

# Forgotten Favorites: Dvořák's *Poetic Tone Pictures* (op. 85)

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## Justification for Research: Contradicting Quotations

Dvořák's *Poetic Tone Pictures* (op. 85) was originally well-received but has been overshadowed by his other works and by other Romantic solo literature. Although many biographers have been flippant or discrediting toward the set, recordings have consistently met with great approval.

### Prevailing Prejudice Found in Biographies of Dvořák

"[*Poetic Tone Pictures*] are not amongst the best of Dvořák's works for piano and do not stand comparison with the earlier *Waltzes* or the later *Humoresques*, but as each of the pieces bears a descriptive title, Simrock<sup>1</sup> snapped them up with glee together with the *Love Songs*."<sup>2</sup>

### Original Reception of the Set

"... Simrock<sup>1</sup> grumbled [*Poetic Tone Pictures*] would be expensive to produce. In the event he was well repaid, as the collection proved extremely popular."<sup>3</sup>

### Critical Response to Recent Recordings

"I waited for a recording like this for many years: one combining Dvořák's *Poetic Tone Pictures* and Janacek's *On an Overgrown Path*, the grandest piano works by these two composers. . ." <sup>4</sup>

## Available Editions

1. Complete editions available on [imslp.org](http://imslp.org) and from G. Henle Publishers, Artia, Kalmus, and Schirmer
2. Selections included with other Dvořák piano works available from Dover Publications, Schott Musik

Dvořák's *Poetic Tone Pictures* (op. 85) includes a variety of musical characters, an appealing harmonic language, and both technical and artistic elements that will prepare the advancing pianist for more difficult pieces of standard repertoire.

<sup>1</sup> Simrock was a music publisher who published works of Brahms and Dvořák

<sup>2</sup> Hans-Hubert Schonzeler, *Dvořák* (Marion Boyars, 1984), 127.

<sup>3</sup> Gervase Hughes, *Dvořák: His Life & Music* (London: Cassell & Company, 1967), 135.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Jemelka, "Slavic Soul/Dumka and Furiant/Poetic Tone..." *Czech Music* 15, no. 3 (July 2017): 35–36.

<b>Dvořák's Op. 85</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Technical Considerations</b>	<b>Artistic Considerations</b>
1. <i>Twilight Way</i>	Rhapsodic with many technical and artistic challenges	1. Wide intervals (blocked/broken 10ths) 2. Rapid repeated chords 3. Written-out trill accompaniment	1. Sectional coherence 2. Tempo <i>rubato</i> 3. Voicing
2. <i>Toying</i>	Playful with sudden and frequent dynamic changes and chord changes	1. Rapid, chromatic chord changes 2. Rapid accompaniment 3. Hand crossing	1. Sudden dynamic changes 2. Tempo <i>rubato</i>
3. <i>In the Old Castle</i>	Mysterious and slow with difficult right-hand subdivisions	1. Rhythmic subdivisions (64ths, 32nd, and 32nd sextuplets)	1. <i>Lento</i> tempo and unusual harmony 2. Long phrasing and sparse texture 3. Dynamic pacing
4. <i>Spring Song</i>	A Song without words accompanied by repeated left-hand chords	1. Repeated LH chord accompaniment 2. Chromatic scalar passages	1. Thematic development 2. Unusual harmonic progression 3. Overall cohesion
5. <i>Peasants' Ballad</i>	A rustic dance with rapid octaves and rhythmic ambiguity	1. Rapid octaves 2. LH leaps 3. Rhythmic ambiguity (hemiola)	1. Tempo <i>rubato</i> 2. Dynamic changes 3. Transitions
6. <i>Reverie</i>	Another song with accompaniment patterns split between the hands	1. Broken chord figuration split between the hands	1. Balancing various textures 2. Pedaling 3. Tempo <i>rubato</i>
7. <i>Furiant</i>	Aggressive outer sections contrast with a lyrical middle section	1. Awkward key signature (7 flats) 2. Pervasive RH octaves 3. LH leaps	1. Rhythmic ambiguity (hemiola) 2. LH accompaniment patterns 3. Large melodic leaps
8. <i>Goblins' Dance</i>	Tricky piece with unusual accompaniment and polyrhythms	1. Broken octave accompaniment 2. Polyrhythms and dynamics	1. Tempo <i>rubato</i> 2. Detailed articulation
9. <i>Serenade</i>	Lyrical melody with unusual harmonic language and meter changes	1. Rhythmic ambiguity (triplets vs 16th-notes)	1. Overall cohesion 2. Repeated notes in melody 3. Meter changes
10. <i>Bacchanalian</i>	A wildly excited dance though at times restrained	1. Fast tempo 2. Close hand position 3. Wide intervals ( <i>ossia</i> )	1. Balancing texture 2. Rhythmic ambiguity 3. Juxtaposition of different characters
11. <i>Tittle-Tattle</i>	Short and playful with frequent accidentals and repeats	1. Wide intervals 2. Rhythmic subdivisions 3. Variety of articulation combinations	1. Ornaments 2. Pedaling 3. Sudden, unusual harmonic shifts
12. <i>At a Hero's Grave</i>	Strong dotted melody with various accompaniment patterns	1. Rhythmic subdivisions 2. Pervasive octaves and RH flourishes 3. Large leaps in both hands	1. Melodic phrasing 2. Overall cohesion 3. Unusual harmonic progression
13. <i>On the Holy Mount</i>	Expansive with unusual meter and <i>quasi cadenza</i> portions	1. Full, rolled chords 2. Balancing texture against repeated notes	1. <i>Quasi cadenza</i> sections 2. Unusual time signature (5/4) 3. Dynamic pacing

