

DVORAK IN AMERICA

Advance notice regarding DVOŘÁK IN AMERICA (Amadeus Press, 1993):

What a wonderful book! The most impressive aspect is the artful way the volume flows effortlessly from one chapter—and one section—to the next. Of all the books on American music at the turn of the century, none brings together so many interesting and richly interrelated dimensions as Dvořák in America.

—Dr. Robert Winter, Chairman of the Music Department of UCLA; author of Beethoven, Performers, and Critics (1980) and former editor of the magazine, Nineteenth-Century Music.

This is a long overdue and thoroughly fascinating exploration of Dvořák's sojourn and influence in America. John Tibbetts is to be congratulated for his passionate commitment to the subject and for this indispensable contribution to Dvořák studies.

—Dr. Leon Botstein, President of Bard College, Chairman of the Bard Music Festival, Editor of The Musical Quarterly, and Artistic Director of the American Symphony.

As Americans, our memories are short. Even our musicians do not realize that a hundred years ago, Dvořák's New York was one of the world's musical capitols. And Dvořák plunged in with inspirational gusto, embracing the vernacular sources of American music as well as its high-culture products. Dvořák in America scans a panorama of American music, high and low. This book is as valuable as it is overdue.

—Joseph Horowitz, former Music Critic of the New York Times and author of Conversations with Arrau and Understanding Toscanini.

This is the best book on Dvořák I have ever seen! It is so well written, so fascinating, and so vivid, that Dvořák really comes to live! It is a marvelous contribution to Dvořák scholarship as well, and I congratulate the writers on their achievement!

—Ruth Laredo, concert pianist

I think it is very important that we in America know about this extraordinary chapter in Dvořák's life; and that he wrote so much remarkable music during his visit. I'm happy to see that at last this story has been given its due in this wonderful book.

—Eugene Istomin, concert pianist

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Two Reviews

Dvořák in America: 1892-1895. Edited by John C. Tibbetts. Portland, Ore: Amadeus Press, 1993. [x, 447 p. ISBN 0-931340-56-X. \$32.95.]

Notes, December 1994, 604-606

Antonín Dvořák's sesquicentennial occurred in 1991, and the hundredth anniversary of his tenure as director of the now defunct, but formerly influential, National Conservatory in New York (1892-95) is upon us. A range of conferences and festivals, in New York, Iowa, New Orleans, and Washington, related to recent Dvořák scholarship and these events, has led to several books.

Dvořák in America: 1892-1895, is, in its editor's words, "not a biography ... but a portrait of a figure in a landscape. It views [Dvořák's] New World visit through a series of interpretive lenses—the diverse perspectives of the musicologist, the cultural historian, the archivist, the educator, the musician, the psychoanalyst, the novelist, and the media reporter" (p. 3), the last being John C. Tibbetts himself. This book is nothing if not richly varied—in tone, in content and in quality. It consists of three principal sections: "Dvořák's New World: An American Sampler," including an introduction, a timeline, and ten contrasting essays concerned with Dvořák's interests and activities in America; the second section devoted to Dvořák's music, ten analyses entitled "New American Songs: The American Compositions"; and the shorter third section, called "Dvořák Today," four chapters discussing Dvořák reception, his modern image, and current scholarship. Drier, more analytical chapters are interwoven with Tibbetts's tone poems, cheerful verbal rhapsodies on conference events, and the general atmosphere of New Orleans and Spillville, among other things.

Reading Tibbetts's collection one can't help but think that a central reason for Dvořák's attractiveness to Americans comes from our sense of his innocent euphoria in America and his willingness to hear as much American music as possible. Not for Dvořák and his devotees was the United States a land bereft of a national song, as it was so often characterized by contemporary intellectuals.

Tibbetts's authors pursue many lines of inquiry, with results ranging from the impressionistically limp to the coolly rational. Overlapping strands of information among the articles provide a nice counterpoint of views and facts. A variety of opinions is expressed on several topics familiar to Dvořák specialists: whether he did or did not know Theodore Baker's doctoral thesis "Über die Musik der nordamerikanischer Wilden" (University of Leipzig, 1882); the exact nature of his musical borrowings and sources for the New World Symphony; the work of his students; and the implications of his several comments to the American press about national music. Even some subjects slightly skew to the main title have found a place in this book, such as Graham Melville-Mason's report on Dvořák's popularity in England and J. Bunker Clark's piece on Anthony Philip Heinrich ("a Bohemian predecessor to Dvořák in the wilds of America," p. vii). The chapters devoted to separate musical works range from modest aperçus to intriguing original syntheses. Deane Root's source study on the Dvořák-Stephen Foster connection falls into the latter category.

Because Dvořák so fatuously struck the right note for American racial minorities,

a consistent theme of many of the commemorative studies is the attention he gave to Native Americans and African Americans. Jean Snyder's excellent article on black singer-composer Harry Burleigh is a high-point in Tibbetts's collection, and Michael Beckerman's close study of Dvořák's interest in Henry Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha* is an informative gloss on the poetry used to structure the New World Symphony, as well as a cautionary tale not to equate an interest in romanticized Indianist narrative with bona fide ethnography.

In his final section, Tibbetts brings us up-to-date on the human dimension of musicological scholarship by providing a candid journalistic commentary. He shares the frustration experienced by conferees suffering through long-winded papers, he cheers on the dogged researchers who share their passions for the music they study when new discoveries are made, and he looks at how symbolic and historical landmarks clash with modern interests: Dvořák's residence in New York was razed in August 1991 in order to make space for the building of an AIDS hospice.

Altogether Tibbetts has made something in the nature of a patchwork quilt, with some complicated patches as well as some simple ones. Its overall appearance pleases — it is well illustrated—and it has much useful information. A potpourri of perspectives, it is a reader-friendly book, approachable by specialist and nonspecialist alike interested in exploring Dvořák's continuing impact.

Thomas L. Riis, University of Colorado at Boulder

Dvořák in America, 1892-1895. ed. by John C. **Tibbetts.** Amadeus, 1993. (Dist. by Timber), 447p bibl indexes ISBN 0-931340-56-X, \$32.95 . Reviewed in 1993dec ` *Choice*

When noted Bohemian composer Antonín Dvořák came to New York (1893-95) to direct the National Conservatory of Music (now defunct), he set in motion a far-reaching series of events governing the character and direction of American music. Dvořák described as his mission “to discover what young Americans have in them and to help them express it. The new American school of music must strike its roots deeply in its own soil.” This splendid collection of 26 articles by 21 specialists fully reveals that the master found America’s “soil” best for cultivating diversity. His influence can be found to varying degrees in three successive waves of nationalism, all rooted in the belief that a vital art music must be sustained by folk music: the Indianist movement of the 1900s, the use of African American idioms from 1910s through the ‘30s, and finally, the latent discovery of our Anglo folk heritage in the 1930s and ‘40s. The first and largest part of the volume is devoted to articles lending context and significance to Dvořák’s work in the US (nationalism, the National Conservatory, the cultural milieu of the ‘90s); the middle part contains descriptions of Dvořák’s numerous “American” compositions, including the Symphony no. 9, “From the New World”; and the final part explores Dvořák’s continuing influence in America today. Recommended for all libraries.

W. K Kearns, University of Colorado at Boulder