



ŠKAMPA QUARTET: DVOŘÁK

AMERICAN STRING QUARTET & QUINTET *Opp. 96-97*



ŠKAMPA QUARTET
KRZYSZTOF CHORZELSKI *viola*

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I FOREWORD

The original idea behind recording Opp.96 and 97 came about quite some time ago. We were seduced by the charming coincidence of both opus numbers having been destined for string quartet, while the preceding work, Op.95, happens to be nothing smaller than the monumental Symphony No.9, the 'New World' Symphony.

Dvořák composed the two works during one happy summer spent in Spillville, a small town in Iowa, where he was staying amongst Czech expats. It is believed that during his American sojourn Dvořák felt he had found an authentic American voice. However, for us there is hardly a more Slavic-sounding piece of music than his 'American' quartet.

We love these two chamber music jewels and treasure hilariously funny memories of our first coaching experience of the quintet with Antonín Kohout back in 1994, as we prepared for a tour of Japan with violist Milan Škampa (both members of the Smetana Quartet).

We were especially pleased by the possibility of joining forces with Krzysztof Chorzelski in the quintet. There is no better combination than that of Krzysztof, the Bowermans and the Champs Hill Records crew! We feel immensely grateful to have been a part of it.

Škampa Quartet

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)

STRING QUARTET No.12 IN F MAJOR, Op.96 'THE AMERICAN'

1	<i>i</i> Allegro	10'30
2	<i>ii</i> Lento	07'07
3	<i>iii</i> Molto Vivace	04'09
4	<i>iv</i> Vivace	05'35

STRING QUINTET IN E FLAT MAJOR, Op.97 'THE AMERICAN'

with Krzysztof Chorzelski, viola

5	<i>i</i> Allegro	09'41
6	<i>ii</i> Allegro vivo	05'56
7	<i>iii</i> Larghetto	10'03
8	<i>iv</i> Allegro giusto	08'17

Total playing time: 61'19

ŠKAMPA STRING QUARTET

KRZYSZTOF CHORZELSKI *viola*

Produced, engineered and edited by Patrick Allen
Recorded 11–13 March and 4–5 June 2015 in the Music Room, Champs Hill, West Sussex, UK

Executive Producer for Champs Hill Records: Alexander Van Ingen
Label Manager for Champs Hill Records: Matt Buchanan

The incentive for Dvořák's period in America was provided by Jeanette Thurber, the wife of a wealthy New York merchant. The philanthropic Mrs. Thurber played a major role in the development of American cultural life. When she died in 1946 aged 95, a *New York Times* obituary spoke of "her vision and invincible spirit so valuable to the musical advancement of America". She founded the American School of Opera in 1885 and six years later this was incorporated into the National Conservatory. The institution was open to female and black applicants and offered scholarships to gifted students. Mrs. Thurber had imagined as a figurehead a famous European musician who would encourage a specifically American nationalist school of composition, and Dvořák seemed an ideal choice. When, in the spring of 1891, he was invited to become the director, he showed little interest, but a further telegram led to determined negotiation and an initial two-year contract. Having been offered an extravagant salary and promised four months' summer leave, he arrived in New York in September 1892 and very soon afterwards assumed his new post. Mrs. Thurber began to educate him regarding the state of American music and he himself attended one of Bill Cody's (Buffalo Bill's) "Wild West" shows in New York, which included native American singing and dancing. Later he was further exposed to traditional culture when the Kickapoo Medicine Company, a travelling enterprise selling miracle cures while providing musical entertainment, performed in Spillville. Negro spirituals and the songs of Stephen Foster also aroused Dvořák's admiration, the former sung to him on invitation by Negro student Harry T. Burleigh. Subsequently Mrs. Thurber persuaded Dvořák to accept a one-year extension to his two-year appointment and he finally returned to Prague in April 1895. During this American period he had composed some of his finest works, including the Ninth Symphony – *From the New World* (premiered Dec. 1893), the String Quartet in F major, the String Quintet in E flat major and the Cello

Concerto. Each of the two chamber works, especially the quartet, is often programmed with the title "American". Dvořák was already a nationalist composer inasmuch as he was deeply influenced by his native Bohemian folk-culture, so Mrs. Thurber's choice was shrewd. However, his claim that he was influenced by the "music of the Negroes and native Americans" was quite possibly a rather disingenuous ploy to ingratiate himself with the American public. He does indeed use features common to native American music (such as the pentatonic scale) but these are found in the folk-music of many countries around the world. Dvořák was no ethnomusicologist and his interest in, and enjoyment of, native American music should in no way be compared to Bartók's meticulous and wide-ranging field-work across several European countries.

Dvořák's very substantial contribution to the chamber repertoire includes more than a dozen string quartets, the most popular being the one in F major. While this work undoubtedly is worthy of its popularity, many of the other quartets do not deserve their almost total neglect. Dvořák composed this F major quartet in about two weeks during June 1893. The work opens with two bars of preparation before the first theme is introduced by the viola – the instrument that Dvořák himself had played in various orchestras for fourteen years. Subsequent lyrical themes, further illustrating Dvořák's abundant and unsurpassed melodic gift, complete the concise exposition. In the development section Dvořák explores the possibilities of the first theme, separately treating its first two bars and then the dotted figure from its third bar, but he also incorporates a *fugato* initiated by the second violin. Following the recapitulation, the *coda* crescendos to the exuberant final bars. More often than not, composers' personal affairs have little bearing on the emotional content of their compositions, private and creative lives usually running on independent tracks. Nevertheless, the homesickness that undoubtedly affected Dvořák seems palpable in some passages from the music of

his American years. It would be perverse to deny that the slow movement of this quartet might justifiably be interpreted on this level. At the time of this quartet's composition Dvořák was on holiday at Spillville, Iowa, an agricultural community in which a large number of Czech immigrants had settled. This convivial company, together with that of his wife and six children, who had made the trip from Europe, must have intensified his yearning for his native country. After two introductory bars, a deeply eloquent melody is played by the first violin (*mezzo piano, molto espressivo*) and repeated *pianissimo* by the cello. An undulating accompaniment is maintained almost throughout the movement in either viola or second violin. The mood becomes more impassioned, while the viola introduces a gentle drumming rhythm. A duet between first violin and cello emerges with even greater emotional intensity, the violin soaring in its highest register. At the first of two big *fortissimo* climaxes the second violin assumes a more melodic role in support of the first violin, before calm returns and the movement ends quietly. In the delightful *scherzo* (an A–B–A–B–A structure) Dvořák plays rhythmic games, with teasing accents on the second beat of each bar. Subsequent melodies are subtle transformations of the opening melody, but much of the beauty of this captivating movement is derived from the colourful, imaginative and constantly varied treatment of the four instruments. Dvořák remarked that he adapted some of this *scherzo*'s melodic material from the song of the scarlet tanager, a stunning bird (of the cardinalidae family) which graced the woodlands near Spillville. The sonata-rondo finale begins with an infectious syncopated rhythm, before the first violin enters with a vivacious theme. This same rhythm underpins the expressive second theme (*pianissimo, dolce*) introduced by the first violin in the key of A flat major. The development section includes a chorale-like episode which may well be a reflection of the composer's organ-playing in Spillville's St. Wenceslaus Church. Eventually the boisterous high spirits are revived and, after the recall of the

relaxed second theme, a mood of joyful exhilaration dominates the closing pages. The F major Quartet received its first private performance in Spillville in June 1893. Dvořák himself played first violin rather than viola, with his daughter and son on viola and cello respectively, and his amanuensis Jan Josef Kovařík on second violin. Its public premiere was given by the Kneisel Quartet in Boston on 1st January the following year.

Dvořák began the String Quintet in E flat major almost immediately after finishing the F major Quartet and completed it in about five weeks in the summer of 1893. This is the third and last of his string quintets, of which the first was his Opus 1, while No.2 in G major, Opus 77, includes a double-bass rather than a second viola. The second viola begins the work, playing a broad melody (soon repeated quietly in the minor by the cello) which proves to be a broad anticipation of the first subject's melodic shape when it emerges at bar 29. Dotted rhythm characterises the second main theme (introduced by second violin) and, following a passage of melancholy character in which both violas are prominent, it is this rhythmic feature that dominates the latter half of the development section. The recapitulation omits the initial part of the first subject, but Dvořák compensates by restoring this melody in a grander *fortissimo* statement in the *coda*. The *scherzo* begins with a vigorous repeated-note rhythm on second viola, which then serves as an ostinato accompaniment to a succession of buoyant melodies. As so often in Dvořák's music, there is a childlike, uncomplicated spirit, an unaffected joy which only the greatest composers are able to convey without sentimentality or banality. In the contrasting trio section (*Minore. Un poco meno mosso*) the first viola plays a B minor melody (*molto espressivo*) above a light *pizzicato* accompaniment. The *Larghetto* is a set of five variations on a theme in two halves, its first strain in A flat minor, the second in A flat major. Once more a viola presents the

theme. Variations 1 and 2, both slightly faster, are remarkable for their textural richness and imagination. Like Tchaikovsky, Dvořák possessed both a generous melodic gift and a facility in presenting his material in a captivating setting. His feeling for instrumental texture is often as striking as the melodic content itself. Variation 3 concentrates on the first bar of the theme, and again, in the second half, has a delightful accompaniment shared by second viola and cello. In Variation 4 the cello takes over the theme *molto appassionato*, with *tremolando* accompaniment. The fifth and last variation begins emphatically (*fortissimo, pesante*) but relaxes into the second strain. A final passionate A flat minor statement dissolves into a restrained ending. With its skipping rhythm, the carefree opening theme of the more lightweight rondo finale again illustrates Dvořák's naïve, childlike quality. A subsequent theme (G minor) in repeated-note triplets closely resembles a C minor melody in the finale of the Piano Trio in E flat by Schubert, whose music Dvořák adored. In the *coda* he revels in the quintet's sonority, producing an almost orchestral texture. Opus 97 was first performed in New York by the Kneisel Quartet and Max Zach in January 1894, less than two weeks after the Opus 96 Quartet had been premiered in public.

This E flat Quintet is a rich and highly characteristic work from Dvořák's American years. It would seem that only its less convenient scoring – an extra viola's services having to be accommodated – has prevented it from becoming as popular as the F major Quartet. Indeed, if one needed to persuade any listener with doubts about chamber music, one might well champion – along with Schubert's Trout Quintet and Dvořák's F major Quartet – this delightfully attractive piece.



I ŠKAMPA QUARTET

Helena Jiříková *violin* **Adéla Štajnochrová** *violin*
Radim Sedmidubský *viola* **Lukáš Polák** *cello*

The Škampa Quartet is amongst the finest of an outstanding group of Czech string quartets that have represented their country in major concert halls around the world for twenty-five years.

Through their mentors, the legendary Smetana Quartet, they trace their roots to the earliest quartets – such as the Bohemian Quartet – in a land described in the 18th century as the ‘Conservatoire of Europe’ and that remains, to this day, the very cradle of European Chamber Music.

To this innate musicality they have added their own particular research to inform their understanding of the folk-song, poetry, rhythms and dance from which their native music grew – to the extent that their recordings of quartets by Janáček and Smetana in particular have become benchmarks against which other performances are judged.

Prizes at international competitions, awards from the Royal Philharmonic Society and others, and an appointment as the first-ever Resident Artists at the Wigmore Hall marked the success of their early years, leading to invitations to perform at major international festivals including Prague Spring, Schwetzingen, Edinburgh, Schleswig-Holstein and Melbourne. These engagements have included collaborations with many fine, internationally recognised artists, including Melvyn Tan, Itamar Golan, Josef Suk, Michael Collins, Kathryn Stott and Janine Jansen among many others.

From the beginning the quartet has established a close relationship with BBC Radio 3, resulting in regular broadcasts from Wigmore Hall, St John’s Smith Square, LSO St Luke’s and the Chamber Music Proms.

The Škampa Quartet members have been award-winning recording artists for Supraphon for most of their career. They are now also among the elite artists whose performances have been selected for release on the Wigmore Hall Live label, and now, for Champs Hill Records.

Krzysztof Chorzelski was born in Warsaw in 1971 and enjoys a diverse career as a performing musician that has taken him all over the world as violist of the acclaimed Belcea Quartet, chamber musician and soloist.

In 1992 he won the Wronski Solo Violin Competition in Warsaw and has subsequently performed as a recitalist and concerto soloist in Europe, making recordings for Polish Radio and the BBC. In 1996 he became the viola player in the Belcea Quartet.

Krzysztof is a viola professor at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London. He works as a chamber music partner with Quatuor Ysaÿe, Quatuor Ebène, Pavel Haas, Jerusalem and Škampa quartets and artists such as Stephen Kovacevich, Piotr Anderszewski, Christian Zacharias, Polina Leschenko, Katya Apekisheva, Henning Kraggerud and Natalie Clein.

In 2006 he was invited by the Alban Berg Quartet to perform as a guest violist in a series of concerts celebrating the 250th Anniversary of Mozart's birth in the Konzerthaus, Vienna.

He performs as soloist with European orchestras, such as Sinfonia Varsovia and Real Filharmonía de Galicia. He also has a keen interest in commissioning new works for the viola from today's leading composers. Premiere performances include a Viola Sonata by Pawel Szymanski and *Letters from Warsaw* by Joseph Phibbs. In August 2015 he also gave the world premiere of a recently discovered Viola Sonata by André Tchaikowsky in Warsaw.

Krzysztof has a keen interest in conducting. His recording of Ittai Shapira's Violin Concerto *Concierto Latino* (CHRCO20) with the London Serenata Orchestra and the composer as soloist was released by Champs Hill Records. He also conducts orchestras in countries such as Poland and Israel.

His debut solo recital recording with pianist Katya Apekisheva (also on Champs Hill Records, CHRCO29) was released in February 2012. It was launched by both artists during a recital at London's Wigmore Hall.



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KATYA APEKISHEVA *piano*

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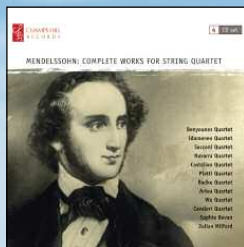
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