
Role Of Music In *Má vlast* Poems

Má vlast by Bedřich Smetana, 1882

Má vlast, by Bedřich Smetana is a set of six symphonic poems, ultimately combined into one composition, around 1882. Each of the pieces premiered by themselves before being added together seven years later. The completed piece premiered on the 5th of November 1882 in Prague. This piece follows the form created by Liszt and adds in a sense of patriotism, both of which were popular in the late nineteenth century. The poems depict stories of banal events that occurred, however these events are made exciting by Smetana's composition. He somehow manages to masterfully breathe life into notes—which makes the music realistic, while still maintaining the beauty of the song and the scene.

Smetana was a gifted pianist. Born on the 2nd of March 1824, he first performed at the age of six. After his schooling, he studied music in Prague. His first music piece was written during the 1848 Prague uprising, spurring his patriotism. After failing in Prague, he left for Sweden where he was a teacher and choirmaster in Gothenburg, and began to compose orchestral works. Throughout his life he was praised and promoted, only to begin composing more modern pieces that his patrons didn't like. From these events his health became a serious issue, so much so that by the end of 1874, Smetana had become completely deaf. In his 'retirement', he began composing plentifully, which continued until he died. Smetana's reputation as the founding father of Czech music has been preserved through time with little contest. He died on the 12th of May 1884.

The *Moldau* begins with a flute playing a fluid melody representing a stream. A second flute joins, adding the harmony. The harmony depicts the two streams meeting, forming the Moldau River. The next section is the *Moldau River Theme*. The theme is an example of a typical piece from the Romantic era, using strings, brass and particularly flutes to emphasize and bring out emotions. The next part is called *The Hunt*. It is played with horns and brass and has a very majestic tone. Underneath the melody with the horns and the brass there is the *River Theme* played softly by the strings. Next *The Wedding* portion begins. *The Wedding* is a folk tune with very distinct rhythm depicted by light intermittent strings. Next is the *Night Music*, a dreamlike sequence. It is legato with strings playing a high-pitch melody and simple rhythm. Again, the original flute melody is played underneath the *Night Music* melody.

The music then moves through melancholy, to hopeful, romantic, longing, triumphant and finally to chaotic as it crescendos into the *Moldau River Theme*. Next is the *Saint Thomas Rapids*,

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which radiates a tense climactic emotion through drums, brass and strings in forte. The piece concludes with the Arrival in Prague, which has a happy yet melancholy tone created by discordant chords. Hearty drums and brass—in addition to high-pitched strings, demonstrate the happiness and triumph in this moment. The piece then fades into the distance, only to come back with a final bang, ending the piece.

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