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College of Music  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

JANUARY-MARCH 2025



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# WELCOME



Friends and patrons,

When I took on the role of executive director of CU Presents in August, I knew that I'd be supporting the CU Boulder College of Music in continuing its tradition of excellence and high-quality performances. What I didn't expect was the variety of new experiences I would discover by delving deeper into the programming we create and support.

This fall, I attended an outreach performance of *Hänsel und Gretel* presented by the College of Music's Eklund Opera Program with hundreds of elementary school students, many experiencing their first live exposure to the performing arts. I saw the gravity-defying acrobatics of Circa's *Duck Pond* at the Artist Series. I laughed at a satiric examination of bullying and its consequences in our musical theatre program's *Heathers*, and I was stunned by our Wind Symphony's collaboration with the ~Nois saxophone quartet to present Viet Cuong's *Second Nature*. At each of these events, I was thrilled to join our audiences on impactful and emotionally transformative journeys.

I'm also looking ahead to next fall. One of my great joys is curating the College of Music's longstanding Faculty Tuesdays series along with Dean John Davis. This free recital series highlights the virtuosity and diverse repertory of the college's own faculty and we hope to see you at the series opener on Aug. 26, 2025. The event promises to be memorable, featuring rotating performances by our piano faculty to celebrate the generous gift of a brand-new Steinway grand piano for Grusin Music Hall. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Gregory Silvus and Deidre Ferris for their leadership and generosity in making the lead gift for this Music Advisory Board-led campaign.

If you see me at a performance this spring, please say hello! I love visiting with our valued patrons about what makes our shared experiences meaningful.

Warmly,

Andrew "Metz" Metzroth  
Executive Director, CU Presents

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## CU ★ PRESENTS

JANUARY-MARCH 2025

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# SPOTLIGHT



## Swashbuckling Fun for the Whole Family

By Henry Michaels

*"I am the very model of a modern Major-General,  
I've information vegetable, animal and mineral,  
I know the kings of England, and I quote the fights historical  
From Marathon to Waterloo, in order categorical."*

An all-time tongue twister, the "Major-General's Song" is the most beloved tune from what is perhaps the most beloved operetta of Arthur Sullivan and W.S. Gilbert: *The Pirates of Penzance*. Delivered at breakneck speed and chock-full of wit and humor, this legendary musical number is the very model of the style of Gilbert and Sullivan's lively, quick-witted comedy.

And when the CU Boulder College of Music Eklund Opera Program presents *The Pirates of Penzance* in March, fun will surely abound.

"The feel and vibe of this show is so much fun. I mean, it takes place on a pirate ship, right?!" says Eklund Opera Program Director Leigh Holman.

"It really is a sight to see. We have a luxurious, beautiful set. There's dance, lots of physicality like tumbling and a ton of swashbuckling fun with the pirates.

Then there are the jokes, which just come at you one after the other. It's the greatest of satire. And the music. The music is gorgeous."

*The Pirates of Penzance* tells the story of Frederic, a young man recently finished with his apprenticeship among a kindly group of pirates. He falls in love—don't they always?—with Mabel, one of the daughters of Major-General Stanley. Hijinks and hilarity ensue as the pirates attempt to find wives and Frederic discovers that his time with the buccaneers is honor-bound to continue because of a Leap Day technicality.

Like many of Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas, *The Pirates of Penzance* is satire, a lampooning of the concept of duty and of Victorian-era norms. The College of Music's production will also feature updates to some lyrics and dialogue, a common practice with Gilbert and Sullivan works.

"Unlike Mozart or Verdi where you would never change anything that they wrote, we know that Gilbert and Sullivan would prefer updates because that was the point of their satire," says Holman. "Gilbert as the librettist wanted to relate to what was going on in the audience's time."

Perhaps best of all, this swashbuckling musical extravaganza is seriously hilarious fun for the whole family. From young to old and everyone in between, *The Pirates of Penzance*—with all its music, its comedy and its dynamism—has something for everyone.

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# HOPE AND GRAVITY

By Michael Hollinger

Nine lives entangle in delightfully surprising and comical ways when an elevator crashes in a major American city. Michael Hollinger's comedy is a reminder that there are only a few degrees of separation between all of us.

**Jan. 23 - Feb. 16**

The Savoy | Denver

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**Feb. 21 - Feb. 23**

The Nomad Playhouse | Boulder

# THE WHITE CHIP

By Sean Daniels

Straight from its critically acclaimed run off-Broadway, *The White Chip* is the true story of one man's journey from alcoholism to recovery in a play *The New York Times* described as "laugh-out-loud funny and gasp-inducing, self-inflicted tragedy."

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**Apr. 10 - May 4**

The Dairy Arts Center | Boulder



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# UPCOMING EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

# CU ★ PRESENTS

## ARTIST SERIES



**Renée Fleming**  
Voice of Nature  
Jan. 31, 2025



**Kodo**  
One Earth Tour 2025:  
Warabe  
Feb. 15, 2025



**Sweet Honey in the Rock**  
Feb. 28, 2025



**Martha Graham  
Dance Company**  
April 26, 2025

## COLLEGE OF MUSIC



**The Pirates of Penzance**  
By Gilbert and Sullivan  
March 14-16, 2025



**Big Fish**  
By John August and  
Andrew Lippa  
April 24-27, 2025

## TAKÁCS QUARTET



**Takács Quartet**  
Jan. 12 and 13, 2025  
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- Hsiao-Ling Lin, piano** | Jan. 14  
**Dan Silver, clarinet** | Jan. 21  
**David Korevaar, piano** | Jan. 28  
**Suyeon Kim, piano** | Feb. 4  
**Doug Walter, percussion** | Feb. 11  
**Andrew Garland and Jeremy Reger** | Feb. 18  
**Sterling Tanner, trombone** | Feb. 25  
**Side-by-Side Chamber Music** | March 4  
**Wind Faculty Showcase** | March 11  
**Mutsumi Moteki, piano** | March 18

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- Loft Theatre (University Theatre Building)

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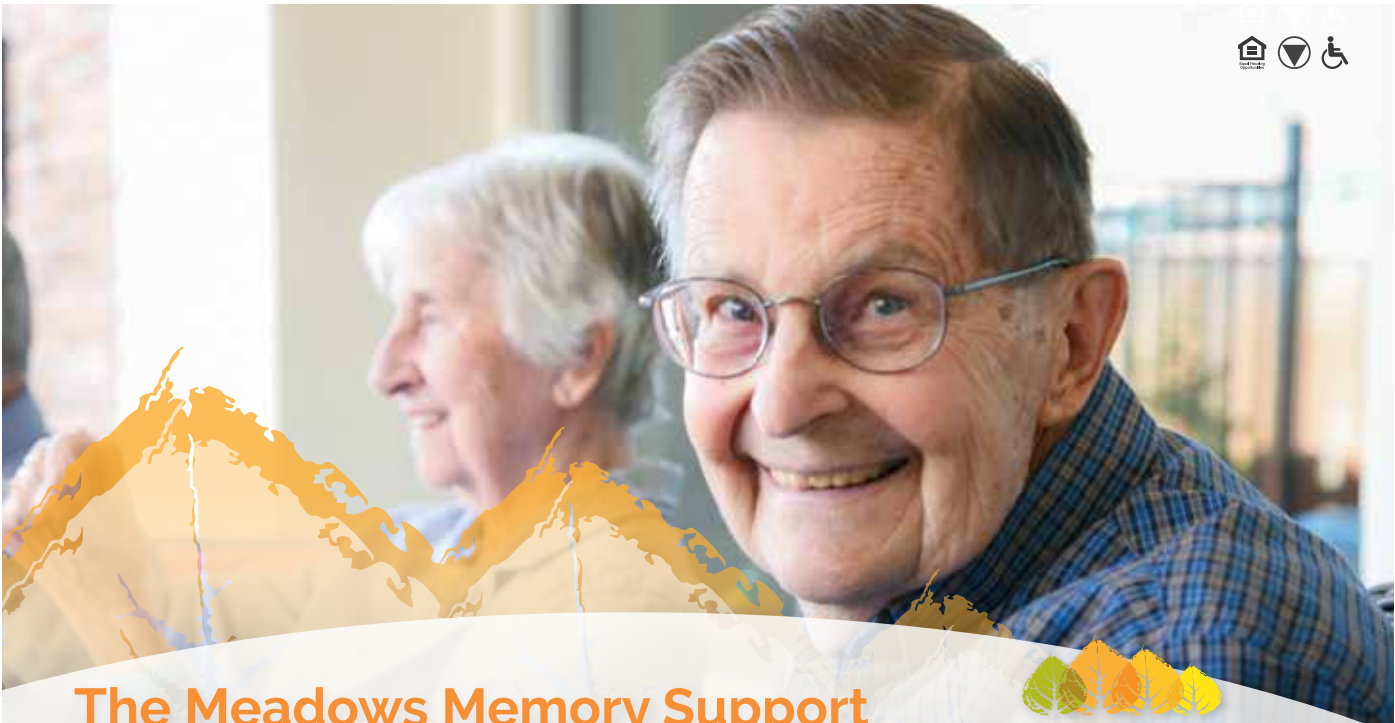
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# SPOTLIGHT



## Sweet Honey in the Rock Continues to Find Hope in the Darkness

By Adam Goldstein

For more than 50 years, the vocal ensemble Sweet Honey in the Rock has worked to address the ills of the world through the power of song.

Dozens of vocalists have brought their talents to the ensemble since Bernice Johnson Reagon, a teacher with the Black Repertory Company, formally founded the group in 1973. Since then, the all-female group has tackled myriad social issues through their a cappella musical stylings including civil rights, domestic violence, immigration and—on their 2016 album *#LoveInEvolution*—the toll of gun violence in the United States including those claimed by police violence and by the school shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

“Since we started writing this piece, we’ve had to keep adding names and sadly, we’ll be adding more before things change,” founding member Carol Maillard says of “Second Line Blues,” the track from the album that directly addresses the crisis.

That unflinching approach to society’s most dire issues is nothing new for the storied ensemble which has long examined contemporary society through a musical lens that draws from the rich tradition of Black female music in the United States. With strains of Gospel, spiritual and traditional hymns, the group in its current quartet form never shies from the world’s woes and will surely offer topical depth during its performance at Macky Auditorium on Feb. 28.

Even so, the note that shines through in the group’s music is full of hope and positivity and has always offered promise. The very name of the group hints at a better world—Sweet Honey in the Rock refers to a New Testament psalm that speaks of a world so abundant that even the rocks offer honey when split open. It’s a vision of a world that offers justice, peace and equality.

Through the group’s different iterations, which have featured more than 20 vocalists, that push toward a better world has remained consistent. The current lineup—which consists of members Nitanju Bolade Casel, Aisha Kahlil, Louise Robinson and Carol Maillard, as well as featured musician Romeir Mendez—continues the musical mission that has earned the group three Grammy Award nominations and spots on some of the world’s most prominent stages.

The group continues to strive for access and equity, whether it’s through their original compositions, their unique interpretations of music from artists ranging from Marvin Gaye to Bob Dylan or the way that they present their art. The group has long offered American Sign Language interpretations during its shows, a feature that will be part of the group’s performance at Macky.

It’s an artistic approach that offers solutions, even in the face of struggle, injustice and darkness.

“We are very forward-thinking as an organization, constantly re-evaluating how we can express concepts to uplift and create change through our music and concerts,” Maillard says. “*#LoveInEvolution* has a more contemporary sound and feel because as people in the group grow and change, we want to hear different things, feel different things and bring fresh elements to our presentation.”

*The performance is sponsored by the Center for African and African American Studies (CAAAS) and the Colorado Association for the Deaf.*

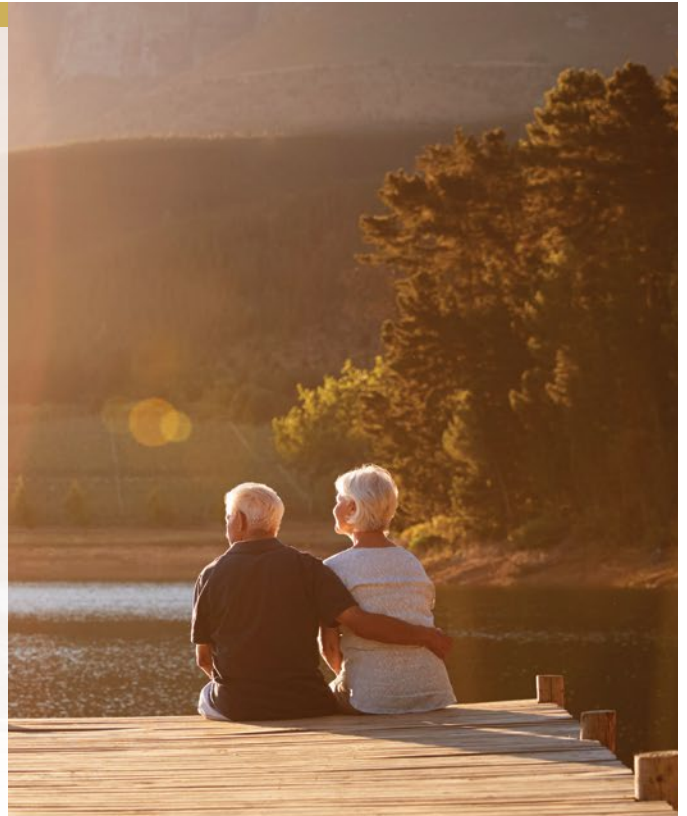
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# Sweet Honey in the Rock® Feb. 28





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# SPOTLIGHT



## 2024-25 Ekstrand Graduate Student Competition winners announced

By Kathryn Bistodeau

We are thrilled to announce the winner of the 2024-25 Bruce Ekstrand Memorial Graduate Student Performance Competition: The Koa String Quartet!

The College of Music's current graduate string quartet in residence—comprising violinists Kisa Uradomo and Leah Pernick, violist Thomas Chafe and cellist Heewon Lee—studies with the Takács Quartet. On Nov. 19, the Koa Quartet performed selections from works by Joseph Haydn and Kevin Lau, and was awarded \$2,000 for their Ekstrand win.

"We are so happy to have started our residency at CU Boulder on such a positive note! It was an incredible opportunity to perform onstage alongside so many of our talented peers," Pernick says. "Thank you so much to the Takács Quartet and string faculty for their mentorship, and to

the Ekstrand family for their generous support of students."

Lee shares, "Our main goal of the performance was to have fun and keep up the good energy. I think us dancing backstage helped with that. But in all seriousness, we're super thankful for the win!"

Second prize (\$1,000) went to saxophonist Joel Ferst, who also won the audience favorite prize (\$250). This year's other Ekstrand finalists (\$500 each) include pianist John-Austin King, baritone Andrew Konopak and violinist Laura Pérez Rangel.

This year's esteemed panel of judges were **Jason Bergman**—Associate Professor of Trumpet, Indiana University Jacobs School of Music; **Courtney Hershey Bress**—Principal Harpist, Colorado Symphony; Adjunct Professor of Harp, University of Denver

Lamont School of Music; and Lecturer of Harp, University of Wyoming; and **Cameron Stowe**—Chair, Collaborative Piano, New England Conservatory; and Director, Collaborative Piano, Aspen Music Festival and School.

The Ekstrand Competition was launched by previous College of Music dean Robert Fink, and later renamed to honor the late Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and psychology professor Bruce Ekstrand. The competition invites top graduate students to compete for cash prizes for professional development. This year's faculty judges for the semi-final competition were Renee Gilliland, Jeremy Reger and Branden Steinmetz.

Semi-finalists included:

- Voice: Sidney Grimm, soprano; Andrew Konopak, baritone; James Robinson, baritone
- Piano: John-Austin King and Luca Pompilio
- Strings: Julian Bennett, cello; Koa String Quartet; Laura Pérez Rangel, violin
- Woodwinds: Joel Ferst, saxophone; Dylan King, saxophone; Harold Gomez-Montoya, clarinet
- Brass + percussion: Mark Bennett, trombone; Sydney Hoehl, trumpet; Connor Johnson, trumpet

Congratulations to the Koa String Quartet and all participants in this year's competition, as well as their teachers—the Takács Quartet, Andrew Cooperstock, Andrew Garland and Nathan Mertens in the final round. Our special thanks also to collaborative pianists Runze Li, Hsiao-Ling Lin, Matthew Sebald—and all other pianists, mentors and teachers involved in the previous rounds of this competition.

*Partially funded by the Ekstrand Competition Endowment Fund, this annual event is the premier performance competition for the College of Music's most outstanding graduate students.*





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# PROGRAM NOTES

By Marc Shulgold

## String Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

On June 1, 1801, Beethoven sent a letter to his dear friend, violinist Karl Amenda, confessing in strict confidence his increasing deafness (“I beg you to treat the matter of my hearing as a great secret ...”). Then, before signing off, he made another request: to resist sharing a string quartet the composer had given him, adding, “... only now have I learned to write quartets as they should be written.” The manuscript in question was a first version of what would become Op. 18, No. 1. That score survives, providing an early glimpse into Beethoven’s quest for perfection. Nearly every bar would be revised, with changes in harmonies, dynamics, rhythms, etc. This comes as no surprise, considering the long and intense labor given to all the String Quartets of Opus 18. The notion of tackling this genre came as early as 1795, on a suggestion from Haydn’s friend and benefactor Count Apponyi. Accepting a quartet commission from Prince Lobkowitz in 1798, Beethoven jumped at the opportunity to display his talents to Vienna and, specifically, to his onetime teacher, the elderly Haydn (who’d received a similar commission from the prince). Years of labor followed until Beethoven saw fit in 1801 to submit six quartets—that number following the precedent favored by publishers.

Begun in early 1799, the F-major Quartet was actually the second to be composed (following No. 3), but it was given the No. 1 designation based on its immediate attractiveness to potential buyers. It certainly does make a positive first impression with its hushed, unison opening statement. This *Allegro* and the following movement became quite

# TAKÁCS QUARTET

Jan. 12 | 13 2025

Grusin Music Hall

## PROGRAM

### String Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Adagio affettuoso ed appassionato
- III. Scherzo. Allegro molto
- IV. Allegro

### String Quartet No. 1 “Les Six Rencontres”

Stephen Hough (b. 1961)

1. Au boulevard
2. Au parc
3. À l’hôtel
4. Au théâtre
5. À l’église
6. Au marché

## Intermission

### Piano Quintet in F minor, Op. 34

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

- I. Allegro non troppo
- II. Andante, un poco Adagio
- III. Scherzo. Allegro
- IV. Finale. Poco sostenuto —  
Allegro non troppo

with Margaret McDonald, piano

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popular with amateur players—no record exists of its first public performance. The remarkable *Adagio* is in the powerful key of D minor (the key of Mozart’s *Requiem* and Beethoven’s Ninth), and it emphatically reveals the composer’s deep soulfulness. According to his pal Amenda, Beethoven was inspired here by the tragic final scene of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Its mournful pulsations, broken briefly by a hopeful episode, leads to an angry eruption that suggests an acknowledgment of a fate that had befallen Shakespeare’s lovers and, perhaps, one that lies in wait for Beethoven himself. The brief, witty *Scherzo* takes us to a finale filled with plenty of Haydnesque bounce, dominated by an endless series of dizzying passages shared equally by all four voices.

## **String Quartet No. 1 “Les Six Rencontres”**

Stephen Hough (b. 1961)

The Takács Quartet deserves an extra-healthy round of applause as they walk onstage for this delightful piece, since it would not exist without them. Hough’s Quartet originated from the group’s commission (and a resulting dedication to them) intended for inclusion in their recording for the Hyperion label featuring Ravel’s familiar String Quartet and Henri Dutilleux’s *Ainsi la nuit* (the latter performed by the Takács at CU Boulder a few seasons back). The title of Hough’s six-movement work refers to encounters of sorts with the *Groupe des Six*. That nickname was given to six composers famous in Paris during the 1920s: Poulenc, Honegger, Milhaud, Auric, Durey and Tailleferre. Not so much descriptions of meetings with these legendary music makers, as more a stroll through their world. Hough, an internationally renowned English pianist and composer, created these miniatures that are mostly portraits of locales popular in the thriving world of Paris in its heyday.

Seemingly enjoying himself in composing this bubbly, free-flowing music, Hough appears to have had as much fun writing extended program notes. In describing each movement, he relies on such colorful phrases as “... the central section warming the trope like vermouth around a bitter olive” (*Au parc*), or “A spiccatissimo skeleton of a motive dances in a recurring harmonic sequence, decorated with each repetition in more and more lurid colours, smeared with lipstick glissandos” (*Au théâtre*).

He is concise in many of his descriptions, however, sharing his desire to convey the dizzy world of a bygone era, one in which painters, poets, novelists and musicians ate, drank, conversed, romanced and created amazing art. The composer brought in influencers such as Stravinsky (labeled by Hough as a godfather to *Les Six*). In the opening and closing movements he singled out “Stravinskian spikes” to describe the angular stabs in the music. Significantly, *Les Six* inspired “a flavour more than a style” in this Quartet. Hough also reminded that he’d composed this music with an ear toward Ravel and Dutilleux, who were sharing that Hyperion recording (The piece received its live premiere in December 2021 by the Takács in Costa Mesa, California). One charming image of those long-ago days in Paris, described in his program notes, might be helpful when listening to these miniatures, which range from two to four minutes each: “Poulenc and his party could never be accused of being clock-watchers; their social hours were dimly lit by sputtering candles as their parties continued through the night, with Jean Cocteau or Picasso (other godfathers) opening yet another bottle of Bordeaux.” Oh, to have been there ...

## Piano Quintet in F minor, Op. 34

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Composers usually work alone, sketching ideas, scratching them out, discarding them, starting over, and finally releasing them for publication. It's a lonely struggle. Brahms was no different—reportedly destroying dozens of failed attempts at chamber works. His brilliant Piano Quintet is another story, however. Its saga from start to finish is actually a collaboration, one that demonstrates the composer's ability to listen to suggestions and follow them (imagine Beethoven being so gracious!). We begin with a Brahms string quintet with two cellos sent to his close friend, the violinist Joseph Joachim, who read through the work and wrote its author on April 15, 1863, praising the music's "overpowering strength," while adding "what is lacking is, in a word, charm." Brahms dutifully made some corrections. Still no luck. By February of the next year, the quintet was transformed into a sonata for two pianos. He tried it out in private with another friend, Carl Tausig. Clara Schumann became familiar with both versions and added her two cents in a letter on July 22, 1864, referring to the keyboard setting: "The work is splendid, but it cannot be called a sonata ... it requires an orchestra ... So please remodel it once more!"

Along comes another voice, Hermann Levi, who suggested a piano quintet. Bingo! On Nov. 5, 1865, Levi received the finished score and wrote excitedly to Brahms, "You have turned a monotonous work for two pianos into a thing of great beauty ..." That said, Brahms held onto his "monotonous work" and had the Sonata for two pianos published as Opus 34a. So we have the F-minor Piano Quintet, Op. 34, a majestic masterpiece, one that Brahms created with a little help from his friends.

The brooding opening to the *Allegro* offers the sort of tension that Brahms usually reserved for his symphonies—and in fact, there are numerous orchestral elements in this work that remind of Schumann's comment. This first movement unfolds with a dizzying series of ideas that confirm the final choice of instrumentation, as the piano and strings hold the spotlight equally and with a natural sense of belonging.

Then, Brahms lets us relax in a gently swaying *Andante*, led by a simple melody offered by the piano and supported by the strings in sweet, close harmonies. We're in a quiet place as the *Scherzo* arrives. Almost invisibly, the cello offers a metronomic plucked bass supporting a mysterious little tune. Then, the explosion, as if Brahms were hiding in the bushes waiting to pounce with a wicked march. Once again, the sound is orchestral. The piano is used as a full-throttle force, matched by the combined strength of the string quartet, as the five players seem to rise above the limits of their individual voices. The effect here is as exciting as chamber music gets. The trio section arrives, offering a chance to catch our breath with a noble hymn sung by the piano. But watch out, the *Scherzo* will return.

If you thought you'd heard enough brooding openings, get ready for the finale. It's like nothing else Brahms had ever penned: strange, dissonant, seemingly aimless. Finally, the cello introduces a jolly tune and we're off on a romp through a rondo of strikingly varied tunes—including a somber episode when time seems to stop. Suddenly, the coda begins and we rush through a dazzling finish. If it took a handful of Brahms' pals to help him pull this piece together, this immortal Piano Quintet-by-committee was worth the effort.



# THE TAKÁCS QUARTET

The world-renowned Takács Quartet is now entering its 50th anniversary season. Edward Dusinberre, Harumi Rhodes (violins), Richard O'Neill (viola) and András Fejér (cello) are excited about projects including a new concerto for them and the Colorado Music Festival orchestra by Gabriela Lena Frank. In November the group will release its latest Hyperion project, *Flow* by Nokuthula Ngwenyama. A new album with pianist Marc Andre Hamelin will be released in the spring featuring works by Florence Price and Antonín Dvořák.

The Takács maintains a busy international touring schedule. In 2025 the ensemble will perform in South Korea, Japan and Australia. The Australian tour is centered around a new piece by Kathy Milliken for quartet and narrator. As associate artists at London's Wigmore Hall, the group will present four concerts featuring works by Haydn, Britten, Ngwenyama, Beethoven, Janáček and two performances of Schubert's cello quintet with Adrian Brendel. During the season the ensemble will play at other prestigious European venues including Barcelona, Budapest, Milan, Basel, Bath Mozartfest and Bern.

The group's North American engagements include concerts in New York, Vancouver, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Lajolla, Berkeley, Ann Arbor, Chicago, Tucson, Portland and Princeton, and collaborations with pianists Stephen Hough and Jeremy Denk.

The members of the Takács Quartet are Christoffersen Fellows and Artists in Residence at the University of Colorado Boulder. During the summer months the Takács join the faculty at the Music Academy of the West, running an intensive quartet seminar.

The Takács has recorded for Hyperion since 2005. Their most recent album includes Schubert's final quartet D887. This and all their other recordings are available to stream at [hyperion-streaming.co.uk](https://www.hyperion-streaming.co.uk). In 2021 the Takács won a Presto Music Recording of the Year Award for their recordings of string quartets by Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn, and a Gramophone Award with pianist Garrick Ohlsson for piano quintets by Amy Beach and Elgar. Other releases for Hyperion feature works by Haydn, Schubert, Janáček, Smetana, Debussy and Britten, as well as piano quintets by César Franck and Shostakovich (with Marc-André Hamelin), and 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 in the Recordings section of the Quartet's website.

The Takács Quartet is known for its innovative programming. In 2021-22 the ensemble partnered with bandoneon virtuoso Julien Labro to premiere new works by Clarice Assad and Bryce Dessner, commissioned by Music Accord. In 2014 the Takács performed a program inspired by Philip Roth's novel *Everyman* with Meryl Streep at Princeton, 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, and played regularly with the Hungarian Folk group Muzsikás.

In 2014 the Takács became the first string quartet to be awarded the Wigmore Hall Medal. In 2012, Gramophone announced that the Takács was the first string quartet to be inducted into its Hall of Fame. The ensemble also won the 2011 Award for Chamber Music and Song presented by the Royal Philharmonic Society in 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. The group 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. The Quartet made its North American debut tour in 1982. Members of the Takács Quartet are the grateful beneficiaries of an instrument loan by the Drake Foundation. We are grateful to be Thomastik-Infeld Artists.

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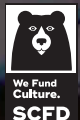
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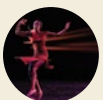
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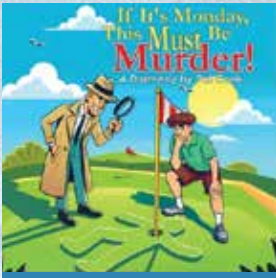
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# LEIGH HOLMAN TO LEAD COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY AS NEW MARSHAL

By Greg Swenson

Leigh Holman, director of CU Boulder's Eklund Opera Program, has been named the new commencement marshal.

Holman, a CU Boulder alumna who has been with the university for 15 years, replaces Bud Coleman who has led the spring commencement ceremony since 2018.

"On behalf of our entire college, we're proud of Leigh Holman assuming the role of the university's next commencement marshal," said College of Music Dean John Davis, also noting Holman's transformative role as director of the college's highly regarded Eklund Opera Program and New Opera Workshop (CU NOW).

"Leigh's work advances our mission to develop multiskilled, multifaceted universal musicians with flexible career options, thereby also amplifying momentum toward more interdisciplinary collaborations across our campus. In that spirit, as commencement marshal, Leigh perfectly represents not only the College of Music, but also our increasingly interconnected campus community."

The role of commencement marshal is mostly behind the scenes, until the day of the ceremony when Holman will be front and center on stage before thousands of graduates and their guests. It's a role she relishes and is excited to take on.

"As a performer, I feel comfortable being on stage. And part of the job of being commencement marshal is emceeding the event, so I feel very comfortable in that role," she said. "The main thing I'm excited about is being a part of this special day for our

students, a day that hopefully they'll never forget."

Holman took some time to talk with CU Boulder Today about herself, her time at CU Boulder and her new role as commencement marshal.

## DIRECTOR, EKLUND OPERA PROGRAM

I am the director of opera for the College of Music, and that means I'm the director of the program administratively, but I'm also the resident stage director. I am in charge of working with my team to cast shows, choose the operas we will be performing and, more importantly, I come up with the vision for the show ... what it's going to look like, what it's going to feel like and what the characters will be like.

So I'm really a storyteller, and I use acting and visual elements on stage to tell that story. That's what a stage director does, and that's my role here at CU.

## NEW OPERA WORKSHOP

In the summer we have a program that I started called the New Opera Workshop (CU NOW). It's a really exciting program where we bring in opera composers who are working on new projects and pair them with our wonderfully talented students who then bring the opera's characters and the music to life. So the composers get to work on their project in a beautiful setting here in Boulder, and our students get the opportunity to work with some of the most renowned creators of opera in the world.

## ROAD TO CU BOULDER

My grandparents went to CU Boulder in the 1920s. After graduating—my grandmother graduated too, which was almost unheard of back then—

they moved to Tennessee. When I was growing up, we lived in Tennessee but my grandparents had moved back to Colorado, so we went to visit them every summer.

After completing my undergraduate and graduate degrees and working for a while, I decided that I wanted to teach voice and direct operas. I had a few schools on my list, and CU was one of them. So, in my 30s, I went back to school and got my doctorate. After teaching at the college level for a few years and working with Opera Colorado, I came to work at CU Boulder. I feel very lucky to have my dream job. It's pretty awesome to be a teacher where my grandparents went to college.

## PASSION FOR SINGING AND OPERA

I've been a singer since birth. I think the first time I ever sang in public I was 4 years old, and I sang the song "Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head." I'll never forget it. I was a voice major in college where I studied classical music. I am a mezzo soprano, which is fun because it is one of the lower soprano voices, so you get cast in roles such as witches. So I sang, went to college to study voice and started doing opera. And then after college, I did opera professionally.

## PEOPLE WOULD BE SURPRISED TO KNOW...

I think people would be surprised that I ride a motorcycle. One other thing ... When I was in high school, I was a Congressional page in Washington, D.C. I was from this little rural town in Tennessee, and I was asked by my Congressman to come to D.C. to be a page. I served during the end of the Carter administration.





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*Current as of Dec. 15, 2024.*

## CONTACT US

**Online:** [cupresents.org](http://cupresents.org)

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