



**TAKÁCS  
QUARTET**

# **Takács Quartet**

## **Haydn, Bartók and Brahms**

**Sunday, Oct. 28, 2018**  
**Monday, Oct. 29, 2018**

# Takács Quartet

## Haydn, Bartók and Brahms

**Sunday, Oct. 28, 4 p.m.**

**Monday, Oct. 29, 7:30 p.m.**

### **Takács Quartet**

Edward Dusinberre and Harumi Rhodes, violins

Geraldine Walther, viola

András Fejér, cello

## Program

### **String Quartet No. 2 in D minor, Op. 76**

- I. Allegro
- II. Andante o più tosto allegretto
- III. Menuetto. Allegro ma non troppo
- IV. Vivace assai

Franz Joseph Haydn  
(1732-1809)

### **String Quartet No. 1, Op. 7**

- I. Lento
- II. Allegretto
- III. Introduzione - Allegro vivace

Béla Bartók  
(1881-1945)

## Intermission

### **String Quartet No. 2 in A minor, Op. 51**

- I. Allegro
- II. Romanze
- III. Allegretto molto moderato e comodo
- IV. Allegro

Johannes Brahms  
(1833-1897)

# Program Notes

Program Notes by Marc Shulgold

## **String Quartet No. 2 in D minor, Op. 76** **Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809)**

You can learn a lot about late 18th-century chamber works by knowing a little about their intended audiences. And a journey through Haydn's 83 string quartets offers ample proof of how listeners impacted his compositions.

During 30 years in the employment of the Esterházy family at their palace not far from Vienna, Haydn had the opportunity to experiment with the unlimited potential of writing for two violins, viola and cello; he also shared his thoughts with young Mozart, who returned the favor in *his* quartets. But Haydn also knew the tastes of his hosts and crafted music that was intellectually stimulating but not overly difficult for them to follow. And, no doubt, many of those chamber works were intended merely as accompaniment to meals and card games.

That long, fruitful relationship ended in 1790, when the composer was released from his Esterházy contract and became a free spirit, so to speak. By then, all of Europe knew of his greatness. The late quartets, of which the six comprising Op. 76 would be his final completed collection, were penned in 1795 and published two years later. They reveal more than a maturity and mastery of the string quartet. They suggest that Haydn was now interested in engaging his listeners (as well as players, many of them homebound amateurs).

The second of the six, set in D minor, demands a focus from all in attendance. It's likely the composer had Mozart in mind with this work, perhaps consciously expanding on the possibilities of Mozart's own D minor quartet, written in 1783 as one of six dedicated to Haydn. Though it was common that a collection of six quartets would include one not set in a major key, this late work digs deeply into the darkness and mystery of D minor.

For reference, consider Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 20, his *Requiem* and Bach's *The Art of the Fugue*, all set in that imposing key. There's more than a touch of Bach in the opening movement of Op. 76, No. 2. The first violin offers two pairs of notes, each showing a drop of five tones (A down to D, E down to A), giving the work its nickname of "Quinten" ("Fifths"). Not to worry if you don't immediately pick up on that interval—you'll hear it shared by the four players a few dozen times in the opening *Allegro*, those fifths occasionally turned upside down or overlapping or played in reverse. (Bach would approve.)

The second movement, a pleasant theme and variations, bears the wordy title *Andante o piu tosto allegretto*, meaning that it's not too slow or too fast. It's a relatively simple tune, introduced by the first violin over plucked accompaniment, expressed with elegant reserve and charm. It's quite a contrast to the following *Menuetto*, a strange, minor-key work that is known as the "Hexen-menuett" ("Witches' Minuet"), launched with the violins playing a heavy-footed tune in octaves, followed closely note-for-note by the lower strings, also in octaves.

This undanceable minuet is contrasted by a smiling D major trio marked with choppy repeated notes. Soon, though, our grins vanish when the stern minuet returns. As one might expect, Haydn can't help finishing up with a happy, folk-like *Vivace* cast, almost imperceptibly, in D minor. Here, we're reminded of Haydn's Hungarian roots and his irrepressible wit. (Listen for those donkey brays.)

**String Quartet No. 1, Op. 7****Béla Bartók (1881-1945)**

As a young composer of 27, attempting his first go-round with the string quartet, Bartók's mind was swirling with thoughts of other composers' music and the search for his own voice—along with the vision of a young lady who had just dumped him. That's quite a load.

All of those factors can be traced in this first of six quartets, a work built on three continuous movements of self-discovery, held together by a few musical threads and memories of the girl that got away. She was a violinist named Stefi Geyer, who so captivated the young composer that he wrote a concerto for her, employing her four-note motif that would soon find its way into the opening violin duet of Op. 7. So crushed was Bartók at her rejection that he penned a piano bagatelle titled "She is Dead" the day her "Dear Béla" letter arrived. The resulting string quartet was identified by the composer's friend Zoltán Kodály as "a kind of 'Return to Life' of one who has reached the brink of the abyss." It's worth noting that Bartók married another girl later that year.

Of greater importance is the music of this early masterpiece, which reveals the composer's early influence from Beethoven—whose Op. 131 quartet, played by the Takács last season, shares many structural elements with Op. 7. One can also hear touches of Brahms and Richard Strauss. However, as this music unfolds from its funereal opening—marked by a two-note descending phrase that would serve as the quartet's unifying feature—it leaves behind those Germanic influences. Instead, it embraces the energy and uniqueness of Bartók's native Hungary. He had already spent time in the countryside, collecting the folk music he (and Kodály) had sought out among Eastern Europe's peasant population. Those melodies had yet to reveal themselves consistently in Bartók's music—but they do so in the quartet's finale.

Are we observing, in one compact work, a composer shedding the voices of his forebears and discovering his own musical personality? It seems that way, as each connected movement of Op. 7 is quicker, livelier and less "Brahmsian" than its predecessor, gaining energy and confidence along the way, finally exploding in an exuberant, Hungarian *Allegro*. Did he also leave behind all thoughts of Stefi Geyer? Of course not. Consider that the cello offers an introduction to the quartet's final movement with a reworking of a popular Hungarian song titled "Just One Beautiful Girl in the World."

**String Quartet No. 2 in A minor, Op. 51****Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)**

Mozart loved making self-deprecating (and often off-color) comments about the ease with which music flowed from him. You'll never find such remarks from Brahms, who, after a decade of struggle, at last shook off the imposing specter of Beethoven and completed his magnificent First Symphony. So, it's no surprise to learn that Brahms' first two string quartets finally saw the light of day in 1873, when he was 40. And we shouldn't be shocked to learn that he had numerous attempts at writing a string quartet early on, all of which wound up in the fireplace. Apparently, some of them were completed and ready for performance—until Brahms changed his mind. The shadow of Beethoven once again?

While we can only wonder and lament about those discarded efforts, we do have the two quartets of Op. 51—and the knowledge that he found time two years later to complete one more (Op. 67 in B-flat). It's unwise to make too much of the influence of those earlier masters of the genre, yet a quick glance at the keys in the pair of Op. 51 does suggest a nod to two of his predecessors. The first of that opus is in C minor—a key employed by Beethoven in such impassioned works as the *Pathétique* and Op. 111 piano sonatas, Third Piano Concerto, Fifth Symphony, *Coriolan* Overture, etc. Then, it's possible that Brahms was so impressed and inspired by Schubert's dark String Quartet in A minor that he cast No. 2 of Op. 51 in that key.

Sleuths examining Brahms' scores have also uncovered a hidden clue of sorts in the opening of the A minor quartet, the first four notes of which are A-F-A-E. Those last three notes represent the musical motif of the composer's longtime friend and violinist Joseph Joachim (dedicatee of the concerto and double concerto). The letters stand for "frei aber einsam"—free but lonely—and served as the basis of a violin sonata movement Brahms had composed for his friend. As for Brahms, *his* motif was F-A-F,

“frei aber froh” — free but happy. Those notes are featured in the opening movement (and closing moments) of the third symphony.

Let’s set aside all those extraneous subjects and discover a brilliant work. For all his discarded attempts at a string quartet, Brahms here instantly emerges as a master of the genre. The opening *Allegro* flows with confidence from that first tune into a new melody supported by the cello’s “walking bass” — a favorite device of the composer. The gentle *Andante* is sung sweetly by the first violin, while the other three voices bring a richness to the melody, until an angry new episode briefly breaks the mood. The third movement is a stately tune in A minor (all four are in A Major or minor), sprinkled with his beloved triplets and marked, unexpectedly, *Quasi Minuetto*, perhaps as a salute to composers of that popular 18th-century dance. More fashionable for his day would have been to produce an exuberant *Scherzo* — which, in fact, does show up in the energetic middle section.

As an enthusiastic student of past masters, it makes sense that Brahms would produce a movement that seems to jump back and forth between an earlier musical era and his own (shades of Bartók’s search for *his* own voice). The A minor finale is a bouncy piece that rarely stops to catch its breath, even as it changes into the major. Then, a brief pause and, in one final burst, it’s back to A minor for a dizzying coda.

## About the Takács Quartet

The Takács Quartet, now entering its 44th season, is renowned for the vitality of its interpretations. The New York Times recently lauded the ensemble for “revealing the familiar as unfamiliar, making the most traditional of works feel radical once more,” and the Financial Times described a recent concert at the Wigmore Hall: “Even in the most fiendish repertoire these players show no fear, injecting the music with a heady sense of freedom. At the same time, though, there is an uncompromising attention to detail: neither a note nor a bow-hair is out of place.” Based in Boulder at the University of Colorado, Edward Dusinberre, Harumi Rhodes (violins), Geraldine Walther (viola) and András Fejér (cello) perform 80 concerts a year worldwide.

During the 2018-19 season, the ensemble will continue its four annual concerts as associate artists at London’s Wigmore Hall. In August 2018, the quartet appeared at the Edinburgh, Snape Proms, Menton and Rheingau festivals. Other European venues later in the season include Berlin, Cologne, Baden-Baden, Bilbao and the Bath Mozartfest. The quartet will perform extensively in the U.S., including two concerts at New York’s Lincoln Center and at the University of Chicago, Princeton and Berkeley. A tour with Garrick Ohlsson will culminate in a recording for Hyperion of the Elgar and Amy Beach piano quintets. The latest Takács CD, to be released in summer 2019, features Dohnányi’s two piano quintets and his second string quartet, with pianist Marc-André Hamelin.

In 2014, the Takács became the first string quartet to win the Wigmore Hall Medal. The medal, inaugurated in 2007, recognizes major international artists who have a strong association with the hall. Recipients so far include Andras Schiff, Thomas Quasthoff, Menahem Pressler and Dame Felicity Lott. In 2012, Gramophone announced that the Takács was the only string quartet to be inducted into its first 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 performed Philip Roth’s “Everyman” program with Meryl Streep at Princeton in 2014 and again with her at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto in 2015. The program was conceived in close collaboration with Philip Roth. The quartet is known for such innovative programming. They first performed “Everyman” at Carnegie Hall in 2007 with Philip Seymour Hoffman. The quartet has toured 14 cities with the poet Robert Pinsky, collaborates regularly with the Hungarian Folk group Muzsikás, and in 2010 collaborated with the Colorado Shakespeare Festival and David Lawrence Morse on a drama project that explored the composition of Beethoven’s last quartets. Aspects of the quartet’s interests and history are explored in Edward Dusinberre’s book,



*Beethoven for a Later Age: The Journey of a String Quartet*, which takes the reader inside the life of a string quartet, melding music history and memoir as it explores the circumstances surrounding the composition of Beethoven's quartets.

The Takács records for Hyperion Records, and their releases for that label include string quartets by Haydn, Schubert, Janáček, Smetana, Debussy and Britten, as well as piano quintets by Franck and Shostakovich (with Marc-André Hamelin), and viola quintets by Brahms (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.

The members of the Takács Quartet are Christoffersen Faculty Fellows at the University of Colorado Boulder. The quartet has helped 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.

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. The quartet made its North American debut tour in 1982. After several changes of personnel, the most recent addition is second violinist Harumi Rhodes, following Károly Schranz's retirement in April 2018. In 2001, the Takács Quartet was awarded the Order of Merit of the Knight's Cross of the Republic of Hungary, and in March 2011 each member of the quartet was awarded the Order of Merit Commander's Cross by the President of the Republic of Hungary.







Takács Quartet: Oct. 28 and 29, 2018



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