

**Symphony No. 7 in D Minor,
Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904)**

- I. *Allegro maestoso*
- II. *Poco adagio*
- III. Scherzo: Vivace – Poco meno mosso
- IV. *Finale: Allegro*

Symphonic music was almost exclusively and quite copiously sustained by Germans, from the era of Beethoven to that of Mahler. There is an overall umbrella of perception that has an essentially Germanic core that is audibly sustained, in my view, almost unbroken from the late 1780's to 1900. It is a common link that, for instance, binds the music of Mozart to that of Wagner, despite the obvious polarity of the two composers. One of the most gifted and luminous exceptions to this extensive German monopoly was the proudly proclaimed Czech, Antonin Dvořák.

It was the reception of his *Stabat Mater* in England, in 1883, that proved to be the turning point of his international reputation. This success generated return engagements with the Philharmonic Society's Concerts in London and sparked off tremendous enthusiasm across the ocean which was to culminate nine years later with his appointment as director of the National Conservatory in New York. The immediate practical outcome of the London concerts was the presentation of his 7th symphony**. "*I am much preoccupied with my symphony, which must once again be of a sufficient quality to attract the attention of the whole world...*" he wrote to a friend. Not least of all was the acknowledgement of his great friend and mentor Johannes Brahms, for whose expectations the symphony had to be *perfect*.

Their relationship started back in 1874 when Dvořák won a prize of four hundred guildens from the Austrian State Stipendium, adjudicated by Brahms. Brahms took a very keen interest in Dvořák's career and personal well being, introducing him to his publisher Simrock along with many influential musicians in Germany. He need not have worried about his seventh symphony, even with Brahms looking over his shoulder. It was a wonderful triumph. It's tragic elements and Brahmsian influences are in

abundance - but so are the endearing trade mark of the Bohemian influences. The Seventh Symphony can be better explained with two strands of thought, brought together.

In coming upon the conditions that would allow for its composition in 1884, Dvořák made no effort to hide the influences of Brahms. His mentor, and sometime benefactor had just revealed his great Third Symphony. Here, instantly, was the reason for why Dvořák's symphonies were so Germanic in tendency, sound and crafting. In the context of Brahms Third and the drama of the soon to come Fourth, Dvořák's Seventh is a brother more than a cousin. It appeals directly to the same sentiments of 'Deutches' greatness shared by Brahms or Schumann.

However, the intent of Dvořák to provide a nationalistic Czech landmark that would stand the test of time, is equally evident. Apparently, the thought of the train station at Prague bringing Czechs from Pest to a dazzling pro Czech rally at the National Theater gave him the sentiment for the first movement. The last movement is supposed to demonstrate the unyielding stubbornness of the Czech spirit under oppression – the ability to triumph against the odds.

There may have been a personal message in this, too. The recent death of his mother and eldest child – he says, turns him to think of salvation of spirit through Czech nationalism. The brooding dark qualities of both bursting out into triumph are exactly what this piece is about. Both essentially Germanic and essentially Czech, Dvorak crosses the divide and truly provides what he set out to achieve. Dvorak's sentiment as recorded at the time of composition says it all.

"What is in my mind is Love, God, and my Fatherland. God grant that this Czech music will move the world!!"

**** Here is a short note explaining the numbering system that the Dvořák symphonies have employed over the years. Only five of Dvořák's symphonies were published in his lifetime, but four more are dated from his earlier years, making a total of nine. The well-known five are now numbered as 5-6-7-8-9 corresponding to a former numbering 3-1-2-4-5. The numbering 1-4 has been reassigned to his youthful symphonies and whereas still published they remain the children who are "seen, but not heard".**

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