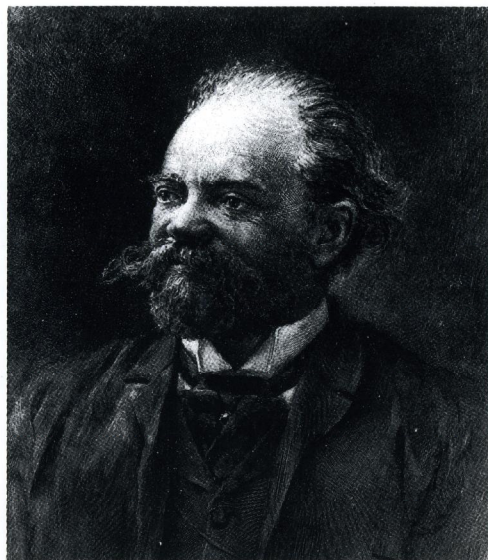


Chandos

CHAN 8406



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Although the eight *Slavonic Dances* of Opus 46 published by Simrock in 1878 captivated music lovers in Germany and England and introduced Dvořák's name to the international world for the first time, they are the work of a composer of considerable experience and maturity. Czechoslovakia, or Bohemia, was a poor part of the Austrian Empire under the Hapsburg Monarchy, and the only composer who was known at all from the country was Smetana, who was seventeen years older than Dvořák. Not that Dvořák was a young man, celebrating his 37th birthday in 1878, but it is fortunate that he yielded to the persuasion of friends in 1874 to send his Second and Third symphonies, some other orchestral music and some songs to the Austrian Commission for the State Music Prize in the Imperial capital of Vienna.

The Grant had been established in 1863, probably as a sop to the rumblings of nationalism within Bohemia, of which Smetana's folk operas were to be an important element. Any Czech could submit works for the Prize, which was for "young, poor and talented painters, sculptors and musicians in the Austrian half of the Empire", and Dvořák was considered good enough to be awarded 400 gold florins, worth about £35, an amount which was more than he had ever earned before. He continued to win this money for some years, thanks to the good graces of the excellent judges, who included the Music Critic of the *Neue freie Presse* in Vienna, the famous Eduard Hanslick, whose anti-Wagnerism led to that composer ridiculing the critic as Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Hanslick had found the perfect classical genius in Brahms, who was eight years older than Dvořák, in whom he recognised a fellow composer whose roots were equally steeped in Beethoven and the past: yet a composer who could appeal directly to the present.

Within Bohemia Dvořák had been a viola player in the Czech National Theatre Orchestra where he had met and received encouragement from Smetana. Some of his smaller pieces had been given public airings in 1871, when Dvořák was 30, but it was with the first performance of *Hymnus*, a patriotic hymn for chorus and orchestra from Vítězslav Hálek's poem *The Heirs of the White Mountain*, in 1873, that Dvořák's name was impressed on the Czech authorities and he then left the orchestra and took an appointment as organist at St. Adalbert's Church which left him time to compose, as well as enough security to marry Anna Čermáková, a contralto. During the next few years Dvořák composed operas, symphonic and chamber works, songs and the *Moravian Duets*, and it was this set which so charmed Brahms that he recommended them to Simrock for publication. Scored for two

sopranos and piano they were an immediate success with the German public, and Simrock was anxious for more.

Brahms' own great fame had begun with the publication of his *Hungarian Dances*, originally for piano duet, and Simrock suggested that Dvořák capitalise on this by composing a set of *Slavonic Dances*, an idea which strongly attracted the Czech composer. He had always loved the folk music of his own country, since delighting in the music played by itinerant musicians in his father's inn when Antonin was about seven. He set to with great enthusiasm and the first was written on 18th March 1878, seven more following in quick succession. With Brahms' *Hungarian Dances* in mind and the knowledge of the orchestra which Dvořák had developed over the years it was easy for him to set his *Slavonic Dances* down both for piano duet and in orchestral dress. For the first set he received 300 marks and they were so very successful that Simrock was happy to offer Dvořák 3000 marks for the Second Series, which was completed in January 1887, by which time Dvořák had become a world famous composer of the front rank. These, too, were written down for both piano duet and orchestra, and Dvořák personally conducted the first, second and seventh of the new set on 6th January 1887 at a concert of the Umělecká Beseda Society. Coincidentally, it was three of the First Series, the first, third and fourth, which had introduced them to the Czech nation, when Adolf Čech conducted them at the New Town Theatre in Prague on 16th May 1878, nine days after the First Series had been completed.

Although the orchestral versions of the dances are in the order given by the composer the first publication of the piano duet version of the First Series, issued by Simrock in August 1878, exchanged the order of the Third and Sixth, for no known reason. In fact, Dvořák completed the orchestration of his first dances on 22nd August that year. Apart from the sheer pleasure and melodic genius, the dances offer a rare compilation of the Bohemian folk dances, although all the melodies themselves are wholly original.

For the first Dance Dvořák takes the simple key of C major for one of his country's most popular dance forms, the *furiant*, which alternates simple duple and simple triple time in a fast moving *presto*.

Alternation, this time between tempi and character in short episodes, characterises the second dance, sometimes called a *Serbian*, although with flavours of the Polish *gumenjak*, the Ukrainian *dumka* and, in a major variant, the *ovčáká*, a shepherd dance from Moravia.

Another mixture fills the A flat third dance, which became the sixth in the duet version

first published by Simrock. The *polka* seems to dominate, coloured in the main theme by the South Bohemian *hulán* and the *klatovák*, sometimes called the *kucmoch*, from Klatovy. At the end a spring dance, or *skečná*, makes a strong addition.

Next, with the atmosphere of an old country dance in the fiercely accented bass steps, we have a Czech *ländler*, or *sousedská*, a typical Moravian *minet-mazur*, in an extended *minuet* form.

Dvořák always had an affection for the rise and fall of the diatonic scale, which involves no accidentals in the major scale, in which the fifth dance, in A major, is cast. This again has a variety of characters, not all from Bohemia; these include the Polish *krakowiak* and the Russian *gopak*, the home country being represented by the Moravian *skečná* and the Czech *vrták*.

The Sixth Dance, the third in the duet publication, is a *sousedská*, not far away from the Polish *mazurka*, with particularly impressive rhythmic backing.

The C minor Dance is generally described as the *skečná*, or spring dance, but some contemporary Bohemian scholarship favours the *tetka*, or *auntie* dance from Haná; the closing section being a spritely *polka*.

Finally, in the First Series, another *furiant*, to balance the set. However, Dvořák uses his orchestral skill to produce a suitable dramatic contrast between the elegiac central section and the bright sunny outer parts.

Although pressed by Simrock to provide a second set of *Slavonic Dances* it was eight years before Dvořák found the impetus to fill the commission. This came between 9th June and 9th July 1886 and the composer was right to inform the publisher that the new set "will be quite different", compared to the first. Their orchestration occupied him from the middle of September 1886 to the first days of January 1887. This time there was no difference in numbering between the duet and orchestral sets. Although more expressive and serious in general character the Second Series is no less entertaining, witty and stimulating.

First is a fast moving Slovak pairing of the *od zeme* and *skoky*, being 'off the floor' and 'springing' dances.

Next, a graceful Ukrainian *dumka*, related here to the Polish *mazurka*.

Back wholly to a variant of the Czech *skečná* for the third Dance.

Grace and elegance bring the Second Series to the half-way mark, with a D flat major piece which impishly opens in E flat major. Here the *mazur* is in evidence, but the music is

so pictorial that the dance nature is all but forgotten in five minutes of pure music making.

Dvořák is supposed to have first heard the Czech promenade dance, or *špacírka*, while in his summer home at Vysoká where it was danced, and uses it for the fifth dance of the Second Series with great charm, the slow introduction leading beautifully to the exhilaration of the main dance.

As a contrast the sixth dance of the set is a delightful *polonaise*, cast in a minuet-style movement.

For the penultimate dance Dvořák returns to C major, this time for a fast and brilliant South Slavonic or Serbian *kolo*.

Finally, in a wonderfully extensive *sousedská*, here used as an atmospheric slow waltz, Dvořák ends his *Slavonic Dances* reminding us that he is the composer of the great D minor Symphony; that he is 45 and at the height of his maturity with nearly twenty years of growing genius before him. A Dance whose seven minutes is truly symphonic but always Slavonic.

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Recording producer: Brian Couzens.

Sound engineer: Ralph Couzens. Assistant engineer: Philip Couzens.

Recorded in the SNO Centre, Glasgow on 17 & 18 March 1985.

Front cover picture: 19th century European engraving, artist unknown.

Sleeve design: Thumb Design Partnership. Art direction: Janet Osborn.



Neeme Järvi took up his appointment as Musical Director and Principal Conductor of the Scottish National Orchestra on August 1, 1984. He was born in Tallinn, Estonia in 1937 and graduated from the Tallinn Music School with degrees in percussion and choral conducting before continuing his studies at the Leningrad State Conservatory. In 1963 he became Director of the Estonian Radio and Television Orchestra and began his 13-year tenure as Chief Conductor of the Opera Theatre Estonia. In 1971 he won first prize in the Conductors' Competition at the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome. Before his departure from the Soviet Union, he had held almost every conducting post his home state could offer and was regularly conducting the great orchestras of Moscow and Leningrad, both at home and abroad.

In January 1980 he emigrated to America with his family, and the next month made his début with the New York Philharmonic. He now regularly conducts the San Francisco, Toronto and Montreal Symphony Orchestras and has appeared with the Philadelphia and Boston Symphony Orchestras and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. His début at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, was conducting Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*.

He is Principal Conductor of the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra with which he toured America in 1983, and with which he has recently won a Swedish Grammy Award. His first recording with the Scottish National Orchestra was a highly-acclaimed 3-disc/cassette set of 6 Operatic Suites by Rimsky-Korsakov, released on Chandos in the Winter of 1984, and this was followed by a prestigious cycle of Prokofiev's Seven Symphonies launched early in 1985.

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**CHAN 8406**

# ANTONIN DVOŘÁK (1841-1904) SLAVONIC DANCES

## Series 1: Opus 46

- 1 No. 1 in C major *Presto* (3:43)
- 2 No. 2 in E minor *Allegretto scherzando* (4:30)
- 3 No. 3 in A flat major *Poco allegro* (4:13)
- 4 No. 4 in F major *Tempo di Minuetto* (6:48)
- 5 No. 5 in A major *Allegro vivace* (3:19)
- 6 No. 6 in D major *Allegretto scherzando* (5:13)
- 7 No. 7 in C minor *Allegro assai* (3:14)
- 8 No. 8 in G minor *Presto* (3:51)

## Series 2: Opus 72

- 9 No. 1 in B major *Molto vivace* (3:56)
- 10 No. 2 in E minor *Allegretto grazioso* (5:28)
- 11 No. 3 in F major *Allegro* (3:11)
- 12 No. 4 in D flat major *Allegretto grazioso* (5:13)
- 13 No. 5 in B flat minor *Poco adagio – vivace* (2:42)
- 14 No. 6 in B flat major *Moderato, quasi Minuetto* (3:41)
- 15 No. 7 in C major *Allegro vivace* (2:56)
- 16 No. 8 in A flat major *Grazioso e lento, ma non troppo, quasi tempo di Valse* (7:16)

## SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

Leader, Edwin Paling

**NEEME JÄRVI** conductor



TT = 70:19 DDD

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