



# American Record Guide

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**D**VORAK: *Quartet 13; String Quintet, op 97*  
Michael Tree, va; Pacifica Quartet  
Cedille 59—76 minutes

Dvořák wrote both the E-flat Quintet (Opus 97) and the G-major Quartet (Opus 106) on returning to his homeland after a long stay in America. Both pieces are brimming with the "American" elements that we know from music he wrote in Spillville, Iowa and in New York City. The Quintet came on the heels of the *American* Quartet (Opus 96), and that came right after the *New World* Symphony (Opus 95). Like the *American* Quartet, the themes in the E-flat Quintet are mostly pentatonic and its rhythms are spiced with Native American (Algonquin) influences.

The 13th Quartet is a wonderful piece of Dvořák. It is a very comfortable-sounding work that expresses both turn-of-the-century American optimism and Bohemian musical traditions. It is an astoundingly beautiful set of variations that sound very free. Dvořák seems to use these variations as a way of making something familiar sound even more precious and meaningful. It does indeed sound like music to celebrate his homecoming; I can think of very little music that makes me feel as comfortable and joyful as this.

The playing is wonderful. Michael Tree (the violist of the Guarneri Quartet) is a great addition to an excellent quartet. Their playing is clean and spirited—light when it needs to be, and strong and solid when lesser quartets might veer towards heaviness.

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