

= Bedřich Smetana =

Bedřich Smetana ( Czech pronunciation : [ ˈbɛdʁ̩ʃ ˈsmɛtaˌna ] ; 2 March 1824 – 12 May 1884 ) was a Czech composer who pioneered the development of a musical style which became closely identified with his country 's aspirations to independent statehood . He is thus widely regarded in his homeland as the father of Czech music . Internationally he is best known for his opera The Bartered Bride and for the symphonic cycle Má vlast ( " My Homeland " ) , which portrays the history , legends and landscape of the composer 's native land .

Smetana was naturally gifted as a pianist , and gave his first public performance at the age of six . After his conventional schooling , he studied music under Josef Proksch in Prague . His first nationalistic music was written during the 1848 Prague uprising , in which he briefly participated . After failing to establish his career in Prague , he left for Sweden , where he set up as a teacher and choirmaster in Gothenburg , and began to write large @-@ scale orchestral works . During this period of his life Smetana was twice married ; of six daughters , three died in infancy .

In the early 1860s , a more liberal political climate in Bohemia encouraged Smetana to return permanently to Prague . He threw himself into the musical life of the city , primarily as a champion of the new genre of Czech opera . In 1866 his first two operas , The Brandenburgers in Bohemia and The Bartered Bride , were premiered at Prague 's new Provisional Theatre , the latter achieving great popularity . In that same year , Smetana became the theatre 's principal conductor , but the years of his conductorship were marked by controversy . Factions within the city 's musical establishment considered his identification with the progressive ideas of Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner inimical to the development of a distinctively Czech opera style . This opposition interfered with his creative work , and may have hastened the health breakdown that precipitated his resignation from the theatre in 1874 .

By the end of 1874 , Smetana had become completely deaf but , freed from his theatre duties and the related controversies , he began a period of sustained composition that continued for almost the rest of his life . His contributions to Czech music were increasingly recognised and honoured , but a mental collapse early in 1884 led to his incarceration in an asylum and his subsequent death . Smetana 's reputation as the founding father of Czech music has endured in his native country , where advocates have raised his status above that of his contemporaries and successors . However , relatively few of Smetana 's works are in the international repertory , and most foreign commentators tend to regard Antonín Dvořák as a more significant Czech composer .

= = Biography = =

= = = Family background and childhood = = =

Bedřich Smetana was born as Friedrich Smetana on 2 March 1824 , in Litomyšl , east of Prague near the traditional border between Bohemia and Moravia , then provinces of the Habsburg Empire . He was the third child , and first son , of František Smetana and his third wife Barbora Lynková . František had fathered eight children in two earlier marriages , five daughters surviving infancy ; he and Barbora had ten more children , of whom seven reached adulthood . At this time , under Habsburg rule , German was the official language of Bohemia . František knew Czech , but for business and social reasons rarely used it , and his children were ignorant of the correct literary Czech until much later in their lives .

The Smetana family came from the Hradec Králové region of Bohemia . František had initially learned the trade of a brewer , and had acquired moderate wealth during the Napoleonic Wars by supplying clothing and provisions to the French Army . He subsequently managed several breweries before coming to Litomyšl in 1823 as brewer to Count Waldstein , whose Renaissance castle dominates the town .

The elder Smetana , although uneducated , had a natural gift for music and played in a string quartet . Bedřich was introduced to music by his father and in October 1830 , at the age of six ,

gave his first public performance . At a concert held in Litomyšl 's Philosophical Academy he played a piano arrangement of Auber 's overture to La muette de Portici , to a rapturous reception . In 1831 the family moved to Jindřichův Hradec in the south of Bohemia – the region where , a generation later , Gustav Mahler grew up . Here , Smetana attended the local elementary school and later the gymnasium . He also studied violin and piano , discovering the works of Mozart and Beethoven , and began composing simple pieces , of which one , a dance ( Kvapílek , or " Little Galop " ) , survives in sketch form .

In 1835 , František retired to a farm in the south-eastern region of Bohemia . There being no suitable local school , Smetana was sent to the gymnasium at Jihlava , where he was homesick and unable to study . He then transferred to the Premonstratensian school at Náměcký Brod , where he was happier and made good progress . Among the friends he made here was the future Czech revolutionary poet Karel Havlíček , whose departure for Prague in 1838 may have influenced Smetana 's own desire to experience life in the capital . The following year , with František 's approval , he enrolled at Prague 's Academic Grammar School under Josef Jungmann , a distinguished poet and linguist who was a leading figure in the movement for Czech national revival .

== = Apprentice musician == =

== = First steps == =

Smetana arrived in Prague in the autumn of 1839 . Finding Jungmann 's school uncongenial ( he was mocked by his classmates for his country manners ) , he soon began missing classes . He attended concerts , visited the opera , listened to military bands and joined an amateur string quartet for whom he composed simple pieces . After Liszt gave a series of piano recitals in the city , Smetana became convinced that he would find satisfaction only in a musical career . He confided to his journal that he wanted " to become a Mozart in composition and a Liszt in technique " . However , the Prague idyll ended when František discovered his son 's truancy , and removed him from the city . František at this time saw music as a diverting pastime , not as a career choice . Smetana was placed temporarily with his uncle in Nové Město , where he enjoyed a brief romance with his cousin Louisa . He commemorated their passion in Louisa 's Polka , Smetana 's earliest complete composition that has survived .

An older cousin , Josef Smetana , a teacher at the Premonstratensian School in Plzeň ( Pilsen ) , then offered to supervise the boy 's remaining schooling , and in the summer of 1840 Smetana departed for Plzeň . He remained there until he completed his schooling in 1843 . His skills as a pianist were in great demand at the town 's many soirées , and he enjoyed a hectic social life . This included a number of romances , the most important of which was with Kateřina Kolářová , whom he had known briefly in his early childhood . Smetana was entirely captivated with her , writing in his journal : " When I am not with her I am sitting on hot coals and have no peace " . He composed several pieces for her , among which are two Quadrilles , a song duet , and an incomplete piano study for the left hand . He also composed his first orchestral piece , a B-flat minuet .

== = Student and teacher == =

By the time Smetana completed his schooling , his father 's fortunes had declined . Although František now agreed that his son should follow a musical career , he could not provide financial support . In August 1843 Smetana departed for Prague with twenty gulden , and no immediate prospects . Lacking any formal musical training , he needed a teacher , and was introduced by Kateřina Kolářová 's mother to Josef Proksch , head of the Prague Music Institute – where Kateřina was now studying . Proksch used the most modern teaching methods , drawing on Beethoven , Chopin , Berlioz and the Leipzig circle of Liszt . In January 1844 Proksch agreed to take Smetana as a pupil , and at the same time the young musician 's financial difficulties were eased

when he secured an appointment as music teacher to the family of a nobleman , Count Thun .

For the next three years , besides teaching piano to the Thun children , Smetana studied theory and composition under Proksch . The works he composed in these years include songs , dances , bagatelles , impromptus and the G minor Piano Sonata . In 1846 Smetana attended concerts given in Prague by Berlioz , and in all likelihood met the French composer at a reception arranged by Proksch . At the home of Count Thun he met Robert and Clara Schumann , and showed them his G minor sonata , but failed to win their approval for this work ? they detected too much of Berlioz in it . Meanwhile , his friendship with Kateřina blossomed . In June 1847 , on resigning his position in the Thun household , Smetana recommended her as his replacement . He then set out on a tour of Western Bohemia , hoping to establish a reputation as a concert pianist .

= = = Early career = = =

= = = Revolutionary = = =

Smetana 's concert tour to Western Bohemia was poorly supported , so he abandoned it and returned to Prague , where he made a living from private pupils and occasional appearances as an accompanist in chamber concerts . He also began work on his first major orchestral work , the Overture in D major .

For a brief period in 1848 , Smetana was a revolutionary . In the climate of political change and upheaval that swept through Europe in that year , a pro @-@ democracy movement in Prague led by Smetana 's old friend Karel Havlíček was urging an end to Habsburg absolutist rule and for more political autonomy . A Citizens ' Army ( " Svornost " ) was formed to defend the city against possible attack . Smetana wrote a series of patriotic works , including two marches dedicated respectively to the Czech National Guard and the Students ' Legion of the University of Prague , and The Song of Freedom to words by Ján Kollár . In June 1848 , as the Habsburg armies moved to suppress rebellious tendencies , Prague came under attack from the Austrian forces led by the Prince of Windisch @-@ Grätz . As a member of Svornost , Smetana helped to man the barricades on the Charles Bridge . The nascent uprising was quickly crushed , but Smetana avoided the imprisonment or exile received by leaders such as Havlíček . During his brief spell with Svornost , he met the writer and leading radical , Karel Sabina , who would later provide libretti for Smetana 's first two operas .

= = = Piano Institute = = =

Early in 1848 , Smetana wrote to Franz Liszt , whom he had not yet met , asking him to accept the dedication of a new piano work , Six Characteristic Pieces , and recommend it to a publisher . He also requested a loan of 400 gulden , to enable him to open a music school . Liszt replied cordially , accepting the dedication and promising to help find a publisher , but he offered no financial assistance . This encouragement was the beginning of a friendship that was of great value to Smetana in his subsequent career . Despite Liszt 's lack of financial support , Smetana was able to start a Piano Institute in late August 1848 , with twelve students . After a period of struggle the Institute began to flourish and became briefly fashionable , particularly among supporters of Czech nationalism in whose eyes Smetana was developing a reputation . Proksch wrote of Smetana 's support for his people 's cause , and said that he " could well become the transformer of my ideas in the Czech language . " In 1849 the Institute was relocated to the home of Kateřina 's parents , and began to attract distinguished visitors ; Liszt came regularly , and the former Austrian emperor Ferdinand , who had settled in Prague , attended the school 's matinée concerts . Smetana 's performances in these concerts became a recognised feature of Prague 's musical life . In this time of relative financial stability Smetana married Kateřina , on 27 August 1849 . Four daughters were born to the couple between 1851 and 1855 .

== == Budding composer == ==

In 1850 , notwithstanding his revolutionary sentiments , Smetana accepted the post of Court Pianist in Ferdinand 's establishment in Prague Castle . He continued teaching in the Piano Institute , and devoted himself increasingly to composition . His works , mainly for the piano , included the three @-@ part Wedding Scenes , some of the music of which was later used in The Bartered Bride . He also wrote numerous short experimental pieces collected under the name Album Leaves , and a series of polkas . During 1853 ? 54 he worked on a major orchestral piece , the Triumphal Symphony , composed to commemorate the wedding of Emperor Franz Joseph . The symphony was rejected by the Imperial Court , possibly on the grounds that the brief musical references to the Austrian national anthem were not sufficiently prominent . Undeterred , Smetana hired an orchestra at his own expense to perform the symphony at the Konvikt Hall in Prague on 26 February 1855 . The work was coolly received , and the concert was a financial failure .

== == Private sorrows and professional disenchantment == ==

In the years between 1854 and 1856 Smetana suffered a series of personal blows . In July 1854 his second daughter , Gabriela , died of tuberculosis . A year later his eldest daughter Bed?i?ka , who at the age of four was showing signs of musical precocity , died of scarlet fever . Smetana wrote his Piano Trio in G minor as a tribute to her memory ; it was performed in Prague on 3 December 1855 and , according to the composer , was received " harshly " by the critics , although Liszt praised it . Smetana 's sorrows continued ; just after Bed?i?ka 's death a fourth daughter , Kate?ina , had been born but she , too , died in June 1856 . By this time Smetana 's wife Kate?ina had also been diagnosed with tuberculosis .

In July 1856 , Smetana received news of the death in exile of his revolutionary friend Karel Havlí?ek . The political climate in Prague was a further source of gloom ; hopes of a more enlightened government and social reform following Franz Joseph 's accession in 1848 had faded as Austrian absolutism reasserted itself under Baron Alexander von Bach . Despite the good name of the Piano Institute , Smetana 's status as a concert pianist was generally considered to be below that of contemporaries such as Alexander Dreyschock . Critics acknowledged Smetana 's " delicate , crystalline touch " , closer in style to Chopin than Liszt , but believed that his physical frailty was a serious drawback to his concert @-@ playing ambitions . His main performance success during this period was his playing of Mozart 's D minor Piano Concerto at a concert celebrating the centenary of Mozart 's birth , in January 1856 . His disenchantment with Prague was growing and , perhaps influenced by Dreyschock 's accounts of opportunities to be found in Sweden , Smetana decided to seek success there . On 11 October 1856 , after writing to his parents that " Prague did not wish to acknowledge me , so I left it " , he departed for Gothenburg .

== == Years of travel == ==

== == Gothenburg == ==

Smetana initially went to Gothenburg without Kate?ina . Writing to Liszt , he said that the people there were musically unsophisticated , but he saw this as an opportunity " ... for an impact I could never have achieved in Prague . " Within a few weeks of his arrival , he had given his first recital , opened a music school that was rapidly overwhelmed by applications , and become conductor of the Gothenburg Society for Classical Choral Music . In a few months Smetana had achieved both professional and social recognition in the city , although he found little time for composition ; two intended orchestral works , provisionally entitled Frithjof and The Viking 's Voyage , were sketched but abandoned .

In summer 1857 , Smetana came home to Prague and found Kate?ina in failing health . In June , Smetana 's father Franti?ek died . That autumn Smetana returned to Gothenburg , with Kate?ina

and their surviving daughter Žofie , but before doing so he visited Liszt in Weimar . The occasion was the Karl August Goethe @-@ Schiller Jubilee celebrations ; Smetana attended performances of Liszt 's Faust Symphony and the symphonic poem Die Ideale , which invigorated and inspired him . Liszt was Smetana 's principal teacher throughout the latter 's creative life , and at this time was crucially able to revive his spirits and rescue him from the relative artistic isolation of Gothenburg .

Back in Sweden , Smetana found among his new pupils a young housewife , Fröjda Benecke , who briefly became his muse and his mistress . In her honour Smetana transcribed two songs from Schubert 's Die schöne Müllerin cycle , and transformed one of his own early piano pieces into a polka entitled Vision at the Ball . He also began composing on a more expansive scale . In 1858 he completed the symphonic poem Richard III , his first major orchestral composition since the Triumphal Symphony . He followed this with Wallenstein 's Camp , inspired by Friedrich Schiller 's Wallenstein drama trilogy , and began a third symphonic poem Hakon Jarl , based on the tragic drama by Danish poet Adam Oehlenschläger . Smetana also wrote two large @-@ scale piano works : Macbeth and the Witches , and an Étude in C in the style of Liszt .

= = = Bereavement , remarriage and return to Prague = = =

Kateřina 's health gradually worsened and in the spring of 1859 failed completely . Homeward bound , she died at Dresden on 19 April 1859 . Smetana wrote that she had died " gently , without our knowing anything until the quiet drew my attention to her . " After placing Žofie with Kateřina 's mother , Smetana spent time with Liszt in Weimar , where he was introduced to the music of the comic opera Der Barbier von Bagdad , by Liszt 's pupil Peter Cornelius . This work would influence Smetana 's own later career as an opera composer . Later that year he stayed with his younger brother Karel , and fell in love with Karel 's sister @-@ in @-@ law Barbora ( Bettina ) Ferdinandiová , sixteen years his junior . He proposed marriage , and having secured her promise returned to Gothenburg for the 1859 ? 60 winter . The marriage took place the following year , on 10 July 1860 , after which Smetana and his new wife returned to Sweden for a final season . This culminated in April 1861 with a piano performance in Stockholm , attended by the Swedish royal family . The couple 's first daughter , Zdeňka , was born in September 1861 .

Meanwhile , the defeat of Franz Joseph 's army at Solferino in 1859 had weakened the Habsburg Empire , and led to the fall from power of von Bach . This had gradually brought a more enlightened atmosphere to Prague , and by 1861 Smetana was seeing prospects of a better future for Czech nationalism and culture . Before deciding his own future , in September Smetana set out on a concert tour of the Netherlands and Germany . He was still hoping to secure a reputation as a pianist , but once again he experienced failure . Back in Prague , he conducted performances of Richard III and Wallenstein 's Camp in the Žofín Island concert hall in January 1862 , to a muted reception . Critics accused him of adhering too closely to the " New German " school represented primarily by Liszt ; Smetana responded that " a prophet is without honour in his own land . " In March 1862 he made a last brief visit to Gothenburg , but the city no longer held his interest ; it appeared to him a provincial backwater and , whatever the difficulties , he now determined to seek his musical future in Prague : " My home has rooted itself into my heart so much that only there do I find real contentment . It is to this that I will sacrifice myself . "

= = = National prominence = = =

= = = Seeking recognition = = =

In 1861 , it was announced that a Provisional Theatre would be built in Prague , as a home for Czech opera . Smetana saw this as an opportunity to write and stage opera that would reflect Czech national character , similar to the portrayals of Russian life in Mikhail Glinka 's operas . He hoped that he might be considered for the theatre 's conductorship , but the post went to Jan Nepomuk Mařr , apparently because the conservative faction in charge of the project considered Smetana a "

dangerous modernist " , in thrall to avant garde composers such as Liszt and Wagner . Smetana then turned his attention to an opera competition , organised by Count Jan von Harrach , which offered prizes of 600 gulden each for the best comic and historical operas based on Czech culture . With no useful model on which to base his work ? Czech opera as a genre scarcely existed ? Smetana had to create his own style . He engaged Karel Sabina , his comrade from the 1848 barricades , as his librettist , and received Sabina 's text in February 1862 , a story of the 13th century invasion of Bohemia by Otto of Brandenburg . In April 1863 he submitted the score , under the title of The Brandenburgers in Bohemia .

At this stage in his career , Smetana 's command of the Czech language was poor . His generation of Czechs was educated in German , and he had difficulty expressing himself in what was supposedly his native tongue . To overcome these linguistic deficiencies he studied Czech grammar , and made a point of writing and speaking in Czech every day . He had become Chorus Master of the nationalistic Hlahol Choral Society soon after his return from Sweden , and as his fluency in the Czech language developed he composed patriotic choruses for the Society ; The Three Riders and The Renegade were performed at concerts in early 1863 . In March of that year Smetana was elected president of the music section of Um?lecká Beseda , a society for Czech artists . By 1864 he was proficient enough in the Czech language to be appointed as music critic to the main Czech language newspaper Národní listy . Meanwhile , Bettina had given birth to another daughter , Bo?ena .

On 23 April 1864 , Smetana conducted Berlioz 's choral symphony Roméo et Juliette at a concert celebrating the Shakespeare tercentenary , adding to the programme his own March for the Shakespearean Festival . That year , Smetana 's bid to become Director of the Prague Conservatory failed . He had set high hopes on this appointment : " My friends are trying to persuade me that this post might have been especially created for me , " he wrote to a Swedish friend . Again his hopes were thwarted by his association with the perceived radical Liszt , and the appointing committee chose the conservative patriot Josef Krej?í for the post .

Almost three years passed before Smetana was declared the winner of Harrach 's opera competition . Before then , on 5 January 1866 , The Brandenburgers had been performed to an enthusiastic reception at the Provisional Theatre ? over strong opposition from Maýr , who had refused to rehearse or conduct the piece . The idiom was too advanced for Maýr 's liking , and the opera was eventually staged under the composer 's own direction . " I was called on stage nine times , " Smetana wrote , recording that the house was sold out and that the critics were full of praise . Music historian Rosa Newmarch believes that , although The Brandenburgers has not stood the test of time , it contains all the germs of Smetana 's operatic art .

= = = Opera maestro = = =

In July 1863 , Sabina had delivered the libretto for a second opera , a light comedy entitled The Bartered Bride , which Smetana composed during the next three years . Because of the success of The Brandenburgers , the management of the Provisional Theatre readily agreed to stage the new opera , which was premiered on 30 May 1866 in its original two @-@ act version with spoken dialogue . The opera went through several revisions and restructures before reaching the definitive three @-@ act form that in due course established Smetana 's international reputation . The opera 's first performance was a failure ; it was held on one of the hottest evenings of the year , on the eve of the Austro @-@ Prussian War , with Bohemia under imminent threat of invasion by Prussian troops . Unsurprisingly the occasion was poorly attended , and receipts failed to cover costs . When presented at the Provisional Theatre in its final form , in September 1870 , it was a tremendous public success .

Back in 1866 , as the composer of The Brandenburgers with its overtones of German military aggression , Smetana thought he might be targeted by the invading Prussians , so he absented himself from Prague until hostilities ceased . He returned in September , and almost immediately achieved a long @-@ standing ambition ? appointment as principal conductor of the Provisional Theatre , at an annual salary of 1 @,@ 200 gulden . In the absence of a body of suitable Czech

opera , Smetana in his first season presented standard works by Weber , Mozart , Donizetti , Rossini and Glinka , with a revival of his own Bartered Bride . The quality of Smetana 's production of Glinka 's A Life for the Tsar angered Glinka 's champion Mily Balakirev , who expressed himself forcefully . This caused prolonged hostility between the two men . On 16 May 1868 Smetana , representing Czech musicians , helped to lay the foundation stone for the future National Theatre ; he had written a Festive Overture for the occasion . That same evening Smetana 's third opera , Dalibor , was premièred at Prague 's New Town Theatre . Although its initial reception was warm its reviews were poor , and Smetana resigned himself to its failure .

= = = = Opposition = = = =

Early in his Provisional Theatre conductorship Smetana had made a powerful enemy in František Pivoda , the Director of the Prague School of Singing . Formerly a supporter of Smetana 's , Pivoda was aggrieved when the conductor recruited singing talent from abroad rather than from Pivoda 's school . In an increasingly bitter public correspondence , Pivoda claimed that Smetana was using his position to further his own career , at the expense of other composers .

Pivoda then took issue with Dalibor , calling it an example of extreme " Wagnerism " and thus , unsuited as a model for Czech national opera . " Wagnerism " meant the adoption of Wagner 's theories of a continuous role for the orchestra and the building of an integrated musical drama , rather than a stringing together of lyrical numbers . The Provisional Theatre 's chairman , František Rieger , had first accused Smetana of Wagnerist tendencies after the first performance of The Brandenburgers , and the issue eventually divided Prague 's musical society . The music critic Otakar Hostinský believed that Wagner 's theories should be the basis of the national opera , and argued that Dalibor was the beginning of the " correct " direction . The opposite camp , led by Pivoda , supported the principles of Italian opera , in which the voice rather than the orchestra was the predominant dramatic device .

Even within the theatre itself there was division . Rieger led a campaign to eject Smetana from the conductorship and reappoint Maýr , and in December 1872 a petition signed by 86 subscribers to the theatre called for Smetana 's resignation . Strong support from vice @-@ chairman Antonín ?ísek , and an ultimatum from prominent musicians among whom was Antonín Dvo?ák , ensured Smetana 's survival . In January 1873 he was reappointed , with a bigger salary and increased responsibility as Artistic Director .

Smetana gradually brought more operas by emergent Czech composers to the theatre , but little of his own work . By 1872 he had completed his monumental fourth opera , Libu?e , his most ambitious work to date , but was withholding its premiere for the future opening of the forthcoming National Theatre . The machinations of Pivoda and his supporters distracted Smetana from composition , and he had further vexation when The Bartered Bride was produced in Saint Petersburg , in January 1871 . Although the audience was enthusiastic , press reports were hostile , one describing the work as " no better than that of a gifted fourteen @-@ year @-@ old boy . " Smetana was deeply offended , and blamed his old adversary , Balakirev , for inciting negative feelings against the opera .

= = = Final decade = = =

= = = = Deafness = = = =

In the respite following his reappointment , Smetana concentrated on his fifth opera , The Two Widows , composed between June 1873 and January 1874 . After its first performance at the Provisional Theatre on 27 March 1874 , Smetana 's supporters presented him with a decorative baton . But his opponents continued to attack him , comparing his conductorship unfavourably with the Maýr regime and claiming that under Smetana " Czech opera sickens to death at least once annually . " By the summer Smetana was ill ; a throat infection was followed by a rash and an

apparent blockage to the ears . By mid @-@ August , unable to work , he transferred his duties to his deputy , Adolf ?ech . A press announcement stated that Smetana had " become ill as a result of nervous strain caused by certain people recently . "

In September , Smetana told the theatre he would resign his appointment unless his health improved . He had become totally deaf in his right ear , and in October lost all hearing in his left ear also . After his subsequent resignation the theatre offered him an annual pension of 1 @,@ 200 gulden for the continued right to perform his operas , an arrangement Smetana reluctantly accepted . Money raised in Prague by former students , and by former lover Fröjda Benecke in Gothenburg , amounted to 1 @,@ 244 gulden . This allowed Smetana to seek medical treatment abroad , but to no avail . In January 1875 Smetana wrote in his journal : " If my disease is incurable , then I should prefer to be liberated from this life . " His spirits were further lowered at this time by a deterioration in his relationship with Bettina , mainly over money matters . " I cannot live under the same roof as a person who hates and persecutes me " , Smetana informed her . Although divorce was considered , the couple stayed unhappily together .

= = = Late flowering = = =

In worsening health , Smetana continued to compose . In June 1876 he , Bettina and their two daughters left Prague for Jabkenice , the home of his eldest daughter ?ofie where , in tranquil surroundings , Smetana was able to work undisturbed . Before leaving Prague he had begun a cycle of six symphonic poems , called Má vlast ( " My Fatherland " ) , and had completed the first two , Vy?ehrad and Vltava , which had both been performed in Prague during 1875 . In Jabkenice Smetana composed four more movements , the complete cycle being first performed on 5 November 1882 under the baton of Adolf ?ech . Other major works composed in these years were the E minor String Quartet , From My Life , a series of Czech dances for piano , several choral pieces and three more operas : The Kiss , The Secret and The Devil 's Wall , all of which received their first performances between 1876 and 1882 .

The long @-@ delayed premiere of Smetana 's opera Libu?e finally arrived when the National Theatre opened on 11 June 1881 . He had not initially been given tickets , but at the last minute was asked into the theatre director 's box . The audience received the work enthusiastically , and Smetana was called to the stage repeatedly . Shortly after this event the new theatre was destroyed by fire ; despite his infirmities , Smetana helped to raise funds for the rebuilding . The restored theatre reopened on 18 November 1883 , again with Libu?e

These years saw Smetana 's growing recognition as the principal exponent of Czech national music . This status was celebrated by several events during Smetana 's final years . On 4 January 1880 , a special concert in Prague marked the 50th anniversary of his first public performance ; Smetana attended , and played his Piano Trio in G minor from 1855 . In May 1882 The Bartered Bride was given its 100th performance , an unprecedented event in the history of Czech opera . It was so popular that a repeat " 100th performance " was staged . A gala concert and banquet was arranged to honour Smetana 's 60th birthday in March 1884 , but he was too ill to attend .

= = = Illness and death = = =

In 1879 , Smetana had written to a friend , the Czech poet Jan Neruda , revealing fears of the onset of madness . By the winter of 1882 ? 83 he was experiencing depression , insomnia , and hallucinations , together with giddiness , cramp and a temporary loss of speech . In 1883 he began writing a new symphonic suite , Prague Carnival , but could get no further than an Introduction and a Polonaise . He started a new opera , Viola , based on the character in Shakespeare 's Twelfth Night , but wrote only fragments as his mental state gradually deteriorated . In October 1883 his behaviour at a private reception in Prague disturbed his friends ; by the middle of February 1884 he had ceased to be coherent , and was periodically violent . On 23 April his family , unable to nurse him any longer , removed him to the Kate?inky Lunatic Asylum in Prague , where he died on 12 May 1884 .



The hospital registered the cause of death as senile dementia . However , Smetana 's family believed that his physical and mental decline was due to syphilis . An analysis of the autopsy report , published by the German neurologist Dr Ernst Levin in 1972 , came to the same conclusion . Tests carried out by Prof. Emanuel Vlček in the late 20th century on samples of muscular tissue from Smetana 's exhumed body provided further evidence of the disease . However , this research has been challenged by Czech physician Dr Jiří Ramba , who has argued that Vlček 's tests do not provide a basis for a reliable conclusion , citing the age and state of the tissues and highlighting reported symptoms of Smetana 's that were incompatible with syphilis .

Smetana 's funeral took place on 15 May , at the Týn Church in Prague 's Old Town . The subsequent procession to the Vyšehrad Cemetery was led by members of the Hlahol , bearing torches , and was followed by a large crowd . The grave later became a place of pilgrimage for musical visitors to Prague . On the funeral evening , a scheduled performance of *The Bartered Bride* at the National Theatre was allowed to proceed , the stage draped with black cloth as a mark of respect .

Smetana was survived by Bettina , their daughters Zdeňka and Božena , and by Ľofie . None of them played any significant role in Smetana 's musical life . Bettina lived until 1908 ; Ľofie , who had married Josef Schwarz in 1874 , predeceased her stepmother , dying in 1902 . The younger daughters eventually married , living out their lives away from the public eye . A permanent memorial to Smetana 's life and work is the Bedřich Smetana Museum in Prague , originally founded in 1926 within the Charles University 's Institute for Musicology . In 1936 the museum moved to the former Waterworks building on the banks of the Vltava , and since 1976 has been part of the Czech Museum of Music .

= = Music = =

The basic materials from which Smetana fashioned his art , according to Newmarch , were nationalism , realism and romanticism . A particular feature of all his later music is its descriptive character ? all his major compositions outside his operas are written to programmes , and many are specifically autobiographical . Smetana 's champions have recognised the major influences on his work as Liszt , Wagner and Berlioz ? the " progressives " ? while those same advocates have often played down the significance of " traditionalist " composers such as Rossini , Donizetti , Verdi and Meyerbeer .

= = = Piano works = = =

All but a handful of Smetana 's compositions before his departure for Gothenburg had been piano works . Some of these early pieces have been dismissed by music historian Harold Schonberg as " bombastic virtuoso rhetoric derived from Liszt " . Under Proksch , however , Smetana acquired more polish , as revealed in works such as the G minor Sonata of 1846 and the E @-@ flat Polka of the same year . The set of Six Characteristic Pieces of 1848 was dedicated to Liszt , who described it as " the most outstanding , finely felt and finely finished pieces that have recently come to my note . " In this period Smetana planned a cycle of so @-@ called " album leaves " , short pieces in every major and minor key , after the manner of Chopin 's Preludes . The project became somewhat disorganised ; in the pieces completed , some keys are repeated while others are unrepresented . After Smetana 's final return from Gothenburg , when he committed himself primarily to the development of Czech opera , he wrote nothing for the piano for 13 years .

In his last decade Smetana composed three substantial piano cycles . The first , from 1875 , was entitled *Dreams* . It was dedicated to former pupils of Smetana 's , who had raised funds to cover medical expenses , and is also a tribute to the composer 's models of the 1840s ? Schumann , Chopin and Liszt . Smetana 's last major piano works were the two Czech Dances cycles of 1877 and 1879 . The first of these had the purpose , as Smetana explained to his publisher , of " idealising the polka , as Chopin in his day did with the mazurka . " The second cycle is a medley of dances , each given a specific title so that people would know " ... which dances with real names we

Czechs have . "

= = = Vocal and choral = = =

Smetana 's early songs are settings of German poems for single voice . Apart from his 1848 Song of Freedom , he did not begin to write pieces for a full choir until after his Gothenburg sojourn , when he composed numerous works for the Hlahol choral society , mostly for unaccompanied male voices . Smetana 's choral music is generally nationalistic in character , ranging in scale from the short Ceremonial Chorus written after the death of the composer 's revolutionary friend Havlí?ek , to the setting of Song of the Sea , a substantial work with the character of a choral drama .

Towards the end of his life Smetana returned to simple song @-@ writing , with five Evening Songs ( 1879 ) to words by the poet Vít?zslav Hálek . His final completed work , Our Song ( 1883 ) , is the last of four settings of texts by Josef Srb @-@ Debrnov . Despite the state of Smetana 's health , this is a happy celebration of Czech song and dance . The piece was lost for many years , and only received its first performance after rediscovery in 1924 .

= = = Chamber = = =

Apart from a juvenile fantasia for violin and piano , Smetana composed only four chamber works , yet each had a deep personal significance . The Piano Trio in G minor of 1855 was composed after the death of his daughter Bed?i?ka ; its style is close to that of Robert Schumann , with hints of Liszt , and the overall tone is elegiac . It was 20 years before he returned to the chamber genre with his first String Quartet . This E minor work , subtitled From My Life , was autobiographical in character , illustrating the composer 's youthful enthusiasm for his art , his friendships and loves and , in a change of mood , the onset of his deafness represented by a long harmonic E in the final movement above ominous string tremolos . His second String Quartet , in D minor , written in 1882 ? 83 in defiance of his doctor 's orders to refrain from all musical activity , was composed in short snatches , " a swirl of music of a person who has lost his hearing . " It represents Smetana 's frustrations with his life , but is not wholly gloomy , and includes a bright polka . It was one of his final compositions ; between the two quartets he wrote a violin and piano duet From the homeland , a mixture of melancholy and happiness with strong affinity to Czech folk material .

= = = Orchestral = = =

Dissatisfied with his first large @-@ scale orchestral work , the D major Overture of 1848 , Smetana studied passages from Beethoven , Mendelssohn , Weber and Berlioz before producing his Triumphal Symphony of 1853 . Though this is dismissed by Rosa Newmarch as " an epithalamium for a Habsburg Prince " , Smetana 's biographer Brian Large identifies much in the piece that characterises the composer 's more mature works . Despite the symphony 's rejection by the Court and the lukewarm reception on its premiere , Smetana did not abandon the work . It was well received in Gothenburg in 1860 , and a revised version was performed in Prague in 1882 , without the " triumphal " tag , under Adolf ?ech . The piece is now sometimes called the Festive Symphony .

Smetana 's visit to Liszt at Weimar in the summer of 1857 , where he heard the latter 's Faust Symphony and Die Ideale , caused a material reorientation of Smetana 's orchestral music . These works gave Smetana answers to many compositional problems relating to the structure of orchestral music , and suggested a means for expressing literary subjects by a synthesis between music and text , rather than by simple musical illustration . These insights enabled Smetana to write the three Gothenburg symphonic poems , ( Richard III , Wallenstein 's Camp and Hakon Jarl ) , works that transformed Smetana from a composer primarily of salon pieces to a modern neo @-@ Romantic , capable of handling large @-@ scale forces and demonstrating the latest musical concepts .

From 1862 Smetana was largely occupied with opera and , apart from a few short pieces , did not return to purely orchestral music before beginning Má vlast in 1872 . In his introduction to the

Collected Edition Score , František Bartol brackets *Má vlast* with the opera *Libuše* as " direct symbols of [ the ] consummating national struggle " . *Má vlast* is the first of Smetana 's mature large @-@ scale works that is independent of words , and its musical ideas are bolder than anything he had tried before . To musicologist John Clapham , the cycle presents " a cross @-@ section of Czech history and legend and impressions of its scenery , and ... conveys vividly to us Smetana 's view of the ethos and greatness of the nation . " Despite its nationalistic associations this work has , according to Newmarch , carried Smetana 's name further afield than anything he wrote , with the exception of *The Bartered Bride Overture* . Smetana dedicated *Má vlast* to the city of Prague ; after its first performance in November 1882 it was acclaimed by the Czech musical public as the true representation of Czech national style . Its *Vltava* ( or " *The Moldau* " in German ) movement , depicting the river that runs through Prague towards its junction with the Elbe , is Smetana 's best @-@ known and most internationally popular orchestral composition .

= = = Opera = = =

Smetana had virtually no precursors in Czech opera apart from František Škroup , whose works had rarely lasted beyond one or two performances . In his mission to create a new canon , rather than using traditional folksong Smetana turned to the popular dance music of his youth , especially the polka , to establish his link with the vernacular . He drew on existing European traditions , notably Slavonic and French , but made only scarce use of arias , preferring to base his scores on ensembles and choruses .

Although a follower of Wagner 's reforms of the operatic genre , which he believed would be its salvation , Smetana rejected accusations of excessive Wagnerism , claiming that he was sufficiently occupied with " Smetanism , for that is the only honest style ! " The predominantly " national " character of the first four operas is tempered by the lyrical romanticism of those written later , particularly the last three , composed in the years of Smetana 's deafness . The first of this final trio , *The Kiss* , written when Smetana was receiving painful medical treatment , is described by Newmarch as a work of serene beauty , in which tears and smiles alternate throughout the score . Smetana 's librettist for " *The Kiss* " was the young feminist Eliška Krásnohorská , who also supplied the texts for his final two operas . She dominated the ailing composer , who had no say in the subject @-@ matter , the voice types or the balance between solos , duets and ensembles . Nevertheless , critics have noted few signs of a decline in Smetana 's powers in these works , while his increasing proficiency in the Czech language meant that his settings of the language are much superior to those of his earlier operas .

Smetana 's eight operas created the bedrock of the Czech opera repertory , but of these only *The Bartered Bride* is performed regularly outside the composer 's homeland . After reaching Vienna in 1892 , and London in 1895 , it rapidly became part of the repertory of every major opera company worldwide . Newmarch argues that *The Bartered Bride* , while not a " gem of the first order " , is nevertheless " a perfectly cut and polished stone of its kind . " Its trademark overture , which Newmarch says " lifts us off our feet with its madcap vivacity " , was composed in a piano version before Smetana received the draft libretto . Clapham believes that this has few precedents in the entire history of opera . Smetana himself was later inclined to disparage his achievement : " *The Bartered Bride* was merely child 's play , written straight off the reel " . In the view of German critic William Ritter , Smetana 's creative powers reached their zenith with his third opera , *Dalibor* .

= = = Reception = = =

Even in his own homeland the general public was slow to recognise Smetana . As a young composer and pianist he was well regarded in Prague musical circles , and had the approval of Liszt , Proksch and others , but the public 's lack of acknowledgement was a principal factor behind his self @-@ imposed exile in Sweden . After his return he was not taken particularly seriously , and was hard put to get audiences for his new works , hence his " prophet without honour " remark after the nearly empty hall and indifferent reception of *Richard III* and *Wallenstein 's Camp* at Šofín Island

in January 1862 .

Smetana 's first noteworthy public success was his initial opera *The Brandenburgers in Bohemia* , in 1866 when he was already 42 years old . His second opera , *The Bartered Bride* , survived the unfortunate mistiming of its opening night and became an enduring popular triumph . The different style of his third opera , *Dalibor* , closer to that of Wagnerian music drama , was not readily understood by the public and was condemned by critics who believed that Czech opera should be based on folk @-@ song . It disappeared from the repertory after only a handful of performances . Thereafter the machinations that accompanied Smetana 's tenure as Provisional Theatre conductor restricted his creative output until 1874 .

In his final decade , the most fruitful of his compositional career despite his deafness and increasing ill @-@ health , Smetana belatedly received national recognition . Of his later operas , *The Two Widows* and *The Secret* were warmly received , while *The Kiss* was greeted by an " overwhelming ovation " . The ceremonial opera *Libuše* was received with thunderous applause for the composer ; by this time ( 1881 ) the disputes around his music had declined , and the public was ready to honour him as the founder of Czech music . Nevertheless , the first few performances in October 1882 of an evidently under @-@ rehearsed *The Devil 's Wall* were chaotic , and the composer was left feeling " dishonoured and dispirited . " This disappointment was swiftly mitigated by the acclaim that followed the first performance of the complete *Má vlast* cycle in November : " Everyone rose to his feet and the same storm of unending applause was repeated after each of the six parts ... At the end of *Blaník* [ the final part ] the audience was beside itself and the people could not bring themselves to take leave of the composer . "

= = Character and reputation = =

Smetana 's biographers describe him as physically frail and unimpressive in appearance yet , at least in his youth , he had a joie @-@ de @-@ vivre that women evidently found attractive . He was also excitable , passionate and strong @-@ willed , determined to make his career in music whatever the hardships , over the wishes of his father who wanted him to become a brewer or a civil servant . Throughout his career he stood his ground ; when under the severest of criticism for the " Wagnerism " in *Dalibor* he responded by writing *Libuše* , even more firmly based on the scale and concept of Wagnerian music drama . His personal life became stressful ; his marriage to Bettina was loveless , and effectively broke down altogether in the years of illness and relative poverty towards the end of his life . Little of his relationships with his children is on record , although on the day that he was transferred to the asylum , ?ofie was " crying as though her heart would break " .

There is broad agreement among most commentators that Smetana created a canon of Czech opera where none had previously existed , and that he developed a style of music in all his compositions that equated with the emergent Czech national spirit . A modified view is presented by the music writer Michael Steen , who questions whether " nationalistic music " can in fact exist : " We should recognise that , whereas music is infinitely expressive , on its own it is not good at describing concrete , earthly objects or concepts . " He concludes that much is dependent upon what listeners are conditioned to hear .

According to the musicologist John Tyrrell , Smetana 's close identification with Czech nationalism and the tragic circumstances of his last years , have affected the objectivity of assessments of his work , particularly in his native land . Tyrrell argues that the almost iconic status awarded to Smetana in his homeland " monumentalized him into a figure where any criticism of his life or work was discouraged " by the Czech authorities , even as late as the last part of the 20th century . As a result , Tyrrell claims , a view of Czech music has been propagated that downplays the contributions of contemporaries and successors such as Dvořák , Janáček , Josef Suk and other , lesser known , composers . This is at odds with perceptions in the outside world , where Dvořák is far more frequently played and much better known . Harold Schonberg observes that " Smetana was the one who founded Czech music , but Antonín Dvořák ... was the one who popularized it . "