody, also in G Major, makes its appearance in an almost rowdy spirit. Yet there is little doubt that this folk dance tune is again a transformation of the G Minor melody from the opening movement – consciously or unconsciously. With growing intensity, the various main themes of the movements now pass in review – a powerful device first shown by Beethoven in the finale of his Ninth Symphony. There, however, triumph finally reigns. Here, the musical sky darkens constantly and the chords from the *Largo* gain demonic stature. The ending is anything but reassuring and the dying away of the final brass and woodwind chord adds one more mystery. What has happened? We should resist the temptation to search for an underlying symbolism. But Dvořák must have realized, as he wrote the words "From the New World" across the title page just before the first performance, that he was implying a tragic side to the vitality of this country, an atmosphere not to be explained away by "homesickness" on his part.

Whatever American elements this symphony may contain, only a composer from Bohemia could have written it. That it could have been written only in America, or at least under the strong impact of its life and indigenous art, is equally true. One writer has put it well when he said, "if this symphony is not America's tribute to Music, it is surely Music's most beautiful tribute to America."

Klaus George Roy

From the notes to the original LP, BC 1026, released in 1959.