CD: Dvorák, Dabić – Origins Akhtamar Quartet Cypres, CYP1691

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Akhtamar Quartet: Between Roots and the Present

Sometimes a CD has a welcoming quality. You put it on, and instead of a loud opening, a door opens. "Origins" by the Akhtamar Quartet greets you in exactly this way. No grand pronouncements, but rather an inviting space in which four musicians want to share where they come from, what moves them, and how tradition and the present can meet seamlessly. Since its founding, the ensemble has sought the connection between classical chamber music and folk music, between cultural roots and a curious gaze toward the future. This new recording continues this path consistently, but with a maturity that has noticeably grown.

The concert begins with Antonín Dvořák's String Quartet No. 13 in G major, Op. 106. The Allegro moderato alone demonstrates the Akhtamar Quartet's confident handling of contrasts. The music doesn't leap out at you; it unfolds. Vibrant colors, clear lines, a resolute tone that nonetheless remains supple. Everything sounds alert, dynamic, and perfectly coordinated.

In the Adagio ma non troppo, Dvořák's great lyricism takes center stage. The ensemble gives the melodies ample space. Nothing is accelerated, nothing slowed down; everything flows. One almost feels transported into his symphonies, and occasionally a hint of the "New World" style even shines through, without ever feeling like a mere quotation. It is this organic growth that is

so compelling: the music breathes and yet maintains a sense of tension.

The third movement, Molto vivace, leaves no doubt about Dvořák's love of rhythm. Dance-like, light-footed, yet never arbitrary. The folkloric touches are perfectly placed, not contrived, but organic. The finale, in contrast, begins somewhat shyly, with a delicate Andante sostenuto. But no sooner has one grown accustomed to this intimacy than the Allegro con fuoco bursts forth. Gripping, full of verve, and with that playful energy that makes the Akhtamar Quartet so powerful. A movement that glows without burning.

With Jelena Dabić's "Anzhamanak," a work written specifically for the ensemble, the CD shifts to a different musical language, but not a different attitude. The four movements form small scenes that are clearly distinct from one another and yet flow seamlessly into each other.

“Root” begins with a searching cello. Not an effect, but a quiet exploration. Only later do the other voices join in, as if exploring a place before settling down. “Signal” then takes off. The violin soars to bright heights, the music picks up speed, and suddenly there is a pull that feels like a collective forward thrust. The movement remains lean yet full of energy.

In "Thread," the music calms down. The violins circle each other, while the cello, with bold pizzicatos, initiates a small, charming dance. It feels familiar, light, chamber-music-like, stripped-down, and intimate. "Glint," finally, concentrates the power of the entire work. An intense melody emerges, warm, sustained, with a radiance that steadily expands. The ending is a wild dance, free, powerful, and perfectly placed.

The Akhtamar Quartet plays all of this with great cohesion. Technique is never displayed, but always serves expression. The four musicians sound intimate, attentive, and courageous. The recording supports this with an airy, warm sound that allows for closeness without any harshness.

"Origins" is therefore not merely a juxtaposition of Dvořák and Dabić, but a cleverly conceived arc. Origin is not the subject here, but the driving force. A CD that one gladly listens to twice, because it piques curiosity on the first listen, and on the second begins to reveal itself.

Dirk Schauß, November 2025

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