



**Dvořák Slavonic Dances**  
**Czech Philharmonic**  
**Sir Simon Rattle**

Album cover painting: *In the Sun, 2020*

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Booklet cover photography: **Sir Simon Rattle**, conducting the Czech Philharmonic

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## Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

### Slavonic Dances (Series I), Op. 46, B. 83 (1878)

1	No. 1, in C Major (Furiant): Presto	4. 01
2	No. 2, in E Minor (Dumka): Allegretto scherzando	4. 47
3	No. 3, in A-Flat Major (Polka): Poco allegro	4. 38
4	No. 4, in F Major (Sousedská): Tempo di minuetto	6. 41
5	No. 5, in A Major (Skočná): Allegro vivace	3. 17
6	No. 6, in D Major (Sousedská): Allegretto scherzando	4. 47
7	No. 7, in C Minor (Skočná): Allegro assai	3. 22
8	No. 8, in G Minor (Furiant): Presto	4. 13

### Slavonic Dances (Series II), Op. 72, B. 147 (1886)

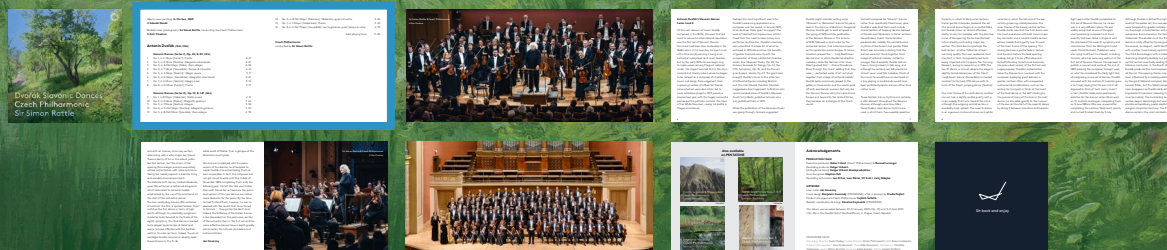
9	No. 1, in B Major (Odzemek): Molto vivace	4. 17
10	No. 2, in E Minor (Mazur): Allegretto grazioso	5. 26
11	No. 3, in F Major (Skočná): Allegro	3. 34
12	No. 4, in D-Flat Major (Dumka): Allegretto grazioso	5. 29
13	No. 5, in B-Flat Minor (Špacírka): Poco adagio	2. 39

14	No. 6, in B-Flat Major (Polonéza): Moderato, quasi minuetto	3. 46
15	No. 7, in C Major (Srbské kolo): Presto	3. 20
16	No. 8, in A-Flat Major (Sousedská): Lento grazioso, quasi tempo di valse	6. 39

Total playing time: 71. 06

### Czech Philharmonic

conducted by **Sir Simon Rattle**



Sir Simon Rattle & Czech Philharmonic

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Dvořák Slavonic Dances  
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Table with track information including titles, durations, and recording details.



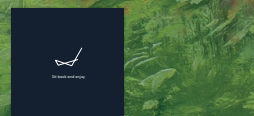
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**Antonín Dvořák's Slavonic Dances Series I and II**

Of the vast amount of music Dvořák composed in the 1870s, the work that did most to secure his international reputation was the first set of *Slavonic Dances*. His career had been slow to develop in the 1860s when, in his twenties, he spent most of his time simply earning a living as an orchestral viola player and music teacher, but by the early 1870s he was beginning to make waves among Prague's cultured circles. His impact was felt first in the city's musical and literary salons where he began to be noticed as a composer of chamber music and songs. Encouragement from a growing number of influential friends, some of whom were also critics, led to more ambitious projects. 1873 proved a momentous year with the hugely successful premiere of his patriotic cantata, *The Heirs of the White Mountain*, raising his profile in Prague enormously.

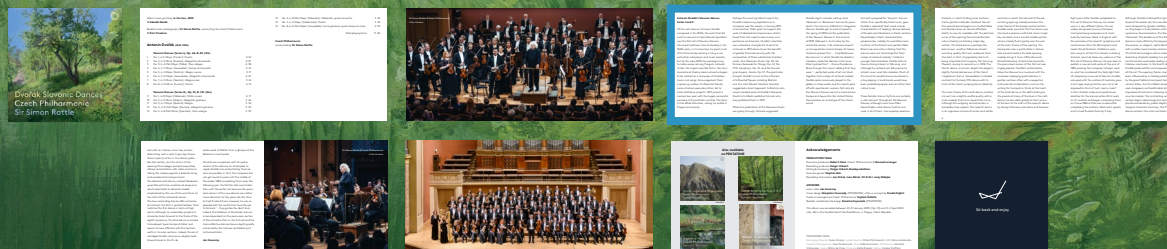
Perhaps the most significant events for Dvořák's advancing aspirations as a composer was the award, in January 1875, of an Austrian State grant to support the work of talented but impecunious artists. Freed from the need to raise money as a performer and teacher, Dvořák's creativity was unleashed. A simple list of what he achieved in 1875 alone shows the benefits of greater financial security with the composition of three substantial chamber works, four *Moravian Duets*, Op. 20, the famous *Serenade for Strings*, Op. 22, the Fifth Symphony, Op. 76, and the five-act grand opera, *Vanda*, Op. 25. The grant also brought Dvořák's music to the attention of influential figures including Brahms and the critic Eduard Hanslick. Hanslick suggested a direct approach to Brahms who recommended some of Dvořák's *Moravian Duets* to his Berlin publisher Simrock who duly published them in 1879.

While the publication of the *Moravian Duets* was going through, Simrock suggested

Dvořák might consider writing some 'Moravian' or 'Bohemian' dances for piano duet in the manner of Brahms's *Hungarian Dances*. Dvořák got to work at speed in the spring of 1878 and the publication of the *Slavonic Dances* in the autumn of 1878, followed in short order by the orchestral version, had a decisive impact on his reputation across Europe. At home, Smetana praised the '.... truly Beethoven-like manner' in which Dvořák handled his melodies, while the German critic Louis Ehlert gushed that '... Divine Providence flows through this music' adding that they were '... perfected works of art not stuck together from scraps of national melody'. Dvořák quite consciously played to the gallery in these works and the results paid off with spectacular success. Not only did the *Slavonic Dances* carry his name across Europe and beyond to the United States, they became an archetype of the Czech sound.

Simrock's proposal for 'Slavonic' dances rather than specifically Czech ones, gave Dvořák a wide brief that could include characteristics of 'leaping' dances beloved of Slovaks and Ukrainians in faster sections. Nevertheless, Czech characteristics predominate, notably the excitable cross-rhythms of the Furiant and gentler Polka. Ehlert was accurate in stating that the dances were not 'stuck together from scraps of national melody'. Unlike his younger friend Janáček, Dvořák did not have a strong interest in folk song, and although he certainly set folk poems he almost never used folk melodies. Much of the music he would have encountered as a boy playing in local bands would have been published popular dances rather than native tunes.

These familiar dance rhythms are certainly a vital element throughout the *Slavonic Dances*, although none have titles. Nevertheless, clear dance rhythms are used in all of them. Two superbly assertive



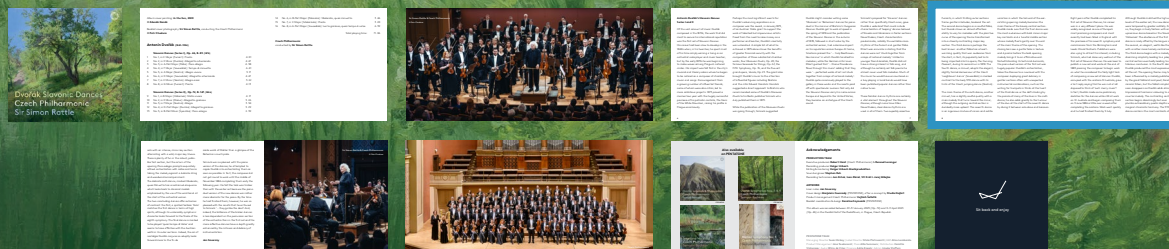
Furiants, in which thrilling outer sections frame gentler interludes, bookend the set. The second dance begins as a soulful Polka, but Dvorak shows an almost effortless ability to vary his melodies with the plaintive curve of the opening theme transformed into a cheerily contrasting major-key section. The third dance is perhaps the best known: another Polka has a heart-warming quality that won audiences from the start, in fact, its popularity led to its being imported into his opera, *The Cunning Peasant*, during its second run in 1878. The fourth dance, a minuet, adopts the elegant, slightly formal demeanour of the Czech 'neighbours' dance' (Sousedská) in marked contrast to the lively fifth dance with its hints of the Czech jumping dance (Skočná).

The main theme of the sixth dance, another minuet, has a slightly soulful quality with a main melody that turns toward the minor, although the outgoing central section is decidedly more upbeat. The seventh dance is an ingenious mixture of canon and subtle

variation in which the tail-end of the ear-catching opening melody becomes the main theme of the breezy central section. Dvořák made sure that the final dance was the most audacious with bold minor-major key contrasts and a tuneful middle section whose melody floats gently over the end of the main theme of the opening. The closing bars see a gentle fade in texture and dynamic before the bold opening melody brings it to an affirmative end. Notwithstanding its technical demands, the piano duet version of the first set was hugely popular. Dvořák's orchestration, takes the *Dances* to a new level with the composer deploying great delicacy in gentler sections often with unexpected instrumental combinations, such as the writing for trumpets in thirds at the heart of the third dance or the deft shading by the piccolo of many of the lines in the sixth dance; he also adds greatly to the humour of the duo at the start of the seventh dance by diving it between solo oboe and bassoon.

Eight years after Dvořák completed his first set of *Slavonic Dances*, his career was in a very different place. He was widely recognised as one of Europe's most promising composers and most recently had been feted in England with the premiere of his seventh symphony and commissions from the Birmingham and Leeds Choral Festivals. Publishers were also vying to attract his interest, including Simrock, who had done very well out of the first set of *Slavonic Dances*. He was keen to publish a new set and wrote at the end of 1885 pressing the composer to begin work on what he considered the fairly light task of composing a new set of dances. Dvořák, occupied with the oratorio *St Ludmila*, gave a tart reply saying that he was not at all disposed to think of 'such merry music'! In fact, Dvořák made some preliminary sketches for the dances while still at work on *St. Ludmila* and began composing them on 9 June 1886 a little over a week after completing the oratorio. Work went quickly and he had finished them by 9 July.

Although Dvořák matched the high energy levels of the earlier set, the new dances were tempered by greater subtlety. Even so, they begin in lively fashion with an uproarious dance based on the Slovak 'Odzemek'. The ebullience of the first dance is nicely offset by the languor of the second, an elegant, waltz-like Dumka with a rather more homely central section. The third dance begins with a melody of disarming simplicity leading to a jokey central section eventually leading to a hilarious conclusion. In the fourth dance, Dvořák produced the most expressive of all the set. The opening theme may have been influenced by a melody published by the great folklorist and poet, Karel Jaromír Erben, but the folkish simplicity soon disappears as Dvořák adds almost Impressionist harmonic colouring to a counter melody. The contrasting central section begins disarmingly but soon plumbs extraordinary poetic depths with magical chromatic harmony. The fifth dance contains the most contrasts of the



sets with an intense, minor-key section alternating with a wild, major-key *Vivace*. There is plenty of fun in the robust, polk-like fast section, but the return of the opening *Poco adagio* prompts exquisitely refined orchestration with cellos and horns taking the melody against a delicate string and woodwind accompaniment.

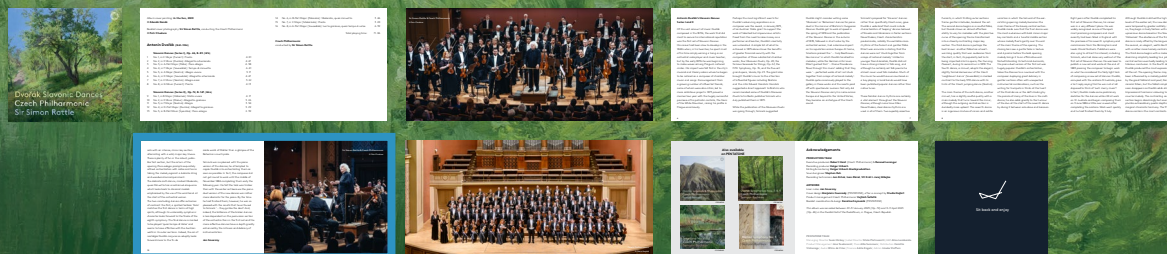
The delicate sixth dance, marked *Moderato*, *quasi Minuetto* has a restrained eloquence which looks back to classical models emphasised by the use of the wind band at the start of the orchestral version.

The two concluding dances offer extremes of contrast: the first, a spirited Serbian 'Kolo' matches the first dance in terms of high spirits, although its undeniably symphonic character looks forward to the finale of the eighth symphony. The final dance is marked to be played 'quasi tempo di Valse' and seems to have affinities with the Austrian waltz in its outer sections. Indeed, the air of nostalgia Dvořák conjures so adeptly looks forward more to the fin de

siècle world of Mahler than a glimpse of the Bohemian countryside.

Simrock was so pleased with the piano version of the dances, he attempted to cajole Dvořák into orchestrating them as soon as possible. In fact, the composer did not get round to work until the middle of November 1886 completing them early the following year. He felt the task was trickier than with the earlier set because the piano duet version of the new dances was rather more idiomatic for the piano. By the time he had finished them, however, he was so pleased with the results that he enthused to Simrock '... they go like the devil'. And, indeed, the brilliance of the brisker dances is less dependent on the percussion section of the orchestra than in the first set and the more reflective dances have a depth greatly enhanced by the richness and delicacy of instrumentation.

**Jan Smaczny**





Czech Philharmonic  
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Dvořák: Slavonic Dances  
Czech Philharmonic  
Sir Simon Rattle

Track	Composer	Conductor	Recording Date	Recording Location
1. Polka	Antonín Dvořák	Sir Simon Rattle	2018	Prague, Czech Republic
2. Polka	Antonín Dvořák	Sir Simon Rattle	2018	Prague, Czech Republic
3. Polka	Antonín Dvořák	Sir Simon Rattle	2018	Prague, Czech Republic
4. Polka	Antonín Dvořák	Sir Simon Rattle	2018	Prague, Czech Republic
5. Polka	Antonín Dvořák	Sir Simon Rattle	2018	Prague, Czech Republic
6. Polka	Antonín Dvořák	Sir Simon Rattle	2018	Prague, Czech Republic
7. Polka	Antonín Dvořák	Sir Simon Rattle	2018	Prague, Czech Republic
8. Polka	Antonín Dvořák	Sir Simon Rattle	2018	Prague, Czech Republic
9. Polka	Antonín Dvořák	Sir Simon Rattle	2018	Prague, Czech Republic
10. Polka	Antonín Dvořák	Sir Simon Rattle	2018	Prague, Czech Republic



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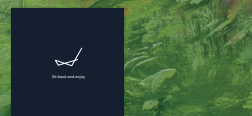
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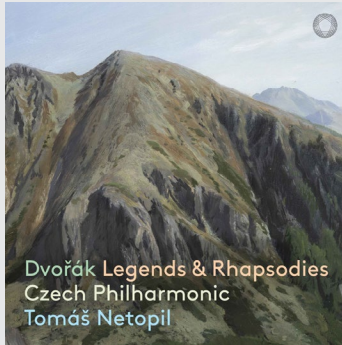
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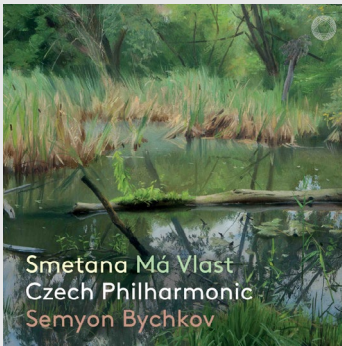
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Editing & mastering **Holger Urbach Musikproduktion**

Sound engineer **Stephan Reh**

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Booklet coordination & design **Karolina Szymanik** (PENTATONE)

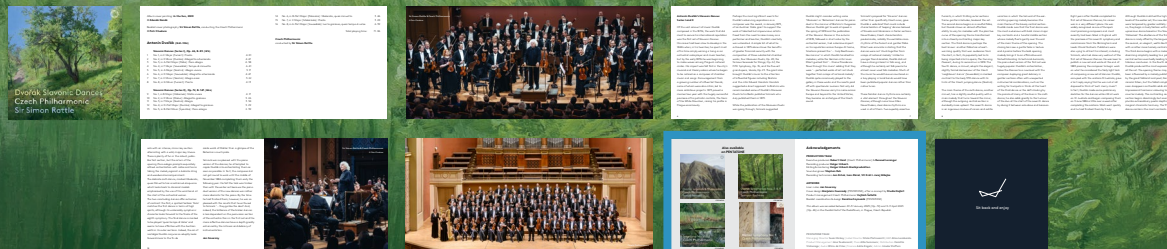
*This album was recorded between 29–31 January 2025 (Op. 72) and 9–11 April 2025 (Op. 46) in the Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum, in Prague, Czech Republic.*

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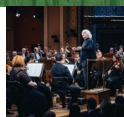
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