



*By Tom Wolff*

DVOŘÁK AND AMERICA  
A SERIES OF THREE CONCERTS PRODUCED BY  
POSTCLASSICAL ENSEMBLE PRESENTED BY AND PERFORMED  
AT THE CLARICE SMITH PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

## DVOŘÁK AND AMERICA

Kevin Deas, bass-baritone/narrator  
Benjamin Pasternack, piano  
PostClassical Ensemble conducted by Angel Gil-Ordóñez

**Friday, March 1, 2013 . 8PM**  
**Elsie & Marvin Dekelbourn Concert Hall**

**PostClassical Ensemble**  
**An Experimental Musical Laboratory**

## DVOŘÁK AND AMERICA

Dvořák's *American Suite* performed by Benjamin Pasternack, piano. Commentary by Joseph Horowitz, Michael Beckerman, Angel Gil-Ordóñez and Patrick Warfield

Dvořák: *Serenade for Strings in E Major, op. 22*

Moderato  
 Tempo di Valse  
 Scherzo: Vivace  
 Larghetto  
 Finale: Allegro vivace

Dvořák: *American Suite in A Major, op. 98b* (version for orchestra with visual presentation by Timothy Barringer)

Andante Con Moto  
 Allegro  
 Moderato (alla Pollacca)  
 Andante  
 Allegro

### INTERMISSION

Dvořák/Horowitz/Beckerman: *Hiawatha* Melodrama for narrator and orchestra  
 With additional orchestration by Angel Gil-Ordóñez\*

\*World premiere performance (*The Hiawatha Melodrama* is published by the Theodore Presser Company)

Prologue  
 Part 1: Hiawatha's Wooing  
 Part 2: Hiawatha's Wedding Feast  
 Part 3: The Death of Minnehaha  
 Part 4: The Slaying of Pau-Puk-Keewis  
 Coda: Hiawatha's Leavetaking

Dvořák/William Arms Fisher: "Goin' Home" (baritone and orchestra)

*Approximately 1 hour, 45 minutes, which includes a 10-minute intermission.*

**Pre-concert presentation at 7PM in the Gildenhorn Recital Hall**

**There will be a post-concert discussion with Michael Beckerman, Kevin Deas, Angel Gil-Ordóñez, Benjamin Pasternack, Patrick Warfield and Joseph Horowitz on the stage immediately following the performance.**

The arrival of Antonin Dvořák in September 1892 as Director of New York City's National Conservatory of Music represented a triumph of persistence on the part of Jeannette Thurber, the conservatory's visionary founder. Not only did so celebrated a European composer confer an indispensable imprimatur on the fledgling school; Dvořák, Thurber knew, was an instinctive democrat, a butcher's son, a cultural nationalist. Dvořák had hardly set foot in Manhattan before learning, and not only from Thurber, that (as he wrote to friends in Prague) "the Americans expect great things of me and the main thing is, so they say, to show them to the promised land and kingdom of a new and independent art, in short, to create a national music. If the small Czech nation can have such musicians, they say, why could not they, too, when their country and people is so immense?" And Dvořák — overwhelmed by new excitement and attention, by the scale and pace of American life, by the caliber of American orchestras — more than took the bait. "It is certainly both a great and a splendid task for me and I hope that with God's help I shall accomplish it. There is more than enough material here and plenty of talent."

By talent, Dvořák meant American composers and instrumentalists, including his own pupils, some of whom he found "very promising." By material, he meant American sights and sounds, American roots: "another spirit, other thoughts, another coloring ... something Indian." There were no indigenous people in Bohemia; like other Europeans, Dvořák was fascinated by the Native American (and had already read Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha* in Czech). And there were no blacks in Hapsburg lands; in New York, he had for the first time heard such "Negro melodies" as "Deep River" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" — in which he detected, as he famously told the *New York Herald* in May 1893, the necessary foundation for "the future music of this country."

In short: with his rustic roots and egalitarian temperament, Dvořák was precisely the kind of cultural nationalist to inspire Americans. He proved inquisitive and empathetic, as eager to learn as to teach. His aspirations for American music resonated with the hopes of Thurber and other New Yorkers impatient for the emergence of a musical idiom as recognizably "American" as Dvořák was Bohemian, or Tchaikovsky Russian, or Beethoven German.

The climactic moment in Dvořák's American career came on December 16, 1893 — the premiere of his *New World* Symphony by the New York Philharmonic. The issue of whether this music sounded "American" instantly ignited fierce debate. At stake were delicate issues of national identity — in particular, whether the African-Americans and Native Americans from whose music Dvořák drew inspiration could be considered representative or emblematic "Americans" in the first place. In New York, a city of immigrants, Dvořák's method was taken to heart. In Boston, he was denounced as a "negrophile" and his music was termed "barbaric."

Dvořák himself told the New York press that the symphony's middle movements were inspired by *The Song of Hiawatha*. And it was well-known that plantation song — the music we now call "spirituals" — was another major influence on the symphony's tunes and the imagery they engendered. It speaks volumes that the Largo of the *New World* Symphony, steeped in plantation song, was turned into an ersatz spiritual, "Goin' Home," by Dvořák's student William Arms Fisher. The same music, the same movement, while not a narrative, is pregnant with *Hiawatha*, with the death of Minnehaha, with a West of the imagination (Dvořák had yet to journey there) conveyed by smooth textures and spread chords, by uncluttered, unadorned musical space. Willa Cather heard in the Largo "the immeasurable yearning of all flat lands." With its incessant tom-tom and exotic drone, the



“primitive” five-note compass of its skittish tune, its whirling and hopping build-up, the Scherzo of the *New World* Symphony depicts the Dance of Pau-Puk Keewis at Hiawatha’s wedding. In the symphony’s finale, a stentorian “Indian” theme launches a fleet, savage chase. With its Indian threnody, the coda — a dead-march, a cry of pain, a loud last chord fading to silence — seals one of the symphony’s meanings: it is, all of it, an elegy for a vanishing race.

\* \* \*

In the decades following Dvořák’s death in 1904, the American controversy over the *New World* Symphony dissipated. The work generally became known as the testament of a homesick European; its possible Americanisms were considered superficial, trite or purely conjectural. The critical tide began to turn in the 1990s thanks to the American music historian Michael Beckerman, who in a series of articles and a book, *New Worlds of Dvořák* (2004), undertook unprecedented research into possible programmatic correlations between Longfellow’s *Song of Hiawatha* and Dvořák’s symphony — and wound up with a radically fresh reading that circled back to what New York’s music critics had to say in 1893. As my own research, at that time, focused on American classical music in the late Gilded Age — the period of Dvořák’s American sojourn — I keenly appreciated the plausibility of it all. Turn-of-the-century Americans were caught in a vortex of immigration, industrialization and urbanization. Issues of national identity acquired an acute urgency.

Dvořák makes a cameo appearance in my *Wagner Nights* (1994), a history of American Wagnerism whose central character is Anton Seidl — in New York, Dvořák’s closest friend and the conductor of the first performances of the *New World* Symphony. In *Classical Music in America: A History* (2005), I allot Dvořák a crucial role in my narrative. Meanwhile, as Director of an NEH National Education Project, I had occasion to produce a young readers’ book, *Dvořák in America*, and to commission a state-of-the-art DVD, *From the New World: A Celebrated Composer’s American Odyssey*, by Robert Winter and Peter Bogdanoff.

Beckerman, Winter and I are true believers for whom Dvořák figures vitally in late 19th-century American culture; and we all hear in Dvořák an “American style” transcending the superficial exoticism of a Rimsky-Korsakov in Italy or a Glinka in Spain. We have many times preached in public forums — most memorably, perhaps, at an international Dvořák conference in Prague. As the Czechs in attendance seemed shocked into silence, it remained for the British and Germans to rebuke us as glib New World maniacs.

\* \* \*

Tonight’s *Hiawatha* Melodrama originated at a Dvořák festival I curated as Executive Director of the Brooklyn Philharmonic in January 1994. In musical parlance, the term “melodrama” refers to a composition mating music with the spoken word. As part of his attempt to demonstrate the relationship of Longfellow’s poem to the *New World* Symphony and also to give a sense of the composer’s inner hearing, Beckerman had combined sections of Dvořák’s symphony with excerpts from *The Song of Hiawatha*. In Brooklyn, he presented this “melodrama” with a taped accompaniment. I suggested to him that it be turned into a continuous concert work with orchestra — which we collaboratively achieved. This “second” version of the Melodrama, some nine minutes long, has been

widely performed by such orchestras as the New York Philharmonic, Buffalo Philharmonic, Pacific Symphony and North Carolina Symphony.

The *Hiawatha* Melodrama we premiere tonight is a third and “final” version which we have expanded to include excerpts from Dvořák’s *American Suite* and *Violin Sonata*. Our objective has been to turn a demonstration arising from scholarly inquiry into a bona fide concert work. The narrative, extracted from Longfellow’s poem, is no longer fragmentary but continuous: it tells the Hiawatha story, beginning to end. From the *American Suite* we have extracted an elegiac Indianist refrain from the third movement. From the Sonata we have used themes from the Larghetto, which (as Beckerman has shown in detail) is a portrait of Hiawatha’s wife Minnehaha. I have also added transitional passages of my own. The orchestration, where not by Dvořák, is by Angel Gil-Ordóñez.

Commenting on the “second” version of the Melodrama, Beckerman has observed that there are passages in the *New World* Symphony where Dvořák clearly imagined textual or narrative images. He further writes: “While this at first may seem far-fetched, we must remember that as soon as he returned to Bohemia in 1895, he composed a series of tone poems based on the ballads of K.J. Erben. In at least one of these, he set down the poem, line by line, beneath the music — so this process was not alien to him.” Beckerman has further written: “Despite his reputation as a composer of abstract instrumental music, Dvořák used extra-musical images to generate musical ideas throughout his career. In fact, his central ambition was to be a successful composer of opera. In the context of Dvořák’s career, “From the New World” is at once his last symphony and a precursor to the mature symphonic poems, all of which follow a narrative thread, to this final trio of operas.” To which it may be added that we know that Dvořák, in New York, aspired to compose a *Hiawatha* opera or cantata and that pertinent sketches infiltrate his sketches for the *New World* Symphony.

In its earlier manifestation, the *Hiawatha* Melodrama attempted to extrapolate the alignments between the *New World* Symphony and *The Song of Hiawatha*. The Melodrama as heard tonight incorporates those alignments but elsewhere does not attempt to argue Dvořák’s intent. It may be regarded as a hint of what a Dvořák *Hiawatha* cantata or opera might have sounded like. Primarily, however, we have attempted to create a viable 35-minute concert work for narrator and orchestra. PostClassical Ensemble and Kevin Deas will shortly record tonight’s *Hiawatha* Melodrama for Naxos. We look forward to further performances by other orchestras.

\* \* \*

What Willa Cather, describing the impact of Dvořák’s *New World* Symphony in her novel *The Song of the Lark* (1915), called “the immeasurable yearning of all flat lands” is embodied in the clean sonority and uncluttered, unadorned musical space of Dvořák’s American style. The little-known *American Suite*, begun in New York just after the premiere of the *New World* Symphony, is a case in point. Dvořák wrote it for solo piano, then lovingly orchestrated it in 1895. Simplicity — its serene speech, shunning compositional virtuosity — is its crux. Thus, Dvořák’s method is also his intended message. The third movement is a jaunty dance not far removed from the world of stride piano.

The fourth evokes the vacant Iowa landscape of which he found “sometimes very sad, sad to despair.” In Spillville, Iowa, Dvořák had listened to interracial Kickapoo Medicine Show



musicians, including two African-Americans who intermingled Native American dances with banjo and guitar. In the *American Suite*, prairie vacancy mates with cakewalk and — in the fifth and final movement — an A-minor “Indian” tune turns into an A-major minstrel song.

Our concert begins with “Bohemian” Dvořák — the well-known *String Serenade*, composed in only two weeks in 1875 — some 17 years before Dvořák set foot in the United States. We end with “Goin’ Home” — created by Dvořák’s onetime New York pupil William Arms Fisher (1861-1948), who here adds words to the famous English horn tune from the Largo of the *New World Symphony*. “Goin’ Home” was first published in 1922.

— Written by Joseph Horowitz  
Artistic Director, PostClassical Ensemble

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#### Cello

Evelyn Elsing, principal  
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Fatma Dagler, principal  
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David Jones, principal  
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Ted Peters  
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Chris Gekker  
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#### Trombone

Lee Rogers, principal  
Doug Rosenthal  
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#### Tuba

Mike Bunn

#### Percussion

Jon Spirtas  
Greg Akagi  
Danny Villanueva

#### Timpani

Bill Richards

#### Harp

Rebecca Smith

Founded in 2003 by Music Director Angel Gil-Ordóñez and Artistic Director Joseph Horowitz, **PostClassical Ensemble** is an experimental musical laboratory testing the limits of orchestral programming. Its tagline, “More than an Orchestra,” refers to the thematic scope and exceptional formats of its concerts and an aspiration to embrace collaborative and educational activities not normally associated with orchestras. PCE’s many previous programs at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center have included a George Gershwin mini-festival, a presentation of the 1939 film documentary *The City* with Aaron Copland’s score performed live (and subsequently recorded as a Naxos DVD) and a program of Schoenberg and Weill based on Joseph Horowitz’s book *Artists in Exile*. In May 2014 PCE returns to College Park for *Mexican Revolution*, featuring the classic Mexican film *Redes* with Silvestre Revueñas’s blistering score performed live. In addition, PCE becomes ensemble-in-residence at Dumbarton Concerts in Washington DC, beginning in fall 2013.

The former Associate Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Spain, PostClassical Ensemble Music Director **Angel Gil-Ordóñez** has conducted throughout Europe, the United States and Latin America. In 2006, the King of Spain awarded Gil-Ordóñez the country’s highest civilian decoration, the Royal Order of Queen Isabella, for his work in advancing Spanish culture around the world. He also serves as Principal Guest Conductor of New York’s Perspectives Ensemble and as Music Director of the Georgetown University Orchestra. His recordings include two Naxos DVDs and a Naxos CD, all featuring American music with PostClassical Ensemble. A CD devoted to “Dvořák in America” is also in the works.

PostClassical Ensemble Artistic Director **Joseph Horowitz** is equally known as the award-winning author of nine books and as a pioneering practitioner of thematic, cross-disciplinary concert programming. His *Classical Music in America: A History* (2005) and *Artists in Exile* (2008) were both named “best books of the year” by *The Economist*. His most recent book is *Moral Fire: Musical Portraits from America’s Fin-de-Siecle*. As director of an NEH consortium, he currently curates contextualized programming for the Buffalo Philharmonic, the North Carolina Symphony, the Louisville Orchestra and the Pacific Symphony. A specialist in the story of Dvořák and America, he is the author of a young readers’ book, *Dvořák and America*, and has directed an NEH teacher-training institute and National Education Project, both devoted to Dvořák’s American sojourn. He is the recipient of a Certificate of Commendation from the Czech Parliament.

**Timothy Barringer**, Professor of Art History at Yale University, specializes in exploring alignments between music and visual art. His specialties include 19th-century American landscape painting. His publications include *The American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States 1820 to 1880*.

**Michael Beckerman**, Professor of Music at New York University, is America’s foremost Dvořák scholar, author of *New Worlds of Dvořák* and editor of *Dvořák and His World*. His research on the relationship between the *New World* Symphony and Longfellow’s *The Song of Hiawatha* is both unprecedented and unsurpassed. As a specialist in Czech music he is a recipient of the Janáček Medal from the Czech Republic and is a Laureate of the Czech Music Council.

**Kevin Deas**, one of America’s most distinguished concert singers, is a regular participant in Joseph Horowitz’s “Dvořák and America” festivals and has appeared as narrator in an earlier version of the *Hiawatha* Melodrama with the New York Philharmonic, the Buffalo Philharmonic and the North Carolina Symphony. He is perhaps most acclaimed for his signature portrayal of Porgy in Gershwin’s opera, having sung the role with the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and the San Francisco, Atlanta, San Diego, Utah, Houston, Baltimore and Montreal Symphonies and the Ravinia and Saratoga festivals. He will record tonight’s *Hiawatha* Melodrama and “Goin’ Home” with PostClassical Ensemble for Naxos.

**Benjamin Pasternack**, a frequent guest of PostClassical Ensemble, was last heard with the Ensemble in Lou Harrison’s Piano Concerto. Next fall, he takes part in PCE’s “Tales from the Vienna Woods” at Dumbarton Concerts, performing Adolf Schulz-Evler’s diabolical paraphrase of the Blue Danube Waltz. He has performed dozens of times with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, including concerts on tour in Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, in Salzburg and Paris. His recordings include an all-Copland CD on Naxos. He joined the piano faculty of the Peabody Conservatory of Music in September 1997.

**Patrick Warfield**, Assistant Professor of Musicology at the University of Maryland, specializes in American music. He recently completed a scholarly edition of six marches by John Philip Sousa and is currently finishing a biography of Sousa to be published by the University of Illinois Press.

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