

People and Culture

The land known today as the Czech Republic has been ruled by several different parties over the centuries. Since Slavic people first came into the area in the 7th century CE, it has been ruled by Bohemian, Moravian, Hungarian, and Austrian kings and queens. In 1918, it became an independent country called Czechoslovakia. Germany occupied Czech lands from 1939 until the end of World War II in 1945. After the war, Czechoslovakia became a communist country allied with the Soviet Union, which significantly altered almost every aspect of government and everyday life. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Slovakia sought to become a separate nation, and as a result the Czech Republic became an independent country on January 1, 1993.



Though Czech lands were a part of the Austro-Hungarian empire until 1918, a movement of Czech nationalism had begun in the 19th century, which promoted the Czech language over the Imperial language of German. National arts also were promoted by Czech poets, playwrights, and composers. Bedřich Smetana (1824-1884) wrote operas in the Czech language, as well as a cycle of symphonic poems called *Má Vlast* (*My Fatherland*), which glorified the Czech nation. Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904) was another well-known Czech composer. He became internationally famous for his symphonies, string quartets, operas, and other compositions. More engaged with Western traditions of music than some other Czech nationalists, Dvořák lived in the United States of America from 1892 to 1895. He was invited there to be the director of the National Conservatory of Music of America in New York City and to help jump-start an American national style. He loved the music of his homeland and was widely praised for his beautiful melodies. Other important Czech nationalist composers include Leoš Janáček (1854-1928) and Joseph Suk (1874-1935).

Czech traditional music includes both instrumental and vocal varieties. **Dudy** (bagpipes) and **fiddles** are found throughout the country, but they have developed distinct styles in the western and eastern regions. In the west, the bagpipes often accompany singing, either alone or with other instruments such as flugelhorn, **cimbál** (hammered dulcimer), and various other brass, string, and percussion instruments. In the western region of Bohemia, traditional music has been influenced by Western European trends in classical music. This is because that region was connected politically with Austria, a main center for classical music. In the eastern regions of Moravia and Silesia, traditional music was much less influenced by Western styles. Its styles are more closely aligned with the traditions of musicians from the Carpathian Mountains and Poland.

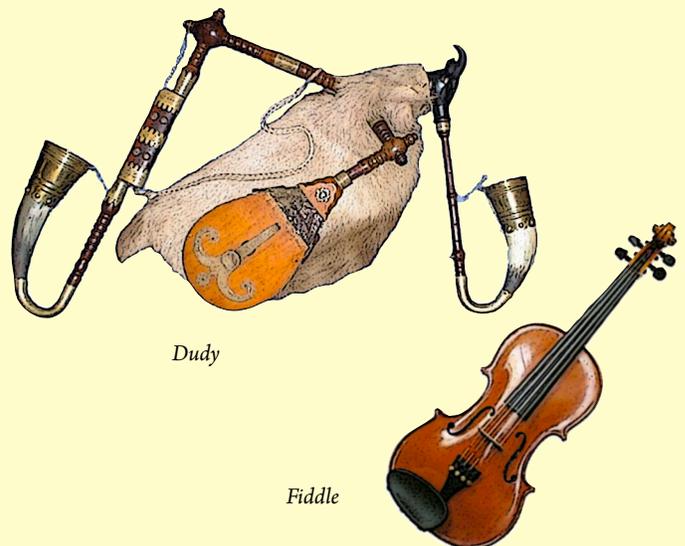
Quick Facts

Capital:	Prague
Location:	Central Europe
Area:	30,450 sq. mi.
Climate:	Temperate Continental
Population:	10.5 million
Language:	Czech
Currency:	Czech koruna
Government:	Parliamental Republic



Instruments of the Czech Republic

- dudy** – bellows-blown bagpipes with a drone and chanter
fiddle – a standard violin, called a “fiddle” when played in a traditional music context
cimbál – a hammered dulcimer, frequently used in Czech traditional music



Apply Your Knowledge!

Write your answers on the back or on a separate sheet of paper.

- 1) List three different kingdoms that have ruled Czech lands throughout history.
- 2) Which composer wrote the cycle of symphonic poems *Má Vlast*? What does the title mean?
- 3) Which Czech composer lived and worked in the United States?
- 4) List two traditional instruments that can be found throughout the Czech Republic.

Perform works by Czech composers on pages 5, 32, and 38 of *Tradition of Excellence*, Book 2.