

The Works of Bedřich Smetana

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Who was Bedřich Smetana?

Bedřich Smetana was a Czech composer, born in Litomyšl, Bohemia, in 1824. In the Czech Republic, he is known as the father of Czech music. However, because his works focused on Czech themes, they are not as well known internationally.

A statue of Smetana
in Litomyšl



The violin is not an easy instrument to learn!



Smetana was born into a musical family. His mother was a dancer and his father was an amateur violinist. He grew up surrounded by music and rhythm.



He learned the violin and piano as a child. In no time, this musical prodigy was playing better than his teachers. He gave his first public performance at the age of six!

↑ A picture of Bedřich Smetana on old Czech money



Smetana's first
wife, Kateřina



A view of Prague

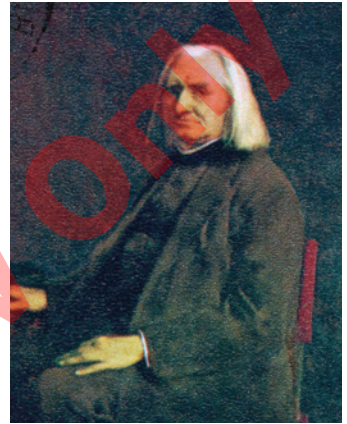
Smetana moved to Prague in 1843, and in 1844, he began to study piano and music composition. He took classes for the next three years. During this time, he earned money by playing the piano. He often played piano duets with a woman named Kateřina Kolářová, who he eventually married in 1849.

Smetana studied
music composition. ➡



In 1848, Smetana wrote to the composer Franz Liszt. He asked him to lend him money to open a music school. Liszt helped Smetana find a publisher for his music, but he did not send any money. A friendship began between the two men, and Smetana opened the school anyway.

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)
was a composer and
piano virtuoso.



Bedřich Smetana Among his Friends,
1865 oil painting by František Dvořák

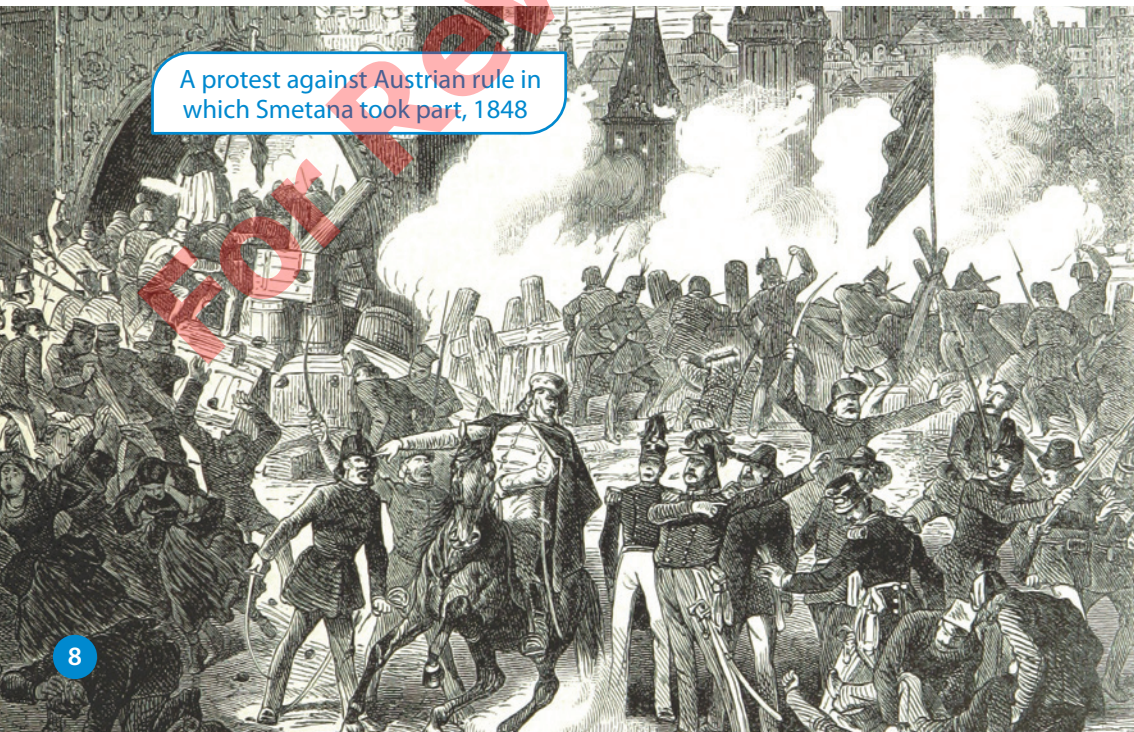


At that time in Bohemia (now part of the Czech Republic), a strong feeling of nationalism was growing. The region was part of Austria-Hungary, which was a great power in Central Europe in the 1800s. The official language spoken there was German. The people of Bohemia wanted to be able to express themselves in their own language—Czech. Smetana shared this feeling.

The Czech word for
"hello" is *ahoj!*

AHOJ!

A protest against Austrian rule in
which Smetana took part, 1848





Around the same time, in 1857, Smetana's wife Kateřina died. Worse, only one of their four daughters lived past childhood. He needed to focus on something other than his sadness. His reputation as a musician was growing, so he started to compose works in Czech. These quickly became popular.



Because he grew up speaking German, Smetana had to study Czech in his 30s to write works in that language.



Smetana got married again in 1860, to a woman named Bettina.



Provisional Theater, 1881



Smetana's grave in Prague

In 1863, when Smetana finished his first opera, *The Bartered Bride*, he was the director of the Provisional Theater. The opera was an immediate hit. Smetana also introduced well-known European operas to the audiences as well as new operas by young Czech composers.

Near the end of his life, Smetana started to lose his hearing. His health also broke down, and he was very sick when he died in 1884.