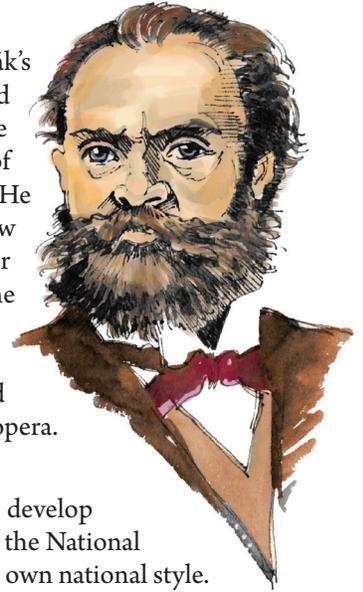


## Works

Though he composed privately as a young man, up to the age of about thirty most of Dvořák's colleagues knew him as a violist. However, by the time he was forty, Dvořák was a well respected composer of instrumental music on his way to international fame. This period of growing repute coincided with his interest in **Czech folk music**. Dvořák looked to the scales and rhythms of Czech music, then emulated them in his own symphonies, string quartets, and piano music. He sometimes used actual folk melodies as themes in his works, but more often composed new melodies that sounded as if they could have come from folk music. His *Slavonic Dances*, for piano (four hands), uses the rhythms of Czech folk dance and even emulates the rhythm of the Czech language. As a result of these traits in his music, Dvořák became known to the world as a **nationalist** composer. This reputation stayed with him throughout his career, but Dvořák could write in international styles as well. Like Mozart a hundred years before, he mastered all major classical genres of the day, including the symphony, string quartet, concerto, and opera. A distinctive mark of his style was combining national characteristics with classical forms.



Dvořák's status as a nationalist composer made him attractive to American composers eager to develop a style of music of their own. In 1891, Jeanette Thurber brought Dvořák to America to teach at the National Conservatory of Music in New York in hopes that he could show American composers the way to their own national style. During his three-year stay in America, he produced two works that remain a very important part of the country's musical heritage: an "American" string quartet, written while summering in Spillville, Iowa, and Symphony No. 9 (*From the New World*). Dvořák used **pentatonic scales** and **syncopated** rhythms to evoke Native-American and African-American folk music, two streams that he considered to be of great importance for the development of an American style.

## Influence

Dvořák is probably the best known nationalist Czech composer of the 19th century, especially in America. His orchestral music holds a prominent place in the concert hall, and his Cello Concerto in B Minor is a triumph for the instrument. More recently, there has been a growing interest in his vocal music, especially his operas, such as the Slavic-themed *Rusalka*.

### Composer Essentials

**Who:** Antonín Dvořák

**When:** 1841-1904

**Where:** Bohemia (modern-day Czech Republic), United States of America

**Key Works:** *Slavonic Dances*, Cello Concerto in B Minor, 9 symphonies (including No. 9, *From the New World*), chamber music (including 14 string quartets), choral music (including *Requiem*, *Stabat Mater*), operas (including *Rusalka*).

### Terms

**folk music** – music of unknown authorship, associated with a particular group of people (also called traditional music)

**nationalism** – in music, the embracing of folk music as representative of national identity

**pentatonic scale** – a five-note scale used in some African, Native American, and other traditions

**syncopation** – rhythmic effect that places emphasis on a weak beat

### Apply Your Knowledge!

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

- 1) What elements of Czech folk music did Dvořák use in his compositions?
- 2) Why did Jeannette Thurber want to bring Dvořák to America?
- 3) What American folk music styles did Dvořák use in his Symphony No. 9?

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

