

SYMPHONY #9 – ANTONIN DVORAK

Dvorak's Symphony #9 is one of the most beloved works in the symphonic repertoire. Having had the experience of conducting it many times, I have accumulated a list of ideas, suggestions, and alterations that might be of interest. These comments are in the spirit of bringing out all the amazing colors, counterpoint and drama of the piece that perhaps go beyond the printed page, and which I have found helpful to performing the piece.

A couple of general notes: I have added rehearsal letters to the set of parts that I use, as the rehearsal numbers are few and far between. When possible, I use doubled woodwinds, with specific indications as to places to double. There are several passages for which this practice is really helpful in bringing out important lines that are often otherwise covered, or for which the conductor might have to make artificial adjustments to have them come out.

Please note that in counting the measures of the first movement, I include the measures in the first ending. I have 452 total measures in the first movement.

DVORAK – SYMPHONY #9 FIRST MOVEMENT

Bar 1, In 4, I suggest about 8th note = about 50; Cello start on D string

Bar 2, Viola, lean slightly on e flat

Bar 3 Lower strings, bassoons, poco tenuto on 16th notes

Bar 5, There is a mistake in some editions, horns should play pickup to beat 2, not 3, same as woodwinds in bar 10

Bar 6, Oboes, not too loud for the flute solo

Bar 8, Watch the intonation, flute and bassoon

Bar 8, As before, poco tenuto on 16th notes, followed by 8th note

Bar 10, I do a slightly faster tempo, 8th note = about 63, starting with the pickup in bar 9

Bar 10, Full quarter note in fortissimo

Bar 13, While this dynamic is not written this way, I have the cellos and basses remain forte, with two bows in bar 14, then diminuendo to bar 15; one bow for cellos in bar 14, two bows for basses

Bar 15 Perhaps a notch faster, 8th note = about 70

Bar 15, For the basses, small accents keeps the pulse, plus allows the flutes and oboes to feel the rhythm more easily. On one occasion, I had two of the basses play pizzicato on the b flats.

Bar 18, Perhaps a misprint - crescendo through entire bar, not forte in the middle of the bar. It's indicated in this manner in some editions.

Bar 19, Short chords, divisi first violin and cello

Bar 21, I have the cellos and basses play the last triplet, all down bow

Allegro molto is more or less twice as fast as introduction

Allegro molto, second bar, horns connect dotted quarter note to quarter note in the following bar; theme always to be played with this phrasing. (tenuto with a slight crescendo) Next example would be for oboes in bar 32, and then strings in bar 39.

Bar 28, Starting with the pickup, clarinets and bassoons play scherzando, highlighting the accents

Bar 39, Brass and timpani, not too loud, for the melody to be well heard
Bar 47, tutti, start appreciably softer to make more effective crescendo
Bar 53, For the cellos and basses, double down bow helps bring out sfz and the accent
Bar 57, Playing piano, and then with a crescendo is very dramatic. Violins can play fortissimo
Bar 67 to bar 72, Timpani can change notes to match trombone 3
Bar 74 and 76, Viola and cello can clip second 8th note
Bar 80, 2nd violins can clip the second 8th note
Bar 89, Tempo can relax slightly going into #3
3, Horn can play a slight accent or articulation to create pulse
2nd violins and at #3, flute and oboe - clip second 8th note; and carry through quarter note in the second bar to create a four bar phrase
Bar 99, Second violins can come out, perhaps middle to upper half of bow
Bar 107, A slight accelerando is possible to get to tempo primo at bar 111
Bar 112, Clarinet and bassoon can clip the second 8th note
Bar 115, Violins can play a tenuto quarter note, with lots of warmth
#4, All violins, always clip second 16th note
Bar 125, Cello, bass, very expressive
Bar 129, Violins, scherzando
Bar 133, It's possible to reorchestrate – perhaps 4 cellos in the back of the section can double the basses, also add bassoons (from George Szell score)
Bar 145, Tutti, relax tempo into #5
#5, No vibrato in strings will help flute project in the low register
Bar 156, First violin, very slight moving forward, all violins, bar 157, scherzando
Bar 157, Clarinets and bassoon can lean on the quarter note, and play a short 8th note
Bar 164 to bar 166, I have the orchestra crescendo to forte, then at bar 167 play subito piano
Bar 167, Perhaps a slight accelerando to tempo primo at bar 171
Bar 173, If the violins accent the melodic 16th notes, that can help to bring out the melody
Bar 173, Trombones might change their rhythm to agree with the cellos and basses
Bar 189, Tutti, not too soft – give room to make the diminuendo all the way to bar 193
Bar 200, Trumpet It's possible to not double this passage until perhaps the pickup to bar 210
Bar 208, The seconds and violas really need to support the crescendo to #7, so that #7 doesn't sound like a subito forte
Bar 233, Strings, I have student orchestras play an E flat harmonic minor scale to hear the tonality of this passage; I then rehearse the first violins and violas alone, and then the second violin, cello, bass
Bar 257, I have everyone play a little softer here and then crescendo
Bar 269, flute 2 and basses, be sure to bring out the canon
#9 Second violins and violas can play a sextuplet on beat 1, but essentially tremolo on beat 2

All comments from the exposition apply for the recap as well

Bar 304, Strings I would suggest an evenly-paced diminuendo for 12 bars - the dynamics until bar 316 can be altered so that the piano at #10 is loud enough to allow for a substantial diminuendo to bar 316

Bar 324 Notice the countermelody in the second horn, which is not in the exposition

Bar 394 Clarinet 2 trill from written F sharp to written G sharp

Bar 396, I suggest observing the single forte, with a huge crescendo into #13
#13 I like to move the tempo here
Bar 408, Brass and timpani can play slightly softer
Bar 412, I like a crescendo to bar 416; violins can remain ff throughout
Bar 416-423, Trumpets, fp crescendo on the quarter note and tied half note is very dramatic
Bar 432, Timpani can be very demonstrative for 4 bars, then step back a bit
Bar 438, Brass and timpani can step back just a little, and crescendo to bar 440
Bar 443, Trumpets need to play with very clear articulation
Bar 446, Adding trills to the horns can add even more excitement
Bar 446, Add bass trombone to the tenor trombone; in bar 447, then play an octave lower from the other two trombones (from George Szell score)

SECOND MOVEMENT

Bar 1 Szell re-orchestrates the opening chorale, utilizing the 3rd horn in place of the trumpets, with the trumpets entering in bar 3 beat 3. Similar retouches are found in the closing chorale.
Bar 1 Questions arise as to whether the tuba should be used at all. Perhaps the tuba can play one octave lower in the second chorale
Bar 5 The effect of the strings already playing when the brass ends is quite beautiful
Bar 6 A very small lift with the basses holding through is possible.
Bar 7 The tempo of the English horn solo is a topic for discussion. I take about quarter note = 44-46, with a nice flowing tempo in 4.
Bar 13 I don't suggest an echo here, but prefer pp contrast in bar 15
Bar 15 For me, no slide on the G string for 1st violins
Bar 17 I find that young musicians tend to overdo the crescendo – care must be taken not to cover the English horn and bassoon
Bar 22 Good intonation in the winds here can be elusive. Careful rehearsing, with attention to the 3rd of the chord, is necessary especially with young players. For example, in bar 22, the first clarinet is the only one who plays the 3rd, and is often sharp. The bassoon has the 3rd in bar 22, beat 3, etc. Note that the horn must breathe with the rest of the woodwinds in bar 23.
Bar 25 The brass may be marked ff, but really should be encouraged to play with a warm, vibrant sound, regardless of dynamic.
Bar 26 Strings enter similarly to bar 5
Bar 27 The tempo can flow a little more starting in this bar
Bar 27 I find it helps to think here in two bar phrases 27/28, 29/30
Bar 30 2nd violins can articulate slightly
Bar 31 I do an echo in this bar, with 1st violins playing on the D string
Bar 32 Back to A string, tempo moves a bit
Bar 34 I continue the crescendo to forte all the way to bar 35, and then diminuendo, bringing out the 2nd violins a bit
Bar 38 Again, careful to not cover the English horn and bassoon
Bar 41 D string for 1st violins is a lovely color
Bar 46 I do, more or less, quarter note = 72, poco agitato
Bar 48 Flute, oboe, strings, crescendo to all the way to bar 49, the top of the phrase
Bar 54 For me, the phrase that starts at bar 54 goes all the way to bar 58, and then diminuendo
Bar 60 Leaning a bit on the 3rd beat 16th note a bit, and adding a diminuendo rounds off the phrase nicely

Bar 63 I suggest adding a crescendo to the 1st violins, beat 4, and playing exactly in time
Bar 64 The mood is slightly agitated, 1st violins can play expressively. For me, the phrase goes all the way to bar 67 – forte in bar 67, and then diminuendo for everyone
Bar 69 This phrase can move a bit. I continue the crescendo all the way to 73 with a very gradual diminuendo all the way to bar 78
Bar 72 Portamento for 1st violins, beat 4, B# to E#
Bar 78 Clarinets can play a bit louder, as they are the only harmony
Bar 86 Diminuendo goes all the way to bar 87, not bar 86
Bar 87 1st violins still somewhat expressive, with diminuendo continuing all the way to bar 89, with a tiny bit of time into the change to E# in the violas, creating a magical moment
Bar 91 I prefer a full expressive 16th note each time this phrase is played, starting with the flute
Bar 94 Woodwinds – each of these is the same, with the 6th note tied to the first note of the group of 6 notes
Bar 99 Trumpets – no diminuendo in bar 99, diminuendo in bar 100
General note – The entire movement is marked to be played with mutes; however, it would be possible for everyone to be senza at bar 90, and muted at bar 101, with the solo players taking their mutes around bar 99, anticipating the mutes at bar 101
Bar 104 The English horn can suspend over the bar line while the strings take a small lift
Bar 107 Violin and violas - be sure to hold on to the end of 3, and for the solo cellos and bass to sustain their notes so that the second violins aren't playing their notes by themselves
Bar 113 The B double flat is particularly poignant in the 2nd violin, inside
Bar 115 Orchestras with excellent violins can play this passage on the A string for the warmest color. It's dangerous, but effective when well played.
Bar 118 1st violins G string, espressivo, diminuendo in bar 119 to bar 120
Bar 124 violins start expressively and diminuendo, bar 124 one down bow, with two bows for the last note
Bar 124 Woodwinds – a difficult place for intonation
Bar 126, 127 Basses, espressivo, and tenuto – I'm not against adding a low D flat below the staff for someone with an extension.

THIRD MOVEMENT

I find 80 is a little too slow – I prefer 88
Bar 31 1st violins, beat 2, G string
Bar 42 Flutes 8va is very helpful in bringing out the canon, which is otherwise hard to hear
Bar 49 can be played as 8th notes in the upper strings, which facilitates bar 52 for 2nd violins and violas
Bar 60 The transition to the trio is difficult – I suggest gradually relaxing the tempo from bars 60-63, arriving in tempo at bar 64
Bar 64 Young players may want to play 2 16th notes instead of 8th, 16th; it essentially should be read as 2 short 8th notes.
Bar 66-67 diminuendo in these two bars makes the bassoon shift to major something special
Bar 92 Cellos can play this passage on the D string
Bar 99 Make sure the new tempo is very clear
Bar 109 to #3 A small accelerando is possible
Bar 142 This transition needs careful rehearsing

Bar 148 I started to do something unorthodox in my most recent performances. I have the first bassoon play C to B below the staff to continue the C to B started by the second oboe in bar 142, so that there are four octaves of C to B

#4 to 176 Starting here, it's possible to think of these passages in 4 bar groups, with bar 170 and 171 as a 2 bar group

Bar 172 Violin 1, poco espressivo, diminuendo to the beginning of the trio

Bar 176, Bar 223 I have the winds play an 8 bar phrase, breathing only after 8 bars

Bar 189 The first violins, the second time through, can shift into a higher position, to enable them to play the high C in the second ending on the A string

Bar 196 I have everyone play diminuendo, rather than subito p

Bar 201 Trill is from E to F natural

Bar 208 First violins – mf; Bar 212 First violins p, Second violins mf

Bar 213 Trill E to F sharp

Bar 216 and Bar 218 Trill Clarinet 1 from written D to written E

Bar 223 Phrase crescendo only to about mf; keep the character charming

#6 Second violins and violas tremolo – measured triplets are too fast to be defined. I always rehearse them by themselves to make sure that the chords are clearly defined

Bar 243 I rehearse the first violins by themselves, and the cello/bass by themselves, pointing out the counterpoint. I then put them together, under tempo, and gradually work to a tempo

CODA I change the dynamic to FF for 2 bars, and diminuendo starting on the 3rd bar

Bar 270 I have the crescendo for everyone go to bar 280, not arriving at the FF in bar 276

Bar 280 The trumpets need to project throughout this passage, so the diminuendo needs to perhaps be delayed.

Bar 288 I have the violas play 6's starting here, which I think gives them a running start for the 5's, 4's, and then 3's. I rehearse this passage with them carefully. With a student group, I'll have them count aloud their rhythm in time; 6, then 5, then 4, and then 3.

FOURTH MOVEMENT

In setting the tempo for the 4th movement, I suggest that the tempo be contrasting to the first movement tempo

Bar 1-3 I prefer short 8th notes

Bar 4 and 5 With student orchestras, I have each string group, except basses, play one at a time, to show the 4 different rhythms

Bar 6 I prefer that the 8th notes be held longer to show the change in the harmony

Bar 9 I do piano crescendo

Bar 10 4 bar phrase for horns and trumpets

#1 An example of a passage which sounds particularly strong with doubled woodwinds

#1 Exaggerated swells in the second violins and violas adds lots of energy

Bar 39 Flute 1, oboe 1, clarinet 1, first violins – I remove the slurs on the 16th notes for greater clarity

Bar 43, beat 2 I have everyone step back just a little and crescendo to #2

Bar 50 If necessary, second violins and violas can play just a little less so that the woodwinds can be heard

Bar 54 The phrase starting here for the violins needs distinction between triplets and dotted 8th-16th notes

Bar 64 This cymbal crash may be played in a variety of ways. I've never heard it played as a crash, but rather with a soft stick. However, it's also possible to play by scraping the two cymbals together.

Bar 66 I like the clarinet to crescendo in bar 67, with a subito piano at #3 to bring out the color change at the change of harmony, and then have the phrase lead to bar 69, to the appoggiatura

Bar 76 Perhaps start this phrase a little softer

Bar 83 First violins need to stop the tremolo just a little early to make sure that the dotted quarter note is clear

Bar 85 and 87 I like staying on the A string, and going over to the E string on the high D in bar 88

#4 From George Szell's score – all violins play the first violin part in unison, with half the violas taking the second violin part

Bar 110 and 111 - Horn 4 can play octave lower on beat 4, then resolve in bar 112 to low D

Bar 118 First violins need some room for diminuendo, so the dynamic here can be louder, and then gradually decrescendo

Bar 120 and 121 For younger players, it's not a bad idea to have a good fingering on hand, to minimize huge jumps on the E string

#5 Clarinet and bassoon match the pizzicato

Bar 129, 130, 136, and 137 Flutes and oboes can stop the trill a little early to assure a good attack on the subsequent 8th notes

#6 Dramatic fpp in the second violins and violas

Bar 156 Be careful that the violas don't rush, and that the woodwinds don't drag. The clarinet is essentially a 3rd flute

7 The oboe here is essentially a third flute

Bar 170 and Bar 172 Be sure that note lengths are consistent

Bar 191 to 195 From George Szell's score – all violins play the first violin part in unison, with half the violas taking the second violin part

Bar 196 It's possible to step back just a little and crescendo to Bar 198

Bar 220 First violins, D string espressivo, and diminuendo all the way to bar 225

Bar 227 First violins, G string

Bar 235 Cellos, D string, soft color

Bar 249 Relax the tempo into #10

Bar 253 Violas, clip second note of 16th note groups

Bar 259 I prefer that the bassoon plays all staccato, scherzando, in contrast to the expressive melody

Bar 267 Violins at the tip, no accents

Bar 280 Strings need to stop the tremolo just a little early to make sure that the triplets start clearly

Bar 287 It's possible to step back just a little and crescendo to bar 289

Bar 291 Trumpet dissonance can be brought out by a crescendo to bar 293

#12 Two bar groups, reminiscent of the second movement

#12 Possible to add the tuba to the bass trombone an octave lower, 2 octaves lower in bar 304 only

Bar 313 relax the tempo a little

Bar 333 I like the tempo to then enable the quarter note to equal the half note at Bar 337, and for Bar 337 to be conducted in 2

Last bar – strings – don't move; winds, watch the third of the chord in the second oboe and first horn, which will help secure the intonation