

## Mostly Symphonies 27.

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“Dvořák and America.” Joseph HOROWITZ and Michael BECKERMAN: *Hiawatha Melodrama* (after Dvořák, 1994-2013; arr. Angel GIL-ORDÓÑEZ, 2013)<sup>1</sup>. Antonín DVOŘÁK: *Larghetto* from *Violin Sonatina*, Op. 100 (1893)<sup>2</sup>; *Humoresque No. 4* and *No. 7* from *Eight Humoresques*, Op. 101 (1894)<sup>3</sup>; *Suite in A major*, Op. 98 (1894-95)<sup>4</sup>. William Arms FISHER: *Goin’ Home* (1922)<sup>5</sup>. Arthur FARWELL: *Navajo War Dance No. 2*, Op. 29 (1904)<sup>6</sup>; *Pawnee Horses*, Op. 20, No. 2 (1905)<sup>7</sup>; *Pawnee Horses* for chorus, Op. 102 (1937)<sup>8</sup>. Kevin Deas<sup>1,5</sup> (narrator, bass-bar), Zhou Qian<sup>2</sup> (vln), Edmund Battersby<sup>2</sup> (pno), Benjamin Pasternack<sup>3,4,6,7</sup> (pno), University of Texas Chamber Singers<sup>7</sup>, James Morrow<sup>7</sup> (cond.), PostClassical Ensemble<sup>1,5</sup>, Angel Gil-Ordóñez<sup>1,5</sup> (cond.). Naxos 8.559777 (1 CD) (<http://www.naxos.com/>).

Antonín DVOŘÁK: *Symphony No. 6*, Op. 60 (1880); *Suite in A major*, Op. 98b, “*American Suite*” (1894; arr. DVOŘÁK, 1895). Luzerner Sinfonieorchester, James Gaffigan (cond.). Harmonia Mundi HMC 902188 (1 CD) (<http://www.harmoniamundi.com/>).

Antonín DVOŘÁK: *Symphony No. 8*, Op. 88 (1889). Leoš JANÁČEK: *Symphonic Suite* from *Jenufa* (1896-1902; arr. Tomáš ILLE and Manfred HONECK, 2013). Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Manfred Honeck (cond.). Reference Recordings FR-710SACD (1 SACD) (<http://www.referencerecordings.com/>).

Examining these three discs together, we may well wonder to what degree Dvořák influenced American music and how American music may have returned the favor. Despite a modest American tenure (1892-95), the Czech composer was clearly influenced by Native American and

other tunes heard on these shores. He encouraged American composers to look to this country for inspiration as well.

Contrasting **Reference Recordings** and **Harmonia Mundi**'s wares, I propose we have an American **No. 8** and a Mitteleuropäische **No. 6**. Honeck's **Eighth** is exemplary, with plenty of sunshine and warmth. Honeck's notes suggest **No. 8** is the most Czech of all Dvořák's symphonies; however, because of that **Scherzo Furiant, No. 6** really can't be anything but Czech. Gaffigan's last movement is energetic but light on bring-down-the-house fire, especially at the final fugato burst.

Undeniably slushy, the five movements of the orchestrated *American Suite* could be late-entry Slavonic dances, except that Dvořák did admit to using New World ideas. On this release, they sound very European, with an emphasis on harmony over melody. Opening with assertive xylophone, the *Jenufa* suite proclaims an opera less pessimistic than in actuality. The excerpts tease out marvelous details. This suite begs investigating the whole opera.

**Naxos'** main offering is the *Hiawatha Melodrama* assembled from Dvořák's music. It startles to encounter bits of the **Ninth** and other pieces in this context. Their union with Longfellow's stanzas is not farfetched, and Beckerman's argument convinces. Deas provides grand narration for what are now quaint words.

The release competes with the familiar versions of content incorporated into *Hiawatha* and works by Fisher and Farwell which reflect Dvořák's influence. Fisher took the second movement *Largo* from Dvořák's **Ninth** and added a text. Farwell's Indian-influenced works require context setting today. Enthusiastic mimicry makes up for precise transcriptions. The *Navajo War Dance* uses silence effectively. The two versions of *Pawnee Horses* (piano solo and a later choral arrangement) recalled Ornstein's rhythms. Dvořák's *Humoresque, Op. 101, No. 7*, is a staple of beginning instrumentalists. In this context the **Op. 98** suite sounds very American owing to the emphasized melody.