

Programme Note by Chris Darwin: please use freely for non-commercial purposes

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904) String Quartet in G major, op.106 (B.192) (1895)

Allegro moderato

Adagio ma non troppo

Molto vivace

Finale: Andante sostenuto; Allegro con fuoco

Dvořák, a professional viola player, wrote chamber music throughout his life; his first official opus was a two-violin string quintet written when he was 20, closely followed by his first string quartet. Over the next 34 years he composed fourteen string quartets, three string quintets and a sextet as well as piano trios, quartets and quintets. Between his eleventh quartet in 1881 and his twelfth quartet (the well-known 'American') there is a twelve-year gap. This was the time when his international reputation grew thanks mainly to appreciative British audiences. Their admiration for his work, and lack of prejudice against his native folk music, gave him the freedom to develop his own musical style. The interest of the Novellos in publishing his music also gave him welcome leverage to secure increased fees from his long-standing publisher Simrock – he had six children to maintain. In August 1885 on the fourth of nine visits to England, he paid a brief visit to Brighton, staying for a couple of days with the Novellos at 7 Victoria Mansions. He was enchanted by the bathers (public, English, female, lovely), the boats (countless, large and small) and the band (playing Scottish folk-songs); he wrote home “*everything is enchantingly lovely so that nobody who has seen it can ever forget it.*”

His visits to England were interrupted by Mrs Jeanette Thurber's invitation to be artistic director of her new *National Conservatory of Music in America* based in New York. Her aim, to which Dvořák was sympathetic, was to develop a national American style of art music. Dvořák immersed himself in spirituals and plantation songs from the South, and transcriptions of Amerindian melodies. During his stay in America, Dvořák returned to quartet writing with what was to be his best-known quartet the *American*, in his words something “melodious and simple” - and none the worse for that.

Today's G major quartet, his thirteenth, was written at the end of 1895 soon after his return home from America. He was living with his family in a house that he had built with the proceeds of his English trips on a country estate owned by his brother-in-law. Shortly afterwards he also finished what was to be his last quartet, which he had started towards the end of his stay in America.

The G major quartet is more complex than the melodic simplicity of the *American*. The raw material, presented at the beginning, is rhythmic and episodic rather than melodic, with each of the first four bars containing a different motif; however, these motifs are soon transformed into a confident *risoluto* theme. It contrasts with a more tender triplet-based second subject, which will reappear in the last movement.

The image shows three staves of musical notation in G major, 2/4 time. The first staff begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and features a complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes, including triplets. The second staff is marked *ff* and *risoluto*, showing a more rhythmic and episodic theme. The third staff is marked *p* and features a tender triplet-based second subject.

The *Adagio* has a dark, melancholy, Slavic theme, introduced by the violin. It is repeated throughout the movement in a variety of different

The image shows a single staff of musical notation in G major, 3/8 time. It is marked *p* and *cantabile e molto espressivo*, featuring a dark, melancholy Slavic theme.

moods and keys. Dvořák's good cheer returns in the *Scherzo*. In the first of its two trios the violin echoes a gentle theme from the viola.

A brief *Andante* introduces the theme of the final *Allegro con fuoco*. The *Andante* returns to introduce the middle section, which is a meditation on the second subject of the first movement. Other elements from that movement also contribute including the tumbling triplets of the opening third bar. The movement's main *Allegro* theme returns and after some characteristic Dvořák sliding key-changes we romp to the finish.