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Dvořák: Cello Concerto

Dvořák's Cello Concerto, composed during his second stay in America, is one of the most popular works in the orchestral repertoire. This guide explores Dvořák's reasons for composing a concerto for an instrument which he at one time considered unsuitable for solo work, its relationship to his American period compositions and how it forms something of a bridge with his operatic interests. A particular focus is the Concerto's unique qualities: why it stands apart in terms of form, melodic character and texture from the rest of Dvořák's orchestral music. The role of the dedicatee of the work, Hanuš Wihan, in its creation is also considered, as well as are performing traditions as they have developed in the twentieth century. In addition the guide explores the extraordinary emotional background to the work which links it intimately to the woman who was probably Dvořák's first love.

JAN SMACZNY is Hamilton Harty Professor of Music at the Queen's University of Belfast and has written widely on many aspects of Czech music.

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521660501

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First published 1999

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Smaczny, Jan.
Dvořák cello concerto / Jan Smaczny.
p. cm. – (Cambridge music handbooks)
Includes bibliographical references, discography, and index.
ISBN 0 521 66050 5 (hardback); 0 521 66903 0 (paperback)
1. Dvořák, Antonín, 1841–1904. Concertos, violoncello, orchestra,
op. 104, B minor. I. Title. II. Series.
MT130.D9S6 1999
784.2′74–dc21 98-52746 CIP MN

ISBN-13 978-0-521-66050-1 hardback
ISBN-10 0-521-66050-5 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-66903-0 paperback
ISBN-10 0-521-66903-0 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2007

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For Duncan Fielden

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Preface and acknowledgements

In an interview with John Tibbetts, the cellist Lynn Harrell spoke movingly about the emotional depth of Dvořák's Cello Concerto, adding that it was a 'unique piece of music'. Few would disagree, but in some ways the extreme popularity of the Concerto – at present over sixty recordings can be listed – has concealed its unusual qualities; while certainly not breeding contempt for the work, its familiarity might seem to obviate the need for close examination since its appeal is evident to any listener. And yet, the closer one looks, the more surprising this Concerto becomes. In form, texture and melodic style it stands apart from the totality of Dvořák's other orchestral works; fascinating too is the way in which the emotional content of the Concerto, felt by so many, can be linked to a personal epiphany with some degree of certainty. This book is offered in part as a guide to the uniqueness of the work, its rich emotional background, the role it filled in Dvořák's working life in America and as a link with the rest of his career.

Charting the history of this remarkable work – the fact that he composed a cello concerto at all is part of the surprise – turned into a process of revelation; a seemingly familiar friend became at times a near stranger and finally, once again, a friend, though certainly one who should not be taken for granted. As with all great works, however much is said about them, there will still remain a great many avenues to explore; certainly, one of the most encouraging aspects of having been so close to the Concerto is that throughout it retained its freshness and ability to surprise. With that thought in mind, I hope those reading the following study will see beyond its conclusions to a new starting point for enquiry.

Nearly everyone I have spoken to about Dvořák and his Cello Concerto in the last few years deserves a mention at the head of this volume; focusing on a single work inevitably leads to a certain monomania, so

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apologies as well as thanks to all those who have suffered from this particular interest. Where basic research on Dvořák is concerned, the motherlode is to be found in Jarmil Burghauser's *Thematic Catalogue* and the complete edition of Dvořák's letters and documents, whose team of editors is triumphantly led by Milan Kuna; no thanks can be too great for access to these resources. In addition, the late Jarmil Burghauser must take a bow where nearly anything relating to Dvořák studies is concerned, not only for his own extensive work, but for his generosity in presenting me with so many ideas. In getting to grips with the manuscript material relating to the Concerto, Markéta Hallová was of inestimable help, not just in her capacity as director of the Dvořák Museum, but as an acute scholar of his work in her own right. Peter Alexander was hugely generous in providing copies of Kovařík's writings and insights in coming to terms with Dvořák's time in, and understanding of, America. Mike Beckerman, in between turning the ether blue with some of the most entertaining one-liners ever to be unleashed on e-mail, has been generous to a fault with both facts and ideas. An additional regiment has enriched my view of Dvořák's Concerto with its thoughts, chief among it are Jitka Slavíková, Alan Houtchens, Ron Speirs and Christopher Hogwood. For help and enthusiasm in examining the performance history of the Concerto and the work's technical peculiarities, I offer heartfelt thanks to Basil Deane. For library backup and support for travel in quest of the meaning of this glorious work, I am grateful to the University of Birmingham and the Queen's University of Belfast. Penny Souster at Cambridge University Press has been assiduous in pursuit of the finished article, for which I thank her, and Julian Rushton has throughout the creative process shown magisterial good sense, good taste and good humour. Finally, even apart from his astonishing technical expertise in turning my manuscript music examples into something a reader can profit from, I must thank Duncan Fielden for his forbearance in dealing so gently with an untidy and undisciplined author.

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