

Antonín Dvořák (September 8, 1841 – May 1, 1904) was born near Prauge in the Austrian Empire (today's Czech Republic). He began his musical training at the local village school at the age of six, and grew into an accomplished musician in his late teens. Dvořák played viola with the Bohemian Provisional Theater Orchestra in the 1860s until he left to orchestra in 1871 to dedicate more time to composition. In 1873, he married Anna Čermáková, and they had nine children.

Dvořák is well known for weaving traditional Czech folk music elements into his many works. His reputation grew during the 1870s as he continued to compose many pieces in a number of genres. Dvořák spent 1892 to 1895 in the United States as the director of the National Conservatory of Music, and it was during this time that he wrote his famous “New World” Symphony, reflecting what he deemed to be elements of American nationalistic music. Later in his life, Dvořák composed primarily opera and chamber music. He served as the director of the Conservatory in Prague from 1901 until 1904, when he died of heart failure at the age of 62.

Symphony No. 6 in D major was composed in 1880 for Hans Richter, the conductor of the Vienna Philharmonic from 1875 to 1882. After several delays and postponements, as well as anti-Czech feelings among the Vienna Philharmonic members, the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra premiered the piece in March of 1881. The piece itself reflects Dvořák's experimentation in German styles, while still including several distinctly Czech musical traditions. Music critics also suggest that his influences for Symphony No. 6 could also include Liszt, Wagner, Brahms, and fellow Czech composer Smetana.

The first movement uses traditional sonata form and features two main themes, two secondary themes, and two main transitional passages. The initial theme rises out of the accompaniment as the piece begins, and references back to the main theme occur all throughout the piece. In the second movement, Dvořák uses a Rondo form and some material from the first movement. He succeeds in creating a passionate, yearning quality in this slow section.

The third movement incorporates a traditional Czech dance called the Furiant. The rapid dance constantly shifts accents as it alternates between 2/4 and 3/4 time. The lyrical second section of this movement features a piccolo solo, and concludes with a restatement of the original scherzo. The final movement returns to sonata form and again plays on some of the compositional material from the first movement. It switches develops the second theme before returning to the first, and ends with a bombastic coda, which builds to a fiery finale.