



Antonin Dvořák

Composer of the Week





Born in a small village
Died in Prague (Czechia
(now Czech Republic) in
September 1841

Born to a poor family,
his father was an
innkeeper, a butcher
and a zither player.



He really loved his homeland, and especially traditional Czech **Folk Music**.

Folk music is the music that ordinary people made up to help them with their work, to tell traditional stories or to dance to.

Dvořák often used these folk **melodies** (tunes) as a basis for his compositions. He is known as a **Nationalistic** Composer.

He began working as a viola player in a local theatre orchestra but after he married he became a church organist.



A **Slavonic Dance** by Dvořák



These dances made Dvořák famous, and brought him to the notice of Johannes Brahms who was on the jury of a composition competition that Dvořák won – three times.

Brahms helped the young composer and as a result he became well-known in other countries.

He travelled to London on nine different occasions and the first performances of many of his works were given in London, Cambridge and Birmingham.



This is a photograph of Dvořák and his wife, Anna, taken in London in 1886.

This is part of Dvořák's **Symphony No.7** which was first performed in London at St James's Hall, Regent Street, on 22nd April 1885.



From 1892-1895 Dvořák was the director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York. He was given an astronomical salary of \$15,000 – that is the equivalent to nearly £500,000 today.

While he was in New York he began researching into Native American music and African-American music. He wanted American musicians and composers to find their own **Nationalistic** style of composing.

An African-American composer called Harry Burleigh introduced Dvorak to traditional **American Spirituals**.

These were often religious songs sung by the African-American slaves while working in the cotton fields.

In 1893 Dvořák wrote his most successful piece of music – his Symphony No.9 entitled **'From the New World'**. It was written for the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and was based on some of the American music he had found.

He was also very homesick, and returned to Prague after 3 years in New York.



Dvořák was a keen train spotter and every morning he would walk to a nearby railway tunnel where he could watch the trains which came from Prague. He would spend hours at the Franz Josef railway station in Prague.

It's said he knew the timetable off by heart.

When he was teaching, he would always ask his pupils to describe in detail any train journeys that they had recently made.

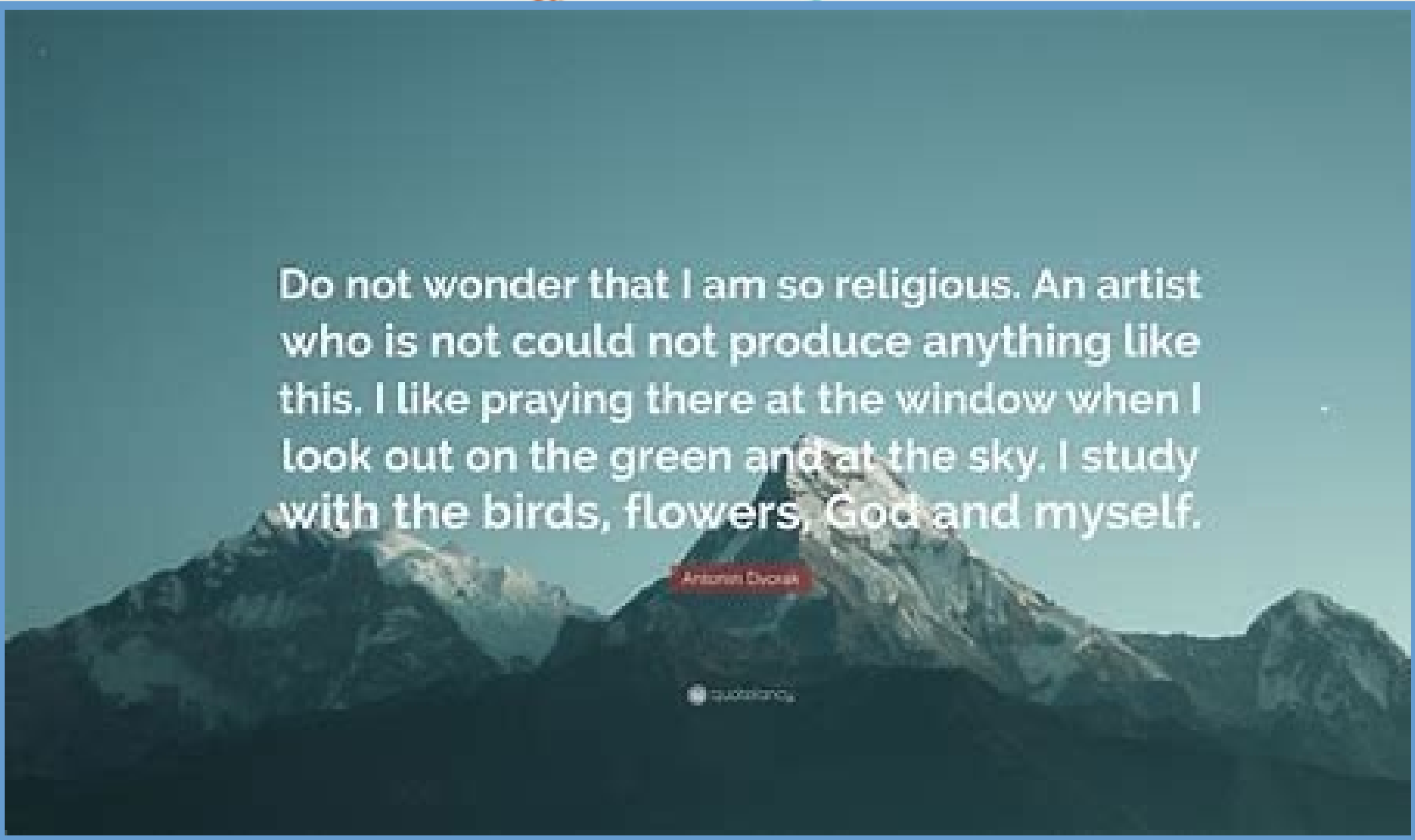
He also kept diaries of his travels, where he made minute notes about all the modes of transport he used.

Dvořák died in 1904 and his funeral was a day of national sadness. He is buried in the central cemetery in Prague.





Dvořák's most well-known opera is called **Rusalka** and this famous **aria** (song) from it is also based on traditional Czech music. In the opera Rusalka sings this lovely **'Song To The Moon'**.



Do not wonder that I am so religious. An artist who is not could not produce anything like this. I like praying there at the window when I look out on the green and at the sky. I study with the birds, flowers, God and myself.

Antonin Dvorak

quobiano