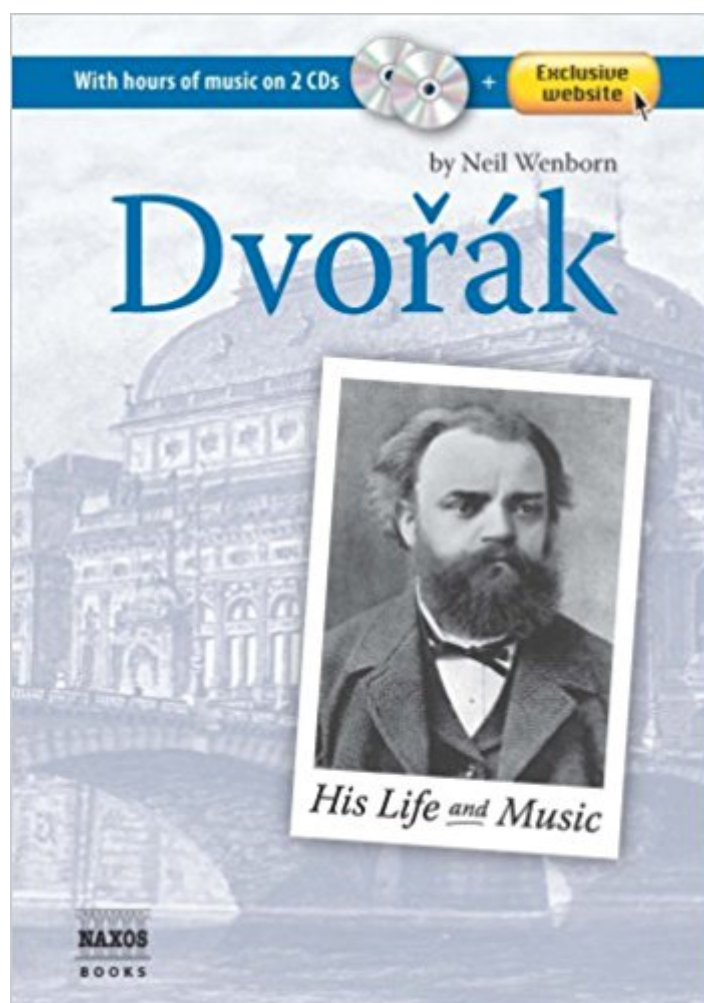


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# Dvorak: His Life And Music (His Life & Music)



## Synopsis

Catapulted to international fame by the runaway success of his Slavonic Dances, Dvorák was, by the end of his life, one of the world's most celebrated composers. Yet his proudest boast was that he remained at heart a simple Czech musician, as inspired by the folk traditions of his native land as by the masterworks of Mozart, Beethoven and Wagner. This book traces the course of an extraordinary creative career that embraced the peasant music-making of rural Bohemia, the grand receptions of Victorian England and the dynamism of fin-de-siècle New York to shape the most versatile genius in the annals of late Romanticism. Contains 2 CDs of music spanning Dvorák's career. Free access to a dedicated website with music. Part of the affordable Life and Music series from Naxos Books, utilizing both traditional and new media.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Enjoyed book very much. But it arrived with one cd cracked and unplayable

All good!

I loved this biography. Dvorak was one of my favorite composers before but after reading this book, and listening to the accompanying CDs, I have an even higher appreciation of him and his art. We see him from humble beginnings as the son of a butcher in a small bohemian village, to his apprenticeship years, to his discovery by Brahms, all the way to his recognition as one of the

greatest symphonic composers of his time. It is a wonderful journey that is filled with triumphs and tragedies, victories and losses. If you love Dvorak or just the Romantic era in general you will find much enjoyment in reading this book, listening to the CDs, and experiencing the multimedia website that you can access with your purchase. Below is a general review of the whole series of His Life and Music books.

**INTRO** Getting into classical music can be difficult. There is so much music it is hard to know where to start. And once you do find a piece of music you enjoy or a composer you are interested in it can be difficult to know where to go from there. That's why I am so excited about the Naxos, His Life and Music, series of books. Naxos, a well known publisher of recorded music, has published a series of biographies of famous classical composers. But they are not just books but a multimedia tool for total immersion into the life and times of the composer. Each book comes with two music CDs that give a fascinating overview of the composer's compositions throughout his life in various mediums of expression (chamber music, opera, songs, symphonies, etc.). Also, with the purchase of the book you get a password that allows you to access a website that has the full versions of the samples on the two CDs along with various other goodies. And one of the best parts of the series is each book is relatively inexpensive for all you receive. So far the series contains the biographies of Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Mahler, Tchaikovsky, Dvorak, Wagner, Puccini, Mendelssohn, and Haydn. Let's take a quick look at what you get with one of these books starting with the book itself.

**BOOK** Each book is a sturdily made paperback, approximately 8 x 6 inches in size, and has around 200 pages. There is a CD within the front and back cover which, when taken out, make the book much lighter and easier to hold. Within you not only find a full biography of the composer accompanied by wonderful photos (or paintings) of people, places, manuscripts, and letters but you get the password to the dedicated website as well. In the back of the book you have a collection of short bios of all the people in the composer's life, a bibliography, a glossary of musical terms, an annotated list of the pieces on the CDs and much more. Now the biographies are well-written, easy to read, and not too technical. They really immerse you in the time period of the composer as you see each step in their life from child to struggling musician to confident master. But these are not hagiographies where the composer seems to have a perennial halo on his head. Instead we see the good and bad of each composer's character and the inevitable ups and downs of their relationships and careers. For instance, with Tchaikovsky we see the mysterious relationship he had with his patroness Nadezhda von Meck and his disastrous and inexplicable marriage to Antonia Milyukova. Also, when you reach the point in each of the composer's lives when they

composed a landmark piece there is an icon on the side margin of the page that tells you where you can find an excerpt on one of the CDs. This is where the immersion really begins to take hold. So let's take a look at what you will find on the recordings.

Each one of the two CDs has over an hour's worth of music by world renowned musicians. That is over two hours of music. But what is on them is what makes them so special. Usually when you buy a CD of a composer's music you get music in a specific genre. Say you buy a Mozart CD. You may buy one that has a couple of his symphonies like symphony 40 and 41. Or you may buy one of one of his operas like, the Magic Flute. Or you may buy one that has several concertos on it like his horn or flute concertos. And of course you can buy a CD touted as "The Best of Mozart" or "Mozart's Greatest Hits" that compiles either complete or partial pieces from several genres of his most well known works. But all of these options can be frustrating if you really want to get an overview of the composer's life and work. Even the "Best of..." category only gives you pieces that you already know (Eine Kleine Nachtmusik, Turkish March, Jupiter Symphony, Rondo Alla Turca, various opera arias, etc.) and really moves you no closer to getting at the depth or breadth of the composer. This is where the Naxos CDs excel. They have various genres represented like the "Best of..." CDs but they showcase less known works by the composer (though important works), throughout his career, and in a wider range of genres. For instance, when I started listening to Puccini discs in the series my preconception was that they would just have famous aria after aria on them. Instead, to my pleasant surprise, many of the pieces were instrumental and where there were arias they were in context together with several other arias and instrumental pieces from the same opera. As I listened to the CDs in the series I could hear the experimentation and growth of each composer and see how they approached each genre. It is a fascinating way to get to know the composer. The selections on the discs remind me of one of those chocolate samplers you might enjoy but without the inevitable, unappetizing, "surprise" pieces. If the CDs in this series whet one's appetite for the composer's music the dedicated website serves up the full course meal.

WEBSITE I have to confess that only recently did I access the free websites and that was after reading three books in the series and listening to their accompanying discs. What the websites boast and deliver are the full works of the excerpts on the CDs (full operas, symphonies, chamber works, song cycles, etc.), music excerpts from the composer's contemporaries to put the composer in perspective of the whole of the classical music world, and a fascinating timeline that shows events

in the composers life alongside events in the world in the areas of the arts, culture and politics. That last feature blew me away. I was seeing for the first time, in my experience, all these events that I knew from world history and see how they each connected to the life and music of this famous composer. And that was a revelation. In an information age such as ours it doesn't seem like it would be a revelation but the fact is a lot of our information is just that, information, and it hasn't been synthesized or processed and thoughtfully connected to other streams of information. Here, in one of these timelines, you can see the stream of a composer's life intersect with the streams of art, culture, and politics and the immersion process goes a bit deeper. You are no longer reading history but experiencing it. No longer a spectator but a participant.

CONCLUSIONI may be a little overboard in my appraisal of the Naxos, His Life and Music, series but as a composer, and lover of books and biographies, I am truly in awe. When Naxos could have given us the books alone, or the CDs alone, or even the websites alone, they have offered it together as a complete package and at an affordable price. Thank you Naxos. Whether you are a classical music lover of many years, or just beginning to test the waters, please take a look at this series. I believe hours of beauty and enjoyment await you.

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