

Scott St. John

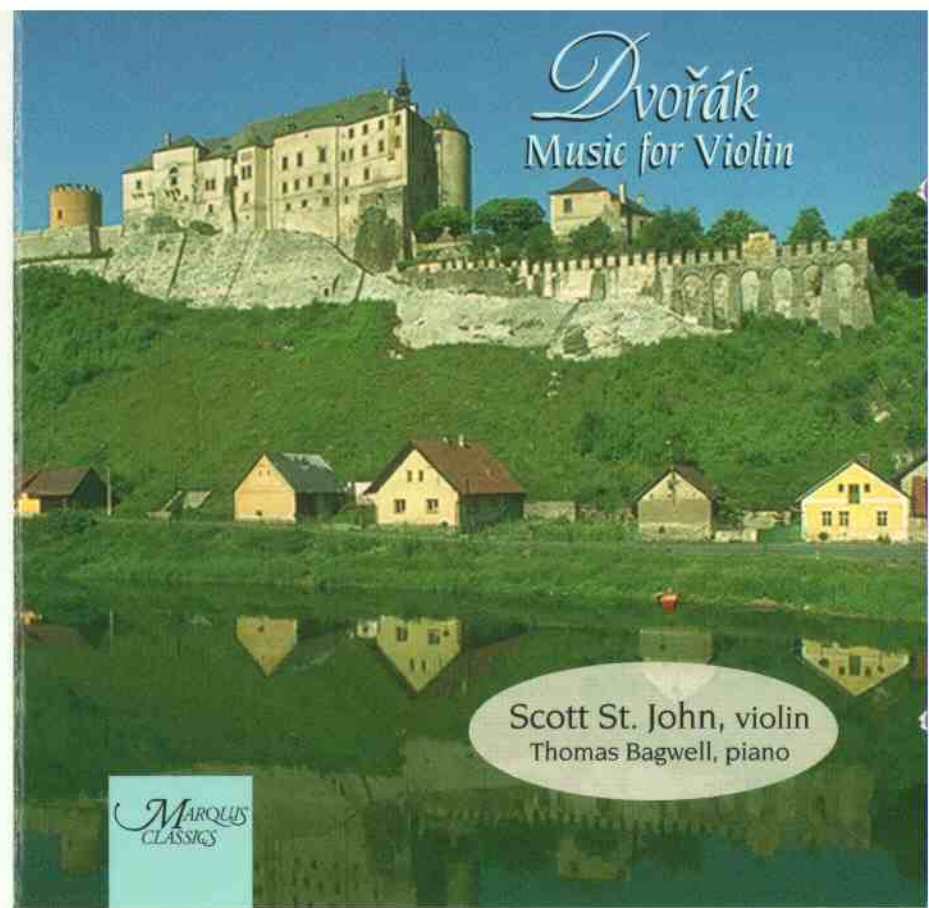
Scott St. John has appeared as a soloist with orchestras around the world, including the Cleveland Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Bavarian Radio Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic in London, and, in Canada, the Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver symphonies.

Mr. St. John is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, where he studied violin with Jascha Brodsky and Arnold Steinhardt and chamber music with Felix Galimir.

Mr. St. John is the first recipient of the Lincoln Center's Martin E. Segal Award.

Thomas Bagwell

Thomas Bagwell is a young American pianist who has performed with numerous orchestras and at the Marlboro Music Festival, the Taos School of Music, and Kniesel Hall. His teachers include Stephanie Brown, Artur Balsam, Richard Goode and Robert McDonald.



Scott St. John, violin
Thomas Bagwell, piano

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Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904)

In the summer of 1874, a young organist and viola player in the provincial capital of Prague applied for an Austrian State Stipend. He described himself: “Antonín Dvořák of Prague, 33 years old, music teacher, completely without means.” His music attracted the notice of Eduard Hanslick, the esteemed Viennese critic who was judging the applicants. The world had discovered Dvořák: a simple country musician, content to make music and watch the trains come in at the station, a supreme melodist outside the streams of sophisticated culture.

Four years later, as Dvořák won his third State Stipend, the composer Johannes Brahms joined the chorus of admiration, recommending the young Czech’s vocal duets to his publisher, the N. Simrock firm. And thus were Dvořák’s Moravian Duets (Op. 20) fitted out with additional German texts and offered to the public, with great acclaim, in 1878.

The publishing company immediately requested a more popular collection from the Czech composer’s inexhaustible supply of beautiful folkish melodies ... something like those Brahms Hungarian Dances. Why not call them Slavonic Dances?

Mazurek in E Minor, Op. 49

Dvořák completed his Mazurek, a bold piece for violin and orchestra, in February 1879. A Czech variant of the Polish form made famous by Chopin, the Mazurek occupies a demi-monde, halfway between the vigour of a country dance and the theatrical dash of a concert work.

Violin Sonata in F Major, Op. 57

The F Major Sonata, dating from March of 1880, is an ambitious concert piece.

The opening movement starts without fanfare, growing almost timidly from a series of modest upward impulses into an eager, fully developed striving. The following slow movement (originally for the C Major Smyčcový Quartet) builds from a tender intimacy to a great lyrical passion. The finale is all good cheer, a virtual stream bubbling with happiness and vitality.

Romantic Pieces for Violin and Piano, Op. 75

Dvořák’s four Romantic Pieces (written in January 1887) are independent concert works of modest length, more formal perhaps than a dance, but not so highly developed as a sonata. The first, an Allegro moderato of broad but restrained character, almost brings to mind a song (rather in the manner of Mendelssohn’s songs without words). The second is more like a polka, a real stout-hearted stomp. The

character of the third piece is virtually a twin of the opening number, a gentle, good-hearted melody. The last of the four short pieces displays the most unusual emotional landscape: a tentative and tragic, intimate confession of sentiment.

Capriccio: Rondo di concerto, Op. 24

Dvořák originally composed his Capriccio as a bravura concert piece for solo violin and orchestra. In the summer of 1878, he needed a flashy virtuoso work for a big concert in Prague. The Capriccio was offered to his publisher, but rejected. Dvořák refined the piece as a duet – intended for his trio partner, the violinist Ferdinand Lachner – and prepared it for performances in 1892, just before leaving for his celebrated sojourn in America. (One of two projected performances was cancelled because a player forgot his score.) When the work was finally published in 1929, as part of a collected works project, a large segment was cut.

The piece begins straightaway with an expansive and rhapsodic version of the main melody, with the violinist sawing away in triple stops. (In fact, an early name for the work had been Rhapsody, but perhaps the publisher found its music too virtuosic and not soulful enough for the middle-class market.) When the main theme arrives, Dvořák adds speed and agility to the powerful simplicity of his melody. A contrasting section is both more lyrical and more agitated. And after the main theme returns, in triple stops

again, the piano takes the lead, offering an Andante version of the theme, in beautiful ringing legato tones.

The restored portion of the piece occurs immediately after the slow section: the agitated lyricism returns, then the main theme, and then the cantabile segment with piano leading. To close, Dvořák takes his Rondo right to the Coda, an altered version of the main theme.

Nocturne in B Major, Op. 40

Dvořák's Nocturne for violin originally had a place in the E minor String Quartet of 1870. It then became the slow second movement of the 1875 String Quintet (and an independent work for string orchestra), before resuming its identity as a solo violin work.

Dvořák inherited the genre of Nocturne from Field and Chopin and produced here a classic example of the type: a three-part form, with relaxed dreaminess surrounding a more turbulent middle section. This version, from 1883, begins in a lyrical passionate manner, after a recitative introduction from the piano.

Slavonic Dances, Op. 46 and Op. 72

When they appeared, the eight Slavonic Dances of Opus 46 were a runaway success, a modest collection of four-hand piano dances for the large home entertainment market. Dvořák arranged them for orchestra, and many others capitalized upon their popularity

as well, with arrangements for all manner of forces. It was probably only a matter of time until the violinist Fritz Kreisler (1875–1962) made a solo display piece of Dvořák's country dance.

Dvořák fashioned his own solo violin arrangement of the E minor Slavonic Dance from the Opus 72 series. A second series was ordered by his publisher, but the composer found it difficult to be inspired on demand, and it took another eight years before the next group of Slavonic Dances appeared (in 1886).

Both these pieces are exactly what was required by N. Simrock: "unsophisticated" dance tunes in gypsy style for a jaded "city" market. From those far-away times to the present day, the Slavonic Dances have represented Dvořák to the larger world as a purveyor of simple and bounteous melody.

Humoresque in G flat Major, Op. 101, No. 7

Schumann invented the name "Humoresque," signifying a short character piece, of good humour, with fanciful overtones. Dvořák's set of eight humoresques was completed in August of 1894, in Czechoslovakia; some of them were sketched during his years in the United States. Kreisler's arrangement of the tender and sentimental tune in G flat Major emphasizes the subtlety for which he was celebrated.

Notes by Alan Gasser

Credits

Producer: Omar Daniel
Recording Engineer: Robert Folkes Hanson
Executive Producer: Earl Rosen

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Scott St. John performs on the Windsor-Weinstein Stradivarius.

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