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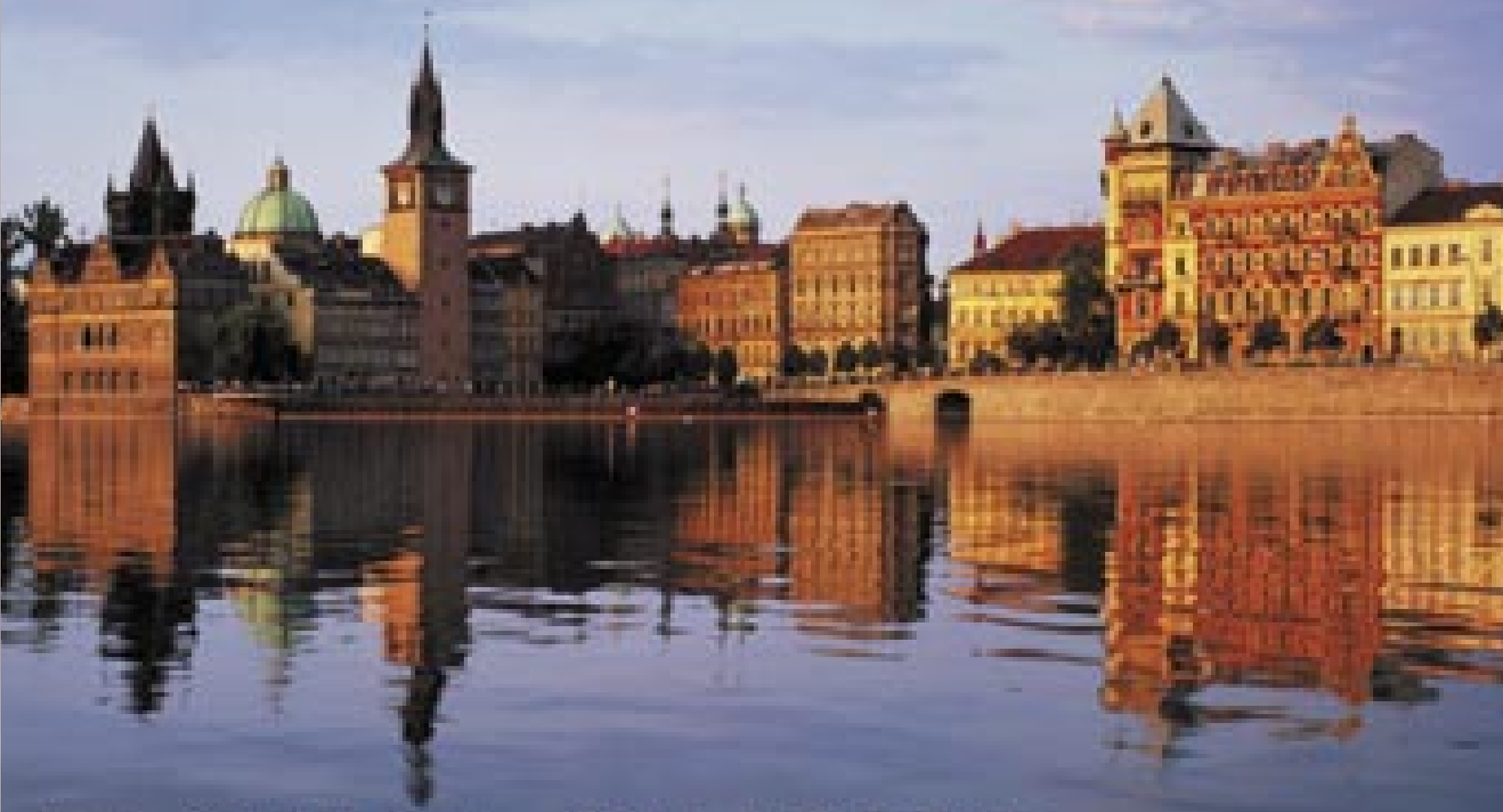
DVOŘÁK

STRING QUARTET No. 13 in G Major Op. 106

STRING QUINTET in E-Flat Major Op. 97



PACIFICA QUARTET

with Michael Tree, viola

DDD *Absolutely Digital*™ CDR 90000 059

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

1841-1904

String Quartet No. 13 in G Major, Op. 106 (38:16)

1. I. Allegro moderato (9:16)
2. II. Adagio ma non troppo (10:47)
3. III. Molto vivace (7:07)
4. IV. Finale: Andante sostenuto – Allegro con fuoco (10:56)

String Quintet in E-Flat Major, Op. 97* (32:02)

5. I. Allegro non tanto (8:37)
6. II. Allegro vivo (5:44)
7. III. Larghetto (9:59)
8. IV. Finale: Allegro giusto (7:31)

Total Time: (70:00)

Pacifica Quartet

Simin Ganatra, violin

Sibbi Bernhardsson, violin

Kathryn Lockwood, viola

Brandon Vamos, cello

**Michael Tree, viola*

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Dvořák Quartet in G major, Op. 106 and Quintet in E-flat major, Op. 97

notes by Wayne Booth and Yonatan Malin

Antonín Dvořák's life (1841-1904) was in many ways strikingly different from those of the contemporaneous composers who influenced him, such as Wagner, Smetana, and especially Brahms. (Earlier influences included, as one would expect, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Liszt.) None of these Dvořák contemporaries came from "peasant" families. Antonín's father was a butcher who tried hard to pass the business on to his son, even while ensuring his training as a "fiddler" and singer. Most of his composing peers received a far more intensive childhood musical and cultural education — and they usually attained favorable responses to their early compositions.

Dvořák's earliest efforts were rejected by almost everyone; he made his living early on as a violist, organist, and music teacher. Lacking external confirmation of his own abilities, Dvořák nonetheless composed morning, noon, and night. He was always extremely critical of his work and, like Brahms — who later became not only a mentor but also a close friend — Dvořák deliberately tore up many of his earliest "completed" works. Those he preserved were all intensely revised as he matured.

Only in his early thirties did signs of success begin to emerge. In his forties he experienced an astonishing rise to international acclaim. At the age of fifty, in 1891, his European fame led to an invitation from the National Conservatory of Music in New York City to become its Director and conduct six concerts of his work, while also teaching composition. Though reluctant to leave his beloved homeland, he came for two visits, first from September 1892 to March 1894 and then, even more reluctantly, October 1894 to April 1895.

To his surprise, he fell in love with much of American popular music. Everyone agrees that his encounter with American culture was immensely influential on his later work. That influence is most evident in his Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95, "From the New World," and the "American" Quartet in F major, Op. 96. It is also noticeable in the two works recorded here — especially in the opus 97 Quintet. Dvořák did not compose the opus 106 Quartet until he returned home, but he conceived some of its substance while still in America.

Critics generally agree that these two compositions are among his finest. They both embody his intense, lifetime love of chamber music, his mature mastery of classical form intricacies, and his revolutionary commitment to folk melody, achieving passionate emotional tensions. They celebrate the joy of life while also exhibiting the profound grief that the loss of his children and many of his friends had produced.

Along with his assigned concert and teaching duties in New York City, Dvořák managed to compose several works including the "New World" Symphony, the "American" Quartet, and the somewhat routine commemorative work, *The American Flag*, written for the 1892 Columbus Centennial.

From the beginning, he experienced an increasing love for American folk music, especially African American and Native American. Yet he also longed for Czech culture. Unable to get home, he managed to arrange a "vacation" with his family in a tiny Midwestern village of Czech settlers: Spillville, Iowa. Dvořák found it a curious place:

> *It is very strange here. Few people and a great deal of empty space. A farmer's nearest neighbor is often*

4 miles off, especially in the prairies (I call them the Sahara) [where] there are only endless acres of field and meadow and that is all you see. You don't meet a soul (here they only ride on horseback) and you are glad to see in the woods and meadows the huge herds of cattle which, summer and winter, are out at pasture in the broad fields. Men go to the woods and meadows where the cows graze to milk them. And so it is very "wild" here and sometimes very sad — sad to despair. ("Antonín Dvořák: Letters and Reminiscences," edited by Otakar Šourek, p. 166)

Surrounded in Spillville both by friends of Czech origin and by African-Americans and Native Americans playing and singing music, Dvořák quickly began compositions influenced by that music. First came the famous "American" Quartet, beautifully loaded with the pentatonic scales that infused so much of the music he was hearing. Then, after listening to more music performed by visitors to the town said to be of the Kickapoo tribe, he composed the opus 97 Quintet. Written in five weeks in 1893, this marvelous work had immediate success and increased speculation about Dvořák's American influences.

The key melodies, such as those central in movements one and three, have invited critics to debate whether Dvořák got them from American or Slovak folk music. How can one decide, since pentatonics are fundamental to both musical cultures? Are critics right to say that he got the bouncing rhythm of the second movement *scherzo* from Native American drum rhythms?

The Quintet opens with a pentatonic melody for solo viola (Dvořák's own instrument). This melody returns first in the minor mode, then in the major, with faster rhythms as the movement gets under way in earnest, building to its first climax. For the second theme of the first movement Dvořák adapted a Native American melody that he heard in Spillville. Its light, dotted rhythms, echoing Algonquin drumming patterns, return throughout this movement as well as in the Finale. The two violas trade a melancholy theme in the development, and Dvořák weaves a recollection of the viola's opening melody into the movement's peaceful ending.

The second movement, a scherzo and trio, begins, like the first, with a viola solo; but here it is a tricky rhythm played on a single note, an *ostinato* that continues to sound as melodic layers are added. A long arching melody with unexpected harmonic turns passes from viola to violin in the trio section. Many consider the slow third movement the emotional heart of the Quintet; it is a set of variations on two themes, the first minor and the second major. Dvořák originally wrote the second theme as a prospective American anthem: a musical setting for "My Country, 'Tis of Thee."

The Finale is a surprisingly light-hearted *rondo* with contrasting episodes and a dervish-like finish. Some critics have declared it a disappointingly frivolous anti-climax to one of Dvořák's (otherwise) greatest achievements. Less erudite listeners, however, will find themselves too busy singing its catchy melodies (which half-reflect the earlier movements) to take any charges of banality seriously.

Despite its wonders, the Quintet is not performed nearly as often as its immediate predecessor, the "American" Quartet. It is, nonetheless, an amazing achievement, avoiding the clichés of some of his lesser work, with just the right amount of formal sophistication: enough to enhance the appeal of its melodic and harmonic material without calling attention to the work's construction.

Some have interpreted the opus 106 Quartet, not written until his return home, as expressing Dvorak's joy over escaping from America, "a fervent thanksgiving for homecoming" (in the words of one critic). That is certainly possible, since the American influences

are much harder to detect. Some who consider it his greatest quartet even claim that in it he ruled out American influences entirely. But anyone who listens closely will hear that American melodies and rhythms were still in his soul.

The Quartet opens with a series of contrasting motives — rising leaps, trills, and descending arpeggios — said by some to echo birdsongs he had heard in Spillville. These are then developed with amazing energy. Only after the treatment of the opening figures subsides does he introduce the central melody, first in fragments, then fully exuberant, and finally dissolving as dissonant harmonies (marked *feroce*) take over. Improvisatory gestures with sudden changes of pacing lead into a lyrical second theme. The development section draws the opening motives and first theme into a Beethoven-like drama; there is even a moment of jagged fury in the recapitulation that recalls Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge*. Dvořák's lyricism, however, returns again and again, holding its own against the impassioned outbursts.

Early Dvořák biographer Otakar Šourek described the second movement as "one of the loveliest and most profound slow movements in Dvořák's creation." Like the slow movement of the Quintet, it is a set of variations on a pair of themes, but here each variation grows and develops, reaching beyond the bounds of its theme. The first theme, in E-flat minor, is full of pathos, while the second, in E-flat major, is tender and peaceful. In the middle of the movement, the first theme is developed with greater and greater ferocity until a grand statement of the second theme breaks through. At this moment the quartet truly sounds like an orchestra, with each instrument playing full-voiced chords. Rarely does any composer produce a theme-and-variations movement as profoundly moving and interesting as this one.

The third movement is a *scherzo* with a main theme that sounds rather rough, especially after the slow movement's tender ending. Dvořák pushes against the boundaries of decorum as dissonances pile up over static harmonies and repeating rhythms. There are two trio sections. The first trio's pastoral mode is pure Dvořák, with a pentatonic melody that is serene, sweet, and touched with nostalgia. Juxtapositions of duple and triple rhythms create shimmering textures. In the second trio, Dvořák demonstrates his mastery of the classical idiom; it would sound perfectly at home in many of Beethoven's quartets.

The Finale is a *rondo* with a slow, hymn-like introduction and a movingly syncopated main subject. Its frequent and aggressive assertions of affirmation seem to say, "No more of that sad sentiment. It's all . . . OK!" A return of the hymn-like introduction in the middle of the movement leads to tender recollections of the first movement. These recollections are again and again placed in dialogue with darker material and with the chanted affirmations. Each idea attempts to seize control of the music, but all give way to the main subject, and the quartet ends with triumphant exuberance.

These two works are, without doubt, not just among the best of Dvořák's chamber music, but also among the greatest in the entire western tradition. Like all of his finest works, they combine romantic lyricism with a classical sense of form and the emotional simplicity of folk music. Those who listen closely can easily imagine themselves glimpsing landscapes that enthrall and shimmer, as individual themes emerge from and transform the musical flow.

Wayne Booth is Professor of English Emeritus at the University of Chicago. Yonatan Malin is a graduate student in the Department of Music at the University of Chicago.

About Michael Tree

Photo: Dorothea Von Haeften

Michael Tree was born in Newark, New Jersey, and received his first violin instruction from his father. Later, as a scholarship student at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, Mr. Tree studied with Efrem Zimbalist, Léa Luboshutz, and Veda Reynolds. In 1954, the *New York Herald Tribune* wrote, "A 20-year old American violinist, Michael Tree, stepped out upon the Carnegie Hall stage last night and made probably the most brilliant young debut in the recent past . . . the violinist evidenced not one lapse from the highest possible musical and technical standards." Subsequent to his debut, Mr. Tree has appeared as violin and viola soloist with the Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Baltimore, New Jersey, and other major orchestras. He has also participated in leading festivals, including Marlboro, Casals, Spoleto, and Israel. A recently formed collaboration is the Fleisher-Jolley-Tree-O, an ensemble featuring Mr. Tree playing violin; Leon Fleisher, piano; and David Jolley, french horn.

As a founding member of the Guarneri String Quartet, Mr. Tree has played in major cities throughout the world. In 1982, Mayor Koch presented the Quartet with the New York City Seal of Recognition, an honor awarded for the first time.

One of the most widely recorded musicians in America, Mr. Tree has recorded over 80 chamber music works, including 10 piano quartets and quintets with Artur Rubinstein. Other artists with whom he has recorded, include Emanuel Ax, Richard Goode, Jaime Laredo, Yo Yo Ma, Sharon Robinson, Rudolf Serkin, Isaac Stern, and Pinchas Zukerman. These works appear on the Columbia, Nonesuch, RCA, Sony, and Vanguard labels. His television credits include repeated appearances on the *Today Show* and the first telecast of *Chamber Music Live* from Lincoln Center.

Michael Tree serves on the faculty of the Curtis Institute of Music, Manhattan School of Music, University of Maryland, and Rutgers University.

About the Pacifica Quartet

Heralded as one of today's most dynamic and exciting young string quartets, the Pacifica Quartet has built an enviable reputation for its brilliant ensemble work and exuberant and impassioned interpretations. *The New York Times* writes, "its sound, individually and as a group, is pure, lyrical, and educated . . . remarkable," the *Los Angeles Times* found that "their confidence is high and their playing compellingly expressive," and the *Chicago Tribune* calls them "a marvelous group." Formed in 1994, the Pacifica Quartet burst onto the chamber music scene when it captured three of the nation's most important awards: Grand Prize at the 1996 Coleman Chamber Music Competition, top prize at the 1997 Concert Artists Guild Competition, and the 1998 Naumburg Chamber Music Award.

The Pacifica enjoys an active international touring schedule. It has played as far afield as Australia, Greece, and Panama, and coast-to-coast from Los Angeles and San Francisco to Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall in New York City. In addition, the Quartet is regularly featured on several of the nation's most reputed radio broadcasts, including National Public Radio's "Performance Today" and Minnesota Public Radio's "St. Paul Sunday." The Pacifica has participated in numerous festivals, including the Aspen and Bellingham Music Festivals, the Cape and Islands Festival, the Vermont Mozart Festival, and the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival. In 1999, the Quartet was selected as "Quartet in Residence" for National Public Radio in Washington D.C., where it presented a series of live broadcast concerts over two weeks. The Pacifica currently holds joint appointments as Quartet in Residence at Northwestern University and the University of Chicago, where it is the first resident ensemble in the history of the institution. In addition, the Pacifica has served as Quartet in Residence at the Music Institute of Chicago since 1996. The Quartet has taught at Interlochen for three summers, and is frequently invited for visiting residencies at universities and schools nationwide.

Cited by the *Chicago Reader* as "having a knack for the new" and as "poised to take over from the likes of the Kronos and Juilliard Quartets," the Pacifica is a leading advocate of contemporary music. In the 1999-2000 season alone, eight new string quartets were written for the Pacifica. As resident string quartet for the Contemporary Chamber Players, one of the country's leading contemporary music organizations, the Quartet presents a series of concerts devoted exclusively to new music each year. In spring of 2002 the Pacifica will present for the Contemporary Chamber Players a concert of Elliott Carter's five string quartets. Recent performances have included premieres of works by Easley Blackwood, Maurice Gardner, Robert Lombardo, and a collaboration with Steve Mackey in a performance of his *Troubador Songs*.