

Canadian University Music Review Revue de musique des universités canadiennes

John C. Tibbetts, ed. *Dvořák in America*. Portland: Amadeus Press, 1993. x, 447 pp. ISBN 0-931340-56-X (hardcover)

Michael Beckerman, ed. *Dvořák and his World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. x, 284 pp. ISBN 0-691-00097-2 (softcover)

David R. Beveridge. *Rethinking Dvořák: Views from Five Countries*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. xi, 305 pp. ISBN 0-19-816411-4 (hardcover)

Kenneth DeLong

Volume 17, Number 2, 1997

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1014791ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014791ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian University Music Society / Société de musique des universités canadiennes

ISSN

0710-0353 (print)

2291-2436 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

DeLong, K. (1997). Review of [John C. Tibbetts, ed. *Dvořák in America*. Portland: Amadeus Press, 1993. x, 447 pp. ISBN 0-931340-56-X (hardcover) / Michael Beckerman, ed. *Dvořák and his World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. x, 284 pp. ISBN 0-691-00097-2 (softcover) / David R. Beveridge. *Rethinking Dvořák: Views from Five Countries*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. xi, 305 pp. ISBN 0-19-816411-4 (hardcover)]. *Canadian University Music Review / Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*, 17(2), 96–100.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1014791ar>

All Rights Reserved © Canadian University Music Society / Société de musique des universités canadiennes, 1997

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

John C. Tibbetts, ed. *Dvořák in America*. Portland: Amadeus Press, 1993. x, 447 pp. ISBN 0-931340-56-X (hardcover).

Michael Beckerman, ed. *Dvořák and his World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. x, 284 pp. ISBN 0-691-00097-2 (softcover).

David R. Beveridge. *Rethinking Dvořák: Views from Five Countries*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. xi, 305 pp. ISBN 0-19-816411-4 (hardcover).

The three books about Dvořák under consideration here have several basic points in common. First, they are all multi-author books consisting of a series of essays devoted to a particular aspect of the composer's life, work, or posthumous reputation. Second, all three books derive from conferences devoted to the life and music of Dvořák — the two edited by Michael Beckerman and David Beveridge directly so, the book by John Tibbetts more indirectly. Beveridge's book is, fundamentally, the outcome of the Dvořák Sesquicentennial Conference and Festival in America held in New Orleans in 1991, a conference which I attended. This conference also provided the starting impetus for the book edited by Tibbetts (Tibbetts also attended the New Orleans conference). Beckerman's book, on the other hand, is one in the series of monographs that have come out of the annual Bard College summer music festivals hosted by conductor and Bard College president Leon Botstein, a series that to date also includes books devoted to Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms, Richard Strauss, Bartók, and Ives.

Despite their genesis in conferences, none of the books constitutes conference proceedings in the conventional sense of the term. Rather, each editor has shaped his volume according to his tastes and point of view — something that gives each book its own distinctive personality and sense of unity. While each of the books has a slightly different purpose and underlying aim, as a group they all attempt to bring the study of Dvořák's music up-to-date both in its positivistic aspects — new sources, facts, and the comprehensive marshalling of known, but scattered bits of information — and in newer, more ideologically based approaches to the study of music. As a general comment, however, in two of these volumes traditional musicology handily triumphs over the "new musicology," a statement in its way of the present concerns of scholars in the field. Given the still relatively small amount of readily available scholarly writing in English on the composer and the generally high quality of the books, all three should be on the "must acquire" list for university libraries with even the most modest pretensions to academic respectability.

The music of Dvořák has never lacked admirers. Beginning in the composer's lifetime and continuing without break to the present, Dvořák's music has readily found a wide and appreciative public that continues to respond to the rhythmic élan of the *Slavonic Dances*, the melodic richness of the final symphonies, the austere majesty of the Cello Concerto, and the Slavic nostalgia of the Piano Quintet in A major and the *Dumky* Trio. Despite its popularity with the general public, Dvořák's music has found less favour with music historians and critics for whom the attractiveness of the musical surface has often been taken as a sign of shallowness and lack of *gravitas*. In an article written at the time of Dvořák's death in 1904, Richard Aldrich, the critic of the *New York Times*, set the tone for

what has become received opinion of the nature of Dvořák's musical accomplishment, especially in German and English academic circles. In his obituary assessment, Aldrich doubted that Dvořák would be "numbered among the immortals," and observed that "[Dvořák] seemed, indeed, the last of the naive musicians, the direct descendant of Haydn, Mozart, and Schubert, rejoicing in the self-sufficient beauty of his music and untroubled by the philosophic tendencies and the search for new things to be said in a new way which animate the younger men of today" (quoted in Beckerman, p. 13). Similar views were expressed by Henry Hadlow in his familiar turn-of-the-century book, *Studies in Modern Music*, in which he compares Dvořák unfavourably to Beethoven and Brahms for his lack of "economy" and "fine reticence and control" (Beckerman, p. 18), an oblique reference, perhaps, to his peripheral status as a non-German composer.

This ambiguity regarding Dvořák's status as a "European" composer or (merely?) a "nationalist" one has dogged Dvořák studies for a century, and recurs as a leitmotif throughout all three of these new Dvořák books. By implication, it forces a reassessment of "national" music both in its historical context and its significance for our time. A second, related issue concerns Dvořák's relationship to America and American music. As Mark Germer succinctly puts it in his brief, but perceptive essay on Dvořák's relationship to the Boston School, "clearing the path for an American musical idiom was not Dvořák's initial objective in coming to North America, but once arrived, he does not appear to have declined any invitation to pontificate on the subject" (Beveridge, p. 237). It is, in fact, surprising how little systematic study there has been to date on the subject of Dvořák in America, and one of the most useful aspects of these volumes is their thorough treatment of this aspect of Dvořák's career. All three books include generous appendices that conveniently gather together the most essential interviews Dvořák gave to the American press, letters written to him while in America, as well as other primary source material hitherto difficult to access. With these documents now conveniently assembled, it is now possible to gain a sense of the nature and context of the controversy over American national music that Dvořák stirred up while resident in New York — a controversy that was to continue well into the twentieth century.

This American aspect of Dvořák's career is most systematically explored in Part One of Tibbett's book, which is entitled "Dvořák's New World: An American Sampler." In a series of twelve richly detailed essays, the book chronicles every aspect of Dvořák's stay in America: his initial trip (Graham Melville-Mason's "Toward the New World"); his encounters with New York in the 1890s (John Tibbett's "Dvořák's New York: An American Street Scene"); his work at the National Conservatory (Emanuel Rubin's "Dvořák at the National Conservatory"); his summer in Spillville, Iowa (Tibbett's "Dvořák's Spillville Summer: An American Pastoral"); his relationship to American-Indian and African-American music (John Clapham's "Dvořák and the American Indian" and Jean Snyder's "Dvořák, Harry T. Burleigh, and the African American Spiritual"); and his relationship to white musical culture (Charles Hamm's "Dvořák, Stephen Foster, and American National Song," and Stuart Feder's "Homesick in America: The Nostalgia of Antonín Dvořák and Charles Ives"). This first part of the book

is, perhaps, the most directly useful to both scholars and Dvořák aficionados, as it contains a wealth of information that is engagingly imparted. It is here that one senses most clearly the strength of Tibbetts as an editor. Although not a musician in the strict sense, Tibbetts brings to his subject considerable skills as a professional journalist, and under his guidance the flow of the prose is as fluent and gracious as one of Dvořák's melodies.

This journalistic approach becomes something of a liability in the second section of the book, devoted to the analysis of the compositions of Dvořák's American years. Consisting largely of short analytical vignettes, this once-overlightly discussion of the music is certainly appropriate given the generalist stance of the book, but it is unlikely to satisfy the more analytically inclined. The one significant exception, however, is the essay by Michael Beckerman on the Scherzo of Dvořák's *New World* Symphony. A continuation of a line of thought developed primarily by Beckerman in his important article on the slow movement of this most popular of Dvořák's works,¹ this essay examines the relationship between Longfellow's poem narrative *The Song of Hiawatha* and the Scherzo. (It has long been known that this poem occupied Dvořák during his sojourn in America.) In his article, Beckerman not only makes a powerful case for a close relationship between the Scherzo of the Ninth Symphony and Longfellow's poem, but takes the reader deep into the complexities that surround the question of extra-musical stimulus and musical expression in late nineteenth-century music. The final section of the book, entitled "Dvořák Today," includes a fascinating piece by Josef Skvorecky on the writing of his popular novel *Dvořák in Love*, as well as a lengthy article by David Beveridge on "The Reception of Dvořák's Operas in America."²

Beckerman's book, *Dvořák and his World*, is both the shortest and most concentrated in its style of writing. Like the other volumes in the series, it contains a small number of extended articles that are followed by the reproduction of a selection of significant primary source materials, mostly in the form of contemporary newspaper articles and personal correspondence. Those familiar with Leon Botstein's opening essays in the other volumes in this series will turn eagerly to the sumptuous intellectual meal he offers in this volume. In a forty-five page essay entitled "Reversing the Critical Tradition: Innovation, Modernity, and Ideology in the Work and Career of Antonín Dvořák," Botstein ranges widely and with Dahlhausian authority over the thorny critical issues surrounding Dvořák's music in its musico-political context, its reception history with Czech/German musical life during the years preceding the Second World War, and its relationship to Adorno's critique of music and social politics. The book is worth obtaining for this essay alone. Also valuable, however, is the extended

¹Michael Beckerman, "Dvořák's *New World* Largo and *The Song of Hiawatha*," *19th-Century Music* 16, no. 1 (Summer 1992): 35-48.

²Beveridge's list of performances (pp. 301-2) neglects to include the production of *Rusalka* at Stanford University during the early 1970s.

and detailed discussion of the Dvořák-Brahms relationship by David Beveridge, as well as the essay on Dvořák's operas by Jan Smaczny, both of which till significant new ground. Beckerman's own essay treats in a speculative manner the issue of Dvořák's musical "nationalism," raising the question of the degree to which Dvořák may knowingly have exploited his reputation as a nationalist composer to his own ends. While the questions he raises are difficult to answer conclusively, the article nevertheless provides a salutary reminder of the difficulties that accompany any search for a historical "truth" that aspires to intellectual sophistication.

The third of these books, Beveridge's *Rethinking Dvořák*, provides at least a partial antidote to one of the most serious problems that have attended the study of Dvořák's music: the language barrier. For the last thirty years or so, English-language speakers who do not read Czech have largely had to content themselves with the Gospel according to John — referring here, of course, to John Clapham, whose books and articles have provided the most authoritative writings in English on Dvořák. However, it comes as no surprise that the largest amount of writing on Dvořák has been by Czech scholars who, over several generations, have developed their own distinctive tradition and, moreover, have direct access to much of the primary source material relating to the musical scores. Thus one of the most important aspects of the Sesquicentennial Conference, and also the book, is the inclusion of articles by prominent Czech scholars, many of whom have devoted a lifetime of study to the composer but whose work is little known outside of the Czech Republic. These articles provide a glimpse into the concerns and methodology of another scholarly tradition, one founded, of course, in German musicology (as is our own), but which has developed in its own direction, and has its own, more local concerns. The articles by Czech scholars include the plenary address by Jarmil Burghauser, the author of the Dvořák thematic catalogue and widely acknowledged dean of Dvořák studies in the Czech Republic, whose discussion of the metamorphosis of Dvořák's image provides a general introduction to the volume. Among the essays that offer significant new insights into Dvořák's music, one can instance the discussion of Dvořák's early symphonies and their relationship to the symphonic tradition by Jarmila Gabrielová ("Dvořák's Early Symphonies in the Context of European Symphonic Writing in the Mid-Nineteenth Century") and Miroslav Černý ("Dvořák's Contribution to Progressive Trends in the European Symphony, 1865–95"), as well as Marta Ottlová's account of the battles over Dvořák within the borders of Bohemia ("The 'Dvořák Battles' in Bohemia: Czech Criticism of Antonín Dvořák, 1911–15").

By and large the book attempts to treat those aspects of Dvořák's music that have generally received the least attention: the operas, the song cycle *Cypresses*, and, especially, the American aspect of Dvořák's career. This final aspect is explored in a series of essays by Charles Hamm ("Dvořák, Nationalism, Myth, and Racism in the United States"), Thomas L. Riis ("Dvořák among the Yankees: George Chadwick and the Impact of the Boston School"), and Richard Crawford ("Dvořák and the Historiography of American Music"), all of which provide new and often imaginative rethinking of old or little-explored questions.

With the facts of Dvořák's biography and the historical context of his music now laid out in detail in modern academic dress, the time is surely ripe for the study of Dvořák's music to proceed to a more sophisticated level, both in its analysis of the musical scores and its significance as national and international music. None of the analytical essays, for example, ventured into the new-familiar world of Schenkerian analysis, and few attempted to problematize the wider issues surrounding Dvořák's music on a level found in the two articles by Michael Beckerman cited above. The question of Dvořák's harmonic language, its relationship to Brahms on the one hand, and to Wagner on the other, surely needs more detailed discussion. One can only hope that, given these books, Dvořák's music will soon be accorded the kind of intense scrutiny routinely given the music of Schubert, Brahms, Berg, or even Verdi. As they stand, however, they provide not only a timely corrective to long-sending, hand-me-down views of Dvořák, but also point the direction that a new, more deeply considered exploration of his music might take.

Kenneth DeLong

R.M.W. Dixon and Grace Koch. *Dyirbal Song Poetry: The Oral Literature of an Australian Rainforest People*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1996. 367 pp. ISBN 0-7022-2593-2 (softcover).

Two hundred years ago few people could have envisaged the impact European expansion would have on a remote continent in the South Pacific. Indeed, in hindsight we might be quick to criticize the objectives of the British Empire in setting out to carry "civilization and humanity, peace and good government, and above all the knowledge of the true God, to the utter ends of the earth."¹ Yet the conquest of distant lands by a dominant civilization is certainly not new and one must wonder how many cultures through the centuries have been assimilated by another society, preserving little recognizable trace of their former identity. We are fortunate that individuals such as R.M.W. Dixon and Grace Koch have taken the initiative to preserve some remnant of this culture in order that we might be able to appreciate a rich heritage that has almost disappeared. This book is the result of a joint effort by Dixon and Koch: Dixon is responsible for much of the biographic and analytic content while Koch worked on the presentation of the musical examples. A compact disc recording of some of the music identified in this study is available and may be obtained directly from the distributor by writing to the address given in the introductory notes (p. xiv).

The present study endeavours to capture the language, music, and traditions of the Dyirbal people of the Cairns rainforest region in North Queensland, Australia, before the last members of the tribe who are fully fluent in the culture pass on to meet their ancestors. Dixon notes that at the time of publication there

¹ Andrew Armitage, *Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation: Australia, Canada, and New Zealand* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995), 6.