

American Women Composers was the first to do so in 1931), but most were amateur ensembles; sadly, Beach never heard a professional performance of the work during her lifetime.

The String Quartet marks a distinct change in Beach's output. Composed in a single, arch-form movement—an opening “A” section followed by a contrasting “B” section before a return to “A”—the harmonic content of the work is often hazy and unstable, resembling less the late-Romantic stylings of her early works than the Impressionistic sound worlds of Debussy and Ravel. Three Inuit tunes from Boas's book appear in the Quartet, and Beach treats them with the utmost craft and respect. After an amorphous opening, the first Inuit melody (titled “Summer Song” by Boas) is heard in a free-flowing declamation by the viola alone. The rest of the quartet immediately responds with the second tune (“Playing at ball”), and the two melodies intertwine in a graceful dance. A livelier section in 6/8 time acts as the midpoint of the work. Here, the third Inuit melody (“Ititaujang's Song”) bounces back and forth between the instrumental parts, with occasional callbacks to the previous themes. The ensemble ultimately runs out of steam and returns to the foggy music of the opening before a peaceful close.

DVOŘÁK: STRING QUARTET NO. 10 IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 51

Dvořák's *Slavonic Dances* sparked a frenzy in the music community. After a successful premiere and its ensuing publication in 1879, the composer was approached by several musicians (and his publisher) for more works in a similar style. One of these was Jean Becker, leader of the Florentine Quartet. Becker asked Dvořák if he would be willing to write a quartet “in the Slavic character,” to which he agreed. The resulting work (No. 10 in E-flat major, op. 51) was not finished in time for the start of the fall 1879 concert season but did receive a soft premiere, in private, by Joseph Joachim's quartet. Its first public performance occurred in Prague on December 19 with a quartet led by Antonín Sobotka; the Florentine Quartet first performed the work a bit later, in the early months of 1880.

Right from the start, Dvořák makes the Slavonic flavor of his Quartet apparent. The first movement (*Allegro ma non troppo*) opens in a bucolic manner, with

smooth lines that swirl around each other in a lovely “stew.” It's from this texture that the first theme soon sprouts, heard by the first violin. A secondary theme area presents a brighter, folksier feel, and the interplay between these two styles drives much of the drama of the first movement. The second movement (*Andante con moto*) displays a strikingly-different character. Subtitled “Elegie,” the music is modeled after the *dumka*, a type of Ukrainian folk ballad in which a performer sings along with plucked string accompaniment (usually from a *bandura*). Dvořák was fascinated by the genre and paid homage to it several times throughout his career, most famously in his E-minor “Dumky” Trio of 1891. The *dumka* of the Tenth String Quartet begins with a strumming cello as a mournful melody is passed between the first violin and viola. One can almost imagine an old balladeer spinning a fascinating yarn to an audience of enraptured children. Several alternating “episodes” provide contrast to the solemn introduction. The sun briefly peeks through the clouds in a section marked by flowing sixteenth-note passages in the second violin and viola; later, a vivacious village dance suddenly breaks out among the ensemble. Towards the end, the somber opening returns, but after a brief pause, one last wisp of the dance appears followed by a wistful sigh, as if the balladeer had to take a moment to remember how the story ends.

A ravishing “Romanze” comprises the third movement (*Andante con moto*), which opens with a short call and response—played with double stops—between the violins above and the viola and cello below. What follows is pure, heart-on-sleeve Dvořák, displaying a lush, more traditionally “Romantic” style more so than the Slavonic qualities of the previous movements. But before too long, folk music bursts back into the picture, with a delightful earworm-of-a-melody introduced by the first violin at the start of the final movement (*Allegro assai*). Skittering lines passed between the rest of the players provide plenty of aural interest, as does a countermelody that is soon layered on top of the opening tune. Like the *dumka* movement, brief episodes provide some contrast—in tempo, key, or playing style—but the feisty melody returns each time. The work eventually closes with a very brief coda and three emphatic chords, bringing this rollicking joy ride to an end.

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