

A NEW *World*

October 16, 2021

Photo: Jeffery Noble



A New World

Saturday, October 16, 2021 • 7:30PM
Grace Presbyterian Church

Peoria Symphony Orchestra
George Stelluto · Conductor
Richard Hirschl · Cello

Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in B minor, Op. 104

Allegro
Adagio non troppo
Allegro

Antonín Dvořák
(1841-1904)

Richard Hirschl • Cello

INTERMISSION

Symphony No. 9 in E Minor, Op. 95 ("From the New World")

Adagio - Allegro molto
Largo
Molto vivace
Allegro con fuoco

Antonín Dvořák

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This program is partially supported by a grant
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Photo: Todd Rosenberg

Richard Hirschl • Cello

Richard Hirschl became an artist because of a family commitment to music. His father Richard Sr. was a fine amateur cellist, his mother Rosemary was a church organist and music educator, and his sister Ann also became a professional violinist. The family would play chamber music together and often performed at church worship services.

Richard was raised in Washington, Missouri, a small town on the Missouri River west of St. Louis. Growing up, his earliest passion was motorcycling, so his father harnessed that interest by promising him a motorcycle for his tenth birthday—if he completed his cello study books by then. When that was accomplished, he was allowed to ride his motorcycle in proportion to the number of hours he practiced his cello daily.

As time went by, Richard was further motivated as a cellist by joining the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra and through lessons with SLSO cellist Savely Schuster. Before embarking on his first summer music camp at the Castleman Quartet Program in New York at the age of sixteen, Schuster arranged for Richard to play for a friend, the eminent cellist Leonard Rose, at his home in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. Much to the surprise of the Hirschl family, Rose invited Richard to study with him at The Juilliard School in New York City for the approaching school year.

Moving from rural Missouri to New York City was a shocking proposal for a boy halfway through high school. Perhaps because it was so startling—but mostly because of the invitation of such a towering and admired musician—Richard enthusiastically embraced the opportunity. The Hirschls enrolled him in the Pre-College Division at Juilliard and arranged for him to live at a boarding school in Tarrytown, the Hackley School. Richard blossomed under the extraordinary guidance of Rose and his assistant, Channing Robbins.

As a student at Juilliard, Richard won the annual school concerto competition. As a result, he played the Barber Cello Concerto with the Juilliard Orchestra under the direction of Stanislaw Skrowascewski in Avery Fischer Hall. During that time, he was also a prize winner in the Irving M. Klein International Competition in San Francisco. He also toured South America as a soloist and played the Milhaud Cello Concerto with the Jupiter Symphony in Alice Tully

Peoria Symphony Orchestra

October 16, 2021

George Stelluto • Conductor

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Hall. After receiving his bachelor's degree in 1987 and a master's degree in 1988 from Juilliard, Richard successfully auditioned for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1989. He was hired by Sir Georg Solti, and has been a member of the orchestra since that time.

In addition to his great enjoyment of the orchestral literature and life in the orchestra, Richard is also deeply committed to teaching young cellists. Teaching lessons began as a hobby and blossomed into a full-fledged passion. Two of his current Chicago Symphony Orchestra colleagues are former students of his, and many others among the hundreds of students he has taught are now esteemed and highly

successful professional musicians.

Richard plays a cello made in 1710 by the Venetian luthier Matteo Goffriller and a cello made in 2014 by the Chicago luthier William Whedbee.

He and his wife Laura make their home in a downtown high-rise, where they are the proud parents of Ava Clare and Vivian Rose Hirschl. Continuing in the tradition initiated in his youth, Richard, Laura, Ava and Vivian play chamber music together and have performed in worship services at their church, The Orchard in Arlington Heights. Richard and Laura also enjoy motorcycling together.

Maestro's Message

Only time will tell if we are truly a new world or an old one that has or hasn't learned new lessons. So, I chose to bring you a program of an old-world composer in the new one. Antonin Dvorák composed both his *Cello Concerto* and his *Symphony No. 9* "From the New World" in New York City. And while they have elements of nostalgia for his "Old World" Czech homeland, they both reveal his new experiences and discoveries in New York and beyond. Native American music and African-American spirituals, the country's vast spaces, and city life all influenced him in ways apparent and hidden. Both of these works have a misty, dream-like quality of memories past and current longings—coupled with the power, awesomeness, and sense of discovery of an Albert Bierstadt painting. They speak of old friends and nature, cities that are charming, and a pace of life with time for reflection and to appreciate beauty. I can imagine the opening of the symphony taking place on a foggy morning upon entering New York harbor and suddenly seeing the Statue of Liberty appear out of the mist. And the symphony has an out-of-this-world component as well—Neil Armstrong took a recording of it to the moon on Apollo 11 in 1969. It is the first human music to travel beyond our planet, predating the famous Golden Record on Voyager in 1977. The dilemma is this: Has Dvorák painted two musical pictures of the past, or is he hinting at a place we should strive to go in the future? It's hard to say. And speaking of old friends, let's give a warm "welcome back" to CSO cellist Richard Hirschl, who has waited since March 2020—some twenty months since his last PSO appearance was cancelled—to walk out on our PSO stage. Welcome back Richard! —G. Stelluto

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Written by Michael Allsen ©2021

In "A New World," the Peoria Symphony Orchestra presents two of the last and finest orchestral works by the Bohemian composer Antonín Dvorák. Both were written while he was in America in 1892-1895. Richard Hirschl, a longtime member of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, joins us for Dvorák's expansive *Cello Concerto*. After intermission, we turn to his enduringly popular *Symphony No. 9*, which he subtitled "From the New World."

Dvorák in America

In 1892, Jeannette Thurber made Dvorák an offer he couldn't refuse. Thurber, the wife of a wealthy New York City businessman, had a dream of raising the standards of American art music to equal those of Europe. She had founded the National Conservatory of Music in 1885, and recruited some of the finest teachers in the world to serve on its faculty. At this time, Dvorák's reputation as a composer was surpassed only by that of Brahms, and Thurber resolved to hire him as director of the Conservatory. Dvorák was lukewarm at first, but the terms she offered were very generous: a two-year contract, with very light teaching duties and four months of paid leave each year. The annual salary of \$15,000 was about 25 times what Dvorák was making as an instructor at the Prague Conservatory, and in the end, he accepted, eventually spending nearly three years in this country.

Dvorák enjoyed his American sojourn. American audiences adored his music, and he blended comfortably into New York society. He spent two summers in the small town of Spillville, Iowa, where he felt at home in a large Bohemian community. He had several promising composition students at the Conservatory, and agreed

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heartily with Thurber's ideal that American composers should foster their own distinctive style of composition. He wrote that:

"My own duty as a teacher is not so much to interpret Beethoven, Wagner, and other masters of the past, but to give what encouragement I can to the young musicians of America... This nation has already surpassed so many others in marvelous inventions and feats of engineering and commerce, and it has made an honorable place for itself in literature—so it must assert itself in the other arts, and especially in the art of music."

Three of Dvorák's most profound works were written during his three-year stay in America: the *Symphony No. 9* ("From the New World"), his F Major string quartet, and the *Cello Concerto*.

Antonín Dvorák (1841-1904)

Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in B minor, Op. 104

Dvorák wrote this concerto in 1894-95, and conducted the first performance in London in 1896 with Leo Stein as soloist.

Duration 40:00.

Background

The immediate inspiration for his cello concerto may have been a performance of a concerto by Victor Herbert, then principal cellist with the New York Philharmonic. However, his friend Hanus Wihan, cellist of the Bohemian Quartet, had been urging Dvorák to write a concerto even before he left for America. The first sketches of the *Cello Concerto* date from the spring of 1894, when Dvorák was briefly back in Bohemia. He completed the score in New York City in February of 1895. When he returned to Prague that April, he handed the score over to Wihan, who carefully edited the solo part. However, Dvorák made several more revisions to the concerto, and when it was published in 1896, very few of Wihan's ideas were used. This chilled their friendship, and Wihan seems to have been especially disappointed by revisions made to the end of the third movement. He had requested the concerto end with a grand virtuoso cadenza; but at the last minute Dvorák changed the final 60 measures to round off the concerto in a more contemplative mood. In the end, although the published score was dedicated to Wihan, he refused to play the premiere. This concerto was to be Dvorák last completed orchestral work.

The movements of the concerto are symphonic in scope, dwarfing Dvorák's violin concerto of 1882. In fact, it may originally have been conceived as a symphony in the composer's mind. When some friends from New York City took him to visit Niagara Falls in



1892, he was deeply impressed, exclaiming, “My word, that is going to be a symphony in B minor!” This symphony was never written, but the B minor cello concerto might well have its roots in this moment of excitement. There is also a moment of much more personal significance in the second movement. Its lyrical second theme is drawn from one of Dvorák’s songs, *Lasst mich allein in meinen Träumen gehn* (“Let me wander alone in my dreams,” Op. 82). This seems to have been a tribute to Dvorák’s sister-in-law, Josefina Kauric. The composer had fallen deeply in love with her as a young man in the 1860s, but she did not return his love. Dvorák would eventually marry Josefina’s sister Anna, but he and Josefina remained close friends throughout their lives. He was devastated when he received word in New York that Josefina was dying. The song was a favorite of hers, and its text probably reflects Dvorák’s emotions at the time.

What You’ll Hear

The opening movement (*Allegro*) begins quietly in the woodwinds, but soon reaches a tremendous peak, with the full orchestra building on the opening idea. The lovely second theme is laid out by the horn and clarinet. When the soloist enters, it is with aggressive variations of the opening theme. The cello’s treatment of the second theme is much more straightforward and lyrical, although it quickly spins off into an ornate set of runs. At the end, Dvorák brings back the themes in reverse order. The movement ends with a dazzling, cadenza-style passage by the soloist and a triumphant statement of the main theme by the brass.

The slow movement (*Adagio non troppo*) begins with a lovely folk-like melody in the solo clarinet, which is then taken up and given broader treatment by the cello. The second idea, Dvorák’s tribute to his beloved Josefina, appears after a forceful passage for full orchestra. This melody is expanded in conversations between the soloist and the woodwinds. The orchestra returns forcefully to announce a more tragic central section. Throughout this episode, Dvorák makes prominent use of woodwind soloists and rounds it off with a beautiful horn chorale. When the folk-like theme returns, it is highly ornamented by the

soloist and overlaid by a solo flute. In the conclusion, the orchestral accompaniment remains quietly in the background, allowing the cello to carry the most expressive moments in the concerto.

The final movement (*Allegro*) is a rondo, with a march-style main theme introduced by the horns and quickly developed by the cello. The first contrasting episode has the cello playing above a sparse woodwind background. This theme is eventually expanded to full strength, and rounded off with ominous trombone chords. After a brief return of the march music, Dvorák begins another contrasting section, now in a slower tempo and a major key. The cello touches upon the march theme again, and the closing episode comes as a series of reminiscences of themes from previous movements. At the end, the orchestra provides a brief coda, with a final forceful statement of the march.

Antonín Dvorák

Symphony No. 9 in E Minor, Op. 95 (“From the New World”)

Dvorák composed this work in New York in the winter and spring of 1892-93. Anton Seidl conducted the New York Philharmonic in the first performance on December 16, 1893. Duration 40:00.

Background

The “New World” symphony is the most famous of the works Dvorák composed while in America. According to Jeannette Thurber, the symphony was written at her suggestion. She felt that Dvorák should write a symphony “embodying his experiences and feelings in America.” It was an immediate hit with audiences in both America and Europe. The new symphony closely matched the style of his other late symphonies, one based on the German symphonic style of his mentor Brahms, and with occasional hints of Bohemian folk style. There are a few “Americanisms” in the *Symphony No. 9*, however. As a strongly nationalistic Bohemian, Dvorák frequently evoked the spirit of his homeland in his works by quoting folk tunes and imitating the style of Bohemian music.

According to his own account, Dvorák attempted to do the same with regard to American music in the *Symphony No. 9*. He was particularly interested in two forms of music that had their origins in the United States: Native American music and African American spirituals. Dvorák frequently quizzed one of his students at the National Conservatory—a talented young African American singer named Harry T. Burleigh—about spirituals. He transcribed every spiritual tune Burleigh knew. His contact with Native American music was a little more tenuous; most of what Dvorák knew came from rather dubious published transcriptions. (The only time he ever heard an “authentic” Native American performance was when he went to Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show!) While he did not use any true American melodies in the symphony, Dvorák immersed himself in American music and culture, and wrote musical themes from this inspiration. At its heart, however, the *Symphony No. 9* is a work “From the New World” by an Old World composer. Dvorák was not trying to create an “American Style”—he firmly believed that was a job for American composers.

What You’ll Hear

The opening movement begins with an *Adagio* introduction, which gradually accelerates into the main body of the movement (*Allegro molto*). The horns announce the main theme, a distinctive motto. This bold minor-key theme will appear in various forms in every movement of the symphony. Dvorák introduces two contrasting ideas: a dancelike minor-key melody, introduced by the oboe, and somewhat brighter theme heard in the solo flute. This sonata-form movement features a lengthy development section, which focuses on the motto theme. After a conventional recapitulation, there is a long coda which again explores the motto theme.

There are a few programmatic elements in the *Symphony No. 9*: according to Dvorák, the second and third movements were inspired by Longfellow’s *Song of Hiawatha*. In the *Largo*, it is *Hiawatha’s* “Funeral in the Forest.” This movement is set in a broad, three-part form. It opens with a solemn brass chorale, which leads into the movement’s main theme, a long Romantic melody played by the English horn. (This melody became popular as a nostalgic song called *Goin’ Home*—so popular, in fact, that it was widely assumed to be a traditional spiritual that Dvorák had quoted!) The contrasting middle section features a more contemplative melody heard first in the flute. The movement ends with a return of the English horn melody.

Dvorák again referred to *Hiawatha* in the scherzo (*Molto vivace*), stating that this movement was supposed to depict “a feast in the wood, where the Indians dance.” The first section features two main themes: an offbeat melody introduced by solo woodwinds and a more lyrical idea played by the woodwinds as a section. Echoes of the motto theme lead gradually into a central trio. The trio section is certainly dancelike, but its waltz-style themes seem to have a lot more to do with a Viennese ballroom than a Native American dance. The opening section returns, and Dvorák closes the movement with more reminiscences of the motto theme.

The finale (*Allegro con fuoco*) begins with a few stormy introductory measures, and then Dvorák brings in the main idea in the brass. After this powerful theme, there is a more lyrical melody in the solo clarinet. Dvorák used the lengthy development not only to work with this movement’s themes, but also to develop music from previous movements. In particular, there are versions of the motto and a faster reading of the *Largo’s* main theme. After recapitulating the fourth movement’s main themes, Dvorák launches into a huge coda, which again brings back material from previous movements. ♦

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