

California State University, Northridge

Antonin Dvořák

Symphony No. 9, Op. 95
(New World Symphony)

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all Baha'i people, who due to their religious beliefs and the discriminatory and political climate in an evolving Iran over the last 40 years, were systematically denied enrollment and attendance to accredited institutions of higher learning. I would also like to recognize and commend the music faculty at California State University Northridge for their thorough mentorship and inspiring instruction during my courses of study there.

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Abstract

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Antonin Dvorak's Symphony No. 9, or *New World Symphony*, is arguably one of the most popular pieces in the Symphonic literature in the world. This symphony was composed and premiered in 1893 at Carnegie Hall with Dvorak present in the audience and Anton Seidle conducting. Dvořák artfully weaves American folk music into his symphony. By utilizing American folk themes, Native American motifs, and African-American melodies Dvorak, in a uniquely Bohemian style, succeeds in creating a distinctly "American" Symphonic identity. This monumental work successfully spans cultural divides and shed light on the plight of many of the cultures whose musical textures were borrowed from. The following pages will contain a brief discussion of the genesis of this symphony and the working career of its composer, and a synopsis of the work (Instrumentation, tempos and folk music characteristics) allowing us to see Dvorak's influence and creation of an "American" symphonic identity. The work will also be analyzed aesthetically comparing and contrasting different artistic interpretations on the part of conductors throughout the works' history as well as a brief discussion on the challenges ensemble face in the performance of this work and the surmounting of these challenges in new and artful ways.

Chapter 1: A Brief History of the *New World Symphony*

The Symphony No. 9 in E minor, "*From the New World Symphony*", Opus 95, composed by Antonin Dvořák is arguably one of the best loved and most well-known pieces in the literature for Symphony Orchestra. The reputation of the Symphony 9 has steadily grown since its premier in 1893, and it has become a staple of popular culture; Neil Armstrong, Commander of Apollo 11, brought along a recording of the Symphony on his 1969 mission of landing on the Moon.

Antonin Dvorak (1841-1904) was a composer who achieved worldwide fame following in the footsteps of his predecessor Bedrich Smetana. Both Smetana and Dvorak developed nationalistic styles in their compositions by combining folk elements of their native countries and cultural neighbors. From the years 1892-5 Dvorak was the Director of the National Conservatory of Music of America in New York City. During his time as director he was exposed to many folk tunes of the Indigenous Indians, African- American work songs, and American popular tunes. In his Bohemian style Dvorak weaves in the many influences he was exposed to into his symphony. He was among the first composers to use folk melodies in classical compositions successfully. Dvorak was acutely aware of the cultural, political, and social concerns and attitudes of the time specifically related to the plight of African-American people in America during the Reconstruction and the displacement of Indigenous Indians from their respective territories. This receptivity and interest in the political and social climate of the time largely influenced his use of Native American and African-American motifs to span the gap between cultures and create a uniquely American tone to the Symphony. It should be noted this was not Dvorak's first utilization of American folk elements; his String Quartet #12, also

composed in 1893, makes use of several motifs of Native peoples and African-American textures. It has since come to be known as the “American String Quartet.”

Dvořák’s role in helping young democracies establish a greater sense of cultural identity has perhaps not been sufficiently recognized until now. The main thrust of his popularity as a composer is the fact that he was able to bridge at least two cultures and assimilate diverse folk music with very little effort. It should be noted here that during the premier of his Symphony 9 applause was so overwhelming in between movements of the work, that Dvorak felt obliged to stand and acknowledge the praise several times during the performance. This seems to indicate that his music played a very important part in establishing a sense of nationalism in the United States. Not only can this artistic accomplishment of establishing an American musical identity be considered a sort of artistic blessing of the Nation-State, it can also be considered a foreshadowing of the modern concept of the “melting-pot,” or “multiculturalism.”

Dvořák’s career is an interesting example of a classical composer who had preexisting experience and success writing pieces that incorporated Bohemian folk elements into his classical compositions. He was able to use this expertise when he migrated to America as the Director of the National Conservatory and in the subsequent years that followed culminating in the presentation of the *New World Symphony*, arguably the first and most successful classical composition to use elements of Native-American, African-American, and American folk music in its creation. The Symphony 9 as well as many of his other pieces had a significant influence on not just American composers of the time, but also many European and Pan-American composers of that era. While less marked due to acculturation this influence on nationalistic styles has continued to influence composers in the present musical age.

Understandably, Dvořák's music created controversy in both America and his native Bohemia. This controversy delayed the dissemination and concertizing of many of Dvorak's works. According to Ottlova, certain elements of Czech society regarded Dvořák's success as a betrayal of the nation's art; and because he accepted commissions from abroad he was accused of trading his art for momentary success and being an opportunist and usurper of American folk music. While some of this criticism may have been valid, it smacks of envy. Along the same lines Dvořák's American experience subjected him to endemic American racism and classism of the nineteenth century. Horowitz argues that only an outsider such as Dvořák could have successfully brought these elements together to create a work of such popularity and far-reaching impact. (Horowitz, p. 18)

Dvorak's synthesis of American popular tunes of the 19th century, African- American melodies and Native American motifs is informative in understanding the evolution of Nationalism of the time. Even before coming to the United States, Dvorak was already widely regarded as an incredibly gifted Bohemian nationalist composer who drew from melodies and rhythms of his native Bohemia, Moravia, surrounding countries and the Ukraine.

The New York Philharmonic Society commissioned Dvorak to write this symphony, which was premiered on December 16th, 1893 at Carnegie Hall, conducted by Anton Seidle with Dvorak present in the audience. The work was rapturously popular among the general audiences of the time and received general acclaim by the musical community. The following letter sent to Dvořák by the Secretary of the New York illustrates the growing admiration Dvorak received Philharmonic Society, Aug. Roebbelen:

The Directors of the Philharmonic Society of New York ask you respectfully whether you would be inclined to be so good as to give your newest Symphony No. 5 to the Philharmonic Society for its premiere performance. (Beckerman, p. 204)

This letter provides not only proof of Dvorak's general acceptance as a composer within the established musical circles of the 19th century but as a composer of the first rank who utilized compositional and folk elements of his adopted home with great success.

Dvorak, as director of the National Conservatory, was exposed to many musical influences that greatly aided in his ability to orchestrate music with a distinctly American tone. One of these influences were his encounters with Harry T Burleigh, an African-American student, who later became a composer later. Burleigh aided Dvorak by singing American folk tunes and African-American work songs, traditionally known as Spirituals, to more deeply understand and the feeling of American music. Dvorak borrowed several of these melodies and idioms and then reworked them within the structures of Classical composition weaving in his perspective through use of rhythms, counterpoint, and orchestration. Dvořák was also interested in Native American music and deeply appreciated the importance of American Folk Music, particularly Negro spirituals, as shown in the following quotation given to the New York Herald: I am now satisfied, he said, that the future music of this country must be founded on what are called the Negro melodies. (Beckerman, p. 96)

Dvorak believed that the music of the African-American and Indigenous Indians shared similarities with Scottish music. Most historians agree that he is referring to the pentatonic scale, which is used in the folk music of many cultures. In the Symphony 9 Dvorak utilizes the pentatonic scale in the second movements' opening English horn theme.

Example 1: The beginning of second movement



Dvorak also drew from techniques of classical composers of his not-too-distant past such as Beethoven and Schubert. For example, in the 3rd movement, the Scherzo, there are some similarities with the Scherzo of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 like falling fourth and timpani strokes. Also in the 4th movement, Dvorak's use of cyclic flashbacks from previous movements is very similar to Beethoven's uses of cyclical in his Ninth Symphony.

Chapter 2: An Analysis of Dvorak's Symphony No. 9

Instrumentation

The *New World Symphony* is written for the following instruments:

- 2 Flutes (2nd also Piccolo)
- 2 Oboes (One can double English horn)
- 2 Clarinets in A
- 2 Bassoons
- 4 French horns in E, C, and F
- 2 Trumpets in E, C, and E^b
- 3 Trombones
- 1 Tuba (2nd movement only)
- Timpani
- Triangle (3rd movement only)
- Cymbals (4th movement only)
- Strings

The duration of this work is 45 minutes approximately. The Symphony is separated into 4 movements.

1. First movement: Adagio with 4/8 time - Allegro molto with 2/4 time in E minor.
2. Second movement: Largo: Common time, D^b Major – Second theme in C[#] minor.
3. Third movement: Scherzo: Molto Vivace – Poco Sostenuto, 3/4, E minor.
4. Fourth movement: Allegro con fuoco, Common Time, E minor – Ends in E Major.

Chapter 3: Interpretation

Due to the rapturous reception of Dvorak's Symphony 9 since its premiere in 1893 the *New World Symphony* has occupied a place of honor among the symphonic orchestral literature. Owing to this popularity and with the advent of recording technology in the early 20th century there are countless performance recordings of the *New World Symphony* available. This large number of performance recordings provides us with a staggering number of interpretations on the part of Music Directors in overall aesthetic, tempi, phrasing and emotionalism. This next section provides a brief comparative analysis between older and more modern recordings of the Symphony 9 and the light these recordings shed as we make preparations to rehearse our own versions.

It is effective to compare recordings for the purpose of studying interpretations. Comparing recordings provides today's Music Director a plethora of interpretive nuances utilized by conductors of the past and provides a window into their interpretive space. Comparing the understanding of two or more performances of this symphony can also help us better understand how this piece might be approached in relation to specific conductors of the past. It can be argued that an older recording of the *New World Symphony* being closer to the composer's life time and encompassing musicians who might have interacted with Dvorak or his disciples could potentially be more beneficial.

Musical tastes are subjective. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the differing interpretations of conductors. For example in comparing the overall tempi of performances by Herbert von Karajan and Sergiu Celibidache we find markedly differing opinions of how fast

individual movements of the Symphony are to be played. Karajan conducts it in faster tempo with almost frantic energy while Celibidache's performance has a breadth of slow romanticism with many frequent use of rubato.

Chapter 4: Rehearsals and Preparation

First Movement: Adagio 4/8 time - Allegro molto 2/4 time e minor

The following is an overview of my rehearsal planning and preparation. The beginning of the first movement feels very mysterious and ominous. The important aspect in the conducting of this section is establishing the tempo in 4/8 without utilizing a large, clear beat pattern. As it is shown on the score, violas, cellos, and double basses play a rather long legato phrase, but the cellos play the second beat of the first three measures with a thirty-second note which makes the conductor's role very important in the coordination of these interweaving lines. In measure 4, the horn III and IV start on the second beat of the measure with a thirty-second note in sforzando and diminuendo. The same thing happens in the woodwind instruments with syncopations in flutes from measures 6 to 8. It is necessary to rehearse these sections for the seamless legato lines and the differences in dynamic range. Also, this brief interlude provides us with the setting of the stage a serene yet anticipatory mood in preparing for the forthcoming Allegro section.

In measure 15, flutes and oboes enter with a faster paced rhythmic passage and the conductor needs to subdivide the beat clearly to assist players to articulate and navigate this section with ease.

The last three measures of the introduction, measures 21 to 24 contain a crescendo at the beginning of the figure and then a diminuendo and forte pianissimo at the end. This figure heightens the excitement of this section before the first very famous theme of symphony. In measure 24, French horn III and IV introduce the first theme in a two beat march pattern with more than twice tempo of the introduction. In measure 39 and 43, there is a crescendo for the string instruments, but with the fortissimo in the other parts, especially for timpani, it can be very difficult to shape the beauty of these crescendos. Therefore, it is better to ask the orchestra (including the timpanist) to perform a diminuendo opposite what the strings are doing in order to hear better the crescendo to ffz in the string parts.

From measure 78 diminuendos are started in different instruments leading into a pianissimo in measure 87. A slight ritardando helps in measures 89 and 90 before the second theme in measure 91, which flutes and oboes play the second theme with a sostenuto. This restatement has accents on the second beat of every other measure as well as a sforzando at the beginning of every other measures that must be carefully observed by the flute I and oboe I player.

From measure 129, there is a hemiola between the double bass and cello parts and other string parts on the second beat of every measure. Rehearsing this interlocking rhythm between parts will help to create a clearer texture in the orchestra sound. At the same time, there is a third interval between violin I, and violin II parts which often requires fine-tuning.

In measures 253 to 257, there are some triplets and sixteenth notes with syncopations, which need to be rehearsed with first and second violins. Then in measure 273, the recapitulation, the first theme is restated with French horn III and IV in mezzo forte dynamic as if to remind the audience of the first theme. Going into the code in measure 424 it is effective to rehearse the trumpet players from measures 440 to 444 to perform the syncopations accurately.

Second Movement: Largo: Common time, D^b Major – Second theme in C[#] minor

The second movement begins softly with a stately yet contained fanfare within a range of mf to ppp dynamic and very slow paced tempo with quarter note equal to 52. The intonation of the opening brass “chorale” requires rehearsal for both accurate intonation and breath coordination between the performers.

In measure 90, because of the inclusion of sextuplet patterns for oboe 1, conducting by dividing each beat into two eighth notes provides better guidance to the players. An interesting feature in this movement is the English horn solo line throughout. The first and third fermatas are on the last beat of measure 107 and 109. It is advisable to do a full cut-off the music off at the end of that measure and collectively taking a breath into the next measure.

Example 3: Measures 101 to 109

Meno mosso, Tempo I. ♩ = 52.

Solo Corno inglese.
p
dimin. pp
dim. *f*

Meno mosso, Tempo I. ♩ = 52.

4 Violini.
pp
pp
pp
pp

4 Virole.
pp
pp

4 Celli.
pp

2 Violini con sordini.
sempre più diminuendo
pp

2 Virole con sordini.
pp

2 Celli.
pp

2 Bassi.
pp
pp sempre più diminuendo

Third Movement: Molto Vivace – Poco Sostenuto, $\frac{3}{4}$, e minor

The conducting of the Third movement is one, but in four bar phrases. This movement contains many repeats of sections throughout. Often clarification is necessary to keep the orchestra coordinated within the repeated sections.

In this movement a very impressive moment starts from measure 60, which has forte-piano signs and diminuendos for four measures in string parts. The coordination of these dynamics really heightens the drama of the music. From measure 64 to the end of 67,

bassoon I performs as a solo instrument with the second violins, violas, and cellos in a soft dynamic. Keeping the strings dynamic in check is necessary so as not to lose the bassoon in the orchestral texture. Coordinating the strings bowings in this section is really helpful as well as organizing the bow area to be used for the soft passages. In general for soft passages it is better for the strings to use little bow pressure into the string and to play close to the fingerboard as it facilitates softer dynamics rather than close to the bridge of the instrument.

A slight ritardando in measures 64 to 67 helps to facilitate the slower broader tempo of the new theme for flute and oboe in measure 68.

Example 4: Measures 56 to 65

The image displays a musical score for measures 56 to 65. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 56-63) features woodwinds (flute, oboe, bassoon) and strings (violins, violas, cellos, double bass). The woodwinds play a melodic line with a 'a2.' marking. The strings provide accompaniment with various dynamics like *ff* and *sf*. The second system (measures 64-65) shows a transition where the woodwinds play a new theme, and the strings continue with a dynamic of *sf*. The score includes various dynamic markings such as *pp*, *dim.*, and *p*.

Example 5: Measures 66 to 73

The image displays a musical score for measures 66 to 73. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes a string quartet (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello) and a piano accompaniment. The string parts are marked with a dynamic of *p* (piano) and the tempo instruction *Poco sostenuto.*. The piano accompaniment is marked with *pp* (pianissimo). The second system continues the piano accompaniment, also marked with *pp* and *Poco sostenuto.*. The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and various articulations such as slurs and accents.

In the measures 92 to 98 French horn and woodwind players, playing a repeated passage taken from the stings, should keep their dynamics very soft and delicate trying to emulate the string like texture in their own respective sounds.

The last eight measures of the movement are particularly tricky for the viola section due to the changing of divisions in each measure. There is diminution in the note grouping (6,5,4,..) and the viola part is very exposed. Rehearsing for coordination in gesture and subdivision was necessary.

Example 6: Measures 292 to 299

The musical score for measures 292 to 299 is presented in three systems. The first system features a woodwind section (flute, oboe, bassoon) and a string section. The second system features a woodwind section (clarinet, bassoon) and a string section. The third system features a woodwind section (clarinet, bassoon) and a string section. The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp*, *ppp*, and *ff*, and performance instructions like *pizz.*, *arco*, and *G. P.* (Grave). The key signature is E minor, and the time signature is Common Time. The score ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

Fourth Movement: Allegro con fuoco, Common Time, E minor – Ends in E Major

This movement is arguably the most exciting movement of this symphony with a tempo marking of *Allegro con fuoco* and a quarter note equal to 152. Note the same rhythms in the strings.

Example 7: Measures 1 to 6

Allegro con fuoco. M.M. ♩ = 152.

Flauti.

Oboi.

Clarinetti in A.

Fagotti.

Corni I. II. in E.

Corni III. IV. in E.

Trombe in E.

Tromboni I. II.

Trombone basso.

Tympani E.H.
(Platti.)

Allegro con fuoco. M.M. ♩ = 152.

Violino I.

Violino II.

Viola.

Violoncello.

Contrabasso.

Theme I is introduced in measure 10 in the trumpets. This theme is passed around through every section of the orchestra in various configurations and guises. In measure 28 and 32 the string section has sforzando accents. It was necessary to rehearse this section to get the correct emphasis for the all the strings.

The changes of rhythms from dotted eighth and sixteenth note to triplet eighth notes are numerous. This motif and rhythmic structure is passed around the entire orchestra. The music director should take care that the difference and accuracy of these rhythmic figures are observed.

Measures 64 and 65 contain a diminuendo and ritardando for the repeated notes of the flutes, violins and other instruments. The ritardando should be lengthened to facilitate the lyrical entrance theme of the clarinet I in measure 66.

Example 8: Measures 63 to 70

The image displays a musical score for measures 63 to 70. The score is written for a full orchestra and includes the following parts and markings:

- Flutes:** Measures 63 and 64 feature a motif of dotted eighth and sixteenth notes. Measures 65 and 66 feature triplet eighth notes. Dynamics include *p*, *dim.*, and *pp*.
- Violins:** Similar to the flutes, they play the dotted eighth and sixteenth note motif in measures 63-64 and the triplet eighth note motif in measures 65-66. Dynamics include *p*, *dim.*, and *pp*.
- Clarinet I:** Enters in measure 66 with a lyrical theme. Dynamics include *pp*, *f*, and *p*.
- Clarinets II, III, and Bassoon:** Play a similar rhythmic motif to the Clarinet I in measure 66. Dynamics include *pp*, *f*, and *p*.
- Trumpets and Trombones:** Play a similar rhythmic motif in measure 66. Dynamics include *pp*, *f*, and *p*.
- Percussion:** Includes *Piatti Solo.* and *Tympani in D, G.* with dynamics *mf* and *pp*.
- String Ensemble:** Includes *arco* markings and dynamics *ppp*.

In measures 100 to 106, the hemiolas between the violas in triplets and second violins in sixteenth notes, need to be rehearsed for clarity.

Between measures 267 to the end of 274, there is a tricky part for the French horn players that includes the first theme of the first movement with a syncopation on the first beat. Measures 267 to 270 French horn I and II continue the music with an *accelerando* and *crescendo* between measures 271 and 274 to get back to *Tempo Primo* of the movement (Quarter note = 152 bpm).

Example 9: Measures 265 to 271

The image displays a musical score for measures 265 to 271. The score is arranged in two systems. The top system contains five staves: three for woodwinds (flute, oboe, and bassoon) and two for strings (violin and viola). The bottom system contains three staves: piano, French horn, and cello/contrabass. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes various dynamic markings such as *p*, *pp*, *ppp*, *fz*, *dim.*, and *Solo.*. There are also performance instructions like *accel.* and *cresc.* in the French horn part. The notation includes complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and syncopations, particularly in the French horn and string parts.

Example 10: Measures 272 to 279

stringendo

11 Tempo I.

cresc. *molto cresc.* *ff* *fff* *in E.*

stringendo

Tempo I.

11

Conclusion

Antonin Dvorak's Symphony 9, "New World Symphony", has enjoyed nearly perennial popularity since its premiere in 1893. Dvorak's artful Bohemian weaving of American folk tunes, African-American melodies, and Native American motifs into this monumental work contributed greatly to an "American" Symphonic sound. Through his use of folk tunes and Native melodies Dvorak was able to bridge the gap between people and cultures of the late 19th century, despite endemic racism and classism of the time. As has been noted by Horowitz only an "outsider" such as Dvorak could have so keenly bridged the gap between people and classes. As an immigrant to the United States as a means of escaping discrimination in the educational system in Iran, I empathize with Dvorak. I feel a kinship with the "outsider" who makes a concerted effort to meld his native ideals with those of his adopted country. Dvorak masterfully blends different cultures and reveals, through music, the alienation, struggle and, ultimate triumph of countless individuals through this Nation's history. Perhaps for this stirring empathy that can be felt by people of all nations Dvorak's masterfully orchestrated Symphony continues to thrill and inspire us nearly 150 years after its premier.

Annotated Bibliography

Beckerman, Michael. "Dvořák and His World." Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

This book represents a comprehensive attempt to reconstruct Dvořák's life from limited available material. The book focuses on his time in America particularly. It also addresses the issue of the influence of Nationalism on his music.

Horowitz, Joseph. "New World Symphony and Discord." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 54. (Jan. 11, 2008): 18.

This article illustrates the discord created by the introduction of folk music into classical music. Only an "outsider" such as Dvořák could dare to introduce national idioms into American classical music.

Appendix: The title for the autograph score by Antonin Dvorak

"Z nového světa"
 ("From the new world")

(Comp.)
 Číslo 1. Symfonie B-moll 1865
 " 2. " " Es Dur 1871
 " 3. " " D moll 1874
 " 4. " " ~~Dur~~ 1880
 " 5. " " Dur 1880
 " 6. " " D moll 1885
 " 7. " " G dur 1890? 1889
 " 8. " " E moll 1893

Symfonie (E moll) Číslo 8.
 opus 95.
 pro orchester
 složil
 Antonin Dvořák

Složil a Instrumentaci začal
 v New Yorku dne 9. února 1893.
 "

W 1 11