



# Takács Quartet

Haydn and Beethoven

Sunday, March 8, 4 p.m.

Monday, March 9, 7:30 p.m.

## Program

String Quartet in C Major, Op. 54, No. 2

- I. Vivace
- II. Adagio
- III. Menuetto. Allegretto
- IV. Finale. Adagio—Presto—Adagio

Joseph Haydn  
(1732-1809)

String Quartet No. 2 in G Major, Op. 18, No. 2

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio cantabile
- III. Scherzo. Allegro
- IV. Allegro molto quasi presto

Ludwig van Beethoven  
(1770-1827)

## —Intermission—

String Quartet No. 14, Op. 131

- I. Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo
- II. Allegro molto vivace
- III. Allegro moderato
- IV. Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile
- V. Presto
- VI. Adagio quasi un poco andante
- VII. Allegro

Ludwig van Beethoven

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### 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 in C Major, Op. 54, No. 2

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

For any composer in the 18th century, Haydn's professional life sounded like a dream come true: nearly 30 years of service in the palace of Hungary's music-loving Prince Nikolaus Esterházy and his family. There, he enjoyed a salary, regular meals, spacious living quarters, an orchestra at his disposal and two theaters for performing his operas. Haydn certainly relished his good fortune. "Not only did I have the encouragement of constant approval," he told his friend and biographer Georg Griesinger, "but as conductor of an orchestra I could make experiments, observe what produced an effect and what weakened it ... I was cut off from the world; there was no one to confuse or torment me, and I was forced to become original."

There is originality in abundance throughout the dozens of string quartets Haydn composed at the palace—perhaps none more so than in the second of three quartets of Op. 54, written in 1788. Writing them was one thing, but because of the isolation of the Esterházy palace, getting them out to the world was quite another. Unable to travel in search of a publisher, the composer deputized Johann Tost, leader of the palace orchestra's second violins, who was relocating to Paris as a freelancer. With scores in hand, Tost headed off and did in fact succeed, arranging for the publication of the three as Op. 54 and another three as Op. 55—all later to be known as the "Tost" Quartets. Haydn was so delighted with that transaction that he dedicated his next six quartets, Op. 64, to the violinist—unaware, no doubt, that secretly hidden in the baggage of the unscrupulous Tost were several scores by other composers purloined from the palace library that he then sold to a Paris publisher.

All that aside, we have, in this C-major quartet, innumerable pleasures and more than its share of surprises. After an energetic opening *Vivace* that bursts out of the starting gate, the intriguing *Adagio* finds the first violin circling over the somber melody below, commenting with a

constant stream of improvisatory passages that all but draw attention away from the movement's theme. A straight-forward *Menuetto* leads into one of Haydn's most original and mysterious finales. Instead of a short *Adagio* setting up an extended full-speed-ahead finish, this introduction becomes the meat of the movement, continuing for several minutes and allowing Haydn to explore every inch of the gentle melody, accompanied by slow ascending arpeggios in the cello. Though set in C major, the music is somehow neither happy nor sad, even as it changes to C minor. At last, a sprightly *Presto* arrives—leading us to believe that the piece will conclude with a lively flourish. Not so. Instead, the *Adagio* returns and leads to a quiet, thoughtful and totally unexpected end.

### String Quartet No. 2 in G Major, Op. 18, No. 2

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

At the bottom of one of his letters to the outstanding violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh, Beethoven wrote out a silly little vocal piece that playfully hurled insults at his dear, famously overweight friend. The composer titled it "In Praise of the Fat One." Well, now it's our turn to praise Herr Schuppanzigh (1776-1830), who led the premieres of Beethoven's middle and late quartets and may have done so with the first efforts of Op. 18. In 1808, at the invitation of Count Andrey Razumovsky, he formed the first-ever professional string quartet. Schuppanzigh and his cohorts were also the first to give public concerts, performing chamber works by composers, living and dead, all the while serving as "lab rats" in private readings with the composer, advising and encouraging Beethoven, who responded by expanding and elevating the string quartet to an exalted place in music.

Schuppanzigh was a pivotal figure in Beethoven's life—but so too were supportive patrons such as Prince Joseph Lobkowitz (1772-1816), who not only commissioned the six quartets of Op. 18 but gifted the composer with a set of four beautiful Italian string instruments. Fully aware and deeply respectful of the ground-breaking string quartets produced by Haydn and Mozart, Beethoven took his time in working and reworking Op. 18's set of six before finally submitting them to a publisher in 1801. Not that he was playing things safe.

Beethoven had no qualms about bending a few of Haydn's rules.

There are delicious, unexpected touches in this G-major quartet, such as the brief, amusing Allegro section that pops up in the midst of the dreamy second movement, and the occasional false endings that cleverly thumb their nose at predictability. Note, too, the inventive stretches in the opening movement's middle section, and some episodes set in the "wrong" key. In these early years, the composer was still learning. (He had studied for a short spell with Haydn—lessons he claimed taught him nothing.) He was also searching for his compositional voice, as he sought to find his audience.

This sunny, spontaneous-sounding G-major quartet (actually the third of Op. 18 to be completed) received numerous revisions before it was released for publication, reminding us that Beethoven was focused on doing his best for the Viennese. That said, every note reflected his own high standards—his search for perfection and immortality. He sensed that his compositions would survive beyond his life and the lives of those, such as Schuppanzigh and Lobkowitz, who played such important roles in their creation.

## String Quartet No. 14, Op. 131

Ludwig van Beethoven

Beethoven's so-called "late" quartets bring us into worlds undreamed of—and even among those autumnal masterpieces, Op. 131 stands alone. Written between November of 1825 and July of the following year, this work brazenly discards the established four-movement structure designed and perfected by his predecessors. Yes, he'd already done that in the five movements of Op. 130 and 132 (the latter completed in the summer of 1825). But this was something different: a quartet of seven linked movements resulting in one uninterrupted musical journey. In his typical self-deprecating wit, when Beethoven sent the work to his publisher, he described Op. 131 as "put together from stolen this and that." He had already completed the three quartets commissioned by the Russian prince Nikolas Galitzin (Op. 127, 130 and 132) but seemed inspired as he dove back into the genre that would occupy him almost exclusively for the rest of his life.

Op. 131, incidentally, is dedicated to Baron Joseph van Stutterheim, a lieutenant field marshal, given perhaps as a show of gratitude to Stutterheim for admitting the composer's troubled nephew Karl into his regiment. This work seemed to be a favorite of Beethoven's, who, though deaf, was said to be intently engaged during a private read-through by his dedicated colleagues in the Schuppanzigh Quartet. And he was not alone in his admiration. Schubert requested the work be played as he lay on his deathbed. A friend who was present wrote that "The King of Harmony has sent the King of Song a friendly bidding to the crossing." Years later, Wagner was even more flowery, writing of the quartet, "This is the fury of the world's dance ... and above the tumult the indomitable fiddler whirls us on to the abyss."

It might be better to rely on Beethoven's self-mocking description, since Op. 131 does seem at first hearing to be a collection of separate ideas "of this and that." A deeper examination, however, reveals an amazing abundance of extraordinary original thoughts and, throughout, a masterful ability to organize those ideas into a comprehensible whole. There are scherzos that bubble with energy and humor, slow sections of heartbreaking profundity and endless moments of sheer technical brilliance that test the musicians' individual skills and ensemble discipline. And it begins with a slowly unfolding fugue, of all things. At the quartet's center, we hear a masterful set of variations on a theme introduced by the two violins, featuring several changes in tempo and time signature. But that's nothing unusual in Op. 131: There are no fewer than 31 tempo shifts and six principal changes in key. This is music of celestial complexity, and so there's really no purpose in trying to outline or follow a detailed musical map. Takács Quartet first violinist Ed Dusing addresses the richness of this work in his delightful book, *Beethoven for a Later Age*, in which he shares the challenges faced by the Takács in doing justice to those 16 mighty masterpieces. "Of all the Beethoven quartets," he writes, "Op. 131 is the most ambitious: how seven such contrasting movements manage to complement each other and be so convincingly bound together is a miracle no amount of musical analysis can explain." For us, we need only travel blissfully through this magical world, a place previously unknown until Beethoven opened the door.

## About the performers

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](http://takacsquartet.com).