

notes to his sister, Fanny, to see "how deeply impressed I have been by the Hebrides..." He finished the composition on December 16, 1830. Its first version was entitled *Die einsame Insale (The Lonely Island)*, which he changed after a revision in 1832, to *Die Hebriden*, with the subtitle, *Fingal's Cave*. In its music's suggestive portrayal of the bleak scenery of the northern isles, Mendelssohn puts to ample use his inexhaustible treasure-chest of imagination in conjuring up onomatopoeic effects evoking the hum of sea-waves or the whizz of wind. The work's premiere took place in London, on May 14, 1832, with the composer conducting.

Jitka Slavíková

English translation by Ivan Vomáčka

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy wrote his first mature work, the overture to Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* which is still often performed today, when he was aged seventeen. He went on to compose works in all genres – for orchestra and chamber ensembles, oratorios and cantatas. Without doubt one of the most played Mendelssohn's works is the *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in E minor, Op. 64*. The first sketches date from 1838, but the work did not take shape until the years 1841 to 1844 at the instance of the celebrated violinist Ferdinand David, to whom it is dedicated. The concerto is enchantingly melodious, classical in temperance of expression, and demands technical virtuosity. Mendelssohn combines disparate elements in a work that appears organically unified. The three-movements form is typical for classicism, but in content the work epitomizes the age of Romanticism with the music surging unceasingly and with a cadenza to round off the first movement and a dreamy cantilena in the second. After Nicolò Paganini's works, the *Concerto in E minor* is unquestionably the first great Romantic violin concerto and occupies a central place in the world violin repertoire along with the concerti of Tchaikovsky, Brahms and Dvořák.

Aleš Březina, 1997

English translation by Giles Shephard, 1997

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904) spent three years (1892–1895) in the USA as the director of The American National Conservatoire of Music, in New York. This "new world" brought him untold opportunities, inspirational, social and financial. During these three years he wrote a series of superb works, at the helm the *Symphony No. 9, Op. 95*, typically called *From the New World*, and *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in B minor, Op. 104*. He took great pleasure in the wonderful sensation of being a reverend artist who was greeted on arrival by crowds of admirers and eulogies in the press. His works were performed to great acclaim in major cities – New York, Boston, Chicago etc. However, Dvořák was not happy and he never got used to America. Being away from his native country for so long, even though he returned for a short while for the summer holidays in 1894 and had his family around him, he felt increasingly homesick. When financial problems also began to arise with the Conservatoire's founder, Mrs Jeannette Thurber, who still owed him some of his pay, he decided not to renew his contract with the institution, despite her insistence that he stay. While, for America, he was a typical example of a "poor boy" who had started out in the butcher's trade and had been propelled to the top, becoming a leading world composer, he never became a "weltman". At heart he remained a simple Czech who loved his country more than all the glory the world could offer.