Romanticism, Nationalism, and Exoticism

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History swings like a long pendulum from one extreme to another. As from Dickens’ opening in *A Tale of Two Cities*, the extremes of joy and sorrow, triumph and dejection, passion and despair, as well as agony and ecstasy define us in all that we do for ourselves, our families, our friends and our patients. The Time of the Season is upon us (and for 2011 it seems that Zombies are everywhere, they seem to creep up every time there is a global recession), so I stray, but in keeping with Dickens, he again moves us from merry to dismal, from merry to morose and from poor enough to rich enough from none other than *A Christmas Carol*. Scrooge’s past captures his present to shape his future much the same way Lincoln reveres the dead and advises the living. This brings us to songs, carols, and music that fill the air in celebration throughout the United States and much of the rest of the world over the next month. The splendor of these melodies arises from the pendulum extremes of life that define our romantic era, a time of personal self-expression through literary, visual, and musical arts.

Where there’s music, there’s Beethoven. Despite being regarded as a Classicist, Beethoven more than any other composer epitomized the Early Romantic period of classical music. The central theme of the romantic spirit brought forth by Beethoven results from the blending of his intense passion, individualism and self-expression. The Early Romantic Period was a time of great thinkers, artists and scientists. Towards the end of the Late Romantic Period many new and diverse musical styles emerged – notably, and because Prague is upon us, is the nationalism of Antonin Dvorak. At this time, it marked the age of Impressionism in the arts and great inventions in the scientific world, for example, trains Dvorak’s second passion after music. Dvorak was greatly influenced by all these changes occurring during his formative years.

A genial family man from peasant stock, Dvorak served as an apprentice in a butcher shop until his talent as a violinist was recognized. He was considered a natural talent with a melodic gift. He writes effortlessly music that we can listen to effortlessly. He remains grounded in spirit to the beautiful land and simple peasant life of his native Bohemia. All of this is reflected in his music with an unself-conscious flair of nationalism, his best melodies are based on Bohemia folk models. His music brings us back to that pendulum ticking our lives away. His music swings from dark, sinister, stormy moments (E-minor) to bright, sunny, lyrical and sometimes lively and robust movements, (E-major). There is a rising and falling in the first movement of his Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Opus 95, *From the New World*, aka *New World Symphony* which should be obvious even to the non-listener.
Other specters of the past that influenced Dvorak included many political and social pressures of the time from the Age of Revolution originating with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Age of Napoleon and finally the universal upheaval against the establishment of the Habsburg Empire in 1848. Never before or since has Europe seen such a struggle where, Bohemia among other nations, for instance, assumed a position of autonomy within the Habsburg Empire. However, these 1848 revolutions failed. The failed revolutions gave impetus to the musical movement of nationalism. National folk music became incorporated into concert pieces and operas which stirred ethnic sentiments and feelings giving an artistic independence away from traditional German/Austrian classical music. A great migration of the intellectual class of Hungarian refugees through Hamburg on their way to the New World greatly influenced Brahms bringing us to exoticism. Musical exoticism is when a composer of one nationality uses the music, rhythm, or ethnic sound of another nationality. For example, Brahms, from Hamburg, became infatuated with the nationalistic Hungarian fervor of improvisational ethnic dances and songs inspiring his great Hungarian Dances. It was Brahms who made Dvorak (a genius who looks like a tinker given his rustic appearance) a protégé which helped him become known outside his native Bohemia.

Philanthropist Jeannette Thurber commissioned Dvorak to become head of the National Conservatory of Music in New York City. Dvorak by age 50 was successful, in demand, admired worldwide and generous to others. Dvorak’s arrival from Europe provoked a media frenzy in September 1892 corresponding with an auspicious occasion, the 400th anniversary of Columbus’ discovery of America. America at this time did not have its own voice in music. Dvorak’s mission was to make Americans aware of their musical culture. Dvorak quickly recognized that the soul of American society was its racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity. He further noted the heritage of not one ethnic or national group could create genuine American music. Only a music that could combine aspects of the diversity and influences by the young and cultured could be called uniquely American.

Dvorak accomplished his mission. His compositional style embodying classicism, romanticism, nationalism and now exoticism gave rise to the New World Symphony. Dvorak blends Bohemian, Slavonic and American folk music with his mentor’s and close friend’s influences (Brahms) admired with Beethoven’s motifs and strict adherence to the classical symphonic style amalgamating into one of his greatest works. The three main American influences making this symphony principally exotic came from the plantation songs of Stephen Foster, (My Old Kentucky Home and
Swanee River); African-American Spirituals (Swing Low, Sweet Chariot, Deep River); and Songs of Native Americans (Songs of Hiawatha) among others.

As with any classical symphony, Dvorak composed a proportional symphony with the standard four movements. The second movement is made of juxtaposed contrasting themes of confrontation, happiness and sadness, brightness and darkness creating tension and ambiguity. Underneath is simplicity, naturalness, pastoral and outdoor sounds. A truly blend of expressive and emotional elements.

The ISHLT can learn from Dvorak. The four movements in transplantation can be depicted as follows: the first movement – the evaluation, second movement – listing, third movement – the transplant event, and the fourth movement – post-transplant care. As in the New World Symphony, the symphony of transplantation has a solemn beginning, E-minor in music. Then there is a struggle with E-minor and E-major, moving from dusk to dawn. The New World Symphony ends in E-major, a new day has dawned, giving our patients hope.