



## IT ISN'T JUST A CONCERT: IT'S A CAMPAIGN FOR A NEW CULTURE!



### HOW ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK, JEANETTE THURBER AND HARRY T. BURLEIGH PROVED THAT "THROUGH BEAUTIFUL ART COMES TRUE FREEDOM"

Prior to our concert of Tuesday, December 18, 2018 at Carnegie Hall at 7:30—only a few days away—we are supplying this "**fact sheet**" to allow interested educators, students, choristers and others to gain an otherwise little-known insight into how the circles of Dvořák, Frederick Douglass, and post-Civil War activist and philanthropist, Jeanette Thurber overcame racial and national prejudice to stand up, 125 years ago in New York City, for the best of American values.

### Dvořák In America: A Fact Sheet

**1. 1880-1910:** Rights gained by freed slaves during Reconstruction, are slowly reversed through so-called "scientific racism", social Darwinism, and the Jim Crow reaction. The right of African-Americans to vote becomes increasingly restricted through passage of State laws.

**2. 1885:** Inspired by Brahms' 3<sup>rd</sup> symphony, patriotic Czech composer Antonín Dvořák completes his 7<sup>th</sup> symphony. The opening theme of the first movement, he says, sprang into his mind as he watched his countrymen disembark from a train at the National Theater in Prague, to stage a play protesting Austro-Hungarian rule. Dvořák says: *"the 4th movement includes a suggestion of the capacity of the Czech people to display stubborn resistance to political oppressors...it must be capable of stirring the world. and may God grant that it will!"* Following Brahms' example, he states that there is not one superfluous note in the symphony.

**3. 1885:** Jeanette Thurber founds The National Conservatory of Music, adopting the highest European musical standards (1). Its mission statement reaches out to women, minorities and the handicapped. Full scholarship is provided free to them, especially to the children and grandchildren of former slaves. In an article entitled "Real Value of Negro Melodies", the May 21, 1893 New York Herald reports: *"This institution has determined to add to its 800 white students as many Negroes of positive talent as may apply. There will be absolutely no limit. I have the authority of Mrs. Thurber herself for that."* African-American students may have comprised fully 1/2 of those enrolled.



4. Critics claim that scholarship for the poor is a bad idea. Only children of the wealthy elites have the education, upbringing and demeanor for musical composition. Dvořák counters that he looks to the poor, because they will be motivated to do the hard work necessary to compose, where privileged people would not. He grew up poor, and he knows what it takes. He disliked having to hob-nob with high society, and once characterized the heavily bejeweled Carolyn Astor, as a "walking chandelier."

5. **1888:** Mrs. Thurber appeals to Congress for financial support. She is turned down, and must rely on private donors. She protests in her testimony: *"America has, so far, done nothing in a national way either to promote the musical education of its people or to develop any musical genius they possess, and that in this, she stands alone among civilized nations of the world."*

6. **Sept. 1892:** Dvořák arrives in NYC to head the composition department of The National Conservatory, at the behest of founder Jeanette Thurber.

**She is likely behind:**

- His attending (with her) the Buffalo Bill show to hear authentic Native American music.
- His attending a concert of patriotic American songs.
- His arrival in time for a 3-day parade celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus' voyage. Many nationalities participate.

**She suggests Dvořák:**

- Compose an opera on the poem "The Song of Hiawatha", which Dvořák knew and loved.
- Compose a symphony called "From the New World."

Most importantly, she arranges for an African-American voice student at the Conservatory, Harry Burleigh, to sing the plantation spirituals several times a week for Dvořák, which the composer also loves.

8. **May 21<sup>st</sup> 1893:** An interview with Dvořák, entitled "Real Value of Negro Melodies", is published in the NY Herald. Dvořák is quoted as saying:

*"I am now satisfied that the future music of this country must be based on what are called the negro melodies. This must be the foundation of any serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States...These beautiful and varied themes are the product of the soil. They are American."*

9. **A full-scale racially charged backlash ensues**, as Phillip Hale takes the point. He is not just a music critic, but an 8th generation Boston blueblood and Yale graduate:

- Eight music authorities, including the Dean of Harvard's Music faculty are recruited to repudiate Dvořák's statement.
- European composers, such as Bruckner, Joachim, and Rubenstein, are asked to weigh in on the matter. Joachim is somewhat favorable. Bruckner is hostile. Brahms acts as Dvořák's aide-de-camp.
- American composers are interviewed by *The Boston Herald*, and other papers. Within a month, 13 articles appear on the subject.

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- Composer John Knowles Paine, after attacking the: "Heathen Chinese, and Digger Indians" writes: "In my estimation, it is a preposterous idea to say that in the future, American music will rest upon such an alien foundation as the melodies of a yet largely undeveloped race."
- Composer George Chadwick writes: "*Such negro melodies as I have heard I should be sorry to see become the basis of an American school of musical composition.*"
- Seventeen years later, in notes for a Boston symphony program, Hale expresses his view that:

"... while the negro is undoubtedly fond of music, he is not inherently musical, that this has been observed by all careful observers of the Negro in Africa...that the American Negro founded his folk-songs" on sentimental ballads sung by the white women of the plantation, that he brought no primitive melodies with him from Africa...."

**10. Dec. 16<sup>th</sup> 1893:** Dvořák's *The New World Symphony* premiers. On **Dec. 17<sup>th</sup>**, Henry Krehbiel writes in *The New York Tribune*:

"A good deal of printer's ink has been wasted during the last six months, in arguing that American music was a mere vagary. Some...have asserted that all good music is universal, and nationalism a figment of the imagination. Others have urged that Dr. Dvořák... was trying to make a place for '*nigger symphonies*'.... While these wise men were talking, Dr. Dvořák was listening with ears of genius, and before they got through talking, he had written his new symphony. They talked... and he walked."

- On the same day in *The New York Times*, W.J. Henderson writes:

"In spite of all assertions to the contrary, the plantation songs of the American Negro possess a striking individuality...a new species...but never anything else than American. Our South is ours. its twin does not exist. Our system of slavery, with all its domestic and racial conditions, was ours, and its twin never existed. Out of the heart of this slavery, envired by this sweet and languorous South, from the canebrake and the cotton field, arose the spontaneous musical utterance of a people. That folk-music struck an answering note in the American heart. ... If those songs are not national, then there is no such thing as national music."

- On a very different note, William Apthorp writes on January 1st 1894, in *The Boston Transcript*:

"*The great bane of the present Slavic and Scandinavian schools is, and has been, the attempt to make civilized music by civilized methods, out of essentially barbaric material. Our American Negro music has every element of barbarism to be found in Slavic and Scandinavian folk music, it is essentially barbarous music.*"

**11.** The beauty of the New World Symphony cannot be denied. However, a new line is devised: *Dvořák was homesick, understood nothing about America, and only wrote Bohemian music while here.* Again, Philip Hale is the point man. He writes, in a review of the world premiere of Dvořák's American Quartet on

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Jan 1<sup>st</sup> 1894 in Boston, that: *"The Negroes encountered by Mr. Dvořák have developed a singular habit of whistling Bohemian tunes."*

In a response to Krehbiel's critique of the Boston premier, Hale quips, sarcastically, that if the New York press is to be believed, the symphony *"could only be appreciated by an audience of intelligent Negroes and combed and washed Indians...."*

Hale's vitriol increases. Three years after Dvořák's death, in 1907, he writes:

- i). *"The New World Symphony expresses the state of soul of an uncultured Czech in America, the state of a homesick soul, remembering his native land and stupefied by the din and hustle of a new life."*
- ii). *"The uncultivated Czech is a born musician, a master of his trade. He is interested only in traces of music that he finds in America. Negro airs, not copied, adapted, imitated, tint slightly two or three passages of the symphony without injury to its Czech character."*
- iii). *"The symphony leaped, Minerva-like, from the head of this uncultured genius. As with nearly all his other compositions, except the operas, it was not stimulated by any foreign assistance, by any consultation of authors, or by quotations, reading, etc., as was especially the case with Brahms."*
- iv). *"The national Czech feeling in this work, quickened by homesickness, is so marked that it is recognized throughout Bohemia, by the learned and by the humblest...Yet some will undoubtedly continue to insist that the symphony "From the New World" is based, for the most part, on negro themes, and that the future of American music rests on the use of Congo, North American Indian, Creole greaser and cowboy ditties, yawps and whooping's."*

What is he so afraid of 24 years later?

12. 1941 celebrates the 100th anniversary of Dvořák's birth: In that year, *The New York Telegram* prints an article: *"Sweet Chariot Inspired Antonín Dvořák to Immortalize Negro Spirituals"*. They quote the program notes written for a 1911 performance in Philadelphia by Harry Burleigh:

*"There is a tendency in these days to ignore the Negro elements in the 'New World' Symphony, shown by the fact that many of those who were able in 1893 to find traces of Negro musical color all through the Symphony...now cannot find anything in the whole four movements that suggests any local or Negro influence, though there is no doubt at all that Dr. Dvořák was deeply impressed by the old Negro Spirituals and also by the Foster songs... it was my privilege to repeatedly sing some of the old Plantation songs for him at his home in E. 17th St. and one in particular, *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*, greatly pleased him, and part of this old Spiritual will be found in the... closing theme of the first movement of the Symphony. It is in G major and is first given out by the flute. Here is the old melody as the slaves sang it ...and here is the...closing theme of the first movement: The similarity is so evident that it doesn't even need to be heard; the eye can see it.... I have never publicly been credited with exerting any influence upon Dr. Dvořák, although it is tacitly believed that there isn't much doubt about it, for I was with him almost constantly, and he loved to hear me sing the old melodies. Walter Damrosch once*

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alluded to my having brought these songs to Dvořák's attention, but there was so much discussion and difference of opinion as to the value of the intimation that in the songs of the Negroes lay the basis for a national school of music and the controversy waxed so hot that all reference to the real source of his information was lost sight of."

Composer Victor Herbert, head cellist at the National Conservatory, writes:

"The very talented Harry Burleigh, had the privilege of giving the Dr. some of the thematic material for his Symphony--"From the New World." I have seen this Denied, but it is true. Naturally I knew a good deal about this Symphony--as I saw the Dr. two or three times a week--and knew he was at work on it."

Dvořák writes home, to his friend Emil Kozanek, head of the Moravian Choral Society: "I am now finishing my new symphony in E minor. I take great pleasure in it, and it will be very different from the others. Well, the influence of America must be felt by everyone who has a nose at all."

**13. 1993:** Academics, perhaps without realizing it, come to the aid of Hale with the discovery that the unsigned interview of May 21<sup>st</sup> 1893, was actually conducted by "yellow journalist" James Creelman, an activist ally of Thurber. Dvořák did not speak English well, they say, and the unscrupulous Creelman put the words about Negro melodies into Dvořák's mouth.

"Doubtless he (Creelman) is the author of "Real Value of Negro Melodies"... "Real Value..." is an article by James Creelman...not merely an interview with Dvořák...we might want to be a trifle careful about how we attribute this material...to Dvořák. The entire episode of May and June 1893 was probably orchestrated by Creelman... Thus we should consider that a good bit of the commotion surrounding the premier of the symphony "From the New World" in December was due to the excitement generated by Creelman."

-----Michael Beckerman

The Real Value of Yellow Journalism. Music Quarterly 1993

The insinuation is that Creelman put words into Dvořák's mouth, and that the composer was pressured into going along with Thurber's agenda.

Another letter from Dvořák to Dr. Kozanek speaks differently:

"There is one young man named Maurice Arnold upon whom I am building strong expectations. His compositions are based on negro melodies, and I have encouraged him in this direction. The other members of the composition class seem to think that it is not in good taste to get ideas from the old plantation songs, but they are wrong."

Choral director Arthur Mees wrote in the program notes, handed out at the premier of the symphony in 1893:

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“Dr. Dvořák has kindly given the following explanation. On his arrival in America the composer was deeply impressed by the conditions peculiar to this country and the spirit of which they were the outward manifestation. In continuing his activity, he found that the works which he created here were essentially different from those which had sprung into existence in his native country. They were clearly influenced by the new surroundings and by the new life of which these were the material evidences. Dr. Dvořák made a study of Indian and Negro melodies and found them possessed of characteristics peculiarly their own. He identified himself with their spirit, and made their essential contents, not their formal external traits, his own...”

14. The universal, and universalizing qualities of the spirituals is recognized. Dvořák's *Farewell to America*, published in an 1895 edition of Harper's Magazine, states:

“It matters little whether the common inspiration ...is derived from the Negro melodies, the songs of the Creoles, the red man's chant, or the plaintive ditties of the homesick German or Norwegian; the germs of the best in music lie hidden among all the races that are commingled in this great country....(but) the most potent as well as beautiful among them are certain of the ...plantation melodies and slave songs. I, for one, am delighted by them. When music has been established as one of the reigning arts of the land, another wreath of fame and glory will be added to the country which earned the name “Land of Freedom” by unshackling her slaves at the price of her own blood.”

15. Let us end with the words of the 83-year-old Harry Burleigh, spoken at the 100th anniversary celebration of Dvořák's birth, at the composer's former residence on E 17th St:

“It was Dvořák who taught me that the spirituals were meant not only for the colored people, but for people of all races, and every creed. In New York, I was with Dr. Dvořák almost constantly. He loved to hear me sing the old plantation melodies. His humility and religious feeling-his great love for common people of all lands-enabled him to sense the pure gold of plantation song. As an outsider...he honored this music with more authority than any American could, whether black or white. It was Dvořák who urged me to take these melodies to the world, to sing them alongside the great art songs of Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms. If I was the first to undertake this, it was Dvořák who instructed me to do so...We will always remember him as a great musician, but also for his greatness as a human being who understood, in the songs of the plantation, proof of the Negro's spiritual ascendancy over oppression and humiliation, who understood the message ever manifest: that the eventual deliverance from all that hinders and oppresses the soul will come, and man-every man-will be free.”

(1) See: “Thirty Years of the National Conservatory” by Henry T Finck



## DO WHAT ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK DID: "THINK LIKE BEETHOVEN!"

**JOIN US FOR TWO EVENTS:**

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 16**

**1:00 PM, St. John's In the Village**

**218 West 11<sup>th</sup> Street, NYC**

**Symposium on Dvorak, Burleigh & Thurber**

**Speakers:** Dr. Marti Newland, co-Founder of Harry T. Burleigh Society

Dr. Lynne Foote, co-Founder Harry T. Burleigh Society

Dr. Jean Snyder, world-renowned expert on Harry Burleigh

Mr. Fred Haight, expert on Antonín Dvořák

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The Foundation for the Revival of Classical Culture invites you to join us, at [Carnegie Hall](#) on [Tuesday, December 18 at 7:30 PM](#). We are initiating a revolution in American education, both "from the bottom up, and from the the top down", simultaneously. We, the citizens of the New York area, are now urgently required to assist teachers in an extraordinary volunteer effort to restore a sense of meaning and purpose to the very idea of great education for each and all, regardless of personal circumstances, on which a just United States must be built.

Why is the performance of Classical music, in chorus and orchestra, by youth and the average person, the crucial experiment that can refocus American education? Because it will work!

The Foundation's music program has already demonstrated many times in the past seven years that youth will embrace the music of the greatest composers, especially if they are participating in performing this music in a chorus or orchestra. **Yet—and this is decisive—youth have to also see that the same sense of musical purpose and excitement demanded of them, already exists in a portion of the adult population**, adults that come from the same households and background as their fathers, mothers, and grandfathers and grandmothers. **Only then can we truly re-educate and heal our divided nation.**

Classical culture may be the new form of "**creative non-violent direct action**," the secret of the American civil rights movement of Dr. Martin Luther King. As King associate Dr. Bernard Lafayette has insisted, "the difference between a protest and a movement, is when people begin to create their own music. That's when you have a movement." We intend to find out if that is true. This concert is not a thing in itself. Adult and youth choruses must rapidly spring up in our city – choruses that sing and teach the history and practice of the greatness that might be America and the world.

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