

# Antonin Dvorak

(1841 - 1904)

## STRING QUARTET No. 13 (8)

### IN G MAJOR, Op. 106

#### Side One (21:05)

1. Allegro moderato (9:45)
2. Adagio ma non troppo (11:30)



#### Side Two (18:15)

3. Molto vivace (7:05)
4. Finale. Andante sostenuto — Allegro con fuoco (11:10)

#### ALBAN BERG QUARTET, WIEN

Gunter Pichler & Klaus Maetzl (Violins) Hatto Beyerle (Viola) Valentin Erben (Cello)

® 1975 TELDEC — TELEFUNKEN-DECCA — Schallplatten-GmbH., Hamburg

**TEL 641933**

This tape was duplicated by Barclay-Crocker in the U.S.A. under license from London Records, Inc., and is encoded to Dolby B standards. The word DOLBY and the Dolby logo are trademarks of Dolby Laboratories, Inc. Unauthorized reproduction of this recording is prohibited by Federal law and subject to criminal prosecution. Copyright protected. Printed in the U.S.A.



Dvorak's string quartets in A-flat major opus 105 and in G major opus 106, his very last chamber music works, were composed on the threshold of the composer's last creative years, in which he turned entirely to symphonic settings and opera. They thus came at the end of that period in which Dvorak, under the determining influence of Brahms, had wholeheartedly devoted his ambition to the representative instrumental genre of the 19th century, the symphony and chamber music. Similarly he was pre-occupied with the synthesis of his personal musical language, marked by the folk music of his homeland, and the demands of the grand forms of absolute music as had been developed in the tradition ranging from Beethoven to Brahms. It was only consistent that Dvorak, while he was already involved with the Czech fairy tale motifs of his tone poems and of the operas "Die Teufelskathe" and "Rusalka", took leave of the "German" tradition with that genre which personified the highest demands of this tradition: the string quartet.

The G major quartet opus 106 was composed at the end of 1895 in Prague; the exact dates which Dvorak noted on the drafts and the autograph fair copies record the extraordinarily brief period of their composition. The first movement was written in nine, the second in five days, and the entire work, started at the beginning of November, was completed on 9th December. Immediately following this Dvorak started work on the A-flat major quartet, which he had begun in New York, and concluded it on 30th December, 1895. The premiere of the G major quartet took place on 9th October, 1896 in a concert organized by the Czech Association for Chamber Music in Prague, and was played by the famous Bohemian String Quartet.

Some of the elated mood and creative joy of the com-

poser in the first months following his return from America is evident in more than just the so carefully noted dates of the composition. On the title page of the G major quartet he noted "First composition after the second return from America"; in a letter dated 23rd December, 1895 he wrote: "I am very diligent right now. I am working so easily and everything is so successful that I cannot wish for things to be better". A good deal of this mood appears to have flowed into the G major quartet which, perhaps also for this reason - as opposed to the A-flat major sister work - succeeded at the first attempt, since from the outset it was less burdened with problems and from a technical compositional viewpoint was somewhat less exacting.

Admittedly the G major quartet also contains a great deal of the special standards of the string quartet standard, which traditionally demands of the composer extreme concentration on strict form, clarity of form and absolute attention to detail. The expansive melody and tonal ecstasy of the "American" F major quartet opus 96 seems to have been suppressed in favour of thematic concentration and motif work; despite the unusual expansion of the work, the form is concentrated and carefully worked through, while the two major problems of the sonata cycle in the late 19th century - the shift of emphasis to the finale and the thematic unification of the movements - have been solved in an original manner. The beginning of the work has a programme-like effect: instead of a subject in the traditional sense, two signal motifs are exposed, from the arrangement of which a theme develops which in turn is immediately transformed into motif work. The side theme restores Dvorak's characteristic methods of design to their proper perspective; the blossoming song and dance-like melody with its Slavic intonation and the infatuation with tone and tonal effect which constantly recall Schubert, evident here in the double presentation of the

theme, firstly in B-flat and then in B major. Also of a colorful nature, but at the same time filled with extremely concentrated motif elements, is the development, in which the signal motifs of the beginning, the first and second themes are combined, varied and primed by constantly changing tonal surfaces. As with this development, the conclusion of the movement also leads to a dynamic intensification, at the climax of which the main theme, "maestoso", once more appears.

The Adagio (E-flat major) is, as is mostly the case with Dvorak, the most emotional movement of the work, at the same time the formally simplest and that which, in its "grandioso" intensifications, most decisively aims for quasi-orchestral tonal richness. The solemn nature of the theme, which throughout is treated as the melody with tonally emphasized accompaniment, the constant alternation between major and minor, and the system of keys (F-sharp minor, C major) leading to the far distance, give the movement that tension arising from rhetorical pathos and transcendental elements which Dvorak, who understood his adagio movements in a religious sense, so often strived for. The third movement (B minor) is a scherzo, "Slavic" in a most extrovert sense, filled with folk music intonations, at the same time by no means a simple movement, but rather one that is extremely subtly structured and many-tiered. Rhythmically melodic formulas of Czech folk music are coined as time-changes and conflict rhythms (for against three-four. 6/8 against 3/4 time); a canon between the first and second violin is built into the side theme of the main section: the bucolic style of the trio, with its shawn melody above bagpipe basses, imperceptibly resolves into a dynamically and harmonically tensed reversion to the main section. Also in its form the movement is anything but simple; it is more of a "grand" scherzo in the sense

that the form was understood at the turn of the century: the main section is within itself in three parts. The first part is built up like a sonata movement exposition; the second part, however, is in trio character and the repetition of the first part is harmonically evaded, thus being a synopsis of elements of the sonata movement and of the scherzo form. Accordingly the third large part, following the formally more simple trio, is a quasi-reprise. The connection with the grand tradition of the epoch's form experiments, from Liszt's piano sonata down to Schöenberg's D minor quartet and first chamber symphony, is unmistakable. However, it is unique how in Dvorak's case the simplicity of folk musical intonations and progressive consciousness of form combine to make up an impeccable unity.

This applies in even greater measure to the Finale: after the short introduction which forms the prelude to the main theme, this stands out like a Slavic dance in rondo form, then inserts signal motifs and side themes of the first movement, bringing the side theme and the dramatic first rondo episode into increasingly violent conflict with each other. until the rondo theme "intervenes" and in a triumphal stretta draws the movement to its conclusion, it is not until this point that programmatic elements which permeated the work beneath the surface take on clearer contours: the Finale clarifies the passions, resolves the conflicts, just as on the higher musical symbolizing level it draws together the thematic and formal elements of the preceding movements. National music, which was understood by Dvorak and his contemporaries as the symbol of the struggle for the unity and liberty of the nation, and also reconciling the grand tradition of the wordless but nevertheless eloquent instrumental music of the 19th century.

English translation by Frederick A. Bishop



Four professors at the Academy of Music in Vienna have been the focus of attention since 1970: Gunter Pichler, born 1940, formerly leader of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Klaus Maetzl, born 1941, formerly leader of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, Hatto Beyerle, born 1933, and Valentin Erben, born 1945. In 1970 the four musicians combined to form a string quartet in Vienna "from the outset of more than local significance" (Die Presse), known as the Alban Berg Quartet. This was effected with the blessing of one of the founders of the New Vienna School: Alban Berg's widow had granted permission for the quartet to bear the name of her late husband. An exacting obligation, and from the start the Alban Berg Quartet undertook to play in every one of its concerts a work by Berg, Schonberg, Webern or also other contemporary compositions. What "Die Presse" prophesied in 1970 has been abundantly fulfilled: Today the Alban Berg Quartet is one of the leading groups of its kind, not only in Vienna, not only in Europe, but throughout the world.

When the four musicians decided to found a quartet and to name it after the great Alban Berg, they did not content themselves with beginning concert work on their own initiative. They went to America for a year to study with the La Salle Quartet in Cincinnati. The Alban Berg Quartet is in the meantime ahead of the others in one respect. This is, whether in the Old or the New Vienna School, or also in the Romantics, a typical Viennese flavour; that Austrian sensitiveness from which the Rose Quartet and also the erstwhile Musikvereins-Quartet profited and which is so difficult to describe. One simply has to listen to it!

English translation by Frederick A. Bishop

Duplication mastering: Harold Kovner

**TELEFUNKEN**

This booklet was designed and printed by Barclay-Crocker in the U.S.A.