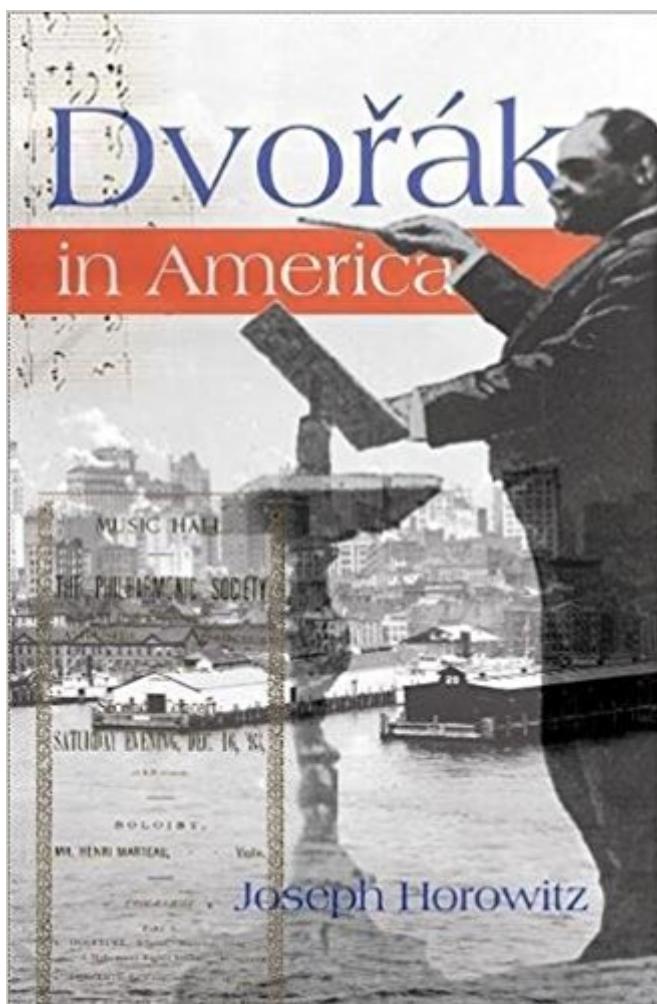


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Dvorak In America: In Search Of The New World



Synopsis

What should the music of America sound like? At the end of the nineteenth century, no one was sure ? should we imitate Europe, or find our own voice? But what would that be? When the great Czech composer Antonin Dvorak came here, he found the answer in the ?sorrow songs? of his African-American student, Henry Burleigh, in the rhythms of the Indian drums, in the church tunes of Spillville, Iowa. Author, critic, and music-educator Joe Horowitz vividly captures the America Dvorak visited, and the brilliant New World Symphony he created. Through the story of one classical composition, Horowitz reveals the many ways in which all Americans have shaped our culture.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 13 years

Grade Level: 7 - 8

Customer Reviews

Grade 6 Up-This is an engaging account of the years the Bohemian composer spent in the U.S. during the early 1890s, teaching at the National Conservatory of Music in New York City and composing his New World symphony and shorter works. The development of Dvorak's controversial views-that a truly distinct American music would be based on African-American spirituals and "plantation songs," and on Native American music-is discussed in detail, as is the attitude of adherents to the Germanic school of classical music toward what they considered his peasant sensibilities. In an afterword, Horowitz, likening his book to a conductor's interpretation of a piece of music, states that some of the incidents are his inventions or re-creations, and that "the words I have put in [Dvorak's] mouth" are based on other writings about the composer. The

fictionalized incidents, feelings, thoughts, and dialogue give the book a friendlier, more intimate tone than a more conventional biography might evoke. The 30 sometimes-dark period photographs include city scenes and portraits. Many of the primary sources on which Horowitz's research was based can be found on a DVD, *From the New World: A Celebrated Composer's American Odyssey*, created by Robert Winter and Peter Bogdanoff in tandem with this title. A welcome addition to music and biography collections. Ginny Gustin, Sonoma County Library System, Santa Rosa, CA
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Gr. 6-12. When Bohemian composer Antonin Dvorak emigrated from Prague to the U.S. in the 1890s, Americans immediately embraced him for being what they idolized most: a self-made man. Horowitz, a leading writer on American music, focuses on Dvorak's American stay. His text doesn't always read very smoothly, but the letters to and from family members and lots of interesting photographs help speed the pace of what is a thorough slice of immigrant life. Most fascinating is the account of the development of Dvorak's great New World symphony: when the composer heard one of his assistants sing slave songs, he realized that American classical music should come from the melodies and rhythms of all its people. In a long final note on sources, Horowitz describes his extensive research and acknowledges where he has imagined scenes and conversations. Roger Leslie
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Dvorak in America. How the 9th symphony was born. Thrilling !

A brief but thorough biography of the great composer and his sources of inspiration. Written for young adult audiences but a good introduction for older readers as well.

Great middle school book of Dvorak's years in America. 70 year olds will love it, too. I did.

I see that Mr. Beckerman has submitted a positive review, which is very gracious, considering that his book is the leading competitor on this subject. I purchased both "Dvorak in America" and "New Worlds of Dvorak," and (sorry, Mr. Beckerman) my vote is solidly for "Dvorak in America." "Dvorak in America" is a simple, informative book with very little conjecture. Horowitz is clear in the opening pages that this is a book accessible to teenage readers, and he gets the story right in a concise and interesting way. His scholarly efforts are persuasive and he successfully merges divergent details to create a fascinating account of Dvorak's journey toward the first truly "American" symphony. On the

other hand, Beckerman's book shares much of the same research and even comes with a CD of excerpts, but the positives end there. Beckerman is bent on interpreting every phrase of the New World Symphony and resorts to conjecture, even delving into other writers' conjecture. It soon becomes a tangled mess in which the hard facts are no longer recognizable. The truth is (sadly) simple: We don't really know much about Dvorak's intentions in the New World Symphony. He shared just enough to give the piece "American" credentials, then promptly shut up to avoid tagging it as a programmatic tone poem. And that's just the way we should enjoy it! We're supposed to accept the American inspiration while giving the notes themselves a fair chance to speak to us, and speak to us they do! If I had overlooked this piece before (mostly because of its overwhelming popularity), I now find it an inspiration and a joy--with greater thanks to Mr. Horowitz than Mr. Beckerman. Read this wonderful little book and move quickly to the music itself. A single phrase of this music says more than any scholarly volume.

...it's very well written, it's hugely informative, AND it's about the greatest composer who is to this day largely under-appreciated!

Mr. Horowitz, the author, gives us scant information about Dvorak's stay in this country. Most of this I had read before in other books. The author seems to make a case that Dvorak used Black or Native American themes in his works and that theory is very questionable. I would like to know how Dvorak worked: Did he make sketches in four-part harmony, did he write directly to manuscript paper. Was the 9th Symphony completely orchestrated when he left New York in June, 1893, or did he do the orchestration in Spillville, Iowa that summer? And, of course, the author continuously uses a false title for the 9th Symphony, which I find very annoying...THE NEW WORLD SYMPHONY is not the title that Dvorak gave it. It was titled, "From The New World" and that alone should be used. Most of this book is wasted effort. Jack Nelson 3940 Park Blvd. #703 San Diego, CA 92103

Joseph Horowitz loves the late 19th and early 20th world of culture. He is simultaneously scholar and activist. His bold, unprecedented project is to take historical moments and richly employ them to introduce the excitement of classical music to young readers. He could have no better scenario than Dvorak in the New World. Here the composer seeks to create an American musical language based on a synthesis of the high symphonic style with elements of Black and Indian music. The characters are vividly drawn and the whole is both beautifully written and wonderfully gauged for young readers. A real treat!

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