

Life Dates: 1824-1884 Country of Origin:  
Bohemia (now the Czech Republic) Musical Era:  
Romantic

Bedrich Smetana was born in 1824 in Bohemia, now known as the Czech Republic. He learned how to play the violin from his father and other local teachers. He was not a good student. He didn't practice or study very much because he spent his time going to concerts and writing music for his friends.

Smetana married and had four children. Sadly, three of his four daughters died within two years. Soon, he had to leave Prague, because he was disappointed with the politics in Bohemia and didn't have enough career opportunities to stay in his homeland. Smetana, his wife, and his remaining daughter moved to Sweden and the composer worked as a piano teacher. Three years later, his wife died while the family was on its way home to Bohemia. Smetana married again, and spent the last years of his life in the countryside with his daughter and his second wife. During this time, he experienced another tragedy: he lost his hearing due to a ringing in his ears. Near the end of his life, he wrote a string quartet that made the instruments sound like the ringing in his ears. He developed some personal troubles and died in Prague in 1884.

Smetana was important in developing the Czech national style and is considered the first nationalistic composer of Bohemia. Although he didn't use folk tunes in his compositions, he was influenced by the music he heard around him. He also helped to get a new opera house built after he returned to Prague. This was a step toward raising the standard of music in Bohemia. Although he was proud of his Czech heritage, Smetana spoke German and never learned the Czech language. This was a problem for his career in Prague, especially as a nationalistic composer.

His music is "programmatic": he uses melody and the sounds of the different instruments to tell a story or depict a scene. Some of his most important works are the string quartet "From My Life," the opera *The Bartered Bride*, and *Má Vlast* (My Fatherland), especially "The Moldau."