

Dvořák's Eighth: Bohemian Dreams

Concert Guide



Kaija Saariaho

Lumière et Pesanteur (Light and Gravity)

First performance: 2009

Approximate duration: 6 minutes

[Listen](#)

Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho (1952–2023) wrote music that is often atmospheric, with more concern for creating interesting colors and textures than distinctive melodies. *Lumière et Pesanteur* translates to “Light and Gravity,” two intangible subjects that fit her atmospheric style. Listen for the contrast between those two ideas throughout this short piece. On the one hand, the high string instruments, harp, and xylophone create twinkling sounds that can be interpreted as “light” or maybe “lightness.” On the other hand, the dissonant trumpet, timpani, and low instruments are the “gravity,” adding a heavy foundation.

Dvořák's Eighth: Bohemian Dreams

Concert Guide



Béla Bartók Piano Concerto No. 2

First performance: 1933

Approximate duration: 28 minutes

[Listen](#)

Hungarian composer Béla Bartók (1881–1945) was known for writing music that was difficult to perform. His second piano concerto was one such piece of music. A concerto is a piece of orchestral music that features a soloist accompanied by the orchestra. The soloist—in this case the pianist—is positioned at the front of the orchestra in a piece that showcases their talent and their instrument's ability. Concertos are often very difficult for the soloist, since the composer's intention is to show off the emotional range and technical capabilities of the musician. In the case of Bartók's second piano concerto, not only was the piece difficult for the soloist, it also challenged the orchestra—so much so that no one would perform it for a year and a half after it was completed. At its first performance, Bartók himself played the solo piano part.

The entire orchestra rarely plays together in this piece. Only the winds and percussion accompany the pianist in the lively first movement. The second movement begins and ends with ghostly chords in the strings. Bartók occasionally pares down the texture to an ominous duet between the piano and the timpani. The winds join in the middle of the movement when the piano begins to play rapid sixteenth notes. This mood change comes to almost a screeching halt with a blare of the trumpet and the return of the ghostly string chords. In the third movement, the orchestra finally comes together in full force. The timpani leads the charge with steady eighth notes.

Dvořák's Eighth: Bohemian Dreams

Concert Guide



Antonín Dvořák Symphony No. 8

First Performance: 1890

Approximate duration: 34 minutes

[Listen](#)

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904) was born in Nelahozeves, a village near Prague in the Czech Republic. He first learned violin and singing from his school teacher when he was six years old. Dvořák began studying composition in 1857 at the Institute for Church Music in Prague. After he completed his education, Dvořák made a living as an orchestral musician and piano teacher. Although he composed many pieces during his twenties, there is no evidence of performances of Dvořák's music before 1871. He struggled to gain traction in his career until about 1879, when his music finally began to be performed more frequently.

Dvořák wrote his eighth symphony in 1889 while out in the countryside with his family. A symphony is a piece for orchestra usually comprised of four movements that are performed with silent breaks between them. He wrote the piece in under a month because of how quickly ideas came to him. For comparison, Bartók took around a year to write his second piano concerto. Dvořák's eighth symphony is very melodic in nature, with many memorable themes throughout. This is due to Dvořák's inspiration from folk music.

The first movement opens with a solemn melody played by the cellos that returns twice: once in the same form, then played by the bold trumpet. The second movement opens with three lush swells in the violins, almost as if they are sighing. The ascending triplet motive echoes through the movement. The third movement is a flowing waltz, and the trumpet heralds the beginning of the final movement with a triumphant fanfare.

Dvořák's Eighth: Bohemian Dreams will be performed on December 4, 2026, in Powell Hall at the Jack C. Taylor Music Center.

Dvořák's Eighth: Bohemian Dreams

Concert Guide



Discussion Questions

1. Saariaho's *Lumière et Pesanteur* does not use melody in the typical sense and instead uses a collective sound texture to convey an idea. Try to do the same with your ensemble. Do this exercise in your ensemble class when your students have their instruments out. Give them the notes of a pentatonic scale of your choice and an emotion to emulate. Then have them improvise a soundscape together based on that emotion and using only the notes of that pentatonic scale. Discuss what musical ideas they used to convey that emotion. Did they respond to what their peers around them were playing? Pause and give them a couple more times to think of and try different ideas with the same emotion or different emotions.
2. In his second piano concerto, Bartók isolates sections of the orchestra to create specific sounds. Listen to one of the movements in class before attending the SLSO performance. Band classes, listen to the first movement. Orchestra classes, listen to the second movement. Discuss what challenges the movement may pose for the orchestra because of the split orchestration. Write down student responses for later. To guide students' listening, right before the concert remind them of their responses and challenge them to think about them as they listen. After the concert, discuss how the SLSO handled the challenges they predicted.
3. Reference this [Feelings Mapping lesson plan](#) from the SLSO Learning Lab. Pass out the adjective circles worksheet on pages 3 and 4. Have your students listen to the first movement from Dvořák's eighth symphony and create a feelings map as they listen to the movement. You can use the timestamps below to break the movement into four excerpts.

[Excerpt 1: 0:30–2:50](#)

[Excerpt 2: 2:50–6:01](#)

[Excerpt 3: 6:01–8:22](#)

[Excerpt 4: 8:22–10:30](#)
4. Learn from the pros! Discuss how the experience of seeing and hearing the SLSO has informed your own music-making. What did you see or hear the SLSO musicians doing that you could strive toward, both individually and as an ensemble? What do you think it would take for you to perform with a professional music ensemble one day?
5. Following the concert, complete the following statements with your students: "I noticed...", "I enjoyed...", I wonder..."

[Explore other learning opportunities available through your SLSO.](#)