

operatic stops and starts that occupied much of the composer's attention in the 1890s, Dvorák produced a substantial body of self-contained orchestral works in the guise of overtures and tone poems.

The Carnival Overture, Op. 92 (1891), was the second of a group of three works by the composer collectively titled "Nature, Life, and Love." An operatic spirit -- one is struck by certain Carmen-esque flashes, for example -- informs the overture throughout, as does a prevailing ebullience and stomping, folk dance-like energy. A brief central Andantino con moto episode of sedate, almost nocturnal character is distinguished by more expansive melodies and the use of the English horn, one of Dvorák's favorite instruments, in an unusual role: sounding an ostinato accompaniment rather than the melody proper. The overture ends in a spirit similar to that in which it begins, aptly embodying the festal atmosphere suggested by its title.

The Slavonic Dances (Czech: Slovanské tance) are a series of 16 orchestral pieces composed by Antonín Dvořák in 1878 and 1886 and published in two sets as Op. 46 and Op. 72 respectively. Originally written for piano four hands, the Slavonic Dances were inspired by Johannes Brahms's own Hungarian Dances and were orchestrated at the request of Dvořák's publisher soon after composition. The pieces, lively and full of national character, were well received at the time and today are considered among the composer's most memorable works, occasionally making appearances in popular culture. "Contrary to what the title might suggest, the dances are not so much inspired by Slavic folk music generally, but specifically by styles and forms from Bohemia. In these pieces, Dvořák never actually quotes folk melodies, but evokes their style and spirit by using traditional rhythmic patterns and structures in keeping with traditional folk dances.

BOHEMIAN CARNIVAL
SMETANA: THE MOLDAU / THREE DANCES FROM "THE BARTERED BRIDE"
DVOŘÁK: CARNIVAL OVERTURE / FOUR SLAVONIC DANCES

GEORGE SZELL
THE CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA



The Moldau , Czech Vltava, symphonic poem by Bohemian composer Bedřich Smetana that evokes the flow of the Vltava River—or, in German, the Moldau—from its source in the mountains of the Bohemian Forest, through the Czech countryside, to the city of Prague. A devoutly patriotic work, The Moldau captures in music Smetana's love of his homeland. Completed in 1874 and first performed the following year, the piece constitutes the second movement of a six-movement suite, *Má vlast* (My Country), which premiered in its entirety in Prague on November 5, 1882.

Má vlast ultimately became Smetana's most enduring composition, and of its movements, the second, The Moldau, has remained the most popular. The movement starts with light, rippling figures that represent the emergence of the Moldau River as two mountain springs, one warm and one cold. Water from the springs then combines to become a mighty river, symbolized by a thickly orchestrated, stately theme that recurs periodically throughout the remainder of the work. Farther downstream, the river passes jubilant hunters, portrayed by a horn melody, and then passes a village wedding, signaled by a passage in polka rhythm. The river then enters a gorge where, according to legend, water nymphs—suggested by serene and mysterious melodies—come out to bathe in the moonlight. With the morning light, the main river theme returns, though it soon breaks into tumultuous dissonance as the river enters the St. John's Rapids. Beyond the white water, the river reaches Prague, where to grand arpeggios of a regal hymn, it flows past the castle Vyšehrad, once the seat of power for Bohemian kings. After fading to a trickle, the piece—and the journey—comes to an unambiguous close with a loud two-chord cadence.

The Bartered Bride Overture; Three Dances

Of the many impulses that enlivened 19th-century Romanticism, none was more ardently promoted by its adherents than nationalism. Toward the middle of the century, some of those countries that had embraced foreign traditions – mainly German ones – began to turn inward, seeking an expression that touched more

deeply their own native instincts. In Bohemia, nationalistic pride was kindled first by Smetana, then by Dvořák, later by Janáček. The *Bartered Bride*, Smetana's second opera (1866), stands in a pre-eminent position, credited with having established in its country a national musical consciousness.

Early in his career, Smetana enjoyed success in two capacities: As a pianist he was reputed to be an especially fine Chopin interpreter; as a conductor, he headed Sweden's Gothenburg Philharmonic Society for several years. Leaving the latter post and returning to Prague, he aided the cause of Czech musical art first by supporting the movement to build an opera house, second by writing truly Bohemian operas to put on its stage. *Bride's* homely story of village life is cloaked in bright music that has enough melodic and rhythmic folk flavoring to make the Bohemian heart beat faster, and enough pure musical value to agitate the non-Czech pulse.

The music of the Overture is drawn largely from the finale of Act II. In this scene, the hero signs a contract relinquishing his claim to his fiancée, and the legal sale is witnessed by the townspeople. The Overture begins with full orchestral thrust, out of which a scherzo-ish figure accumulates in the strings, and then a syncopated dance figure makes its vigorous appearance. These materials are developed with great instrumental brilliance – the Overture's high spirits are activated as much by virtuosic orchestration as by vital, folkish picturesqueness.

In many ways, the 1890s represented for Dvořák a time of creative and personal renaissance. It was during this decade that he made his first forays into the New World, the direct result of which included the production of a wealth of American-inflected chamber music as well as the composer's best-known work, the *Symphony No. 9* (1893). The latter proved to be Dvořák's final essay in that form, signaling, perhaps, his increasing interest in other genres. In addition to the

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Smetana: "The Moldau"

1 ("Vltava") Symphonic Poem No. 2 From The Cycle, "My Country" ("Ma Vlast") 12:49

Smetana: Three Dances From The Opera "The Bartered Bride"

2 Polka (Act I, Scene 5) 5:10

3 Furiant (Act II, Scene 1) 2:10

4 Dance Of The Comedians (Act III, Scene 2) 3:58

Dvořák: Carnival Overture Op. 92

5 Carnival Overture, Op. 92 9:20

Dvořák: Four Slavonic Dances

6 Op. 46, No. 1 In C Major (Bohemian Furiant, Presto) 3:52

7 Op. 46, No. 3 In A-Flat Major (Bohemian Polka, Poco Allegro) 4:55

8 Op. 72, No. 2 In E Minor (Polish Mazurka, Allegretto Grazioso) 5:58

9 Op. 72, No. 7 In C Major (Serbian Kolo, Allegro Vivace) 2:55

The Moldau, Three Dances, and Carnival Overture recorded January 4-5, 1963.

Slavonic Dances recorded July 19, 1962 Producer – Thomas Frost



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