



**TAKÁCS
QUARTET**

Takács Quartet

Haydn, Beethoven and Beach

Sunday, Jan. 13, 2019
Monday, Jan. 14, 2019

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Edward Dusinberre and Harumi Rhodes, violins

Geraldine Walther, viola

András Fejér, cello

Program

String Quartet in G Major, Op. 76, No. 1

I. Allegro con spirito

II. Adagio sostenuto

III. Menuetto. Presto

IV. Allegro ma non troppo

Franz Joseph Haydn

(1732-1809)

String Quartet No. 16 in F Major, Op. 135

I. Allegretto

II. Vivace

III. Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo

IV. Grave, ma non troppo tratto—Allegro—Grave, ma non troppo tratto—Allegro

Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770-1827)

Intermission

Piano Quintet in F-sharp minor, Op. 67

I. Adagio – Allegro moderato

II. Adagio espressivo

III. Allegro agitato—Adagio come prima—Presto

Amy Beach

(1867-1944)

with Jennifer Hayghe, piano

Program notes

String Quartet in G Major, Op. 76, No. 1

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

The music world changed dramatically during Haydn's long, productive life. As the 18th century unfolded, performances that had been in the possession of aristocrats and royals soon opened up to the public-at-large, as opera houses and concert and recital halls began to spring up all over the continent. With the growth of the orchestra and the popularity of opera and ballet, an awareness of music as an exciting, hall-filling entertainment increased. And where did that leave the intimate world of chamber music? How could a string quartet fill larger spaces and have any impact?

This was a problem that Haydn tackled, beginning with his two lengthy visits to London in the early 1790s. In between introducing a dozen symphonies, he wrote quartets that were unveiled in mid-size venues with great success. Not only were larger spaces a factor to be overcome, so too was the less-than-attentive behavior of audiences new to the concert world. Often, they were uninterested in curtailing their conversation and snacking as the music was performed. Back in 1642, Monteverdi had encountered the same problem. So, he instructed his brass players to sound an opening fanfare three times, to finally get his audience to sit down and be quiet for the start of his opera about Nero and Poppea. Mozart described to his father the unruly Parisian crowd that booed and cheered during the premiere of his "Paris" Symphony. (Audience behavior would remain a major issue: In 1882, Wagner instructed that no applause follow the ending of *Parsifal's* second act.)

Which brings us to the first of Haydn's last completed string quartet cycle, Op. 76, written in 1796-97, commissioned by Joseph Erdödy. This G major work begins with a powerful three-chord call to attention—or possibly the composer's plea to stop the chatting. It's reminiscent of the explosive start to Mozart's "Jupiter" Symphony and Beethoven's "Eroica." Throughout this quartet, Haydn keeps listeners engaged with some exciting, full-bore unison passages, notably in the final *Allegro*. Not that this work is merely about volume: The achingly slow *Adagio* offers a hymn-like melody that demands close-up listening. In keeping with the changing tastes of musical Vienna, Haydn all but abandons the increasingly old-fashioned minuet by offering a scherzo-like third movement marked *Menuetto*, but with a tempo indication of *Presto*. Try minueting to that!

Today, audiences willingly create a moment of pure silence before the music starts, but those three opening chords of Op. 76 remind us of a time when concert audiences seemed more interested in themselves than the music.

String Quartet No. 16 in F Major, Op. 135

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Completed only months before his death on March 26, 1827, this light and cheerful work contradicts the horrid state of Beethoven's life at the time. As his health was starting to fail, Op. 135 and an alternate ending to the Op. 130 quartet from the previous year would prove to be his final compositions.

Besides the recurring ailments he was battling (not to mention his now-complete deafness), Beethoven was also dealing with the attempted suicide of his troubled nephew Karl, whose cause the composer had championed with unstoppable zeal. In a contentious court battle, he'd won custody but was constantly dealing with the youth's deep unhappiness—leading to his clumsy attempt at suicide in July of 1826 at age 20. It was at his brother's house in October of that year that Beethoven cared for Karl while completing Op. 135. In that stressful climate, and placed alongside the monumental "late" quartets that preceded, this relatively brief work might be viewed as an effort to find some respite, to return to earlier, more pleasant days of Haydn and Mozart (and early Beethoven), when a string quartet of modest lengths and accessible tunes followed the tradition of four movements.

The F major quartet begins with a warm welcome in a graceful *Allegretto* built around a sweet, four-note idea that distributes question-and-answer episodes with equanimity. Despite its friendly demeanor, Op. 135 offers huge challenges to the players, particularly in the off-the-beat twists and turns of the

wildly unpredictable second movement. But then, a prayer-like third movement offers a reminder of the composer's singular ability to lift his music to a higher spiritual plane, with a melody sung in the ensemble's lower ranges. The enigmatic Beethoven emerges in the final movement, which he titled *Der schwer gefasste Entschluss* (The Difficult Resolution). Had he known the resulting head-scratching by succeeding generations of scholars, he might have chuckled.

But there's more here. Right below that title is a single line of music divided in two segments. The first is marked *Grave*, the second *Allegro*—the first consisting of three notes over the words "Muss ess sein?" (Must it be?), the second responding with the repeated exclamation, "Es muss sein!" (It must be!). These motifs form the basis of the movement's two main ideas: the anguished introductory section (*Grave*) and the main *Allegro* theme. What does all this mean? Two possible explanations, as it turns out. Beethoven had been squabbling with a concert organizer named Ignaz Dembscher involving payment for a manuscript of Op. 130. When he learned of the fee, Dembscher reportedly replied, "Must it be?" Told of this, the composer burst into laughter and soon wrote a four-voice canon with the words, "It must be! Yes, take out your wallet"—its theme connected to the exclamation in Op. 135.

A more likely explanation comes from the note Beethoven sent his publisher: "Here, my dear friend, is my last quartet. It will be the last; and indeed it has given me much trouble. For I could not bring myself to compose the last movement. But as your letters were reminding me of it, in the end I decided to compose it. And that is the reason why I have written the motto: 'The difficult resolution—Must it be?—It must be, it must be!'"

Piano Quintet in F-sharp minor, Op. 67 **Amy Beach (1867-1944)**

Thanks to a recent flurry of recordings and concert performances, the works of Amy Beach have now taken a justly deserved place among those of respected American composers. Her archly romantic music can uncover the story of a remarkable life and offer glimpses into the stifling aura of Victorian America.

Born in Henniker, New Hampshire, and raised in Boston, Amy Cheney quickly displayed musical talents that astonished her mother Clara, who was a gifted musician. Able to harmonize with Clara's singing at age 2, the little girl took to the piano at 4, though lessons were not allowed until two years later. Despite her teachers' pleadings, Amy's parents decided that advanced study in Europe was out of the question. Still, her keyboard technique developed at break-neck speed, such that, at 16, she debuted with the Boston Symphony, playing Beethoven's third concerto, featuring her own cadenzas.

The parental control exerted over the girl's talents likely prepared her for a similarly limited adult career. At age 18, she married Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, a prominent Boston surgeon 24 years her senior. Now known professionally as Mrs. H.H.A. Beach (as was customary), Amy lived and worked under her husband's rule of one benefit concert performance a year. It's easy to picture Dr. Beach as domineering and cruel—but consider that he was a member of Boston high society and worried that some might interpret Amy's performing as a sign that the couple was struggling financially. However, Dr. Beach did encourage his wife to write music, which she did with growing confidence, learning her craft by voraciously reading theory books and examining scores. Having studied theory for one semester at age 14, she was forbidden to take lessons in composition, since, at that time, it was thought that artistic women should be guided by emotion rather than acquired technique.

Amy composed with unstoppable energy, eventually publishing 300 works in various genres, and always as Mrs. H.H.A. Beach. She became the first American woman to compose a symphony, soon joining the ranks of the Second New England School: Arthur Foote, George Chadwick, Edward MacDowell and others. When Dr. Beach died in 1910, the concert world opened to his widow, who successfully toured America and Europe as Amy Beach. Among her works are several that have entered the standard repertory: the "Gaelic" Symphony, Mass in E-flat, Piano Concerto and this F-sharp minor piano quintet, which Beach and the Hoffman Quartet premiered in February 1908.

Conceived as a showcase for the composer's keyboard talents, the quintet was well received by critics ("Truly substantial, free, variously imagined and restlessly expressive," one wrote). It's easy to

hear the influence of Old World composers such as Brahms, whose own piano quintet she had played and admired. Elements common in Beach's style can be found here: an episodic handling of themes with numerous key and meter changes, chromatic scales (perhaps influenced by Liszt) and a grand romantic sweep.

She clearly absorbed techniques from all those theory books, as revealed in a brief fugue in the concluding *Allegro agitato*. (Note, too, the recurrence of the opening movement's somber introduction near the end.) Having written some 150 songs, the composer knew how to craft a melody, here lovingly represented in the start of the *Adagio*. Though the piano is the obvious star, there are solo moments for each of the string players, notably in the viola's extended tune midway through the final movement. Overcoming the whims of parental pressure and Boston's male-dominated society, Beach remained undeterred. When her husband forbade concert appearances, she enthused about her other passion: "My compositions gave me a larger field," she later said. "From Boston, I could reach out to the world."

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.





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