COLORADO COLLEGE

SMf Summer Music festival

Program Notes
by
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FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA CONCERT

June 27, 2025 | 7:30 PM | Celeste Theatre

Cello Concerto in B minor, Op. 104 — Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Allegro
Adagio, ma non troppo
Finale - Allegro moderato-Andante-Allegro vivo

When this writer first started studying classical music and buying LPs, the Dvořák cello concert was one of the first discs that I actually wore out from continual playing. I can't recall why I loved it so much, but I hope that it gets to first-time listeners in this audience as powerfully as it did to me about 65 years ago! It has become Dvořák's gift to all cellists and is generally thought to be their most prized possession.

Since his death in 1904, Dvořák has been a cultural hero in Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic). In the dramatic cemetery on the top of a hill in Prague, his burial monument is among the most grand. I imagine this fame is based on several factors. First, he loved Czech national music – folk songs, dances, etc. – and frequently absorbed their musical personalities in his "classical" music. In fact, he was so adept at infusing music with national personality that he created one of the most recognized "American" works during his brief stay in this country, fondly known as the "Symphony from the New World." Second, he was simply an excellent composer in the Western musical tradition. He was quickly recognized by Brahms as a musician of superior talent and the latter recommended him enthusiastically to his own publisher.

The Cello Concerto in B minor was one of Dvorak's last pieces. He was back in New York where he had spent some time as a distinguished composer. On

this last trip, he met the celebrated musician Victor Herbert and heard the latter's cello concert. He was so inspired he decided to finish his own right away. The music of the first movement, *Allegro*, consists of two memorable tunes. The first is introduced by the clarinet and subsequently answered by the other winds. The second is simply one of the most beautiful and lyrical moments for the French horn, perhaps in the history of the instrument! It is one of those delectable moments that one looks forward to with loving anticipation.

The second movement, *Adagio ma non troppo*, had a special meaning for the composer. He had been in love with a young Czech actress named Josefina Kaunitzová, but his feelings were not reciprocated. He wound up marrying her sister. But when Josephina died about 8 years later, in her memory he added the elegiac coda in this movement, making it especially personal and poignant. The third movement, *Finale – Allegro moderato*, starts in a more dance-like mood until Dvorak brings back the elegy from the 2nd movement. He wrote the following note about this return that reveals his personal engagement with the music.

> "The Finale closes gradually diminuendo, like a sigh, with reminiscences of the first and second movements—the solo dies down . . . then swells again, and the last bars are taken up by the orchestra and the whole concludes in a stormy mood. That is my idea and I cannot depart from it."

So ends this simply beautiful piece of music.

Symphony No. 1 in F minor, Op. 10 Dmitri Shostakovich
(1906-1975)

Allegretto-Allegro non troppo
Allegro-Meno mosso
Lento-Largo
Allegro molto

Dmitri Shostakovich was launched into a spectacular career with the premiere of his First Symphony in 1926, a graduation piece for the School of Composition at the Leningrad Conservatory, when the composer was not-yet twenty years old. This first performance was a great success and subsequent performances in Europe and the United States signaled his fame as an international composer. It was performed by the best-known conductors in the west, including Bruno Walter, Arturo Toscanini, Otto Klemperer and Leopold Stokowski, and was praised by other composers such as Milhaud and Berg.

Here was the first symphony by a teenager from the Soviet Union winning a place in the general repertoire of orchestras around the world.

But unlike his slightly older Soviet colleague, Sergei Prokofiev, Shostakovich did not rebel as a student. He had composition teachers who were disciplinarians and did not allow for much experimentation. Still, he was able to combine a modest degree of experimental freedom with the disciplined foundations of his schooling and arrive at a style that was both musically solid and fresh.

It is important to recall that Shostakovich was a part of the generation of composers who were trained entirely under the Soviet regime (as opposed to Imperial Russia) in the same school formerly known as the St. Petersburg Conservatory. His predecessors there included the greatest names in Russian music – Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky and Prokofiev, and as a youth he was aware of their shadows. His early works thus take only tentative steps toward the more modern styles of his later works. For the record, we should know that he suffered for these later modernisms; in 1936, just ten years after the auspicious beginning with the First Symphony, he was attacked in *Pravda*, the Communist newspaper, for writing music that was "formalist, coarse, primitive and vulgar." This began his troubled relationship with his government, a relationship that he endured rather than escape like his fellow Russians – Prokofiev and Rachmaninoff.

Regardless of his later political problems, his first symphony is a fresh creation full of variety, compositional skill, and expressive feeling. After an extended slow introduction that grows out of little opening solos by a trumpet and a bassoon, the first real theme of the first movement, *Allegretto*, is heard in the clarinet. It sounds slightly like a vaudeville march. His compositional skill is heard in the way he passes motives from this theme around the orchestra in a manner almost reminiscent of Beethoven! The second theme, like a waltz but without a downbeat, is similarly developed by being passed around the orchestra. This opening exposition of themes is fresh, youthful, charming, and really well written. And while most of the movement uses only small sections of the large orchestra at once, during the development of his ideas occasionally all instrumental forces are unleashed at once in striking contrast to the prevailing delicate orchestration.

The following slow movement, *Allegro*, after a two-measure false start in the cellos and basses, romps into a real scherzo theme. It is fast, jaunty and rhythmically bouncy. It briefly features the orchestral piano. A more somber mood is heard in the middle section with long extended melodies in the winds. Tremolos in the strings prepare the listener for an exuberant return of the opening scherzo, again giving some important exposed passages to the piano.

A little codetta that closes the movement contains a charming moment of orchestral color with the strings playing harmonics accompanied by a triangle.

The third movement, *Lento*, opens with a dark oboe solo which leads into a big rhapsodic section for the full orchestra. It sounds like Shostakovich is trying to show us his Wagnerian side. After a gradual quieting down, a second plaintive solo theme is sounded by the same oboe. This again builds dramatically to a full and dramatic orchestral climax. The third melody is heard in a high solo violin and leads to one last climax. This entire movement is passionate and deeply expressive for such a young composer.

The finale, *Allegro molto*, is introduced by a snare drum roll at the end of the third movement and begins without a pause. It has a slow introduction before the first fast theme is heard in the clarinets. With help of the piano, this builds to a furious climax. A tender theme in a violin solo follows with its own ensuing climax. There are additional moments of calm, one particularly striking one with a tympani and violin duet. Through all this, Shostakovich demonstrates a great sense of musical drama, creating an exciting experience for the listener and foreshadowing his great works yet to come. The climactic final cadence will be noticed by all of us!

Thank you for contributing to a very successful 41st season!
We are grateful and look forward to seeing you in 2026.

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