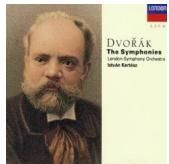


Antonin Dvorak – Symphony No. 8 (Kertesz) [1992]

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 22 October 2009 13:37 - Last Updated Sunday, 03 November 2013 11:29

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01. *Allegro con brio* 02. *Adagio* 03. *Allegretto grazioso; Molto vivace* 04. *Allegro ma non troppo* London Symphony Orchestra István Kertész - conductor

Antonín Dvorák was something of a “mixed-up kid”. The son of the village butcher at Nelahozeves, in Bohemia, Antonín left school at 11 to learn the trade. However, showing promise as a violinist, off he was sent to an uncle in Zlonice – to learn German! While there, he took in viola, organ, piano and counterpoint but, apparently, not harmony and such like. Eventually, he entered the Prague Organ School, graduating not as an organist but a violist.

Around this time, he “straightened himself out”. He joined a band that became the core of the Provisional Theatre Orchestra (est. 1862), which was often conducted by Smetana. When his own music began to attract attention, Dvorák left the orchestra to concentrate on composition, supporting himself in time-honoured fashion by working as a church organist and purveying private tuition.

His income was bolstered by Ministry of Education stipends in 1875 and 1877 (some sources quote “Austrian National Prizes, 1874 and 1876”). A further application in 1888 brought interest from Hanslick and Brahms, who commended him to the publisher Simrock. He quickly achieved prominence, attracting the attention of such as Joachim, Richter and Bülow, and making several visits to England.

Far from being diminished by his influences, Dvorák absorbed and took nourishment from them. Having subsumed an early Wagnerian influence, the Smetana experience fired him with a passion for his native folk-culture. Dvorák brilliantly integrated the vital, attractive Czech

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folk-idioms – which admirably complemented his Schubertian talent for melody and pastoralism – with classical form and counterpoint.

This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the Eighth Symphony of 1889. This carefree composition finds him free of the dark demeanour of the preceding Seventh (1884-5), which was composed in the shadow of the death of his beloved mother, in a period he described as “of doubt and obstinacy, silent sorrow and resignation”. Equally, since he hadn’t yet crossed the Big Pond, the Eighth was unaffected by the emotional ambivalence of the Ninth (1893), in which the excitement of new and vibrant cultures collided with a nagging, dispiriting homesickness.

The Eighth was for a time known as the “English”, for no better reason than its publication by Novello following a falling-out with Simrock – other than that, it’s about as “English” as its third movement’s dumkas. --- Paul Serotsky, musicweb-international.com

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