

Takács Quartet

Haydn, Mendelssohn and Beethoven

4 p.m., Sunday, Jan. 8, 2023

7:30 p.m., Monday, Jan. 9, 2023

Grusin Music Hall

Streaming Jan. 8-16

Program

String Quartet in F Major, Op. 77, No. 2

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Menuetto
- III. Andante
- IV. Finale

String Quartet in E-flat Major

Fanny Mendelssohn (1805-1847)

- I. Adagio ma non troppo
- II. Allegretto
- III. Romanze
- IV. Allegro molto vivace

—Intermission—

String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

- I. Assai sostenuto - Allegro
- II. Allegro, ma non tanto
- III. Molto adagio
- IV. Alla Marcia, assai vivace
- V. Allegro appassionato

PLEASE NOTE

- Masks are optional in public indoor spaces on the CU Boulder campus as of March 7, 2022.
 - 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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Program notes

By Henry Michaels

The history of the string quartet as a genre is inextricably linked to the ever-shifting interplay between the private and public musical spheres. By the late eighteenth century, instrumental music's public realm was increasingly defined and dominated by the symphony, while the private realm was the domain of the string quartet. This was music that was played in well-to-do homes amongst family and friends, music that was part of a certain type of domesticity. The string quartet was pulled further and further afield from this domestic association in the nineteenth century, however, until eventually it became the central repertoire of its own type of public-facing musical entertainment.

This concert program in some ways illustrates this shift from music that was intended for private gatherings to music that was intended for the stage. But it also shows how fuzzy these lines of demarcation were. Take, for example, publishing. Although the issuing publications of music is, in fact, a public act, the publishing industry was in many ways tied up with musical domesticity. The public and private musical worlds of the late 1700s and early 1800s, then, were not so much opposing arenas as they were two parts of a venn diagram whose section of middle overlap was always shifting and up for debate.

As the composer dubbed the “Father of String Quartet,” it is perhaps appropriate that **Joseph Haydn's** career mirrored this move from the private realm to the public one. For the bulk of his career, Haydn served as music director for a wealthy and powerful Hungarian nobleman named Prince Nicholas Esterházy. Of Haydn's remarkable 68 string quartets, 28 of them date from the first two decades of his employment with Prince Nicholas. These quartets—indeed, all of Haydn's music at the time—were the legal property of his patron.

This changed, however, when the prince, after nearly two decades as Haydn's employer, agreed to a relaxation of the exclusivity clause in the composer's contract. This allowed Haydn not only to write works for publication, but also to receive one-off commissions from other wealthy patrons. Haydn was further freed up when the music-obsessed Prince Nicholas died in 1790 and was

succeeded by the more music-agnostic Prince Anton. Although he still remained in the employ of the Esterházy family, he had more time for commissions, publications, and, eventually, touring and public concerts. The remaining 39 quartets were written during this period of publication and outside commissions.

Which brings us back to the sometimes messy “divide” between the public and private domains, both of which Haydn inhabited during the final decades of his life. Because whether he was writing for publication or for the prince, the inherent “private-ness” of the quartet remained. While publication did make them, well, public, these were still a vehicle for domestic music-making regardless of whether the domicile in question was the home of a work's noble commissioner or of some other talented musician who simply purchased the sheet music (or both as would have been the case with a work like Haydn's String Quartet in F Major, Op. 77, No. 2).

Haydn began work on Op. 77, No. 2 in 1799 as part of a planned set of six quartets commissioned by Prince Joseph Franz von Lobkowitz. This quartet, along with the first in the proposed set, were completed by the end of the year, but the remaining four never materialized (although he did compose and later publish two movements of a third quartet). Haydn, who had almost always published his quartets in sets of three or six, resisted calls from his publisher to issue the extant quartets as a set of two. He eventually gave in, however, and in September of 1802 released a two-quartet Op. 77 dedicated to Prince Lobkowitz. It has been suggested that Haydn may have abandoned the remaining Op. 77 quartets in order to avoid direct comparison with Beethoven's opus 18 quartets, which had appeared in 1801 and were also commissioned by and dedicated to Prince Lobkowitz. Regardless of whether or not there is any truth to this interpretation, it certainly underscores the increasingly public nature of the discourse surrounding quartets. Although commissioning a work could in many ways seem to be a private act, the publicity that resulted from the accompanying dedication was anything but.

By 1834, the year **Fanny Mendelssohn** composed her String Quartet in E-flat Major, the private-to-public shift of the string quartet was well under way. While there were certainly still plenty of

quartets being written with an eye toward home-based amateur music-making, the genre's growing importance—and the Capital-S Seriousness with which it was treated—meant that composers increasingly produced dramatic music whose difficulty meant it was really best suited for professional-caliber musicians.

From the intense fugal section in the second movement to the third movement's repeated denials of tonal expectations (throughout the movement Mendelssohn prepares for but ultimately evades the key of G minor), there is difficulty and drama aplenty in Mendelssohn's quartet. Fanny Mendelssohn, however, was never afforded the opportunity to see how this work would go over with an audience. When she showed the quartet to her brother, Felix, who was also a composer, he was extremely critical of it, arguing that the ways in which she approached to keys and form were too meandering (or, perhaps, too original?). Fanny had this to say in response to Felix's criticism of some of her large-scale pieces:

I've reflected how I, actually not an eccentric or overly sentimental person, came to write pieces in a tender style. I believe it derives from the fact that we were young during Beethoven's last years and absorbed his style to a considerable degree. But that style is exceedingly moving and emotional. You've gone through it from start to finish and progressed beyond it in your composing, and I've remained stuck in it, not possessing the strength, however, that is necessary to sustain such tenderness. Therefore I also believe that you haven't hit upon or voiced the crucial issue. It's not so much a certain way of composing that is lacking as it is a certain approach to life, and as a result of this shortcoming, my lengthy things die in their youth of decrepitude; I lack the ability to sustain ideas properly and give them the needed consistency.

Her discouragement is as clearly discernible as it is tragic. Equally tragic (and certainly discouraging) was the fact that despite requesting Felix's help in arranging for a public premiere, the String Quartet in E-flat Major was performed just a single time—in a private reading. Nor was it published. Despite the increasingly public-facing nature of the string quartet, Fanny Mendelssohn was confined to a

more extreme type of musical privacy for one reason and one reason only: her gender.

As a cultured woman of means, Fanny Mendelssohn's music making was still expected to adhere to gender norms. She understood these expectations as well as anyone. The conclusion at which she arrived in the letter quoted above is that she should stick to writing *song* ("Lieder suit me best"). Unlike the string quartet, lieder were still primarily connected with home music making and involved musical forces that were considered gender-appropriate (voice and piano).

Whether public or private, the string quartet was simply not associated with women musicians, and the String Quartet in E-flat Major is one of the first contributions to the genre by a female composer. For Fanny Mendelssohn to have undertaken that without the support of her family and musical collaborators must have been daunting. And while it certainly seems that she took her brother's lack of *support* to heart, it's entirely less clear whether she took his *judgments* nearly as seriously. While she did not dispute his feedback, she also made not one single revision to the work as originally composed.

While it has been argued quite convincingly that **Ludwig van Beethoven's** most important audience in the late quartets was himself, it can't be denied that they were written with a larger audience in mind. By 1825, the year in which Beethoven composed the String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132, Vienna boasted a thriving public concert scene for string quartets. In 1823 the violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh— with whom Beethoven had worked before— had returned to the city after a nearly decade-long absence, reformed his professional quartet and started a new concert series. Within a year Beethoven's nephew Karl was able to write to his uncle that one of Schuppanzigh's concerts was popular enough to have been standing room only.

Beethoven's late quartets pushed the expected boundaries of the genre, frequently asking much from both performer and audience. But the relationship between the composer, his audience and his professional musical collaborators was a symbiotic one. For his part, Beethoven received access to musicians capable of executing the increasingly difficult music he was producing, as well as an audience—many of whom were

musical connoisseurs—who could appreciate the staggering importance of what he was creating, even if they couldn’t always understand. For Schuppanzigh, on the other hand, there was the marketing advantage of premiering works by Vienna’s greatest living composer; he told Beethoven in 1825 that featuring one of his quartets could have a “big difference in my present subscription [series].”

Op. 132 was publicly premiered by Schuppanzigh’s quartet in November of 1825 after having been performed some months prior in an intimate home-based gathering (the lines are, as always, fuzzy). It was a great success, with Beethoven’s nephew Karl writing that there was “a lot of applause.” In this quartet, Beethoven undertook an expansion of the traditional four-movement form by adding in a short march movement that leads straight into the finale. When Fanny Mendelssohn referred to Beethoven’s late style as “exceedingly moving and emotional,” one has to think this quartet was one of those in her mind, as it includes one of the composer’s most glaringly personal moments. Beethoven, having dealt with a life-threatening illness earlier in the year, labeled the chorale in the third movement with the words, “Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der Lydischen Tonart,” or, “Holy Song of Thanksgiving by a Convalescent to the Divinity, in the Lydian Mode.”

About the performers

The world-renowned **Takács Quartet** is now entering its 48th season. **Edward Dusinberre**, **Harumi Rhodes** (violins), **Richard O’Neill** (viola) and **András Fejér** (cello) are excited about the 2022-2023 season that begins with a tour of Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea, and includes the release of two new CDs for Hyperion Records. A disc of Haydn’s opp. 42, 77 and 103 is followed by the first recording of an extraordinary new work written for the Takács by Stephen Hough, *Les Six Rencontres*, presented with quartets by Ravel and Dutilleux. As Associate Artists at London’s Wigmore Hall, the Takács will perform four concerts there. In addition to programs featuring Beethoven, Schubert and Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, one concert consists of works by Britten, Bartók and Dvořák that highlight the same themes of displacement and return explored in Edward Dusinberre’s new book *Distant Melodies: Music in Search of Home*. The book is published by Faber and the University of Chicago Press in the Fall of 2022. The quartet will perform the same program at several venues in the U.S., complemented by book talks. During this season the quartet will continue its fruitful partnership with pianist Jeremy Denk, performing on several North American series.

Throughout 2022 and 2023 the ensemble will play at prestigious European venues including the Edinburgh and Schwetzingen

Festivals, Madrid’s Auditorio de Música, Bilbao’s Philharmonic Society, Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw and the Bath Mozartfest. The group’s North American engagements include concerts in New York, Toronto, Vancouver, Philadelphia, Ann Arbor, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, Seattle, Tucson, Portland and the Beethoven Center at San Jose State University.

The Takács Quartet is known for 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.

The Takács records for Hyperion Records, recently winning awards for their recordings of string quartets by Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn, and—with pianist Garrick Ohlsson—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.

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.

Based in Boulder at the University of Colorado Boulder, the members of the Takács Quartet are Christoffersen Faculty Fellows, and the grateful beneficiaries of an instrument loan by the Drake Foundation. The members of the Takács are on the faculty at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, where they run a 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. 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.