

# Takács Quartet

Haydn, Shostakovich and Dvořák

Sunday, March 6, 4 p.m.

Monday, March 7, 7:30 p.m.

Grusin Music Hall

## Program

### String Quartet in B-flat, Op. 76, No. 4, "Sunrise"

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

- I. Allegro con spirito
- II. Adagio
- III. Menuetto. Allegro
- IV. Finale. Allegro, ma non troppo

### String Quartet No. 11, Op. 122

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

- I. Introduction. Andantino
- II. Scherzo. Allegretto
- III. Recitative. Adagio
- IV. Etude. Allegro
- V. Humoresque. Allegro
- VI. Elegy. Adagio
- VII. Finale. Moderato — Meno mosso — Moderato

### —Intermission—

### String Quartet No. 13, Op. 106

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Adagio ma non troppo
- III. Molto vivace
- IV. Finale. Andante sostenuto — Allegro con fuoco

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#### PLEASE NOTE

- Masks are required in public indoor spaces on the CU Boulder campus, regardless of vaccination status.
  - Latecomers will be seated at the discretion of the house manager.
  - Photography and video recordings of any type are strictly prohibited during the performance.
  - Smoking is not permitted anywhere. CU Boulder is a smoke-free campus.
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*The members of the Takács Quartet would like to dedicate this program to the memory of our dear friend and colleague Roger Tapping, violist of the Takács between 1995 and 2005, who died of cancer on Jan. 18, 2022.*

## Program notes

*Notes by Marc Shulgold*

### **String Quartet in B-flat, Op. 76, No. 4, “Sunrise”**

*Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)*

Life was rarely easy for the hundreds of composers seeking to earn a living in the late 18th century. Most had to elbow their way through a crowded field in order to be heard and hired by music-loving patrons. Mozart’s struggles in Vienna are well-known. But then, there is Haydn, doubly blessed with a long life and a long association with members of a wealthy family, who provided comfortable living quarters, steady employment and an on-call ensemble of fine players. A composer couldn’t ask for more. No wonder Haydn produced so much music: more than 100 symphonies, numerous sonatas, concertos, operas, choral works and a huge body of chamber pieces. In all, he wrote 83 string quartets, returning to this exciting new genre throughout his life—experimenting with its possibilities and stretching its boundaries (aided in no small measure by Mozart and his inspired thoughts on the subject).

After successful visits to London in 1791 and ‘94, where his final symphonies were premiered, Haydn returned to Vienna as the greatest composer in Europe. No longer in the lavish palace of his Hungarian patrons, the Esterházy, he now joined the ranks of freelance composers seeking work. Not surprisingly, his lofty reputation brought him numerous requests once he settled back home. Among them was a commission in 1796 for six quartets from the Hungarian count Joseph Erdödy (brother-in-law of Haydn’s former patron, Anton Esterházy). This would prove to be his last complete quartet collection. Two more, released as Op. 77, would follow, along with a fragmentary piece, published as Op. 103.

Finished in 1797, though not released for two more years, the half-dozen quartets of Op. 76 represent more than a taste of the composer’s

mature thoughts on the genre—they are among his greatest works, period. The B-flat quartet, known as the “Sunrise,” became the most popular and (critics have offered) perhaps the finest of the six. There is on every page abundant invention, charming wit, heartfelt soulfulness and memorable melody, starting with the evocative opening. A gentle sustained chord supports a softly rising pair of phrases in the first violin—suggesting the sunrise that subsequently gave the work its nickname. Ever fond of exploring all the possibilities of minimal ideas, Haydn then inverts that simple rising motif and gives it to the cello for the movement’s second theme (a “sunset,” perhaps?). Playful interaction among the four voices contrasts magically with those early moments of repose. More simplicity emerges in the *Adagio*, built on a dark recurring five-note phrase. Sunshine returns in the jaunty *Minuet*, a ballroom ditty that playfully contrasts with its central *Trio*, whose heavy beat, low drone and unison melody suggest a dance performed by common folk. Haydn’s trademark wit is in full flower as the Finale unfolds, ending in an amusing, whirlwind treatment of the theme. Here, the players’ talents are given a severe test, as Haydn instructs the music to be played fast, faster and, in a mind-boggling coda, fastest.

### **String Quartet No. 11, Op. 122**

*Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)*

Few works by Shostakovich are as compact and intense as his eleventh string quartet. Lasting only 16 or so minutes, it is built on seven brief, stitched-together movements, three of which last a little more than a minute each. The unusual number of movements and the antiquated titles of some of them might suggest a divertimento from an earlier century. But this is modern music—passionate, anguished, angular and deeply personal. Composed in January 1966, Op. 122 is dedicated to the memory of the composer’s friend Vasily Shirinsky, who had died the previous year. Shirinsky was the longtime second violinist of the Beethoven Quartet, which had been closely tied to Shostakovich, and had premiered most of his 15 string quartets. In fact, this work and the three that follow each contain dedications to members of the ensemble.

The presence of Shirinsky in Shostakovich’s score is inescapable, felt most directly in the touching *Elegy*, which is at the heart of Op. 122. Here, cello

and viola offer a mournful melody in unison, leading to the first violin giving voice to the group's sense of mourning—just as it had done at the start of the quartet. Though all of the movements flow one to the next, their individual personalities make it easy to follow along. The fugal *Scherzo* begins with the first violin introducing a jumpy theme that will return, much slower, in the *Finale*. Adding an element of creepiness are the occasional quick, slithering glissandos up the neck (likewise heard again in the final movement). The mood of the *Scherzo* is rudely broken, as anger explodes in the brief, dissonant *Recitative*, perhaps a reaction of frustration to Shirinsky's early death at age 65. The first violin once again takes the lead in the ensuing *Etude*, grabbing our attention with a nonstop flurry of notes, spun nervously against mournful chords from the other players. There's little that is "humorous" in the following *Humoresque*, dominated by the second violin, incessantly (almost annoyingly) locked in a quick two-note phrase that continues nonstop, before finally fading away and leading to the *Elegy*. Fittingly, the work ends with the emptiness of loss, as the sad remnants of the *Scherzo* theme are heard beneath a quiet high C held by the first violin for 18 measures.

### String Quartet No. 13, Op. 106

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Dvořák divided his later years between two worlds: the crowded confines of New York City, where he headed the National Conservatory of Music in the early 1890s, and the familiar peacefulness of his country home in Vyoská near his hometown of Prague. Take a guess which one he preferred. At least his time spent in America (1892-95) did prove financially successful—and artistically as well, thanks largely to vacations spent in the rural Bohemian community of Spillville, Iowa, where such masterpieces as the "New World" Symphony and "American" String Quartet were conceived. But things soon began to fall apart in New York after a nationwide economic downturn in 1893-94, which resulted in tensions at the Conservatory and inconsistent payment of salaries. Worried about the ability to support his wife and children (and terminally homesick), Dvořák tendered his resignation, and the family sailed for Bohemia in April 1895.

Home at last, he was able to recharge his batteries and, after a spell, turn with renewed vigor to composing. During his final days in the U.S., he'd

begun a string quartet in A-flat (Op. 105), but set it aside once back in Prague. The reason was explained in a letter written to cellist Hanuš Wihan (who'd encouraged the creation of the composer's glorious Cello Concerto, and was its dedicatee): "Since I returned from America I have not put pen to paper ... Here at Vyoská, I don't want to waste my time, and prefer to enjoy the divine beauties of the countryside." Perhaps inspired by his favored morning walks in the pastoral setting, Dvořák suddenly went to work on an entirely new string quartet. This would become the G-major of Op. 106. Once he finished that one, he returned to complete the New York-born A-flat quartet. Thus, we have the odd ordering of Op. 106 as No. 13, and its predecessor, Op. 105, assigned No. 14—the pair becoming the last two of the composer's string quartets.

To fully understand the rush of inspiration Dvořák experienced as he worked on the G-major quartet, consider that he finished the first movement in nine days, the following *Adagio* in five. The work was completed in early December 1895, and premiered the following October by the Bohemian Quartet, with Wihan as cellist. The speed in writing this piece should not suggest a lessening of originality or depth. Quite the opposite. There are elements in Op. 106 that overflow with newfound approaches to traditional musical structure. Bold handling of thematic elements reveal an adventurous spirit that mixes the composer's lifelong love of age-old Bohemian dance rhythms with an awareness of new directions being explored by other composers.

That desire and ability to change with the times had already affected the direction of his orchestral writing. Once he'd completed the "New World" Symphony, Dvořák turned away from that genre and began to investigate the newly popular symphonic poem. Similarly, he discarded established forms in much of this G-major quartet. The brilliant *Adagio*, for example, is something fresh and unforgettable. Shying away from the predictable theme-and-variation structure, Dvořák instead builds the theme in dramatic fashion, expanding it from a simple, spiritual-like melody into a powerful emotional journey, utilizing major and minor key episodes with extraordinary effect. But then, the simple pleasures of home are never far away. The two little notes and trill that begin the opening *Alllegro* may have come from a bird encountered during one of those early-morning strolls.

Folk-dance rhythms abound, such as the Czech spring dance, the *skočna*, featured in the third movement. On the other hand, these infectious sounds may be echoes of the music Dvořák discovered during his American tenure. Such cross-pollination has remained a popular topic among musicologists: Did his American works contain hints of the Old World? Did his post-American works contain hints of the New World? We'll leave such scholarly concerns to the scholars.

## About the performers

Recent winner of the Gramophone Classical Music Awards 2021 chamber category, the world-renowned Takács Quartet is now entering its 47th season. Edward Dusinberre, Harumi Rhodes (violins); Richard O'Neill (viola); and András Fejér (cello) are excited to bring to fruition several innovative projects for the 2021-22 season. With bandoneon/accordion virtuoso Julien Labro, the group will perform new works composed for them by Clarice Assad and Bryce Dessner throughout the U.S. This season also marks the world premiere of a new quartet written for the Takács by Stephen Hough, *Les Six Rencontres*. The Takács will record this extraordinary work for Hyperion Records, in combination with quartets by Ravel and Dutilleux.

During the last year, the Takács marked the arrival of Grammy-winning violist Richard O'Neill by making two new recordings for Hyperion. Quartets by Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel and Felix Mendelssohn were released in the Fall of 2021, to be followed in May 2022 by a disc of Haydn's Opp. 42, 77 and 103.

The Takács Quartet continues its role in 2021-22 as associate artists at London's Wigmore Hall, performing four concerts there this season. In addition to many concerts in the U.K., the ensemble will play at prestigious European venues including the Paris Philharmonie, Berlin Konzerthaus, and Teatro Della Pergola, Florence. The Takács will perform throughout North America, including concerts in New York, Boston, Washington, Princeton, Ann Arbor, Berkeley, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Vancouver, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Cleveland and Portland.

The Takács records for Hyperion Records. The ensemble recently won a Gramophone Classical Music Award 2021 in the chamber category for their recording of quintets by Amy Beach and Elgar with pianist Garrick Ohlsson. The CD also won a Presto Classical Recording of the Year. Other discs for Hyperion include string quartets by Haydn, Schubert, Janáček, Smetana, Debussy and Britten, as well as piano quintets by César Franck and Shostakovich (with Marc-André Hamelin), viola quintets by Brahms and Dvořák (with Lawrence

Power). For their CDs on the Decca/London label, the Quartet has won three Gramophone Awards, a Grammy Award, three Japanese Record Academy Awards, Disc of the Year at the inaugural BBC Music Magazine Awards, and Ensemble Album of the Year at the Classical Brits. Full details of all recordings can be found at [takacsquartet.com/recordings](http://takacsquartet.com/recordings).

In 2014 the Takács became the first string quartet to be awarded the Wigmore Hall Medal. The Medal, inaugurated in 2007, recognizes major international artists who have a strong association with the Hall. Recipients include Andras Schiff, Thomas Quasthoff, Menahem Pressler and Dame Felicity Lott. In 2012, Gramophone announced that the Takács was the first string quartet to be inducted into its Hall of Fame, along with such legendary artists as Jascha Heifetz, Leonard Bernstein and Dame Janet Baker. The ensemble also won the 2011 Award for Chamber Music and Song presented by the Royal Philharmonic Society in London.

The Takács Quartet is known for innovative programming. The ensemble performed a program inspired by Philip Roth's novel *Everyman* with Meryl Streep at Princeton in 2014, and again with her at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto in 2015. They first performed *Everyman* at Carnegie Hall in 2007 with Philip Seymour Hoffman. They have toured 14 cities with the poet Robert Pinsky, collaborate regularly with the Hungarian Folk group Muzsikás, and in 2010 they collaborated with the Colorado Shakespeare Festival and David Lawrence Morse on a drama project that explored the composition of Beethoven's last quartets.

Based in Boulder at the University of Colorado, the members of the Takács Quartet are Christoffersen Faculty Fellows. The quartet has helped to develop a string program with a special emphasis on chamber music, where students work in a nurturing environment designed to help them develop their artistry. Through the university, two of the quartet's members benefit from the generous loan of instruments from the Drake Instrument Foundation. The members of the Takács are on the faculty at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, where they run an intensive summer string quartet seminar, and Visiting Fellows at the Guildhall School of Music, London.

The Takács Quartet was formed in 1975 at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest by Gabor Takács-Nagy, Károly Schranz, Gabor Ormai and András Fejér, while all four were students. It first received international attention in 1977, winning First Prize and the Critics' Prize at the International String Quartet Competition in Evian, France. The quartet also won the Gold Medal at the 1978 Portsmouth and Bordeaux Competitions and First Prizes at the Budapest International String Quartet Competition in 1978 and the Bratislava Competition in 1981.