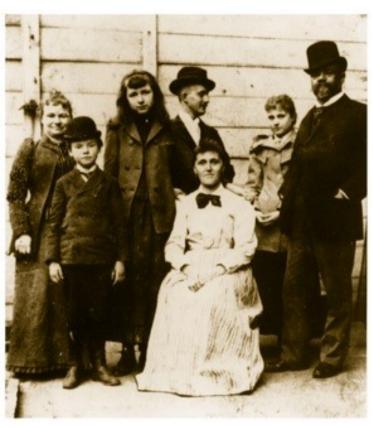
Antonín Dvořák

(1841 - 1904)

String Quintet in E^b Op 97 (July 1893) 'American'

arranged for Wind Octet (Flute; Oboe & Cor Anglais; 2 Clarinets in B^b & A; 2 Horns in F; 2 Bassoons) by Toby Miller (2017)



Dvořák with his family and friends in New York in 1893.

From left: his wife Anna, son Antonín, Sadie Siebert, (secretary) Josef Jan Kovařík, mother of Sadie Siebert, daughter Otilie, Antonín Dvořák

(from Jarmil Burghauser, Antonín Dvořák (2006), p. 82, sourced via Wikipedia)

Dvořák spent over 2¹/₂ years in America in 1892-5, arguably the climax of his compositional career. Works he composed there include the Symphony no 9 'From the New World', his second cello concerto, and on a smaller scale his 'American' string quartet and quintet, a Sonatina for violin and piano, his 'Humoresques' and an 'American' suite for piano. Reluctant to leave home, he was enticed to become titular Head of New York's first Music Conservatory by Jeannette Thurber, its indefatigable founder (wife of a successful businessman with substantial financial clout). The astounding salary of \$15,000 ensured that Dvořák's wife Anna made him sign on the dotted line (they had 6 children), but Mrs Thurber's stated ambition to found a new American 'national' music, and her policy of offering free places to promising black and native students, were also attractive: as a poor Czech in German-dominated Bohemia, Dvořák's early difficulty getting a good grounding for a career in music gave him strong empathy with their disadvantages.

The *New York Herald* on Sunday May 21st 1893 quoted his famous 'manifesto': "In the Negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music." Dvořák had made friends with one of his students Harry T. Burleigh, who later reminisced that "Dvořák used to get tired during the day and I would sing to him after supper ... I gave him what I knew of Negro songs – no one called them spirituals then – and he wrote some of my tunes (my people's music) into the New World Symphony."

Although reconciled to city life, Dvořák did not enjoy it and was frequently homesick for the Bohemian countryside. Resolved to take a holiday back home in summer 1893, he was diverted by Joseph J. Kovařík, a violinist keen to see his parents who had made a new home in Spillville, Iowa, a village of about 350 mainly Czech immigrants. Dvořák had himself diverted Kovařík from planned study at the Conservatoire in Prague, suggesting he join New York's instead, and now employed him as a musical secretary and personal assistant.

Ten days after his New York Herald article, which provoked wide debate, Dvořák and his entire family (the 4 younger children came from home with their grandmother) travelled with Kovařík to his home village. They took the Chicago Express from Grand Central station, a 30-hour journey. Here (on June 4th) the party attended the World's Fair, the main American celebration of the 400th anniversary of Columbus' voyage. Chicago to Calmar was a short hop by train, leaving the final 11 miles to Spillville to be travelled by horse cart.

In the newspaper *Katolik*, Josef later wrote: "The Master occupied the upper floor in the home of Mr. Schmitt (now the Bily Clocks/Dvořák Museum). After the piano was tuned, repaired and moved into the dwelling, the Master undertook a new work. When the piano did not suffice for the outline of his work, he used a reed organ which he had searched out at his neighbor's across the street, at Kovařik's, my father's cousin, who had a harness shop. He went there often, played a couple of measures, then quickly returned home. So began the Master's new work, a piece of chamber music for strings, a quartet in F. Major, Opus 96". Completed in just 8 days in mid-June, this 'Spillville' quartet was soon renamed simply the 'American'. Ten days later, Dvořák picked up his pen again: like Mozart, another viola player whose string quintets were written after the completion of quartets, he perhaps felt inspired to create a larger work. This quintet Op.97 occupied him for the whole of July. As remembered by both Kovařik and Dvořák's son Otakar, for two weeks in the middle of the month his favoured occupation was "a little performance of Indian songs and dances accompanied by a little drum. Master was very interested in seeing the genuine Indians, especially to hear their songs. For fourteen days while the group remained in Spillville, Master and I spent every evening there. Immediately after they left, we started up with 'Darda' again' [Austrian *Tartl*, Dvořák's favourite card game, like *Jass* for 2 players].

During the holiday, Dvořák returned to the World's Fair, conducting a gala performance as part of 'Bohemian Day' (August 12th). The conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra arranged for a play-through of the new quartet at Dvořák's hotel, and for the Kneisel quartet from Boston to give the first public performances of quartet and quintet in January 1894 (quartet: Boston, New Year's Day; both pieces: Carnegie Hall, NY, 12th).

The pentatonic flavour of the quintet and constant major/minor alternation are very characteristic of Dvořák but there is something else—a persistent rhythmic drive, most obviously in the Scherzo. An 'Indian drum' connection has been assumed, but could it reflect his long journey to Spillville or his general interest in trains? [He told off his prospective son-in-law Josef Suk for writing down the wrong number on an engine at Prague station and once said "I'd give all my symphonies if I could have invented the locomotive!" The main theme of the first movement of Symphony No. 7 "occurred to me upon the arrival at the station of the ceremonial train from Pest in 1884", and he wrote the *Lacrimosa* of his Requiem on a train to London in May 1890.] Others clearly hear trains in the Scherzo—I like the performance idea of returning gradually rather than suddenly to Tempo 1 at letter N (bar 170). The first and last movements with their pervasive dotted rhythms suggest horses to me. Is it fanciful to hear whinnying in the final trills, which (in the Eulenburg edition at least) are unusually written out as explicit semiquavers starting on the lower note, with accents? The main theme of the last movement is from the Finale of the E^b piano trio by Schubert, whom Dvořák admired. The third movement presents a hymn Dvořák had sketched in New York to replace the English tune of America's national anthem, with exquisite harmonization and strongly characterized variations. The whole work is a masterpiece equal to the quartet, its relative neglect surely due (as usual) only to that extra viola.

American String Quintet Op. 97 arr. for wind octet by Toby Miller











































American String Quintet Op. 97 arr. for wind Octet by Toby Miller































American String Quintet Op. 97 arr. for wind octet by Toby Miller

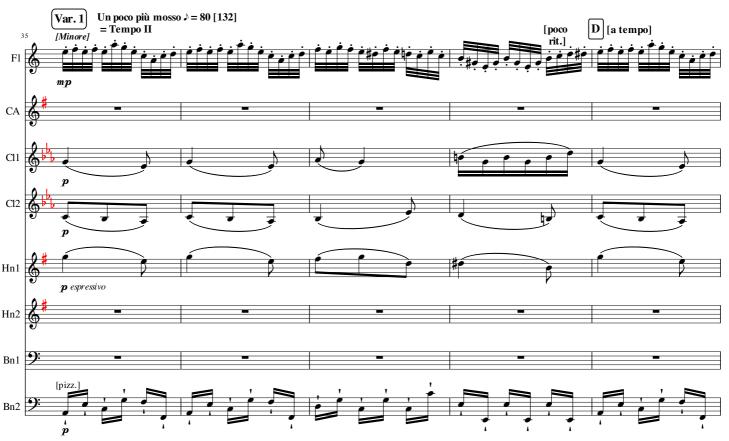
Score (instrumental pitch)

Will and the string of the str

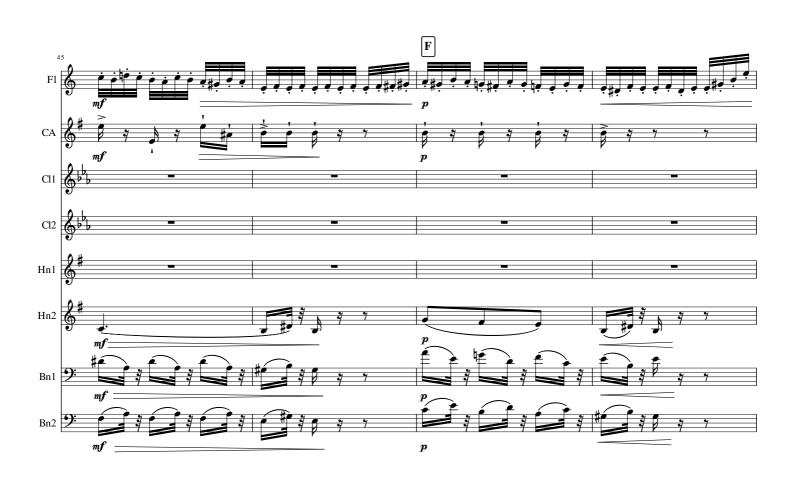


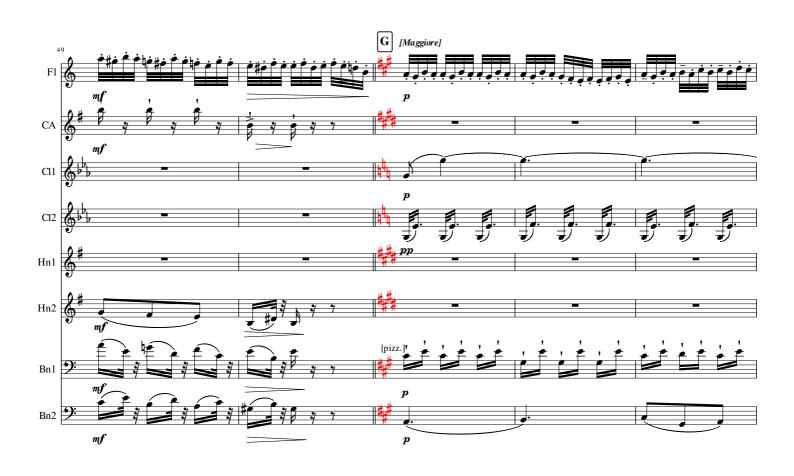


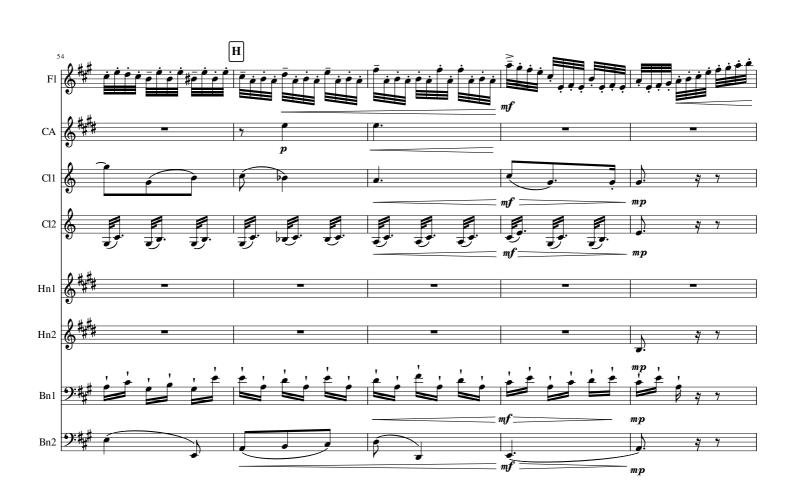


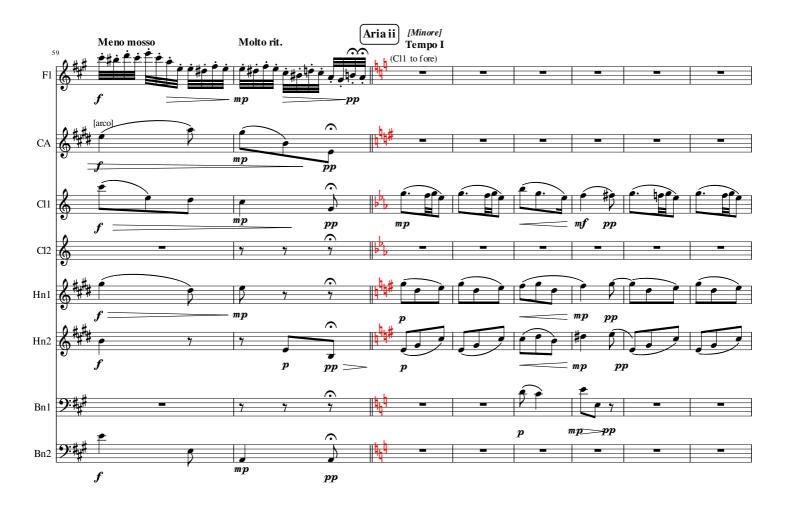


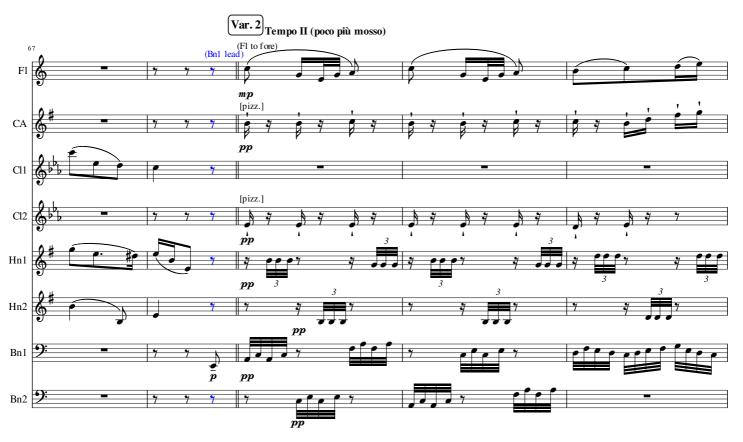




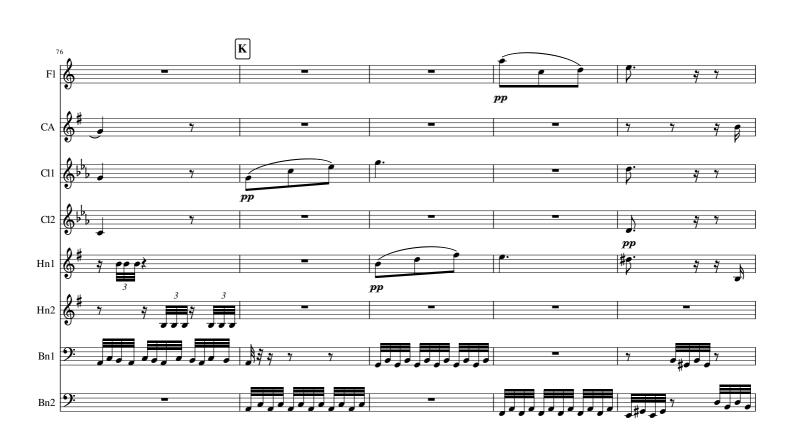






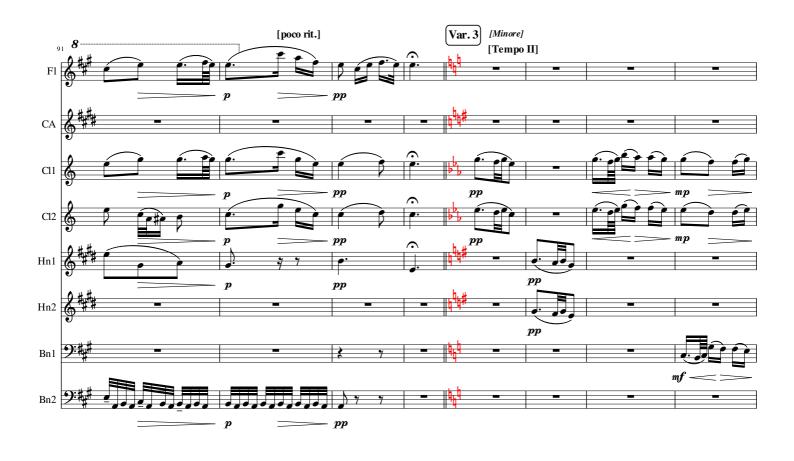


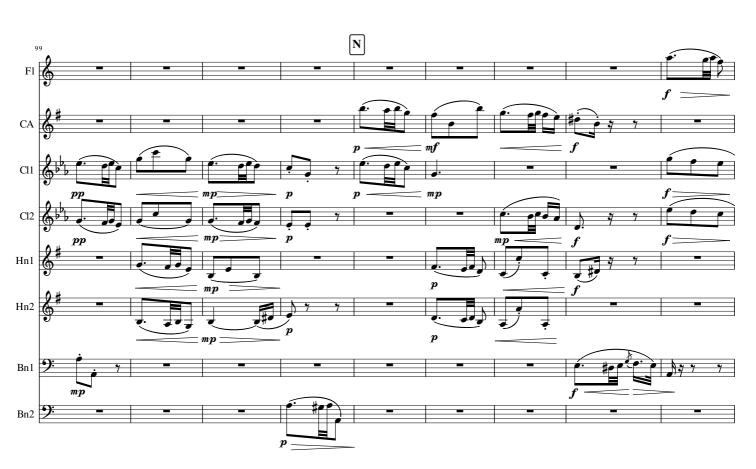








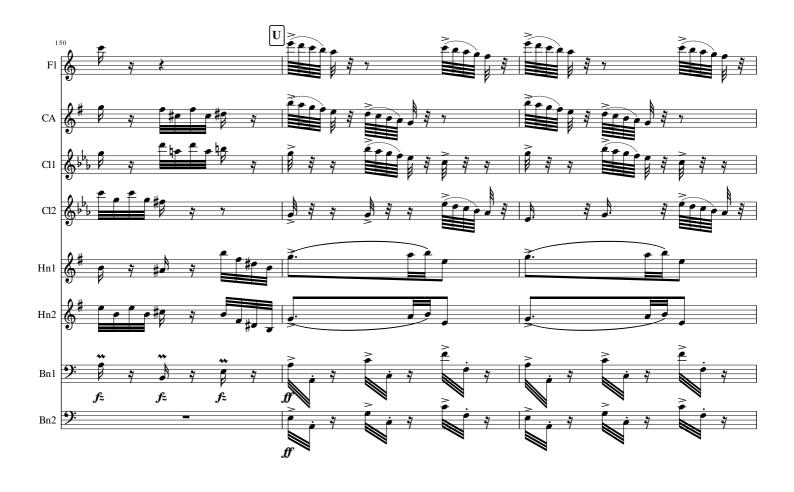


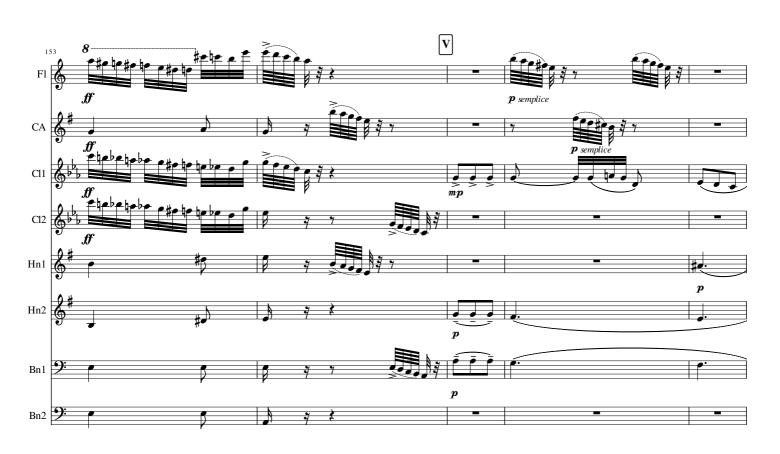


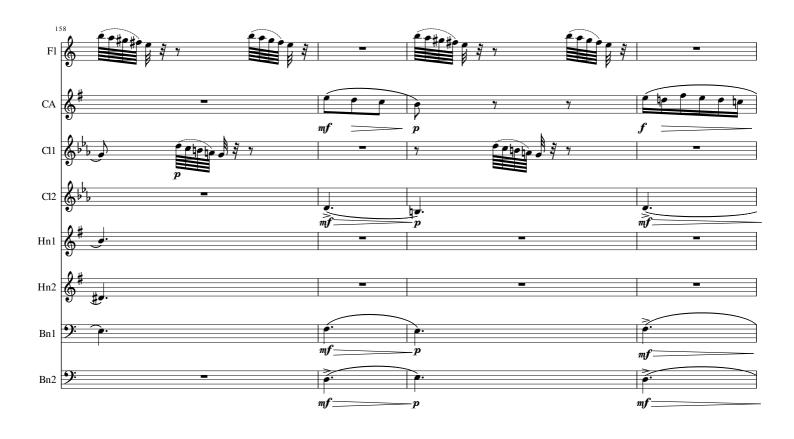






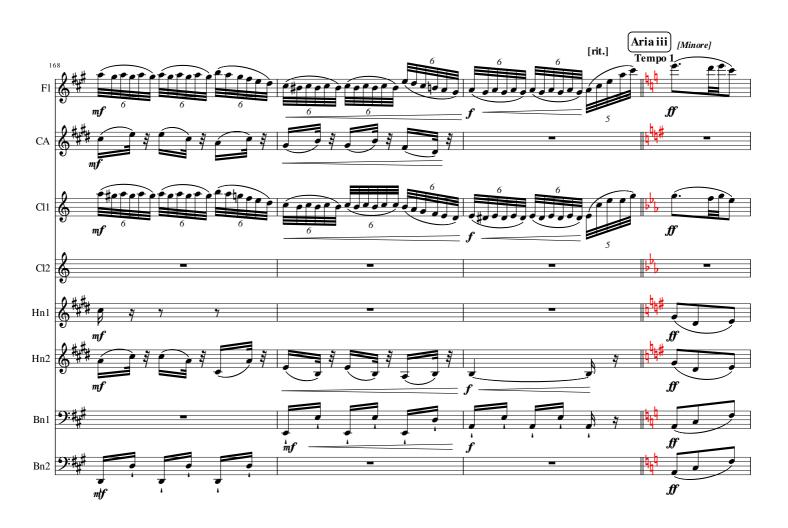
















American String Quintet Op. 97 arr. for Wind Octet by Toby Miller Fore (instrumental pitch)

No. 97 arr. for Wind Octet by Toby Miller Antonín Dvořá















































