

# World Dances



## Lesson – *Slavic Folk Dance in Dvořák's Slavonic Dances*

Companion Video – *Slavonic Dances*, Op. 46, No. 7 *Skočná*

### Suggested Grade Level

Grades 1-4

### Objective

Students will identify and explore rhythm in the Slavic *skočná* dance and in Dvořák's *Slavonic Dances*, Op. 46, No. 7. They will compare and discuss the musical elements. Students will gain insight into traditional Slavic folk dance music forms and practices.

### Suggested Materials

- BPO video of Dvořák's *Slavonic Dances*, Op. 46, No. 7 *Skočná*
- YouTube example of *Skočná* dance - <https://tinyurl.com/38ns5kk6>

### New York State Arts Standards

MU:Re7.2.1a-4a      DA:Cr1.1.1a-4a  
MU:Cn10.1.1c-4c    DA:Pr4.1.1b  
DA:Cn11.1.1a-4a

### New York State English Language Arts & Literacy Standards

Speaking & Listening, Standard 1, 2, 4 & 6  
Language, Standard 1, 3, 5 & 6

### Procedure

- 1) The *Slavonic Dances* are a series of 16 orchestral pieces, originally written for piano four hands (a piano duet with both players playing on the same piano), composed by Antonin Dvořák in 1878 and 1886 and published in two sets. Op. 46, No. 7 is structured in the *skočná* folk-dance form.
- 2) The *skočná* is a rapid Slavic folk-dance, typically in 2/4 (duple) meter involving leaping or hopping. *Skočná* literally means "jumping." Much of Dvořák's musical style was heavily influenced by the rhythms and other aspects of the folk music of Moravia and his native Bohemia, and he frequently used Slavic folk dance forms, including the *skočná* in many of his compositions. Although Dvořák composed all his own melodies for his *Slavonic Dances*, his pieces are written in the forms and styles of specific dances that are easily identified by their rhythmic patterns. The lively pieces were symbolic of Dvořák's homeland and were so popular that they propelled his international reputation.



## Lesson – *Slavic Folk Dance in Dvořák’s Slavonic Dances* (continued)

---

- 3) Traditional Slavic folk dances maintain a strong sense of rhythm and pulse in which the *downbeat* of the music is strongly felt. The *downbeat* is the accented beat in the first bar of music. Since the *skočná* dance is in duple meter, we feel beat one as the strongest in the pair of beats - 1 + 2. The heavy weight of beat one makes it easy to feel the overall pulse of the music, which lends well to dancing.
- 4) Play the YouTube example of the *skočná* dance for students. Have them tap their foot or clap on each heavy, first beat they hear and feel. Notice how the dancers jump on the strong beats as well and often change movements when the strongest beats are played by the instrumental accompaniment. Have students verbally identify when they hear the most accented (strongest) downbeat played by the violin.
- 5) Have students listen to the BPO recording of Dvořák’s *Slavonic Dances*, No. 7 *Skočná*. Have them hop or jump to the pulse of the music. Can the students feel the strong downbeat of each phrase in the music? What instrument stresses the downbeat at the beginning of the piece? (Time Stamp: 0:42) Ask students, at this point in the music, what do you hear? How does the music make you feel? How does the composer achieve this effect in the music? What instruments are used to create the effect? Ask students to identify what instrument(s) take over stressing the downbeat once the full ensemble is playing.



## Lesson – *Slavic Folk Dance in Dvořák's Slavonic Dances* (continued)

### Antonín Dvořák

Antonín Dvořák was a Czech composer who is most well-known for his Symphony No. 9, "From the New World." He was born the eldest of eight children in a small village north of Prague. He joined his father in the local band at a young age, and studied organ, violin, piano, and composition. Much of Dvořák's childhood was centered around folk music, which is reflected in many of his most famous compositions.

In 1877, on recommendation by Brahms, Dvořák was commissioned to write some Slavonic dances for piano duet, from which he became an international celebrity almost overnight. In Berlin the sheet music sold out in one day.



*"The music of the people is like a rare and lovely flower..."*  
-Antonín Dvořák

#### What does *Slavonic* mean?

The term *Slavonic* means relating to the Slavic language family. Slavic languages are spoken by certain countries in Eastern Europe. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it was estimated that 315 million people spoke Slavic languages. That's almost the entire population of the United States! Slavic countries included Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Czech Republic (formerly Bohemia & Moravia) and Slovakia.

Dvořák was born near Prague.

The *Skočná* is the most characteristic dance of this area of former Moravia.

