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ELOQUENCE

DVOŘÁK

Violin Concerto  
Serenade for Strings



Edith Peinemann  
Peter Maag · Rafael Kubelík

**ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK** (1841-1904)

**Violin Concerto in A minor, Op. 53**

<b>1</b>	I	Allegro ma non troppo – Quasi moderato	12'10
<b>2</b>	II	Adagio, ma non troppo	10'38
<b>3</b>	III	Finale. Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo	10'55

**Edith Peinemann**, violin  
**Czech Philharmonic Orchestra**  
**Peter Maag**

**Serenade for Strings in E major, Op. 22**

<b>4</b>	I	Moderato	4'28
<b>5</b>	II	Tempo di valse	6'17
<b>6</b>	III	Scherzo (Vivace)	5'21
<b>7</b>	IV	Larghetto	5'03
<b>8</b>	V	Finale (Allegro vivace)	5'49

**English Chamber Orchestra**  
**Rafael Kubelík**

Total timing: 60'55

In April 1893, William Smythe Babcock Matthews, music critic and editor of Chicago's *Musical Monthly*, wrote the following to Antonín Dvořák, who at that time was conducting and teaching at the National Conservatory in New York City:

I have been hearing your works such as *The Spectre's Bride*, the *Requiem*, symphonies, a violin concerto, and in New York a quartet of yours by the Kneisel Quartet [...] and it was not lost upon me the honour which your coming to America conferred upon our country. It was my desire to print a sketch of you, and a picture, in the magazine I edit, a copy of which I have directed to be sent you. But I found myself treated with what I regarded as unnecessary rudeness at the Conservatory, and therefore decided to give myself no further trouble in the matter. This was wrong in me, for I believe you to be either the very first of living composers, or at least one of the two or three very first.

By the 1890s, Dvořák was indeed a successful composer with an international reputation. It had taken many years for his star to rise, however. It wasn't until he was in his thirties that good luck began to come his way. One particular piece of luck was attracting the attention of Johannes Brahms. The influential German composer had heard Dvořák's *Moravian Duets*, and was sufficiently impressed

to recommend them to Simrock, his publisher. The *Moravian Duets* led to the commissioning of the *Slavonic Dances*, also published by Simrock, and Dvořák's fame consequently spread far outside of his native Bohemia.

Simrock was pleased with the sales of Dvořák's music, and with the attention it was beginning to receive abroad. Naturally, he encouraged the composer to keep working. In July 1879, Dvořák began to compose his first and only Violin Concerto, and he finished it at the end of the summer. Because violin virtuoso Joseph Joachim had taken an active interest in Dvořák's chamber music, Dvořák worked on the new concerto with the hope that Joachim would play it – a coup that would have greatly pleased not only the composer but Simrock. Joachim even went so far as to suggest changes to the solo part, and also to the scoring.

During a visit to London in 1884, a performance of the Violin Concerto at the Crystal Palace, with Joachim as soloist and the composer at the podium, seemed imminent, but a last-minute objection by London's Philharmonic Society – who had sponsored the composer's visit – caused the plan to fall through. Later that year, another opportunity for Joachim to play the

concerto – this time in Berlin – also came to naught. (The violinist had expressed reservations – shared by Robert Keller, Simrock's musical advisor – about the structure of the first movement, although it is not clear whether those reservations played a role in Joachim's failure to perform a concerto that was, after all, dedicated to him.) Simrock published the concerto in 1883, and it wasn't until 1886 that it was heard in London, and then in a performance by František Ondříček, who had premiered the work in Prague in October 1883, and repeated it in Vienna two months later.

Specifically, what was it that bothered Joachim and Keller? The absence of an extended orchestral introduction was troublesome; indeed, the soloist enters after little more than an imperious stamping of feet by the orchestra. However, what really broke with tradition was Dvořák's bringing the first movement to a close without a fully-rounded recapitulation. Instead, he pulls the rug out from under the listener by deftly sliding into the second movement without pause. The composer's penchant for interrupting his slow movements with stormy outbursts – note also, for example, the Cello Concerto – is observed in this concerto as well.

The finale is a rondo in the manner of Beethoven's Violin Concerto – but with Dvořák's inimitable Bohemian inflections.

Recommending Dvořák to Simrock was not the only way in which Brahms benefited the young composer. In 1874, Austria's Ministry of Education announced that it was offering stipends to impecunious but talented artists, and that those interested in competing for a stipend should submit samples of their work. After obtaining a document certifying that he was, in fact, poor, Dvořák got together a parcel of 15 compositions, including his Third and Fourth Symphonies, and sent them off to Vienna. The examining committee consisted of Brahms, music critic Eduard Hanslick, and Johann Herbeck, the director of the Viennese Court Opera.

In February 1875, it was announced that Dvořák was the winner of the 400 gulden prize. The Minister of Education spoke of the composer's talent and early acclaim in his homeland – this in spite of the fact that he couldn't even afford his own piano! The composer reapplied for the stipend several times, and although it was denied him the second time, he succeeded in receiving awards

of 500 and 600 gulden on his third and fourth attempts in 1876 and 1877, respectively.

The initial stipend boosted Dvořák's confidence, and 1875 saw the completion of many works, including the aforementioned *Moravian Duets*, his opera *Vanda*, the Fifth Symphony, and the String Serenade. The latter work was written over the course of less than two weeks in what must have been an exceptionally happy period for the composer. It was premiered in December 1876 by Adolf Čech and the Prague Philharmonic Orchestra.

Hermann Krigar, a writer for the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt*, was quite probably the composer's first biographer. A series of articles, published in the weekly between 1879 and 1880, discussed Dvořák's blossoming career, and some of his earliest works. Krigar called the String Serenade (and the Wind Serenade which followed it in 1878), 'eminent proof of Anton [to use the German variant of his given name] Dvořák's skill in handling the larger musical forms.' He continued, 'With their lighter construction and more transparent fabric [...] the two Serenades show themselves to be two thoroughly graceful mood paintings, of several movements each, which never for a moment

deny the character of what they are intended to portray: an untroubled, flowing night music' (cited in *Dvořák and his World*, edited by Michael Beckerman). Indeed, the two serenades are Dvořák at his most Mozartean and most aristocratic, although the composer has not neglected the folk music and the people of his Bohemian homeland in either of these works.

### Raymond Tuttle

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**Executive producers:** Rolf Peter Schröder (Violin Concerto); Volker Martin, Gernot Westhäuser (Serenade)

**Recording producer:** Hans Weber

**Recording engineer:** Günter Hermanns

**Recording locations:** Rudolfinium, Prague, Czech Republic, July 1965 (Violin Concerto); Brent Town Hall, Wembley, London, UK, May 1969 (Serenade)

**Eloquence (Australia) series manager:** Cyrus Meher-Homji

**Art direction:** Chilu Tong