

CU ★ PRESENTS

2020-21 Season
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CU ★ PRESENTS is the home of performing arts at the University of Colorado Boulder.



The Grammy Award-winning **Takács Quartet** has been moving audiences and selling out concerts for three decades at CU Boulder.

As we gather, we honor and acknowledge that the University of Colorado's four campuses are on the traditional territories and ancestral homelands of the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Ute, Apache, Comanche, Kiowa, Lakota, Pueblo and Shoshone Nations. Further, we acknowledge the 48 contemporary tribal nations historically tied to the lands that comprise what is now called Colorado.

Acknowledging that we live in the homelands of Indigenous peoples recognizes the original stewards of these lands and their legacies. With this land acknowledgment, we celebrate the many contributions of Native peoples to the fields of medicine, mathematics, government and military service, arts, literature, engineering and more. We also recognize the sophisticated and intricate knowledge systems Indigenous peoples have developed in relationship to their lands.

We recognize and affirm the ties these nations have to their traditional homelands and the many Indigenous people who thrive in this place, alive and strong. We also acknowledge the painful history of ill treatment and forced removal that has had a profoundly negative impact on Native nations.

We respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land. We honor them and thank the Indigenous ancestors of this place. The University of Colorado pledges to provide educational opportunities for Native students, faculty and staff and advance our mission to understand the history and contemporary lives of Native peoples.

Pandemic Players: **A Peek Behind the Masks**

By Becca Vaclavik

As the United States rounds out a full year of pandemic living, so CU Presents rounds out a year without its vibrant in-person events. Since last March, departments and artists across campus have spent the season finding new and innovative ways to connect with our audiences. One such group is the Takács Quartet, whose members have streamed its concert series directly into the homes of beloved audience members since September.

“We are so grateful for the willingness of the members of the Takács Quartet to partner with our terrific College of Music faculty and staff in the production of streamed performances during this past year while we haven’t been able to present concerts in public,” says College of Music Dean John Davis. “It is our hope that these events have brought joy and enrichment to the lives of our community supporters during these challenging times.”

From the renegotiation of contracts with outside venues, to the in-person audio and visual work of

the College of Music Operations team, to customer communications from CU Presents, moving the season online has been no small feat. It has been an unusual season inside the culture of the quartet, too.

Following violist **Geraldine Walther's retirement**, **Richard O'Neill joined the quartet** during the early days of Boulder County's COVID-19 response. He stayed with fellow Takács members. The group lived a very closed life, becoming each other's "pandemic pod," so they could safely rehearse together in-person in their homes. And over the summer they recorded a new album for Hyperion Records at the Lone Tree Arts Center, south of Denver.

"There is a very obsessive quality that comes with recording—many hours a day of playing to the best of your ability and hoping never to lose focus," says violinist Harumi Rhodes. "It was an intense bonding experience for us, especially with concert life so up in the air these days. The recording was a wonderful project for us to grow together in our new quartet formation."

Slowly, as the Boulder community settled into its new normal, the quartet returned to Grusin Hall and

other local venues, usually performing via streaming services and always while wearing masks. Though they have certainly hit their stride with the new format, Rhodes confesses they hope to return to the old way of performing again soon.

“We have been very fortunate these past months, remaining safe and healthy and having the support of our friends and family in Boulder. Now, we are mostly trying to be patient but it is difficult. We can’t wait to be backstage again in Grusin Hall and hear the expectant buzz of our CU audience chatting before a concert.

“There is already an ephemeral nature to music, and that quality seems particularly present to us right now. When we perform our CU streamed concerts this spring, we will imagine our loyal CU audience listening from home.”

*“During this time we are especially grateful to the CU community as a whole and especially to our friends and colleagues in the String Department. With demands on financial resources stretched thin by the pandemic, we have decided to set up a new fund. The quartet will be making an initial gift of \$13,000 to the new **CU**ltivate Undergraduate String Scholarship Fund. This fund is not intended to benefit specifically our own students, but rather to support the continued excellence of the String Department as a whole. We feel that the future is bright for undergraduate music students despite these challenging times: We hope that others may be inspired to join us in celebrating their beautiful potential!” — Harumi Rhodes*

*“We look forward to presenting both Takács Quartet and Faculty Tuesdays recitals in person in the near future! We thank the members of the Takács Quartet for their generosity and support of our undergraduate string students through their founding of the **CU**ltivate Undergraduate String Scholarship Fund,” — Dean John Davis*

Takács Quartet

Haydn, Britten and Brahms

Streaming Jan. 10-18, 2021
Virtual performance streamed from
Grusin Music Hall

String Quartet in G Major, Op. 77 No. 1

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

I. Allegro moderato

II. Adagio

III. Menuetto

IV. Finale

String Quartet No. 3

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

I. Duets

II. Ostinato

III. Solo

IV. Burlesque

V. Recitative and Passacaglia (*La Serenissima*)

—Intermission—

String Quartet No. 3 in B-flat, Op. 67

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

I. Vivace

II. Andante

III. Agitato (Allegretto non troppo)

IV. Poco Allegretto con Variazioni

Program notes

By Marc Shulgold

String Quartet in G Major, Op. 77 No. 1

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

As the 1700s slid into the 1800s, music's classical era reached its peak in Vienna, represented by Mozart, Haydn and the young Beethoven. When Mozart died in 1791, Beethoven arrived a year later, intent on dethroning the elder Haydn. Perhaps mindful of the potential "changing of the guard," Prince Joseph Lobkowitz invited each of the two survivors to create sets of six string quartets in 1799. It's easy to interpret these commissions as a competition, but there's no evidence the prince saw it that way.

Still, it's a juicy idea, one that gains strength with Beethoven's half dozen quartets, published in 1801 as Op. 18, while the following year, Haydn could only deliver the two works of Op. 77 — his last completed quartets. Was Haydn throwing in the towel, having encountered Beethoven's extraordinary Op. 18? Again, we can only speculate. (There's no record that Beethoven was familiar with Haydn's Op. 77.)

Or perhaps Haydn, at 67, was too weary to write more quartets—he'd already composed more than 80. He wrote his publisher in 1799, "Every day the world compliments me on the fire of my recent works, but no one will believe the strain and effort it costs me to produce them." That said, he had the strength to complete a major oratorio, *The Creation*, while he worked on the quartets.

What cannot be questioned is the sheer brilliance of Op. 77. The First shows faithfulness to established musical form, though Haydn does throw in some surprises. The opening *Allegro*, for example, follows the rules of sonata form—but notice the startling key shift as the exploratory development section begins. Following an affecting *Adagio*, the composer uncorks a Hungarian-flavored *Menuetto* (marked *Presto*) that is clearly undanceable. Perhaps Haydn was sharing the young Beethoven's apathy toward the stodgy old minuet. The *Finale* zips along with confidence, invention and Haydn's ever-present wit. Any thoughts that he was weary of writing vanish amid the energy and joy found on every page.

String Quartet No. 3

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Britten's third quartet, completed shortly before his death, can be viewed as a farewell to life. As such, it reminds us how important context of time and place can often be. It was premiered in late 1976 by the Amadeus Quartet, which had commissioned the work in 1974. Though the composer, in failing health, had heard a run-through in September, he died a few weeks before its first performance at Aldeburgh. Somber in tone, save for a warped and wobbly *Burlesque*, the quartet is filled with significant extra-musical elements. It was dedicated to musicologist Hans Keller, who had requested a work of only four players, so as to make composition physically easier after Britten's heart surgery in 1973.

Begun in England, it was completed in Venice—a place referenced in the final movement, marked *La Serenissima* (“Serene,” an early nickname of the Republic of Venice). That movement is a *Passacaglia*, built on the slow alternating notes in the bassline, inspired by the tolling of Venice's bells. What's more, the music has quotes from Britten's opera *Death in Venice*. The composer was mindful of the

history of the string quartet and sought to expand its possibilities, adding a fifth movement to the standard four. But notice the movement titles, recalling such familiar musical devices as *Duets*, *Ostinato* (a short, repeating phrase heard in accompaniment), *Solo* and, as noted, *Passacaglia*. In *Duets*, he explores friendly and adversarial relationships between two voices. No explanation needed for the introspective *Solo* movement. Broken only by the occasional hostility of the *Burlesque*, this is music of resignation—a search for peace, completed in a city that was far from England, but one that served as a welcoming home.

String Quartet No. 3 in B-flat, Op. 67

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Brahms was his own harshest critic, never content (He famously fussed over his First Symphony for 20 years). A similar struggle ensued when he tackled the string quartet—destroying some 20 or so attempts because, in his view, he kept failing to measure up to Beethoven. “It is not hard to compose,” he suggested in reference to writing a quartet, “but what is fabulously hard is to leave the superfluous notes under the table.” Even after completing his first two string quartets, he proceeded to spend almost

two decades polishing them before they were sent off to be published as Op. 51 in 1873.

Two years later, Brahms tackled another string quartet. That summer of 1875, he stayed in the lovely town of Ziegelhausen not far from Heidelberg, and wrote several pieces, mostly songs, as a way to avoid tackling that dreaded First Symphony. Among these smaller offerings was a third string quartet, published as Op. 67. By now, his fierce self-criticism seemed to soften. Brahms came to admire String Quartet No. 3, and considered it his favorite. Nonetheless, Op. 67 became his final effort in that genre. (The Symphony No. 1, incidentally, was published as Op. 68.)

In the flowing melodies of this sunny music, it's easy to hear the influence of his idyllic warm-weather surroundings—quite a contrast to the intensity of the earlier Op. 51 quartets. Compared to the endless revising of those two, progress on Op. 67 went smoothly and relatively quickly. We hear a delightful polka-like hunting tune in the opening *Vivace* and a catchy little *Gavotte* used as the theme of the concluding set of variations. In between is the exquisitely serene *Andante* and a *Scherzo*-like *Agitato* that gives the viola plenty of time in the spotlight.

About the performers

The Takács Quartet, now entering its 46th season, is renowned for the vitality of its interpretations.

The Guardian recently commented: “What endures about the Takács Quartet, year after year, is how equally the four players carry the music.” BBC Music Magazine described the group’s recent Dohnányi recording with pianist Marc André Hamelin as “totally compelling, encapsulating a vast array of colours and textures.” Based in Boulder at the University of Colorado, Edward Dusinberre and Harumi Rhodes (violin), Richard O’Neill (viola), and András Fejér (cello) perform 80 concerts a year worldwide.

In June 2020, the Takács Quartet was featured in the BBC television series *Being Beethoven*. The ensemble also released an album of piano quintets by Amy Beach and Edward Elgar, a fitting way to celebrate Geri Walther’s 15 years as the Takács’ violist before her retirement from the group. The members of the quartet welcomed Richard O’Neill as their new violist in June and are looking forward to many exciting projects during their first season together.

The Takács records for Hyperion Records, and its releases for that label include string quartets by

Haydn, Schubert, Janáček, Smetana, Debussy and Britten; piano quintets by César Franck and Shostakovich (with Marc-André Hamelin); and viola quintets by Brahms (with Lawrence Power). For its albums 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**](http://takacsquartet.com).

The members of the Takács Quartet are Christoffersen Faculty Fellows at the University of Colorado Boulder. 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 are Visiting Fellows at the Guildhall School of Music in London.



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January-March 2021

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