The Moldau – Bedřich Smetana

Listening Guide – Classical Music Library version

Smetana’s program: “Two springs pour forth in the shade of the Bohemian forest, one warm and gushing, the other cold and peaceful. Coming through Bohemia’s valleys, they grow into a mighty stream. Through the thick woods it flows as the merry sounds of a hunt and the notes of the hunter’s horn are heard ever closer. It flows through grass-grown pastures and lowlands where a wedding feast is being celebrated with song and dance. At night, wood and water nymphs revel in its sparkling waves. Reflected on its surface are fortresses and castles— witnesses of bygone days of knightly splendor and the vanished glory of martial times. The Moldau swirls through the St. John Rapids, finally flowing on in majestic peace toward Prague to be welcomed by historic Vysěhrad. Then it vanishes far beyond the poet’s gaze.”

0:00 Source of river, Rippling figures in flute, then added clarinets; plucked string two springs accompaniment.

Stream broadens Rippling figure moves to low strings.

1:07 River theme - Stepwise melody in violins, minor mode, rippling in low strings;

2:53 Hunting scene Fanfare in French horns and trumpets:

Rippling continues (in strings); dies down to gently rocking motion.

3:57 Peasant dance - repeated notes in strings lead to rustic folk tune, staccato in strings and

woodwinds: closes with repeated single note in strings.

5:24 Nymphs in moonlight - Mysterious, long notes in double reeds:

Rippling figures in flutes; muted string theme with harp, punctuated by French horn; brass crescendo,

fanfare.

8:16 River theme - Like beginning, strings in minor, then shift to major (raised 3rd scale step).

9:01 St. John Rapids Brass and woodwinds exchange an agitated dialogue, builds to climax, then dies out.

10:12 River theme Full orchestra, loudest statement.

10:39 Ancient castle: Hymn-like tune in brass, slow, then accelerates:

11:26 River dies away Strings slow down, lose momentum; 2 forceful closing chords.