

Dvořák: Symphony No. 9: Whose World?

Perusal script

Not for performance use

Copyright © 2010 Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Duplication and distribution prohibited.

Part 1 The journey outwards

VO 1

Narrator

In the spring of 1893...

an American... Thomas Edison...

built the world's first film-studio...

The Black Maria...

in West Orange, New Jersey...

He shot his first moving pictures here... in May...

And at the very same time...

just 15 miles miles away... in the city of New York...

a famous European composer... was finishing a new symphony...

This composer had not long before arrived...

from faraway Bohemia...

what is now... the Czech republic...

Soundtrack of birds, including pigeons and turtle-doves

Recorded VO of Czech voice

Byl pozdní večer – první máj
– večerní máj – byl lásky čas.
Hrdliččin zval ku lásce hlas,
kde borový zaváněl háj. ⁱ

Words on the screen:

'It was late evening on the first of May... a lovely time...

The

turtle-dove called sweetly from the pine-wood...'

Suddenly, the harsh sound of tapping telegraphic keys...

Text of Mrs Thurber's telegram appears on screen in telegraphic form starting with 'would you accept...' and finishing with 'twenty words prepaid'

Actor - [telegram, urgent]

June 1891....

would you accept position director national conservatory

New York October 1892

also lead six concerts of your works

twenty words prepaidⁱⁱ

Dvořák

I would not dream of it!

To cross the big water and risk my children to be drowned!

America is full of Indians and wild animals!ⁱⁱⁱ

Actor - [the composer's young son]

My mother had more concern for our financial situation...

She proposed we vote on it...

There were eight of us at table... and we voted in favour.

She took my father to his study...

where she had a pen ready... and the contract... and he signed...^{iv}

Sounds of trains, steam, whistles...

Narrator

In September 1892...

Antonín Dvořák set out from Prague's Franz Josef railway station...

with his wife... two of their children...

and a young assistant, Jan Kovařík...

Actor - *[the composer's Czech pupil and assistant]*

The Master's friends were there to wave goodbye...

Dvořák

See you next summer!

Actor - *[Czech pupil and assistant]*

At Bremen, we boarded the SS Saale...

The voyage lasted nine days... and the Master was an excellent sailor...

It might be as stormy as you liked...

he was always out on deck... looking at the ocean...^v

ME 1 - Opening of Mvt 1 – bars 0-62 (2'33")

Part 2 The Great American Symphony

VO 2

Dvořák

This city is magnificent!

Lovely buildings, beautiful streets...

Everywhere the greatest cleanliness!

But it is expensive...^{vi}

Actor - *[the composer's younger son]*

My father wrote to us...
of Central Park, the biggest zoo in the world...
and the ocean liners in the harbor...
and what kind of students he had...

Among them there were Black people...^{vii}

Narrator

Jeannette Thurber...

Dvořák's wealthy patron and the founder of the Conservatory...
was a woman of outspoken and progressive views...

Actor

Mrs Thurber's National Conservatory of Music...
is to be thrown open... free of charge... to the negro race...

The director... Dr Dvořák... expresses great pleasure at this decision...^{viii}

Dvořák

We like it here...

It is so free... and one can live so much more peacefully...^{ix}

It's true...

there are things here one must admire...
and others I would rather not see...

But what can you do?

It is different in this country...^x

Actor - [Czech pupil and assistant]

The Master missed two things from home...
his flock of pigeons...

and steam locomotives...

We would take the elevated railway to a bridge...

where we could watch the express trains to Chicago thunder by...^{xi}

Dvořák

The Americans expect great things of me...

and the main thing is to show them to the promised land...

to create for them a national music...^{xii}

Narrator

Soon... ideas began to stir in Dvořák's mind...

He would write... a symphony...

Actor - *[professor, as though opening a vast and heavy book]*

Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians... 1883...

The symphony illustrates the highest way

in which the tendencies of the age... may be expressed...

It is the austere form of art...

In a symphony, the subjects must be noble...

and they must be... well marked...^{xiii}

ME 2 - Mvt 1 - bars 24 to down beat of 31 (8")

VO 3

Narrator

The New York papers... buzzed with rumors...

One journalist was even shown the manuscript...

Actor - [New York music-journalist, with amazement]

In delightful contrast to the boisterous vigor of the principal theme ...

the subsidiary melody gives a somewhat Oriental tinge...^{xiv}

**ME 3 – Mvt 1 – bars 91-98 (plus 2 bars of drone before and a modal 7th)
(10'')**

VO 4

Narrator

Dvořák's American students... adored him...

Actor - [the composer's American pupil]

No teacher ever inspired us like he did... He was a second father...

Simple as a child, but with an unaffected confidence

in his own deep and rich authority...^{xv}

ME 4 – Mvt 1 – bars 115-129 (downbeat) (14'')

VO 5

Actor - [American pupil]

Schubert was the great prophet, he would say...

You could find the music of the future...

only by going back to Schubert...^{xvi}

ME 5 – Mvt 1 – bars 149-156 (8'')

VO 6

Actor - [professor, in a lecturing tone of voice]

In a symphony... a melody, however striking, must not preponderate...
over the power of development...^{xvii}

Narrator

Development...

[explaining]

Change...

Movement from one place in the music to another...

This was the age of long distance travel...

and the transcontinental locomotive...

ME 6 – Mvt 1 – bars 181-200 (no trumpet in last bar) (20")

VO 7

Dvořák

What the New York newspapers write about me is terrible...

They say they see in me the saviour of music...

and I don't know what else besides!^{xviii}

Actor - [New York music-journalist, with astonishment]

Dr Dvořák is the most ingenious... of living composers...

[changing to tone to smug approval]

But in this symphony... he adheres closely to established forms...^{xix}

Narrator

Which means... that in the first movement...

after a stormy... 'development'...

Dvořák returns to where he started...

He was setting a good 'classical' example...

ME 7 – Mvt 1 – bars 277- 284 (8")

VO 8

Narrator

But... Dvořák does not 'adhere to the established forms...'

quite as closely as that New York journalist imagined...

Take 'the melody with the Oriental tinge'...

ME 8 - Mvt 1 – bars 91-94 (5")

VO 9

Narrator

This time... Dvořák raises it...

by half a step...

ME 9 – Oboe solo – G to A flat

leading straight to

ME 10 – Mvt 1 – bars 316-319 (5")

VO 10

Narrator

We easily recognise the music that we heard before...

but it's not quite the same...

ME 11 - Mvt 1 – bars 374-381 (8")

VO 11

Narrator

That critic who first saw the newly finished manuscript...

was keen to explain this music to his readers...

Actor - [New York music-journalist]

Here is the melody which clings most pertinaciously
to the memory of those who hear this symphony...

ME 12 – Mvt 1 – bars 400-403 - Trumpets 1+2

VO 12

Actor - [New York music-journalist]

And they will quickly recognise its spirit...

[with pride]

It is American!...

[confiding an intellectual secret]

And... it has the same rhythm as the principal subject...

ME 13 – Mvt 1 – bars 402-405 (omit last note) - Trombones 1+2

VO 13

Actor - [New York music-journalist, as though proving a point]

And what is American about this rhythm?

The 'Scotch snap'... a short note followed by a long one...

The energy imparted by this 'snap' is unmistakable...

and a natural expression...

of one of the chief national characteristics of our people...^{xx}

Dvořák - [ruminating with amusement]

Anyone with a 'nose' can feel the influence of America...^{xxi}

ME 14 – Mvt 1 - bars 400-450 (tutti) (60")

VO 14

Actor - [New York music-journalist, as though making a political point, with over-emphasis]

Dr Dvořák has successfully imbued this symphony with unity...

And this is due... to the relationship between his different melodies...^{xxii}

Narrator

It's true...

Dvořák's melodies are all related to each other...

But that is not the only thing that gives this music unity...

Beneath the melodies...

there is a hidden bed-rock of mysterious harmonies...

ME 15 – Chord pattern (horns) (14")

VO 15

Narrator

But then... at the beginning of the second movement...

as sometimes happens in a landscape...

the bedrock... suddenly reveals itself...

ME 16 – Mvt 2 – Bars 1-5 (no strings) (20”)

VO 16

Narrator

These strange chords... connect... one world of the imagination...

ME 17 – Mvt 2 – Bar 1, first chord (2”)

VO 17

Narrator

with another...

ME 18 – Mvt 2 – Bar 4, tailing over into bar 5 (2”)

VO 18

Actor - *[American student]*

Sometimes... in our classes... Dvořák played his melodies to us...

I remember how he sang...

the immortal theme of the second movement of his new symphony...

with passion and fervor... his eyes bulging,

his blood purple in his veins, his body vibrating...^{xxiii}

ME 19- Mvt 2 – Bars 5-10 (24”)

Part 3 All Indian Music

VO 19

Actor - *[Czech pupil and assistant, with pride]*

When the Master's score was finished....

I... delivered it to the conductor of the New York Philharmonic...

Anton Seidl...

The next day Seidl said to me...

“This symphony is all Indian music!”

Conductor

Wissen Sie, die Sinfonie ist lauter Indianermusik!^{xxiv}

Narrator

Indian music?

What did the German Seidl ... or the Bohemian Dvořák ...

know about Native North Americans?

Like so many foreigners, most of their information...
came from a single... exceedingly inaccurate... source...

Dvořák

As you know, I am a great admirer of Longfellow's *Hiawatha*...^{xxv}

Narrator

Hiawatha... the first American poem to conquer Europe...

And be translated into many languages...

Dvořák first read it in his native Czech, when he was in his early twenties...

and it haunted him for years...

Some Americans... felt threatened...

by the international success of this poem...

and by the way it had awoken worldwide curiosity...

about the fate of the original inhabitants of this country...

Actor - [The New York Times]

This Indian Saga... embalms the monstrous traditions...

of an uninteresting and, one may almost say, a justly exterminated race...^{xxvi}

Narrator

But what made this poem *most* notorious with ordinary readers...

was its unforgettably catchy rhythm...

borrowed... not from Native America at all...

but from a German translation of a Finnish epic...^{xxvii}

Actor - [exaggerate the rhythm]

By the shore of Gitche Gumeo,

By the shining Big-Sea-Water...

At the doorway of his wigwam...

Hiawatha stood and waited...^{xxviii}

Narrator

This thumping beat passed immediately into popular culture...

and was widely parodied in ballads, circuses and vaudevilles...

Dvořák knew it in two languages...

Actor - [exaggerate again, catching Scotch snap of 'foot was']

Swift of foot was... Hiawatha...

Strong of arm was Hiawatha...^{xxix}

ME 20 – Mvt 1 – Bars 24-28 (horns alone) (4")

VO 20

Dvořák [enjoy the grammatical mistake]

I get so attached to this *Hiawatha*...

that I cannot resist... to write an opera on it...^{xxx}

Narrator

Dvořák's dream of a 'Hiawatha' opera...

was keenly encouraged by his patron... Mrs Thurber...

Actor - [Mrs Thurber]

It is really to be regretted that this project came to nothing...

We discussed librettists...

and I... took him to see... Buffalo Bill...^{xxxi}

[Sound recording of Buffalo Bill advertising Rough Riders of the World]

Narrator

At 'Buffalo Bill's Wild West'... Dvořák heard 'Indian' singing...

[Recording of Indian singing from that time...]

ME 21 – Mvt 1 – Bars 149-152 (flute alone) (4")

VO 21

Narrator

And he saw... many of these same performers...

who were filmed by Edison... just one year later... in 1894...

[Recording of dancing music with flute and drums if possible]

ME 22 – Mvt 1 – Bars 91-94 (flutes and oboes) (4")

VO 22

Dvořák

My new symphony has been written under the direct influence...

of the national music of the North American Indians...^{xxxii}

Narrator

This white man's fascination...

with the supposedly 'primitive' and 'savage' 'Red Indians'...

may strike us as completely inappropriate...

to the real historical disaster that overwhelmed...

the nations and cultures of Native North America...

But Dvořák saw things differently...

He'd been asked by Mrs Thurber...
to create a national music for America...
and he knew from his own experience in Bohemia...
exactly how this should be done...

You start... with the songs and dances...
of those who have lived longest on the land...

Dvořák

The music of the people...
is a rare and lovely flower growing amidst encroaching weeds....
And it will perish unless it is seen by the one discriminating spirit...
who will prize it above all else...^{xxxiii}

Actor

Should you ask me, whence these stories?
Whence these legends... and traditions?...
I should answer, I should tell you,
"From the forests and the prairies..."^{xxxiv}

Narrator

Legends... and traditions...
Over the opening of the slow movement of his symphony...
Dvořák wrote...

Dvořák

The beginning of a legend!

ME 23 – Mvt 2 – Bars 1-2 (8’')

VO 23

Actor - *NY journalist*

Dr Dvořák tells me that this slow movement...

is a proclamation of the mood he found...

in the story of Hiawatha’s wooing ...^{xxxv}

And the lovely Laughing Water...

Softly took the seat beside him...

‘I will follow you, my husband!’

This was Hiawatha’s wooing!...^{xxxvi}

Narrator

Minnehaha’s father mockingly describes...

how Hiawatha lured away his daughter...

Actor - *[with mocking anger]*

‘With his flute of reeds, a stranger...

Wanders piping through the village...^{xxxvii}

**ME 24 – Mvt 2 – Bars 7-8 (English horn, original version with G flat)
(8’')**

VO 24

Narrator

An English horn... ‘a flute of reeds...’

That was Dvořák’s first version of the melody...

Later... he discovered...

Dvořák [in some surprise]

Native American music is like Scottish or Chinese music...

It's pentatonic...^{xxxviii}

ME 25 – Pentatonic scale (English horn) (2")

VO 25

Narrator

And so he changed the tune to fit that five-note scale...

And... he changed the rhythm...

ME 26 – Mvt 2 – Corrected version – Bars 7-8 (English horn) (12")

VO 26

Narrator

The centre of this movement is darker...

more despairing...

Actor - [Harry T. Burleigh]

I remember that he wrote it...

after he had read the famine scene in *Hiawatha*...^{xxxix}

Narrator

In a 'cold and cruel winter'... Minnehaha is starving...

Sick and feverish in her wigwam...

she sees... Death... stalking towards her...

Actor

“I can feel his icy fingers
Clasping mine amid the darkness!
Hiawatha! Hiawatha!”

And the desolate Hiawatha,
Far away amid the forest...
Heard the voice of Minnehaha
Calling to him in the darkness...^{xi}

ME 27 – Mvt 2 – Bars 46-49 (preceded by a bar vln and vla trem)

VO 27

Actor

Then they buried Minnehaha;
In the snow a grave they made her...
Underneath the moaning hemlocks...^{xli}

Dvořák

What could sound more like a funeral...
than the low notes of the clarinet?^{xlii}

ME 28 – Mvt 2 – Bars 78-82 (preceded by 2 bars of low clarinets)

VO 28

Narrator

After the bleakness and the grief...
Dvořák returns to the first part of the story...

and the young Hiawatha travelling homewards...

with his bride...

Actor

Pleasant was the journey homeward!

All the birds sang loud and sweetly...

Sang the bluebird, the Owaissa...

Sang the robin, the Opechee...^{xliii}

Narrator

Dvořák, the European...

had no idea what these American birds sounded like...

So he looked in a book...

ME 29 – Examples of Bluebird and Robin from Simeon Pease Cheney (flute and oboe)

VO 29

Narrator

And then... he combined the bluebird and the robin...

with his three Hiawatha themes...

ME 30 – Mvt 2 – Bars 90-101

VO 30