



Takács Quartet

Mozart and Fanny Mendelssohn

Sunday, Jan. 12, 4 p.m.

Monday, Jan. 13, 7:30 p.m.

Program

String Quartet No. 21 in D Major, K. 575

I. Allegretto

II. Andante

III. Menuetto and Trio. Allegretto

IV. Allegretto

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

String Quartet in E-flat Major

I. Adagio ma non troppo

II. Allegretto

III. Romanze

IV. Allegro molto vivace

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel
(1805-1847)

— Intermission —

Clarinet Quintet in A Major, K. 581

I. Allegro

II. Larghetto

III. Menuetto

IV. Allegretto con variazioni

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Daniel Silver, clarinet

PLEASE NOTE

- 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 Marc Shulgold

String Quartet No. 21 in D Major, K. 575

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Mozart's final set of three string quartets carries the nickname "Prussian"—an unfortunate moniker that calls up a frustrating episode late in the composer's life. The name stems from the misconception that these works, written in 1789 and 1790, were commissioned by Friedrich Wilhelm II, King of Prussia, whose love of music was inherited from his uncle, Frederick the Great. In perhaps an act of wishful thinking, Mozart had written his wife Constanze of this supposed royal request as he set off for Berlin in April 1789. This was a journey borne out of desperation: Mozart was heavily in debt, and he probably hoped that an audience with Friedrich might lead to a commission. There were good reasons for such optimism: A colleague of the composer had relayed to him the king's love of chamber music in general and the string quartet in particular—along with an apparent interest in Mozart himself. Yet there are no records of a meeting at court and no report of any commission from the Prussian monarch.

Evidently, the Berlin visit was a failure. (It's revealing that Mozart made no mention of it in any of his subsequent correspondences.) Undaunted, upon leaving Berlin he worked diligently on a projected set of six quartets for the king—finishing the first, K. 575 in D, on his way back to Vienna. It appears that Mozart was consciously out to please the monarch, since each piece shows particular attention to the cello, an instrument the king played exceptionally well. In K. 575, the cello is given numerous soloistic opportunities, notably in the *Trio* section of the *Menuetto*. (Nothing too difficult for His Majesty, mind you.) K. 575 demonstrates Mozart's remarkable ability to maintain a balance among the four voices, as he introduces one lovely melody after another.

There is a remarkable transparency here, even in the ambitious finale, which cleverly hints at a recall of the first movement's opening theme. How sad that this brilliant work, and the other two

completed later, failed to fulfill Mozart's hopes for financial success. Later, he wrote to his publisher Artaria about the quartets' eventual sale. "I have now been forced to give away my quartets, that laborious work ... for a mere song." One last irony: These last of his quartets were finally published on Dec. 28, 1791—23 days after Mozart's death. Subsequent profits went to Artaria.

String Quartet in E-flat Major

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel (1805-1847)

Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn had two strikes against them as composers: Each shared the name of a towering figure in that field, and both were women. In her day, Clara was famous as a brilliant concert pianist—yet her music remained mostly hidden, due to society's disapproval of creative women. Only recently have Clara's works found popularity, with last year's performances and recordings honoring her bicentenary. But Fanny never achieved such a public profile during her sadly brief life or in the years following. Growing up in an intellectually vibrant household, she and her younger brother Felix received early musical training. Each studied composition with the renowned pedagogue Carl Zelter, which erases any suggestion that Fanny was discouraged from writing music. That said, her gender and a life spent in her younger brother's illustrious shadow dampened hopes of becoming a published composer. The siblings exchanged numerous letters dealing with the art and craft of composition, and Felix accepted her as a competitor, albeit in a condescending way. When Fanny sent him her latest scores—mostly songs—he would offer gentle criticism. Reading through her only string quartet, written in 1834, he chided his sister for an "indistinct" approach to form and modulation. He did like the *Scherzo* and admitted that "the theme of the *Romanze* also pleases me very well."

It's shocking to learn that Fanny's published songs were credited to her brother. No, Felix didn't intend to steal them; it was a necessary ruse, given the prejudice against women who composed. During Felix's visit with Queen Victoria in 1842, Her Majesty sang a favorite song of his, "Italien," after which he informed her that it was in fact written by his sister. Late in life, Fanny finally submitted works under her own name. It was no surprise that she

remained unsure and critical of her music. “I lack the strength to sustain my ideas properly and give them the necessary consistency,” she wrote to Felix. Her music was performed at private parties in the home she shared with her husband, the painter Wilhelm Hensel. These “Sunday Musics” were attended by friends and visitors, including Robert and Clara Schumann.

There is an intriguing freedom of construction in Fanny’s quartet, noticeably in its opening movement, which is miles away in tonality and mood from the work’s stated key of E-flat. The sadness in that music is broken by the energetic *Scherzo*-like *Allegretto*—shimmering music understandably favored by Felix. Observe its well-drawn fugal section in the middle. The soul of this quartet lies in the dark, passionate *Romanze* in G minor, displaying Fanny’s unbridled, often rebellious personality (in contrast to her brother’s more reserved demeanor). In the high-energy final *Allegro*, the home key of E-flat emerges. Those close harmonies and unison passages in the violins and the soaring melodies over agitated accompaniment show Felix’s influence.

The work was likely played at one of Fanny’s “Sunday Musics,” though she clearly hoped for more exposure: “Receive my thanks for your satisfactory review of my quartet,” she wrote her brother, adding “Will you have it performed sometime?” Alas, Felix never followed up on her request.

Clarinet Quintet in A Major, K. 581

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

For all its natural beauty, Mozart’s beloved Clarinet Quintet represents a victory against severe odds: matching the singular sound of this late-arriving wind instrument with the familiar blend of the string quartet. In fact, so new was the clarinet in the late 1700s that the instrument was still in development when discovered by Mozart. Its history dates back to France in the late 1600s, when a single-reed instrument known as the chalumeau had gained acceptance, improved dramatically in 1700 by J.C. Denner of Nuremberg.

The evolution of what we know as the modern clarinet saw several subspecies popping up in Mozart’s Vienna. For that, credit the Stadler Brothers: Johann and, of particular importance,

Anton (1753-1812). The significance of the latter Stadler is seen in the productive collaborations of Mozart and his “excellent clarinetist and careless friend,” in the composer’s words. The quintet and sublime concerto, K. 622, were written for Stadler—along with the Kegelstatt Trio and the extended solo in the aria “Parto, parto” from *La Clemenza di Tito*. Some or all of those works were played by Stadler on his curious invention, the basset clarinet, which increased the lower range (known as the chalumeau) by four notes.

Premiered at a benefit concert on Dec. 22, 1789, where it was sandwiched in the midst of a cantata by Vincenzo Righini, the quintet must have seemed an oddity to its first listeners, since nothing like it had existed previously. Given all that, one is struck by the work’s subtle perfection. Notice how Mozart cleverly holds back the clarinet in the opening *Allegro*, giving the first six measures to the strings before introducing the new kid on the block. The clarinet instantly projects a comfort in ensemble, while displaying the instrument’s warmth, wide range and solo virtuosic possibilities—all in service to some of Mozart’s most inspired melodies. The composer wrote this quintet while at work on *Così fan tutte*, and it shows in the clarinet’s aria-like melody gracing the *Larghetto* (accompanied by muted strings). Besides its unprecedented instrumentation, K. 581 also contains the novelty of two separate *Trio* sections in the *Menuetto*, the first given to the strings alone and the second a folksy oom-pah-pah dance. The final *Allegretto* is an inventive set of variations, interrupted by a loving, introspective *Adagio*.

It turns out that Anton Stadler was, indeed, a “careless friend,” since he kept the manuscripts of the quintet and concerto and declined to return them to Mozart’s widow. Poor Constanza was convinced that the clarinetist had sold them to a pawn shop. In any case, both manuscripts disappeared. Still, we’re forever indebted to the man who inspired Mozart’s late masterpieces. The composer’s gratitude is clear in a letter sent to Stadler: “Never should I have thought that a clarinet could be capable of imitating the human voice as it was imitated by you. Indeed, your instrument has so soft and lovely a tone that no one can resist it.”

About the performers

Praised by the Washington Post for his “sense of freedom and extraordinary control,” Professor of Clarinet **Daniel Silver** is active as a soloist, chamber musician, orchestral performer, clinician and teacher. He has served as principal clarinet of the Baltimore Opera Orchestra, the Washington Chamber Symphony (Kennedy Center) and the National Gallery Orchestra. From 1980 to 1987, he was the principal clarinet of the Hong Kong Philharmonic, appearing often as a concerto soloist. From 1988 to 2000, he was a member of the Contemporary Music Forum of Washington, D.C. in residence at the Corcoran Gallery, taking part in premiere performances of many works by noted composers. Silver has performed with the Baltimore Symphony and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, including Carnegie Hall concerts with David Zinman and Lorin Maazel. He has been a concerto soloist with the Washington Chamber Symphony, the National Chamber Orchestra, the Roanoke Symphony and others. He has played under many of the leading conductors of recent decades, including Seiji Ozawa, Leonard Bernstein and Andre Previn. His festival credits include Tanglewood and Aspen and he now spends his summers at the Interlochen Arts Camp, where he has been a faculty member since 1991. In recent seasons, Silver has performed in Europe and Asia, as well as having been a featured performer on National Public Radio’s Performance Today for domestic concerts. He has recorded for the Marco Polo, Naxos and CRI labels. A graduate of Northwestern University and the University of Michigan, his teachers have included Thomas Peterson, Robert Marcellus and Deborah Chodacki. Silver taught previously at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Academy for the Performing Arts, Towson University and the Baltimore School for the Arts. In demand as a clinician and adjudicator, he has served on panels in the United States, Asia and Australia.

The **Takács Quartet**, now entering its 45th season, is renowned for the vitality of its interpretations. The New York Times has 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 and Harumi Rhodes, violins; Geraldine Walther, viola; and András Fejér, cello; perform 80 concerts a year worldwide. The Takács records for Hyperion Records, and its releases for that label include string quartets 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 (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. The ensemble’s next recording, to be released in October 2019, features Dohnanyi’s two piano quintets, with Marc-André Hamelin, and his second string quartet. A recent tour with Garrick Ohlsson culminated in a recording for Hyperion of the Elgar and Amy Beach piano quintets that will be released in 2020. 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 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. 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. To see a complete bio of the Takács Quartet, please visit takacsquartet.com.