

Chandos

CHAN 8530

DVOŘÁK

Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904)

- 1 **THE NOON WITCH**
Symphonic Poem Op.108 (12:32)

SYMPHONY No.6 in D major Op.60 (43:01)

- 2 I Allegro non tanto (15:43)
3 II Adagio (9:58)
4 III Scherzo — Furiant: Presto (8:00)
5 IV Finale: Allegro con spirito — presto (9:05)

TT = 55:42

SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA
Leader, Edwin Paling
conducted by **NEEME JÄRVI**

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DIGITAL

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SYMPHONY NO.6

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THE NOON WITCH

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NEEME JÄRVI





Photo: Brooks von Aix jr

Neeme Järvi

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Dvořák had long been an admirer of Karl Jaromir Erben's poetry, particularly a collection of Czech folk ballads published as *The Garland* in 1853. But it wasn't until 1896, when his nine symphonies and all the other orchestral works by which we know him best were behind him, that he was able to undertake a project he had had in mind for years — which was to write a series of colourful symphonic poems or orchestral ballads based on stories in *The Garland*. He started work on no fewer than three at the same time — *The Water Goblin*, *The Noon (or Noontday) Witch*, and *The Golden Spinning Wheel* — completed them within a matter of weeks, and added a fourth, *The Wild Dove*, within a few months.

Dvořák had such faith in Erben's ballads that he allowed the demands of the narrative to determine the shape of his music. In most cases the resulting construction approximates to some kind of accepted musical form. But in *The Noon Witch*, perhaps because it is shorter than the others, he seems to have abandoned all such safety devices — although it is just possible that, since he added a scherzo episode to the story to make four main sections, Dvořák had something like a symphony in mind.

The first section (*Allegretto*) is a delightful domestic idyll with the child happily amusing himself (clarinet) while his mother prepares the midday meal. Irritated, however, by the toy cockerel he is playing with (oboe) she tells him to be quiet, at which he starts crying and she becomes even more irritated, finally threatening to send for the Noon Witch, a familiar scary figure in Bohemian folklore. The Noon Witch's malevolent motif is briefly heard on clarinets and bassoons before the child calms down. The domestic idyll resumes, but only to be disturbed in just the same way.

This time the Noon Witch actually materialises, making her quietly ominous entry on bass clarinet under shivering muted strings at the beginning of the second section (*Andante sostenuto*). 'Give me your child,' she demands on bass clarinet and bassoon, and still more insistently on trumpet, while the mother runs away from her (high legato violins) clutching the child to her breast.

In the third section, a kind of scherzo (*Allegro*), the Witch's motif is transformed into a frenzied dance on upper woodwind. The mother screams and finally collapses, still holding the child to her — just before the noonday bell rings out and the Witch disappears.

In the last section the father comes cheerfully home (*Andante*) on strings in contrary motion, opens the door, and finds the mother collapsed on the floor (solo oboe). As he attempts to revive her (flutes and clarinets) she regains consciousness in a lovely modulation to A major (flute and clarinet over string arpeggios). But the key changes when the father, discovering that the child is dead, crushed beneath her, breaks into a passionate, full-orchestral expression of anguish. The Noon Witch has the last malevolent word.

* * * * *

Dvořák had written five symphonies before anyone in the great world of music west of Czechoslovakia actually asked him for one. Some of the earlier symphonies had helped him win an Austrian State Stipendium — awarded by a distinguished jury in Vienna to 'young, poor, and talented artists' — but the Sixth was written at the specific request of no less a musician than Hans Richter, who had conducted a very successful performance of the Third Slavonic Rhapsody in Vienna in 1879 and was anxious to encourage the still little-known composer.

The new work was completed in less than a year and Richter was delighted with it. But, because some members of the Vienna Philharmonic didn't much like the idea of encouraging Czech composers (however young, poor, and talented they might be), the Vienna performance was twice postponed and the Sixth Symphony was eventually introduced to the world by the Prague Philharmonic under Adolf Cech in March 1881. Although it was a great occasion in Czech musical history, with the audience so enthusiastic that the *Furiant* was immediately encored, the fact remains that Dvořák was very conscious of the Viennese symphonic tradition — Beethoven's Ninth and Brahms's recent Second in particular — when he wrote the work.

The Viennese influence in the *Allegro non tanto* is not in the melodic material. The main theme, presented in D major in the opening bars by woodwind over cheerful syncopations on horns and violas, is actually based on a Bohemian folk-song. Of the two second-subject themes — one for cellos and horns, the other for solo oboe — the first is more an anticipation of Brahms's Fourth Symphony than an echo of his Second.

There is, however, a classical Viennese precedent in the way the transitional events between the introduction of the first and second subjects assume such importance later in the movement. Neither of the second-subject themes figures in the development section, which is a highly imaginative treatment of the main theme in conjunction with the transitional material; and the climax of the construction features the main theme again, now in a *grandioso* version recalled from the exposition but held out of the recapitulation and kept in reserve for this dramatic moment in the coda.

The woodwind introduction to the *Adagio* has been compared to the opening of the slow movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. But the resemblance is superficial, since Dvořák's oboe and bassoon actually anticipate the melody which is introduced by the violins on their first entry. The basis of the construction is the three further appearances of that theme in the tonic B flat major. The remarkably free episodes between are devoted either to new melodic material or to development of the main theme, which undergoes a crisis in B flat minor at the very centre of the movement.

The Scherzo has nothing to do with Vienna. Derived from the *furiant*, a folk-dance which generates its energy from the rhythmic friction of twos against threes, the outer sections are purely Bohemian in character. The inspiration of the beautifully scored pastoral interlude in the middle is not far from home either.

The last movement, on the other hand, does owe something to Brahms. The *Allegro con spirito* tempo, the 2/2 metre, the D major tonality are the same as in the corresponding movement of the Second Symphony, and there is also something of the Brahms characteristic *sotto voce* manner in Dvořák's *pianissimo*

first theme. It is worth noting, however, that the main theme of Dvořák's *Finale* is related, deliberately or not, to that of the first movement. Besides, not even Brahms could have outshone Dvořák's brilliance in sustaining the physical impetus through the second subject — clarinets dancing on triplet quavers, violins striding forward in minims — and then right through the development and recapitulation into the rhythmic exhilaration of the *Presto* coda.

GERALD LARNER

Neeme Järvi took up his appointment as Musical Director and Principal Conductor of the Scottish National Orchestra in August 1984, since when both he and the orchestra have received great critical acclaim. Born in Tallinn, Estonia, in 1937, he graduated from Tallinn Music School with degrees in percussion and choral conducting before continuing his studies at the Leningrad State Conservatory. In 1963 he became Director of the Estonian Radio and Television Orchestra and began his 13-year tenure as Chief Conductor of the Opera Theatre Estonia.

He took up residence in North America in 1980 and almost immediately made his *début* with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. He now makes frequent appearances with the San Francisco, Toronto, Montreal and Chicago Symphony Orchestras and has also appeared with the Philadelphia, Boston and Los Angeles Symphony Orchestras. His engagements at the Metropolitan Opera have included *Eugene Onegin* and a new production of Mussorgsky's *Khovantschina*. He works frequently in Europe — at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and with German and Scandinavian Orchestras — and is Chief Conductor of the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra in Sweden.

His extensive recordings with the SNO on Chandos include the complete Prokofiev Symphonies, a set of 6 Opera Suites by Rimsky-Korsakov, Scriabin's Symphony No. 2, Shostakovich's Symphonies 1 & 6, Rachmaninov's Choral Symphony *The Bells*, and a coupling of *Scheherazade* and *Stenka Razin*. Recently

two major cycles have been launched: Dvořák's Symphonies with Symphonic Poems, and Richard Strauss's Tone Poems coupled with groups of his orchestrated songs, including *Four Last Songs* with Felicity Lott.

The Scottish National Orchestra became a full-time body serving the whole of Scotland in 1950, although its history (as the Scottish Orchestra) dates back to 1891. Under Karl Rankl, Hans Swarowsky and, more recently, Sir Alexander Gibson, the SNO has achieved remarkable international prestige, acknowledged in 1978 with a grant of patronage by Her Majesty the Queen.

In addition to making around 150 appearances each year in Scotland, the SNO appears regularly at many of the British festivals, including the London Proms and the Edinburgh Festival. Touring commitments have included many cities in the UK, several European trips and two visits to North America.

The SNO has built up a considerable reputation as a recording orchestra and recently won the Gramophone Award for the best orchestral recording of 1985 for its recording of Prokofiev's Symphony No. 6 with Neeme Järvi. The SNO played a major role in the first years of Scottish Opera and its involvement with contemporary music includes the triennial festival *Musica Nova*.

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