

Saxonburg Concerts Presents

## Definitely Dvořák

**Musica Hermosa String Ensemble**

Jonathan Moser, Violin

Mary Moser, Violin

David Moser, Cello

Melissa Byerly, Piano

Dan Byerly, Tenor

**Sunday, March 22, 2026**

**4:00 pm**

at Saxonburg Memorial Church, Saxonburg, PA

*Bagatelles, Op. 47*

Antonin Dvořák

- I. Allegretto scherzando
- II. Tempo di minuetto, grazioso
- III. Allegretto scherzando
- IV. Canon. Andante con moto
- V. Poco allegro

Selections from *Poetic Tone Pictures, Op. 85*

Antonin Dvořák

- III. In an Old Castle
- X. Bacchanale

*Biblical Songs, Op. 99*

Antonin Dvořák

- I. Clouds and Darkness (Psalm 97:2-6)
- II. Lord, Thou Art My Refuge (Psalm 119:114-17, 119, 120)
- III. Hear My Prayer (Psalm 55:1-2, 4-8)
- IV. God Is My Shepherd (Psalm 2:1-4)
- V. I Will Sing New Songs (Psalm 144:9; 145:1-3, 5-6)
- VI. Hear My Prayer, O Lord (Psalm 61:1, 3-4; 63:1, 4-5)
- VII. By the Waters of Babylon (Psalm 137:1-5)
- VIII. Turn Thee to Me (Psalm 25:16-18, 20)
- IX. I Will Lift Mine Eyes (Psalm 121:1-4)
- X. Sing Ye a Joyful Song (Psalm 98:1, 4-5, 7-8; 96:11-12)

## *Program Notes*

**Antonin Dvořák** was a Czech composer who lived from 1841 to 1904. Following the model of his predecessor, Bedřich Smetana, Dvořák firmly ensconced himself as a Romantic era nationalistic composer. He wrote a great deal of music that reflected his Moravian and Bohemian heritage, especially including many folk songs and tunes. These influences bring a particularly interesting rhythmic life to all his music. From 1892 to 1895 he lived in New York City, where he served as director of the National Conservatory of Music of America. His body of work is broad and varied, showing his compositional versatility. Among his most famous pieces are the *Slavonic Dances*, *Symphony No. 9 (The New World Symphony)*, and the highly regarded *Cello Concerto*. He also composed ten operas, all in Czech, the most famous of these by far being *Rusalka*, from which comes the famous soprano aria, “Song to the Moon”.

The five *Bagatelles* were written in 1879 for the unusual combination of two violins, cello, and harmonium. The harmonium is a sort of pump organ, where the player has to be constantly pumping foot pedals to fuel bellows which force air over reeds to allow the instrument to sound. The main reason for the choice of instrumentation was apparently that the friend for whom Dvořák wrote and first performed the piece did not have a piano, but he did have a harmonium. The work is structured similarly to a suite, and employs some Czech bagpipe melodies.

*Poetic Tone Pictures* is comprised of 13 sections in all, totaling about 50 minutes of performance time, easily making it Dvořák’s longest and most elaborate piano cycle. Written in the spring of 1889, the title of the full cycle is reflective of the composer’s intent to create musical poems, ideologically in the same vein as Schumann before him (though musically quite different). Each individual piece elicits a different mood for the listener, from the romantic and dream-like image of an old castle to the wild and furious dance of the bacchanale.

The ten *Biblical Songs* were written in March of 1894, while Dvořák was living and working in New York City. He spent some time seeking solace in the Psalms of the Holy Bible. Whether spurred by news of the deaths of a few important people in his life, namely his father, or simply homesickness for his native Bohemia we are not exactly certain. But the cycle of songs that resulted is entirely beautiful. Interesting to note is that the original publication included the songs in the composer’s native Czech, as well as German and English translations, of which it is said that the composer took great care to ensure that the musical and vocal lines were well-preserved.