

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904), or “Borax” (as he was affectionately known by some American colleagues during his years in the United States [Sept. 1892 – Apr. 1895]), was highly acclaimed during his lifetime not only by audiences and professional musicians in Europe, England, and the United States, but also he was the recipient of honorary doctorates from the University of Prague and Cambridge University, as well as the knightship of the Order of the Iron Cross of the Austrian Empire. His fame has endured. He made lasting contributions in many genres: symphony, concerto, opera, choral, and chamber music. Among this last there are some thirty works, including 14 string quartets and four piano trios. The two trios on the present CD are not only the crowns of his piano-trio oeuvre, they are two of the very finest works in the entire piano-trio literature.

The coupling here of the F-minor Trio, Op. 65, and the *Dumky*, Op. 90, is one that was used by the composer himself at a concert of his works on 24 March 1892, just months before his departure for the United States. On this occasion, as on so many others, he played the piano parts, which, then, provide us with a good index of his expertise at the keyboard. The F-minor Trio follows the traditional design for four-movement works, prevalent at the time; contrarily, the *Dumky* present a *sui generis* format based on a folk-genre—an original approach to multi-movement design, brilliantly executed.

Op. 65 was written in Feb./Mar. 1883 (a short time after Dvořák’s mother’s death), and was premiered, with the composer as pianist, on Oct. 27 that same year. The key of F minor (typically used to express grief, despair, and sometimes anger) and the general tone of the Trio suggest that it may have been conceived as an elegy. Similarly, Mendelssohn’s superb String Quartet in F minor, Op. 80, is apparently an expression of overwhelming grief on the death

of his beloved sister, Fanny. The first movement is a huge, one might say symphonically-conceived, movement in sonata form: indeed it is the longest movement among Dvořák's piano trios. The three instruments are equal partners here in the ebb and flow of an outburst of tribulation, an equality characteristic of both of the present trios. For the second movement Dvořák adopts a scherzo format, over which the spirit of Franz Schubert hangs heavily. During his sojourn in the United States, Dvořák published an article (*Century Magazine*, July 1894), dealing with his appraisal of Schubert in which he wrote: "Brahms ..., whose enthusiasm for Schubert is well known, has perhaps felt his influence; and as for myself, I cordially acknowledge my great obligations to him." This scherzo is not humorous and only occasionally boisterous. It is thought by Leon Botstein that its opening melody may be based on the Hussite chorale "Ye who are God's warriors", which Dvořák cited in his dramatic overture *Husitská*, *Op. 67*, that same year. The highlight of *Op. 65* is most assuredly the third movement, one of the most gorgeous moments in all Dvořák. (Worthy companions are the slow movements of the D-minor String Quartet, *Op. 34*, and of the Symphony "From the New World".) This *Poco adagio* is absolutely compelling, perhaps a remembrance of things past; it begins with a sense of restrained mourning, which is later countered with a simple, elegant, soaring melody in the violin. Throughout, the strings have singing lines of great beauty. It is difficult to imagine the ecstasy the composer must have experienced during and after the completion of this movement! The passionate *finale*, is a rondo whose couplets stand in stark contrast to the high drama of the refrain. In this movement the Affekt and symphonic fullness of the first movement return and are worked out with new materials. It's an angry piece—in spirit not unlike the raging finale of Mendelssohn's F-minor Quartet.

The title of Op. 90 (1890/91) is *Dumky* (plural of *dumka*), indicating a series of dumkas. Concerning the term *dumka* and Op. 90, the Czech Dvořák scholar Otakar Sourek wrote: “a characteristic type of Slavic folkmusic (of Ukrainian origin, *dumky* are folksongs of the ballad type) leads in [Op. 90] to a cycle of such pieces. ... As in their Ukrainian models, the *dumky*, in which sections full of anxious self-preoccupation suddenly alternate with fiery incandescent eruptions ..., have charming melodies with the occasional flavor of folkloric simplicity, colorful harmonies, and fiery rhythm; [they] abound in dazzlingly gorgeous beauty of sound.” A Czech program note for Dvořák’s performance in 1892 contains in part this description of the Trio: “... by its modern yet genuinely Czech character, by its buoyancy and its partly cheerful, partly pensive melodies, [it] ranks among the most beautiful and enthralling compositions of the [piano-trio] genre.”

The Op. 90 Trio is Dvořák’s great summary of *dumka* composition—here a united series of six thematically independent movements, which over their course give trenchant affirmation to the balladesque aspect of the parent genre. Earlier essays in his oeuvre are the so-titled piano pieces Opp. 12/1 and 35; a single *dumka* movement appears in Opp. 48, 51, and 81 (chamber works) and the Symphony in F, Op. 76. —It will be remembered that Vladimir Horowitz for many years kept Tchaikovsky’s dashing *Dumka*, Op. 59 (subtitled “Russian Village Scene”), in his repertory; he eventually recorded it.

Ellwood Derr
Professor of Musicology
University of Michigan
(Winter 2001)

Stephen Shipps, violin, has made solo appearances with the Indianapolis, Dallas, Omaha, Ann Arbor and Seattle Symphonies. He appears regularly in international music festivals and serves on juries of major U.S. and international competitions. Mr. Shipps has recorded for the Bay Cities, American Gramophone, Albany, Citadel, Russian Disc and Melodiya labels. He was recently awarded twelve gold and platinum records for his solo performances on the Grammy-nominated Mannheim Steamroller Christmas Albums. He studied with Josef Gingold, Sally Thomas, Ivan Galamian and Franco Gulli. He has served on the faculties of the North Carolina School of the Arts, Indiana University, and the Banff Center for the Arts. He is currently on the faculty of the University of Michigan, the Meadowmount School of Music and is a regular Guest Professor at the Prague Conservatory of Music.

Owen Carman, violoncello, has concertized in the United States, Canada, Mexico and the Netherlands and as a guest artist with the Juilliard Quartet. Mr. Carman has appeared often on NPR and PBS. He has given master classes at many of the major conservatories and universities in the United States. Mr. Carman studied with Leonard Rose, Channing Robbins, David Soyer and Orlando Cole at the Juilliard School and the Curtis Institute of Music. He has served on the faculty of Michigan State University and is currently the Director of the Meadowmount School of Music.

Eric Larsen, piano, has been heard in the major concert halls of Russia, Europe, South America and the United States. He has recorded for the Hessisches Rundfunk, Bay Cities and New World Records and his live performances have been broadcast nationally on NPR and WFMT Chicago. As the recipient of major grants from the Mary Duke Biddle and Andrew Mellon Foundations, he has done extensive research of the Edvard Grieg Manuscript Collection at the Bergan Bibliotek in Norway. His association with the Moscow Conservatory has led to numerous recitals and master classes throughout Russia. Mr. Larsen studied with Dora Zaslavsky, Artur Balsam and Carroll Chilton in the United States, Pierre Sancan in Paris and Benjamin Kaplan in London. He is currently a member of the Artist-Faculty of the North Carolina School of the Arts, the Ibla International Piano Academy in Italy and the Meadowmount School of Music.

The Meadowmount Trio has been in demand for concerts and recordings worldwide since its formation in 1991. Comprised of three of the most noted chamber musicians in the United States, the Trio is ensemble-in-residence at the Meadowmount School of Music. Meadowmount is the legendary summer school founded by the master teacher-violinist Ivan Galamian situated in the beautiful Adirondack Mountains of New York.

In their first season, Chamber Music America and the American String Teachers Association (ASTA) co-sponsored a feature appearance by the Trio at their 1992 national convention in New Orleans. Subsequently, the Trio has made repeated tours of the United States, in recital and residencies. The Trio has been featured soloists across the United States with orchestra in Beethoven's Triple Concerto to wide acclaim. They have been featured in many broadcasts on NPR and made a highly successful New York debut at the Weill Recital Hall of Carnegie Hall in 1998.

Their South American debut was made in 1995 at the AmArte International Arts Festival in Colombia. The Trio has toured Russia twice and was featured by Moscow Radio in 1993 which carried the live broadcast of the Trio's Russian debut from Rachmaninoff Hall at the Moscow Conservatory. The Trio's European debut was in 1995 at the Teatro Rossini in Pesaro, Italy. Further European appearances have featured the Trio as soloists with the Czech Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra in 1998.

The Meadowmount Trio has had an active recording career for a decade. Their first recording of Dvorak's Dumky and F minor trios is now available on an American reissue on Equilibrium CD 41. Their recording "American Music in Moscow" is available on CD on Melodiya CD 1000571 and features works of Arthur Foote, Samuel Barber, William Bolcom and Paul Schoenfield. Upcoming releases include the music of Chausson for Equilibrium and music of Robert Ward on Citadel.



MEADOWMOUNT TRIO

Eric Larsen piano • Stephen Shippy, violin • Owen Carman, cello

Antonín Dvořák

Trio for piano, violin and cello in F minor, Op. 65

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|-----------------------------|-------|
| 1. Allegro ma non troppo | 13:40 |
| 2. Allegretto grazioso | 6:06 |
| 3. Poco Adagio | 10:48 |
| 4. Finale: Allegro con brio | 10:21 |

Trio "Dumky" for piano, violin and cello in E minor, Op. 90

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| 5. Lento maestoso | 11:17 |
| 6. Andante | 6:28 |
| 7. Andante moderato
(quasi tempo di marzia) | 5:23 |
| 8. Allegro | 4:10 |
| 9. Lento maestoso | 5:47 |

Total time **74:00**

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