

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904) – Cello Concerto in B Minor, Op. 104

Few works in the cello repertoire rival the grandeur, lyricism, and emotional depth of Antonín Dvořák's *Cello Concerto in B Minor*. Composed in 1894–95 during his tenure as director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York, the concerto masterfully blends symphonic richness with the cello's expressive voice.

Though initially reluctant to write a cello concerto—believing the instrument lacked the necessary power to stand against a full orchestra—Dvořák was ultimately inspired by hearing a concerto by his colleague Victor Herbert. What followed was a work of astonishing balance: the cello soars with both tenderness and defiance, weaving seamlessly with the orchestral fabric.

The first movement (*Allegro*) opens with a brooding introduction before the cello enters, introducing a theme of noble intensity. This movement showcases the instrument's full range, alternating between sweeping lyricism and dramatic virtuosity.

The second movement (*Adagio, ma non troppo*) is deeply personal. Here, Dvořák recalls a melody from one of his own songs, *Lasst mich allein*, in tribute to his sister-in-law Josefina, with whom he had once been in love. The movement is a tender reflection, imbued with longing and nostalgia.

The final movement (*Allegro moderato*) is a vibrant and triumphant rondo, but not without a final moment of introspection. Near the end, the music softens into a haunting reminiscence of the second movement before surging forward to a decisive conclusion.

Orchestration:

Dvořák scored the concerto for a full symphony orchestra, including:

- **Woodwinds:** 2 flutes (one doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons
- **Brass:** 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba
- **Percussion:** Timpani
- **Strings:** First and second violins, violas, cellos, double basses
- **Other:** Solo cello

Dvořák's masterful orchestration ensures that the cello is never overwhelmed, crafting a dialogue between soloist and orchestra that highlights both the instrument's lyrical warmth and dramatic power.