

# Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904)

## Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95

### (From the New World)

*Adagio–Allegro molto*

*Largo*

*Scherzo: molto vivace*

*Allegro con fuoco*

By 1890 Dvořák had established himself as a major creative force in European music. That year he conducted his Eighth Symphony with great success in London and Frankfurt, and completed his *Requiem*. This was performed the following year at the Birmingham Festival, which had commissioned it. In 1891 he started to teach composition at the Prague Conservatory of Music, and received an honorary doctorate from the University of Cambridge. In September 1891 he celebrated his fiftieth birthday at his country home in the village of Vysoka.

While celebrating his European success he was at the same time negotiating to begin a new chapter of his career in the USA. In 1888 Mrs Jeanette Thurber, the wife of a millionaire New York merchant, asked Congress for a grant of \$200,000 to set up a conservatory of music. Although she received no money from Congress, it did grant to her a charter for the conservatory, the only such one to be created to this day. Mrs Thurber put up an initial \$100,000 for the company's first year, and raised further monies from wealthy contemporaries including August Belmont and Andrew Carnegie.

In June 1891 Mrs Thurber invited Dvořák to take up the directorship of her institution, now named the National Conservatory of Music, New York. The terms offered were generous: in return for an annual salary of \$15,000, nearly thirty times the equivalent of what he was receiving in Prague, he agreed to a two-year contract. This required him to conduct ten concerts of his music each year, to teach composition for six hours weekly, and to conduct orchestral rehearsals for four hours each week. Otherwise he was a free man, provided also with four months' holiday each year.

Dvořák accepted these terms and left Prague for New York in September 1892. On 21 October 1892 he gave his first concert at Carnegie Hall, which included his recently completed trilogy of overtures, *In Nature's*

*Realm, Carnival, and Otello*. The public reception was wholly favourable. At the beginning of 1893 Dvořák started seriously to sketch his new Symphony. As with the Eighth it was quickly completed, on 24 May. The first performance was given by the New York Philharmonic Society, the forerunner of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Anton Seidl on 15 December 1893, with unqualified success. Since then the Symphony has remained one of the most popular in the whole repertoire.

The origins of the Symphony's nickname 'From the New World' have clearly been explained in the memoirs of Kovarik, a close colleague of Dvořák. On the evening of the day on which Seidl had told Dvořák of the proposed date for the first performance, and just as Kovarik was about to take the score to Seidl, "the Master wrote at the last minute on the title page 'From the New World'. Till then there was only 'E minor Symphony No. 8'. The title 'From the New World' caused then and still causes today, at least here in America, much confusion and division of opinion. There have been and are many people who thought and think that the title is to be understood as meaning the 'American' Symphony, i.e. a symphony with American music. Quite a wrong idea. This title means nothing more than 'Impressions and Greetings from the New World' – as the Master himself more than once explained. And so when at length it was performed and when the Master read all sorts of views on it as to whether he had or had not created an 'American' music, he smiled and said, 'It seems that I have got them all confused' and added: 'At home they will understand at once what I meant'."

The first movement commences with a slow introduction, which swiftly changes from sadness to a passionate outburst. Following an answering set of phrases, the orchestra then repeats the theme, before leading into a second theme which in turn leads to the theme for flute which is reminiscent of the spiritual *Swing low, sweet chariot*. In the development section, the themes follow one another, and the recapitulation is reached through various bold changes of key. This boldness continues, with the original second subject presented in keys remote from the Symphony's harmonic base. This harmonic subtlety, which is a notable feature of the