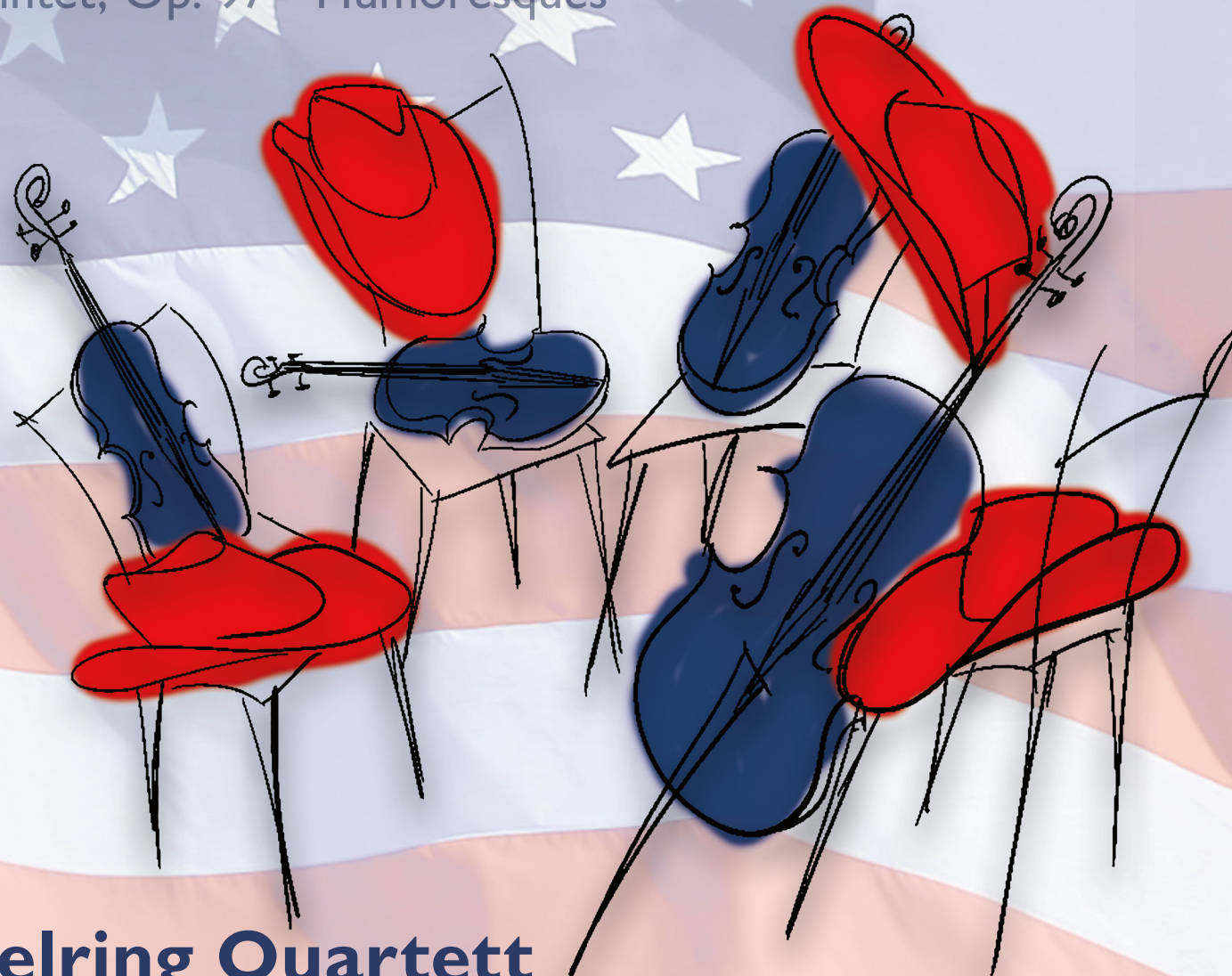


# DVOŘÁK

String Quartet, Op. 96 'American'

String Quintet, Op. 97 • Humoresques

audite



**Mandelring Quartett**



**ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK** (1841-1904)**String Quartet No. 12  
in F Major, Op. 96 'American'**

- I. *Allegro ma non troppo* 9:31
- II. *Lento* 6:08
- III. *Molto vivace* 3:53
- IV. *Finale. Vivace ma non troppo* 5:26

**String Quintet No. 3  
in E-Flat Major, Op. 97**

- I. *Allegro non tanto* 7:06
- II. *Allegro vivo* 5:42
- III. *Larghetto* 9:47
- IV. *Finale. Allegro giusto* 8:17

**8 Humoresques, Op. 101**  
(Arr. Matthias Eichhorn)

- No. 1 in E-Flat Minor. *Vivace* 2:17
- No. 2 in B Major. *Poco andante* 2:28
- No. 3 in A-Flat Major. *Poco andante e molto cantabile* 4:06
- No. 4 in F Major. *Poco andante* 2:42
- No. 5 in A Minor. *Vivace* 3:04
- No. 6 in B Major. *Poco allegretto* 3:13
- No. 7 in G-Flat Major. *Poco lento e grazioso* 2:52
- No. 8 in B-Flat Minor. *Poco andante* 3:17





### **A Bohemian in America**

26 September 1892: After a nine-day crossing, Antonín Dvořák arrives in New York with his wife and two of their six children. “It is a huge city, almost like London, life in the streets is very colourful and lively from morning until almost all night, and it seems that we will be fine here”, he writes to a friend back home a few days later. Indeed, the newly appointed director of the New York National Conservatory of Music can expect a comfortable life: He receives a fabulous salary of 30,000 guilders a year, 25 times what he earned as a professor in Prague. His teaching commitments are manageable; he has enough time to explore the city on long walks, attend Buffalo Bill shows with the president of the Conservatory, Jeanette Thurber, and, in the absence of his beloved locomotives, of which there are only a few in New York, take up a new hobby: exploring ocean liners. “There wasn’t a ship we didn’t roam”, recalls Josef Jan Kovařík, Czech-born violinist and Dvořák’s tireless travel guide in New York. “The master always started a conversation with the captain, then with his assistant, and so we soon knew every ship and all the captains and officers by name.”

Dvořák could not complain about a lack of professional recognition either. He was popular among his students and the musical performances of his works were met with rapturous applause. Although he was annoyed by the press hype that was organised around him from day one and the social obligations, he reported with satisfaction on the success of his concerts in numerous letters. And Jeanette Thurber sums up much later: “When I look back on my thirty-five years as president of the American National Conservatory of Music, there is nothing I would be more proud of than the fact that I succeeded in bringing Dr Dvořák to America.”

Only two things cast a shadow over this happy life: homesickness and Dvořák’s longing for his children. Both are alleviated in the summer of 1893: Dvořák spends a few weeks in Spillville, a village in Iowa, home to his companion Josef Jan Kovařík and an enclave of Czech emigrants. And the four children, who have so far remained in Bohemia, are travelling across the ocean accompanied by their aunt Resi.

### **Rural idyll: the String Quartet in F major, Op. 96**

As soon as the family is happily reunited, they set off on their journey. The journey by express train from New York to Spillville, 1,700 kilometres away, takes around 36 hours. It’s a tiny town, today with less than 400 inhabitants; just what Dvořák needs after the noise of the big city. As usual, he gets up early in the morning. He takes a long walk, sits down at the organ in church and then at his desk, goes on afternoon trips with the priest, who owns a horse-drawn carriage, or meets with older Czech emigrants to hear their life stories. And he composes. Already on his third day he began sketching a string quartet.

It seems that ideas just flew at Dvořák – especially in nature. His son Otakar describes a fishing trip with a friend that came to a premature end: “We wanted to leave father to his thoughts and go fishing ourselves. However, Dad’s ideas came faster than we finished our preparations, and so it happened that after a short time he came to us and ordered: ‘Boys, pack up your



fishing gear, we're going home.' I expressed my surprise that the walk to this favourite place of his should end so suddenly. He replied curtly: 'I've already written so much on my cuff that it's completely full'..." And Otakar adds that this work is particularly dear to him, as his father "came up with the motifs for it close to me on the banks of the Turkey River, where many a fish swam away from me only because his shirt cuffs were already full of notes..."

The nature experiences have left their mark on the quartet, as the key of F major, which has symbolised the pastoral since the Baroque era, reveals. The beginning of the quartet exudes an atmosphere of rural idyll that reminds musicologist Hartmut Schick of the 'Waldweben' from Wagner's *Siegfried*. "Into this sonorous landscape steps a cheerfully singing person, represented by the viola – not coincidentally Dvořák's own instrument. I am convinced that we are dealing here with a kind of self-portrait."

The slow movement seems to reflect the longing for the Bohemian homeland: the voices are intimately interwoven in this melancholy, minor-key movement characterised by syncopations and arpeggios. Dvořák told the Kovařík family that the melody of the Scherzo was inspired by a bird he heard on one of his early morning walks. Since the 1950s, it was thought to have been identified as the magnificent red and black feathered scarlet tanager based on Dvořák's description; it was not until 2016 that the American ornithologist Ted Floyd discovered that Dvořák had apparently heard one bird and seen another and that his feathered source of inspiration was the visually far less striking red-eyed vireo.

Tangible impressions from Spillville can also be found in the finale: a short chorale-like section with echoes of morning organ playing is inserted into the lively dance.

After three days, the sketch of the quartet was finalised, and two weeks later the score was ready. "Thank God. Finished 10 June 1893 – Spillville. I am satisfied. It went quickly!" the composer wrote on the last page of the sketch.

### **Indian music? The String Quintet in E flat major, Op. 97**

As soon as the ink was dry, Dvořák tackled the next work. This quintet is also completed in a short time and is immediately performed in the Kovařík family circle, with Dvořák taking up exceptionally the first violin instead of the viola.

There has been much speculation and discussion about whether the drum-like rhythms in the fourth movement of the quartet or in the second of the quintet are quotations from Native American music, and to what extent traditional American music was incorporated into the works, be it the spirituals and work songs of African Americans, which Dvořák was already familiar with from New York, or songs of the American Indians.

Dvořák certainly got to know Indian music in Spillville: there were around 30 Indians living in the village, mainly from the Kickapoo group, who he asked to perform traditional dances and songs for him. And in July 1893, a herbalist came to Spillville accompanied by two Indians. "They sang some Indian songs", Kovařík recorded, "accompanied by a drum, and finally they also danced. The master was very interested in this little performance, and during the fortnight that the troupe spent in Spillville, we went there every evening".



Generations of music researchers have not succeeded in finding concrete traditional melodies in the 'American' works. However, Dvořák undoubtedly uses stylistic devices that exude an American spirit: a relatively simple compositional structure, repetitions, constant rhythmic patterns, sparingly harmonised melodies, the aforementioned drum imitations, pentatonic scales without leading tones, which exude something archaic and unspoiled. Incidentally, the theme of the touching Larghetto variation movement in the quintet is said to have been the first 'American' melody that Dvořák came up with in New York; he wanted to make a new national anthem out of it.

With regard to the symphony 'From the New World', Dvořák once explained to the *New York Herald* that he had wanted to reproduce the spirit of some Native American melodies that he had received from a friend and carefully studied. "I didn't use any of these melodies, I simply wrote original themes, which I imprinted with the characteristics of Native American music, and developed them further with all the achievements of modern rhythms, harmonies, counterpoint and orchestral colours." And he added that the string quartet and the quintet were written in the same way: "Both breathe the same Native American spirit."

### **America in Bohemia: the Humoresques, Op. 101**

Despite his enthusiasm for America, Dvořák missed his homeland. He spent the summer holidays of 1894 at home in Bohemia, on his beloved country estate in Vysoká, 70 kilometres south-west of Prague. As in the old days, he devotes himself to gardening and his pigeons, walks through the surrounding woods and goes to the pub in the evening. He reworks his opera *Dimitrij*. And he composes the *Humoresques*, which are released shortly afterwards by his publisher Fritz Simrock as op. 101 (as with many other works by Dvořák, Johannes Brahms is responsible for proofreading). They were originally intended for piano; the seventh in particular soon circulated in countless arrangements and, with the underlying text "Eine kleine Frühlingsweise", became one of Dvořák's best-known melodies.

Despite their title and a certain village-musician cheerfulness, the humoresques are characterised more by gentle melancholy than by exuberant laughter: eight miniatures, all in  $\frac{2}{4}$  time, all with the same tempo specification – and yet of completely different character.

Dvořák had already drafted the pieces in New York and was inspired by his American impressions: No. 5, for example, was associated with the popular song 'Oh Susanna', No. 7 with 'Swanee River'. Dvořák notated "Street Songs on New Year's Eve" for No. 6 in his sketchbook. Some pentatonic-coloured melodies, some syncopated and dotted rhythms also seem typically American. However, a Bohemian, Slavic tone seems to resonate more clearly. – Perhaps because "Dr Dvořák", as his friend and music critic Henry Edward Krehbiel wrote in his review of the *New World Symphony*, "can no more shed his nationality than the leopard can shed its spots".





## MANDELRING QUARTETT

After a Mandelring Quartett's concert in Madrid, the leading Spanish classical music magazine Scherzo raved about the "luxurious poetry of the sound". Right at the beginning of its career, the ensemble was honoured with prizes at major competitions such as the ARD International Music Competition and the Premio Paolo Borciani. Since then, the quartet has toured Europe, North and South America as well as Asia. The ensemble is a welcome guest at major festivals, including the Schubertiade Schwarzenberg and Hohenems, Niederrhein Musikfestival, Ludwigsburger Schlossfestspiele, Festival Internacional de Música de Marvão and Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival. In addition to the 1997 founded Hambacher Musikfest in Neustadt an der Weinstraße, it has also organised its own concert series at the Berliner Philharmonie since 2010.

The Mandelring Quartett has repeatedly performed cycles of the complete string chamber music of Mendelssohn and Brahms on several occasions. The ensemble performed Shostakovich's 15 string quartets at the Salzburg Festival, in Berlin and at the Círculo de Bellas Artes in Madrid.

Numerous prize-winning CD recordings (Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik, International Classical Music Awards nominations and others) testify to the quartet's exceptional quality and wide-ranging repertoire. Their most recent releases include the CD Pennies from Heaven with selected encores and a double release with French string quartets by Debussy and Ravel, among others.





## ROLAND GLASSL

Roland Glassl has established his reputation as a soloist and chamber musician. Numerous prizes at international competitions (including 1st prize at Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition) as well as 16 years as a quartet member of the Mandelring Quartett (1999-2015) have taken him to many of the major concert stages and international festivals around the world.

As a soloist, he has worked with conductors such as Sir Colin Davis, Hermann Bäumer, Howard Griffiths, Hans Richter, Markus Poschner, Alfred Eschwé and Theodor Guschlbauer and has performed with numerous orchestras, including the Tonkünstler Orchestra of Lower Austria, the Philharmonic State Orchestra of Mainz, the China National Opera House Symphony Orchestra, the Georgian Chamber Orchestra Ingolstadt, the German State Philharmonic of Rhineland-Palatinate, the Hungarian Symphony Orchestra of Pécs, the Istanbul State Symphony Orchestra and the Prague Chamber Orchestra.

Since 2018, Roland Glassl has been a professor at the University of Music and Theatre in Munich.

The Ingolstadt-born musician initially studied violin with Prof. Ana Chumachenco at the Munich Conservatory, but was already fascinated by the viola's extraordinary variety of sounds during his studies. After initial inspiration from Thomas Riebl, Roland Metzger and Hariolf Schlichtig, he decided to devote himself entirely to the viola. His playing was significantly influenced by his subsequent studies with Atar Arad at the Indiana University in Bloomington, USA.



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