



# DVOŘÁK & MOZART

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FRIDAY & SATURDAY, JANUARY 7 & 8, AT 8 PM  
SUNDAY, JANUARY 09, AT 2 PM

## NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

GIANCARLO GUERRERO, *conductor*

GEORGE LI, *piano*

FRANZ VON SUPPÉ

*Poet and Peasant: Overture*

**10 minutes**

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

*Piano Concerto No. 24 in C minor, K. 491*

**30 minutes**

*I. Allegro*

*II. Larghetto*

*III. Allegretto*

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

*Symphony No. 8 in G major, Op. 88*

**35 minutes**

*I. Allegro con brio*

*II. Adagio*

*III. Allegretto grazioso*

*IV. Allegro ma non troppo*

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## AT A GLANCE

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Vienna looms large in the history of classical music. The opportunities it offered as the capital of one of Europe's great empires attracted talent from across the realm ruled by the Habsburg dynasty. Mozart was one of many composers who were born elsewhere but moved to Vienna to further their careers. It was in Vienna that he contributed to forging what we know as Classical style.

Mozart accomplished this through influential works like the series of mature piano concertos he wrote to showcase his celebrity as a charismatic piano *virtuoso*. His dark, troubling Concerto in C minor had a powerful impact on Ludwig van Beethoven, in particular, who had followed in Mozart's steps by moving to Vienna to establish himself as a pianist-composer.

Franz von Suppé and Antonín Dvořák represent composers who emerged from outside the mainstream Germanic sphere of the multiethnic Habsburg Empire. Suppé assimilated into Viennese culture from a young age and even helped define its characteristic form of operetta through his prolific writing for the stage. But he is mostly remembered today for a few sparkling overtures that have been appropriated for use in cartoons, soundtracks, and other popular media.

As a proud Czech, Dvořák, on the other hand, experienced an ambivalent relationship with Vienna. He faced anti-Czech bigotry, for example, from leading institutions like the Vienna Philharmonic, yet his talent so impressed gatekeepers such as Johannes Brahms that the eminent German composer became an important champion. Near the end of his life, Brahms tried to persuade his younger colleague to resettle in Vienna – he even offered to help defray expenses – but Dvořák remained too attached to his beloved Bohemia.

Musically, Dvořák fused his reverence for the tradition represented by Mozart and Brahms and his attraction to the “modern music” of Richard Wagner with the vivid melodies and rhythms inspired by his native Bohemia. His Eighth Symphony reflects the composer's love of nature and offers a fresh perspective on the Austro-German symphonic lineage Dvořák aspired to build on.

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# FRANZ VON SUPPÉ

## *Poet and Peasant Overture*

Born on April 18, 1819, in Spalato, Dalmatia (then part of the Habsburg Empire, now Split, Croatia)

Died on May 21, 1895, in Vienna

**Composed:**  
1846

**Estimated length:**  
10 minutes



### **First performance:**

August 24, 1846, in Vienna, with the composer conducting

### **First Nashville Symphony performance:**

These are the first Nashville Symphony performances.

Said to have been born on a boat in the Adriatic, Franz von Suppé grew up in current-day Croatia — a part of the world that was once controlled by the Roman and Byzantine Empires and linked to the Republic of Venice but then, a generation before Suppé's birth, ceded to the Habsburgs as part of the polyglot Austrian Empire.

The composer's family origins and early years are obscured by a good deal of lore. Even the spelling of his last name shows a tendency to embroider the facts of his life story. Francesco Ezechiele Ermengildo de Suppe Demelli streamlined his name into a German version for the Viennese after settling in the capital city. But since *Suppe* means "soup" in German, he flavored it by adding an accent.

As part of the legend he spun, Suppé claimed to be distantly related to Donizetti and to have defied his civil servant father's objections to a musical career. What is known for certain is that the talent Suppé revealed at a young age was supported when his widowed mother took her teenage son with her to live in Vienna, where one of his mentors was a former friend of Beethoven.

Young Franz actually began composing with a focus on sacred music and, late in his life, returned to this genre. But it was above all the vast quantity of music he produced for the

stage — operettas, operas, ballets, incidental music for plays — that made Suppé rich and famous. He became a 19th-century celebrity by establishing a Viennese version of operetta, the genre of light opera pioneered by Jacques Offenbach in Paris. Despite his great success in the later 19th century, however, Suppé is nowadays primarily remembered for a few overtures that hardly reveal the extent of his ambitious catalogue of works.

Starting with his 1860 operetta *Das Pensionat* ("The Boarding School"), Suppé began competing with the popular stagings of Offenbach's operettas that had been imported to Vienna. *Dichter und Bauer* ("Poet and Peasant") dates from earlier in his career and was actually a comedy by the playwright Karl Elmar about a lovesick poet who flees to the countryside when he faces obstacles to marrying his young beloved. Suppé supplied a score of incidental music and songs for the 1846 production at the legendary Theater an der Wien, one of several theaters in Vienna with which he was closely associated.

Herbert describes the piece as "a gesture of empathy." He remarks: "There is a need to place a higher value on the strength that comes from diverse peoples living together in Britain. We all have something valuable and very positive to contribute to the larger part

of the puzzle of life in Britain today. Stephen Lawrence was deprived of the right to a life where he could use his amazing talents for the good of wider society. Nevertheless, we can press together across our communities to help realize his dreams.”

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Overture to *Poet and Peasant* recycles music Suppé had already used elsewhere — a practice reminiscent of Rossini, whose ebullient style is among the stylistic influences that echo in this piece. It begins with fanfares that soon segue into an expanded cello solo

set against flowing harmonies from the harp. The pace quickens to the main body of the Overture, an Allegro that Suppé directs to be performed “boisterously.”

Along with an irresistible, heavily syncopated tune that is Suppé’s answer to Offenbach’s French can-can, the Overture takes a detour into a graceful Viennese waltz. Fans of vintage cartoons may recognize the use of this music in an old *Popeye the Sailor* episode. The Overture itself has inspired dozens of varied arrangements.

*Scored for flute and piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, harp and strings.*

# WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Piano Concerto No. 24 in C minor, K. 491

Born on January 27, 1756,  
in Salzburg, Austria

Died on December 5, 1791,  
in Vienna

**Composed:**  
1786

**Estimated  
length:**  
30 minutes



**First performance:**

Likely April 7, 1786, in Vienna,  
with Mozart as the soloist

**First Nashville Symphony  
performance:**

February 15, 1979, at War Memorial  
Auditorium with Michael Charry  
and Paul Badura-Skoda on piano.

**I**n 1781, when he was 25, Mozart abruptly broke with his hated employer and left his native Salzburg for new adventures. The decision to leave a secure position under a patron to trying to make it as a freelance artist in Vienna was bold, and it opened the door to a previously unimaginable new phase of Mozart’s career. It brought a sense of hope and possibility — and anxiety — as he worked

his way through the complexities of Viennese social and musical politics to carve out a niche. Mozart combined private lessons with public concert appearances that featured himself as a keyboard soloist. His Viennese fans were a fickle audience, but for several years Mozart attracted them to these concerts like a magnet. He used his piano concertos to show off his keyboard style but also to introduce his latest

thoughts as a composer.

Earlier, in Salzburg, Mozart had written a handful of piano concertos. But his situation in Vienna during the early 1780s encouraged him to formulate a rich synthesis that made his latest efforts in the genre among his most innovative and emotionally complex compositions. Mozart managed to entertain his listeners while at the same time challenging them with new discoveries and establishing the concerto format as more than a vehicle of virtuosity. In his hands, the concerto became a pillar of Classical style.

Mozart delighted in the aspects he knew would be appreciated by his more intensely focused listeners, but he also boasted of the wider appeal of these works. The piano concerto, according to biographer Robert Gutman, became “the symbol of his ascending popularity, the very core of his extraordinary success in Vienna.”

In the process, Mozart laid the groundwork for the piano concerto as a substantial musical statement that could parallel the symphony. The later Romantic generation especially prized his two concertos anchored in a minor key: those in D minor (1785) and C minor (1786). For his performances, Beethoven provided cadenzas of his own for the D minor Concerto, and his own C minor Concerto bears the imprint of his predecessor’s masterpiece in the same key.

Mozart entered K. 491 into the catalogue of works he began keeping in Vienna on March 24, 1786. It was the second to last of the dozen piano concertos he wrote in the fertile period between 1784 and 1786. Typically written for the Lenten season, when the law forbade theaters to operate, the piano concertos provided a practical outlet for Mozart’s dramatic sensibility.

The composer likely premiered the C minor Concerto in a special concert he produced at Vienna’s Burgtheater on April 7 to support his freelance career. This was just three weeks

before the opera *Le nozze di Figaro* opened at the same venue, launching a new phase of his career. Both the C minor Concerto and *Figaro* represent some of Mozart’s most innovative and ambitious works in their respective genres, yet each inhabits a world utterly unlike the other.

Into the Classical era and even beyond, certain keys were associated with particular emotional states or moods. For Mozart, the tonality of D minor, for example — an important key for *Don Giovanni* and the Requiem — could reinforce images of death, destruction, and even the demonic. His use of C minor, on the other hand, anticipates something of the emotional turmoil and tragic intensity that Beethoven made into a signature with his works in that key — though Mozart’s approach is more intimate and introspective. It’s worth recalling a point that Arthur Hutchings made in his *Companion to Mozart’s Piano Concertos*: “If we are to know Mozart as he was, is, and always will be, we must trust our eyes and ears to reveal a wonder far greater than the miniature Beethoven which romantic faith wants us to create.”

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The lengthy first movement is designed on a large scale. The orchestra presents the main material per Classical convention in a section to itself before the soloist enters the picture. The main theme is restless and angular, smoldering with a passion that can swell at any moment with frightening intensity. Mozart leads us into a nocturnal realm with music that inescapably gravitates back to the minor despite some lyrical escapes into the major. In his later opera *The Magic Flute*, Mozart also uses C minor to depict the mysterious, old-fashioned chorale of the Armed Men as the protagonists, who wait to undergo their



initiation, remain encircled by night.

The soloist quietly steals on the scene with a surprise, presenting brand-new material before the main theme returns in a spirit of relentless, haunting desperation. The score calls for his fullest complement of woodwinds to date in the concertos (flute and pairs of oboes, clarinets, and bassoons), which gives the orchestral part a characteristic timbral fullness. The integration of the solo piano part with the orchestra shows the craft of a brilliant symphonist. The original surviving score has no written cadenza — composers such as Brahms wrote their own. Mozart weaves the soloist into the coda's final pages, bringing the first movement to a tensely quiet, unresolved close.

Such emotional complexity is countered by a middle movement of disarming simplicity. The main theme, first played by the pianist alone, is indeed so simple that it almost resembles a riddle — as if something is hiding behind

its naively repeated notes. Shadows from the opening movement breeze by in a section in C minor. Mozart's woodwind writing in this *Larghetto* is particularly exquisite.

Even with its trumpet-and-drums sonorities, the music of the finale retains a notably dark quality. The movement proceeds as a set of eight variations on a theme comprising two parts, each of eight measures. Only two of them are in major keys. After the seventh variation, the soloist presents a cadenza that leads into the final (at first solo) variation. There is no redemptive, “happy ending” transformation into a major key in the final pages. Mozart keeps on his tragic, C minor course to the very end.

*In addition to solo piano, the Piano Concerto in C minor calls for flute; pairs of oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, and trumpets; timpani; and strings.*



# ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

## Symphony No. 8 in G major, Op. 88

Born on September 8, 1841, in the Bohemian village of Nelahozeves, just north of Prague

Died on May 1, 1904, in Prague

**Composed:**  
1875;  
revised 1889

**Estimated length:**  
35 minutes



**First performance:**

February 2, 1890, in Prague, with the composer conducting

**First Nashville Symphony performance:**

October 23, 1980, at Tennessee Performing Arts Center, with Michael Charry conducting.

After years of struggling for recognition from the gatekeepers, Antonín Dvořák at last got his foot in the door when he won a prestigious Austrian State Prize for emerging composers in 1874. He was recommended by a jury to receive a grant administered from Vienna. Dvořák's success at gaining this vote of confidence (on top of the badly needed cash) resulted in a creative outburst.

He kept winning the prize over the next several years and in the process came to the attention of Johannes Brahms, a member of the selection committee. Brahms persuaded his influential publisher, Fritz Simrock, to give his young Czech colleague a chance, and Dvořák soon had his first international success with his rousing *Slavonic Dances* in 1878.

But this came with a catch: Dvořák became typecast as an “ethnic” composer with a flair for tapping into folkloric Czech sources — above all in the areas of rhythm and melody. A central challenge Dvořák faced in these years of emergence, and even at the height of his success, involved the question of how to remain true to his voice and to his proud use of Bohemian idioms while claiming a place within the mainstream tradition of canonical composers.

Dvořák had grown up in a small village,

the son of an innkeeper/butcher who also performed music as a pastime. Young Antonín was given the opportunity to study in Prague, but he also gained practical experience playing with a dance band in restaurants and for balls. The image of a “spontaneous” and “nationalist” composer led to Dvořák's being pigeonholed as an artist defined more by Czech influences than by the fresh voice he brought to the dominant tradition.

This led to spats with Simrock, his German publisher, who complained that Dvořák was too “ambitious” by continuing to devote his energy to such large-scale (and unprofitable) genres as the symphony. By the time of his Eighth Symphony, tensions were so great that Dvořák refused to continue negotiations and offered the score instead to the English publisher Novello.

The success of the turmoil-filled Seventh Symphony in 1885 had given Dvořák much-needed validation, proving that he really did belong in the top league in the face of German-Austrian ethnocentrism. This took some of the pressure off the composer, so that a few years later, in 1889, he could return to the genre with renewed confidence, eager to voice his unique perspective with less constraint. The Eighth would be a symphony,

Dvořák remarked, “different from the other symphonies, with individual thoughts worked out in a new way.” In fact, the most powerful of the Viennese critics, Eduard Hanslick (a major champion of Brahms), agreed in his review: “It differs considerably from both his previous symphonies now familiar in Vienna.” (This was before the composer had written what became his best-known symphony *From the New World*.) Hanslick concluded that “Dvořák is a serious artist who has learned much but, despite his knowledge, he has not sacrificed spontaneity and freshness. His works give voice to a singular individual, who emanates a refreshing breath of innovation and originality.”

Certainly the Eighth Symphony contains typically Dvořákian touches of Czech musicality and local color. But this sense of a personal voice is even more pervasive here. Another important influence was the composer’s reverence for nature, which he could enjoy without interruption at his comfortable country home in Vysoká, about 40 miles south of Prague. Dvořák loved to wander in the nearby forest as he mulled over musical ideas. It was here, in the summer of 1889, that he began work on the Eighth Symphony. The result can suggest a beguiling pastoral ode at times, but the Eighth is by no means an unambiguously cheerful score. Much of the fascination of this music lies in the unpredictable gestures Dvořák weaves into it.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Eighth opens in singing style — one of its signatures — with a chorale-like slow introduction that recurs at several important “joints” in the first movement. Already Dvořák adds a note of ambiguity, beginning in G minor and wandering before honing in on the key of G major — like sunlight suddenly bursting through a tree canopy. Birdsong responds, in the form of a flute — but this is an important

theme, not a merely picturesque episode. These pastoral moments coexist with energetic, brass-driven climaxes. The feeling is not so much of a retreat into nature as of finding within its domain a vast and unpredictable spectrum of emotions. Like nature itself, musical events germinate into abundant variety as Dvořák recombines and diversifies his basic elements.

The technique of variation is, after all, central to nature, and it becomes a major strategy within the Eighth. The Adagio unfolds as a many-hued set of reflections on the theme presented by the strings at the outset. One of these subtly recalls the serene bird-call music from the first movement, but the Adagio also encompasses a stormier development. Variations of instrumentation are also part of the musical logic. Dvořák writes a melancholy waltz in G minor in lieu of a boisterous scherzo for the third movement — a choice that might bring to mind Brahms’s use of a more tempered intermezzo at parallel moments. Countering its moodiness is a sweetly innocent section that recycles material from a one-act comic opera Dvořák had written long before. The movement unexpectedly shifts in meter and tempo near the end.

The finale opens with trumpet fanfares and proceeds to explore widely ranging variants on the two-part theme first played by cellos — another echo of the first movement’s flute theme. The model of invention here recalls Beethoven’s *Eroica* as well as Brahms, but the music is stamped by Dvořák’s unmistakable personality. No one else could so effectively combine reverie and punch-drunk humor that becomes downright giddy in the frantic final moments.

*Scored for 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (1st doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani and strings*

— Thomas May is the Nashville Symphony’s program annotator.