

Listening Guide

Smetana: *The Moldau*

DATE: 1874–79

GENRE: Symphonic poem, from cycle *My Country (Má vlast)*

TEMPO: Allegro comodo non agitato (fast, not agitated)

PROGRAM: Scenes along the river Moldau in Bohemia

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR: Musical images of scenes along the river Moldau, each scene marked by different instrumentation (flutes for the bubbling spring; horns for the hunt; staccato strings for peasant dance; double reeds for nymphs in moonlight).

Wide-ranging river theme, which recurs to unify the work.

Shifts between minor and major mode (river theme heard in both major and minor).

Smetana's program: "Two springs pour forth in the shade of the Bohemian forest, one warm and gushing, the other cold and peaceful. Coming through Bohemia's valleys, they grow into a mighty stream. Through the thick woods it flows as the merry sounds of a hunt and the notes of the hunter's horn are heard ever closer. It flows through grass-grown pastures and lowlands where a wedding feast is being celebrated with song and dance. At night, wood and water nymphs revel in its sparkling waves. Reflected on its surface are fortresses and castles—witnesses of bygone days of knightly splendor and the vanished glory of martial times. The Moldau swirls through the St. John Rapids, finally flowing on in majestic peace toward Prague to be welcomed by historic Vyšehrad. Then it vanishes far beyond the poet's gaze."

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION
Source of river, two springs	Rippling figures in flute, then added clarinets; plucked string accompaniment.
Stream broadens	Rippling figure moves to low strings.
River theme	Stepwise melody in violins, minor mode, rippling in low strings; repeated:

Allegro comodo non agitato

p dolce *< sf >* *p* *< dim.* *< >* *>*

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Hunting scene Fanfare in French horns and trumpets:



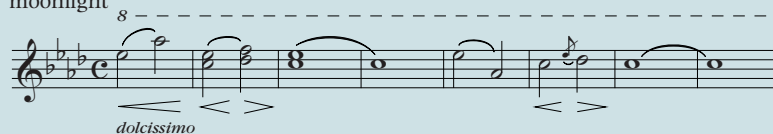
Rippling continues (in strings); dies down to gently rocking motion.

Peasant dance Repeated notes in strings lead to rustic folk tune, staccato in strings and woodwinds:



Closes with repeated single note in strings.

Nymphs in moonlight Mysterious, long notes in double reeds:



Rippling figures in flutes; muted string theme with harp, punctuated by French horn; brass *crescendo*, fanfare.

River theme Like beginning, strings in minor, then shift to major (raised 3rd-scale step).

St. John Rapids Brass and woodwinds exchange an agitated dialogue, build to climax, then die out.

River theme Full orchestra, loudest statement.

Ancient castle Hymnlike tune in brass, slow, then accelerates:
(near river mouth)



River dies away Strings slow down, lose momentum; 2 forceful closing chords.