

Hungarian and Slavonic Dances.

This great folk dance genre, so popular the world over, is successful because of the two composers most associated with it. Johannes Brahms and Antonin Dvořák have a conjoined legacy in so many ways, that it is not all together surprising that the Dances would also display a strong connective tissue.

Brahms, the ever careful, methodical giant of German Romanticism was plagued by insecurities. His first symphony wasn't presented until he was forty years old, and even then he was concerned about his musical reputation. In 1868 the great success of *Ein Deutes Requiem*, confirmed the opinion of critics and the public alike, that he was under no shadow, and had demonstrated a consummate mastery. It is perhaps because of this acknowledgment that Brahms turned in 1869 to write his twenty-one lively *Hungarian Dances*, in a completely light vein. They were written for four hand piano first, and some arranged by him again for solo piano, but all of them now enjoy orchestral arrangements which have propelled them to immense popularity. They not only widened his audience appeal, but were instant hits with Simrock his publisher, and both made good money on the set. Out of these twenty-one folk vignettes, we perform No.'s 1, 3 and 10. This is completely fitting, since they are the only orchestral arrangements that were undertaken by Brahms himself. The Hungarian style, whether rightly or wrongly conceived by local Viennese, was part and parcel of the sonic experience of the Austro-Hapsburg empire. The *hungarische* qualities prevalent in minor keys of some of Beethoven's music, were no different to the *Turkish* impulse in some of Mozart's music. The Austro-German palette had developed a taste for putting foreign things of which they were vaguely aware, into the more conservative cultural fabric and under direct scrutiny. One can imagine the audiences, witness to these elements scattered liberally through the music of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven, rather perversely enjoy the implications of having heard gypsy, Hungarian or Turkish music at their soirées. By the time Brahms comes to these elements, as standalone works, the effect is of a greater acceptance of the empire's diversity. Nevertheless, Brahms thinks he's quoting various folk themes as he knows them, but is very often simply restating an existing form, as in the case of the existing Csardas of Hungarian Dance No. 5. Which brings us to consider Dvořák's contribution.

Simrock was aware that the Hungarian Dances had made Brahms popular, not to mention the money. Brahms was ever encouraging of Dvořák, spurring him on, reviewing his work and at least twice, placing him as a prize winner in judged competitions, allowing him considerable benefit from the prize money. Dvořák was a great admirer of Brahms and the close relationship and mutual admiration bears out when one listens to their music side by side. But perhaps the greatest favour was introducing Dvořák to Simrock Publishers. Simrock immediately set about encouraging Dvořák to write a set of Dances, of which the Slavonic Dances are the result. Dvořák didn't quite know what was expected of him, so modeled his dances on Brahms' format. The ensuing pieces of Opus 46, written in 1878 are a wonderful tribute to Brahms, but also piquantly original themes by Dvořák. The later published group Opus 72 of 1886 complete the set. These dances are no longer a Viennese approximation of the Hungarian or Slavic flavor, but the authentic article written by arguably the greatest Slavonic composer. We perform No.'s 1 and 7 from Opus 46 and No. 2 (renumbered No. 10) from Opus 72.

The interchangeable nature of these great orchestral dances relies on the close relationship between these two composers, and the common thread they seem to have created within their music. No wonder then, that the last five of Brahms' Hungarian Dances, No's 16-21, were orchestrated by Dvořák.