

## ***Slavonic Dances, Op. 46, Nos. 1, 3 and 8 • Antonin Dvorak***

SCORED FOR: PICCOLO, TWO FLUTES, TWO OBOES, TWO CLARINETS, TWO BASSOONS, FOUR HORNS, TWO TRUMPETS, THREE TROMBONES, TIMPANI, BASS DRUM, CYMBALS, TRIANGLE, AND STRINGS.

It was Johannes Brahms' interest in and support for his younger colleague's work that led directly to Dvorak's first set of *Slavonic Dances*. In 1877, Dvorak applied for a renewal of the Austrian State Grant he had received two years earlier (Bohemia was a part of the Austrian empire at that time), and Brahms, a member of the commission, was so impressed with the work Dvorak submitted that he made his discovery known to his own publisher, Simrock of Berlin, who not only bought that score at once, but immediately asked Dvorak for more material.

Simrock knew his audience. He suggested to Dvorak that he compose a set of national dances, to be written for piano duet. Dvorak at that point was interested in making his name with weightier offerings, but he recognized the practical nature of Simrock's request, not only for own benefit, but as an opportunity to acquaint a broad public with the Czech spirit in music. The dances were an opportunity to celebrate the Slavic cultures of Central Europe, which were currently under the repressive control of the Austrian Empire.

Dvorak composed the dances in short order and then, at Simrock's request, proceeded to orchestrate them. The original four-hand version, published in August 1878, made a small fortune for Simrock; Dvorak was paid only 300 marks. Through their publication, however, Dvorak gained international celebrity status, and ultimately the financial rewards that he deserved.

It is significant that Dvorak labeled his dances "Slavonic," rather than "Czech" or "Bohemian." While his first book of *Slavonic Dances, Op. 46* is predominantly Czech in respect to the forms represented, the second book, *Op. 72*, which came along nine years later, includes forms native to such other Slavic lands as Serbia, Poland, Moravia, and Ukraine. Unlike Brahms' *Hungarian Dances*, which make use of actual folks tunes, Dvorak composed original melodies in a style akin to authentic folk music.

Of the eight Slavonic dances in *Op. 46*, this performance will feature Nos. 1, 3, and 8. *No. 1 in C major* is cast in the form of a furiant. Its character is fiery and impulsive, but in a cheerful, exuberant frame. *No. 3 in A-flat* is essentially a sunny lyrical polka, however, it contains sections that have other dance characteristics including the kucmoch (a dance from Klatový), the South Bohemian hulan and, at the end, the skoná, a *spring dance* involving leaping or hopping. *No. 8 in G minor* is also a furiant, though this one is even more fiery and brilliant than the opening number.