

**Chandos**

CHAN 8445



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Printed in West Germany/Imprimé en Allemagne  
CHANDOS RECORDS LTD, LONDON, ENGLAND



The *Dumky* Trio was completed in February 1891, a few months before Dvořák's 50th birthday. For twelve years the Czech composer had been hugely successful, thanks to the championship of Brahms and the publication of his *Slavonic Dances*. The previous year his own country had honoured him with the election to the Czech Academy of Art and Science and the University of Prague had conferred an honorary degree of Doctor of Philosophy on their great national composer. In England, where he was particularly popular, Dvořák's half-century was celebrated by an Honorary Doctorate of Music at Cambridge. The following year he was to take up the directorship of the newly opened New York National Conservatory.

The *Dumky* was the fourth and last of Dvořák's Piano Trios and has remained one of his popular works. The title is the plural of the Russian term *dumka*, which is also found in both Poland and Czechoslovakia. It is a literary term for a lament, generally highly emotional in content. Dvořák's musical use of the term suggests a melancholy slow idea contrasted with alternating movements of a faster character. The six movements provide an elegiac atmosphere, the first three intended to be played with only the briefest of pauses between them.

Composers have always been inspired by great instrumentalists and Dvořák wrote some of his finest music for the Czech cellist Hanuš Wihan. One of the first of these was the cello part in the *Dumky* Trio, although the superb Cello Concerto, begun in 1895, remains the finest monument to Wihan's musicianship. Without Wihan's special qualities, however, the *Dumky* would have probably been more conventionally scored for the cello. The first performance was on 11 April 1891 with Dvořák at the piano and Wihan as the cellist; the violinist was probably Lachner, who toured with Dvořák and Wihan through Bohemia and Moravia early in 1892.

The form of the *Dumky* Trio has led to some controversy, for it is possible to regard it as being in four, five or six movements. That there are six *dumky* suggests a six movement piece, but since the first three are virtually uninterrupted does put the work into a four-movement format. To the listener, swept along on a sea of melodic waves, there is no problem, the work becoming a sequence of musical sonnets offering constant variety of mood and colour.

From the opening bars the music stands firmly on its dramatic character, the theme of the first *dumka* being readapted to suit the faster central section, with its ornamentation and good humour. The second *dumka*, again introduced as a slow theme, follows, this time with a second theme in the *poco adagio* section and yet another for the *vivace non troppo* section, all three related in mood and substance. The third *dumka* again enters without a break, bringing a sense of calm beauty and harmonies evocative of Wagner's *Lohengrin* as well as the gentle wistful *larghetto* of Dvořák's own *Serenade for Strings*; this *dumka*, too, has a contrasting fast section. There follows the first break. A special feature of this extended movement is a fine *cadenza* in the second *dumka*, for solo cello.

If the first three *dumky* are considered to have formed a first movement in a four-movement work, then the fourth *dumka*, marked *andante moderato*, becomes the slow movement. The theme is related to that of the first *dumka*, now in a minor mode, the major central *allegretto scherzando* section providing a perfect contrast. This movement is strongly Russian in character, the tender sad melody being sung by the cello.

Next comes the *Scherzo*, a lively *allegro* with a persistent pulse maintaining the strong impetus throughout. Finally, with a look back to the beginning, a movement where the slow melancholy is finally banished by a triumphant *vivace*.

In the *Dumky* Trio Dvořák's genius brings the Slavic mixture of sadness and joy to a musical masterpiece.

Fifteen years earlier Dvořák had poured out his grief at the loss of his eldest daughter, Anna, in his second piano trio, in G minor, Opus 26. One wonders if that choice of key came partly from Smetana's only piano trio, composed in 1855 under similar circumstances.

Smetana, the father of Czech nationalistic music, was both hero and mentor to Dvořák, the two meeting when Smetana was appointed chief conductor of the Czech National Theatre in 1866, when the younger musician was a member of the viola section in the orchestra. Dvořák was 25 and virtually unknown as a composer while Smetana was 42 and a leading spirit in the Czech musical life.

Smetana appreciated the latent genius of Dvořák and conducted the first performances of several works, including the Third Symphony, but he was always critical and was not reticent in refusing a work, such as the opera *King and Collier*, which the Provisional Theatre management had accepted for production after Smetana had given a successful performance of the Overture in 1871. After four weeks of rehearsal Smetana pronounced that it was "a serious work, full of ideas imbued with genius – but I do not believe that it can be performed!" Dvořák withdrew it.

Twenty years earlier Smetana's first child was born and named Bedřiška. Smetana's life seemed perfect. He was happily married, he had a child he adored, his musical life was full and he was being praised as composer, teacher and practical musician. In February 1852 and May 1853 Katerina gave birth to two more daughters, Gabriela and Zofie, and their father would rush home from his work at the Academy to play with his children, of whom his favourite was Bedřiška. His diaries record the child's musical precocity: she would sit silently listening to her father's piano playing, as he had sat listening to his violinist father. When she was three Bedřiška would attend chamber music rehearsals, listening intently for two hours or more; she would also improvise dance steps to folk rhythms and obviously had a natural sense of rhythm. Then, in the first week of July 1854, while the family were on holiday in the Moravian town of Lupnik, Gabriela became ill and her parents watched her die at twenty minutes after eleven on the night of 9 July.

Deeply wounded by his loss Smetana's life went on, and he devoted even more time to the musical development of Bedřiška, who urged him to teach her the piano.

Smetana watched his infant daughter developing her musicianship with understandable pride, writing in his diary: "At the age of three she is singing songs with a good ear for pitch, giving the impression that she understands the text remarkably well for a child of her age. She already plays the piano with a lot of promise. I am sure that she has a natural musical talent."

The following summer Katerina, again pregnant with their fourth daughter, took Bedřiška and Zofie to visit her parents, leaving Smetana busily working.

News came that Bedřiška was seriously ill with scarlet fever and he arrived the day before she died, on the morning of 6 September 1855. Smetana was distraught, his poor wife having to cope with a mentally sick husband, her own pregnant condition and their remaining daughter. The new child was born on 25 October, but was only to live for eight months. Smetana knew only too well that infant mortality was a fact of life: he had been the 11th child of his parents and the first son to survive infancy. No amount of knowledge could soften his sense of loss.

He finally flung himself into composition, producing the Piano Trio in G minor as though purging himself of all the horror and sorrow which filled his soul. It is not difficult to hear Katerina's weeping in some of the violin passages, or Smetana's own suffering in the cello, while the piano provides the emotional outbursts which were drawn from the despair of Bedřiška's tragic death.

Perhaps the very act of composition brought Smetana back to sanity, for the immensely tragic first theme is to some extent offset by the cello second subject and the development reaches towards a touch of serenity when the piano rises to a higher register.

G minor is a key which has long held special tenderness for composers and Smetana retains it for his central *scherzo*, at first thought a strange decision since there is no slow movement in a work of such tragic provenance. However, this *scherzo* has two trios, called *alternativos*, the first of which begins with four bars suggesting the wistful melancholy of Schumann, while the second, in E flat, is filled with expressive poignancy.

The finale, still in G minor, looks back to 1846 and Smetana's Piano Sonata in that same key, which provides the main theme, here used as a rondo subject, the cello again providing a contrasting melody, tender and intensely sad, which returns as a funeral march, while the first theme provides a triplet figure in the form of a muffled drum.

The G minor Piano Trio remained Smetana's only work in the *genre*, and certainly brought him back from a threatening mental condition. Happily he was able to continue his work and establish the Czech national school of music. Even total deafness, from 1874, did not stem his flow of compositions, but in 1883 he could no longer hold on to sanity and died the following year in an asylum.

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**The Borodin Trio** was formed after the three members emigrated from the Soviet Union in 1976. Since that date they have established themselves as one of the best piano trios of our generation, having played in all the major cities of Europe and America, as well as making a tour of Australasia. Their British debut at the Wigmore Hall in July 1978 was "an outstanding success in anyone's book" (*Daily Telegraph*), and other appearances have included the Bath, Malvern and Boston Festivals.

Rostislav Dubinsky was founder and first violinist of the legendary Borodin Quartet for thirty years. Decorated as Musical Artists of Great Merit for 25 years of service, the quartet had given some 3,000 concerts around the world up until the time of Dubinsky's emigration. During this period he became a celebrated chamber music coach, preparing a number of prize-winning ensembles for international competitions. He met his wife Luba Edlina at the Moscow Conservatory when they were both students. She is best known for her many brilliant performances and recordings as pianist with the Borodin Quartet, and was associated with them for 20 years. The Dubinskys now live in the USA, where they both teach at one of America's most prestigious schools of music, that of Indiana University: Mr Dubinsky as Director of Chamber Music, and Mme Edlina in the piano faculty. Cellist Yuli Turovsky also studied at the Moscow Conservatory: he was a prize-winner of the Third Soviet Cello Competition and a laureate at the 22nd International Prague Spring Competition in 1970. His many performances as soloist with the Moscow Chamber Orchestra won him acclaim before he emigrated in 1976 to Montreal, where he now teaches at the Conservatoire de Musique. He is founding music director and conductor of Canada's new chamber orchestra, I Musici de Montréal.

Recordings for Chandos by the Borodin Trio include Piano Trios of Beethoven, Brahms, Dvořák, Mendelssohn, Rachmaninov, Schubert and Tchaikovsky, and the Piano Trio and Piano Quintet of Shostakovich. In addition, Dubinsky and Edlina (as the Dubinsky Duo) have recorded Violin and Piano Sonatas of Shostakovich and Schnittke; Yuli Turovsky has recorded the Cello and Piano Sonatas of Prokofiev and Shostakovich with Luba Edlina, and Kodaly's Cello Sonata and Duo plus an album of French duo works with his wife Eleonora.

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Recording Producer: Brian Couzens.  
Sound Engineer: Ralph Couzens. Assistant Engineer: Philip Couzens.  
Recorded in Layer Marney Church, Essex, England in June 1985.  
Front Cover Illustration: Clare Osborn.  
Art Direction: Janet Osborn.

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# DVOŘÁK ~ SMETANA

## ANTONIN DVOŘÁK

(1841–1904)

### Piano Trio No.4 in E minor Op. 90 'Dumky' (36:23)

- 1 I – Lento maestoso (4:58) –
- 2 II – Poco adagio (7:42) –
- 3 III – Andante (7:23)
- 4 IV – Andante moderato (6:08)
- 5 V – Allegro (4:37)
- 6 VI – Lento maestoso (5:26)

## BEDŘICH SMETANA

(1824–1884)

### Piano Trio in G minor Op. 15 (32:00)

- 7 I – Moderato assai (12:07)
- 8 II – Allegro, ma non agitato – Alternativo 1: Andante –  
Tempo 1 – Alternativo 2: Maestoso – Tempo 1 (9:21)
- 9 III – Finale: Presto (10:23)

DDD TT : 68 : 28

## THE BORODIN TRIO

Luba Edlina *piano*

Rostislav Dubinsky *violin*

Yuli Turovsky *cello*



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