

Takács Quartet

Mozart, Mendelssohn and Vine

Oct. 29–30, 2017

CU ★ PRESENTS



TAKÁCS
QUARTET

Program

String Quartet No. 22 in B-flat Major, K 589

- I. Allegro
- II. Larghetto
- III. Menuetto. Moderato
- IV. Allegro assai

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756–1791)

String Quartet No. 6 “Child’s Play”

- I. Play
- II. Concentration
- III. Friendship
- IV. Sleep
- V. Running

Carl Vine
(b. 1954)

— Intermission —

String Quartet No. 6 in F minor, Op. 80

- I. Allegro vivace assai
- II. Allegro assai
- III. Adagio
- IV. Finale: Allegro molto

Felix Mendelssohn
(1809–1847)

Program Notes

Program Notes by Marc Shulgold

String Quartet No. 22 in B-flat Major, K 589

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

Mozart's final set of three string quartets has long carried the nickname "Prussian." It shouldn't. The name comes from a misconception that the works, written in 1789 and 1790, were requested by Friedrich Wilhelm II, King of Prussia. In perhaps an act of wishful thinking, Mozart had said as much in a letter to Constanze, as he set off for Berlin in April 1789 with young Prince Karl Lichnovsky (later to become an important patron of Beethoven's). This was a journey borne out of desperation: Mozart was heavily in debt and his wife had endured a difficult pregnancy, so he probably hoped that an audience with Friedrich would lead to a commission. And there were reasons for his 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 his apparent interest in Mozart. Yet, there are no records of a meeting at court other than perhaps a quick greeting, 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 his subsequent correspondences). Undaunted, upon leaving Berlin he worked laboriously on a projected set of six quartets for the king—finishing the first, K.575 in D Major, on his way back to Vienna. This work, incidentally, is the only one of the completed three bearing a dedication to Friedrich. As he worked, 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, having studied with Jean-Pierre Duport, a noted cellist and director of chamber music in the court. The B-flat Quartet not only provides important moments for the cello, which introduces the second theme of the opening *Allegro* as well as the lovely tune of the following *Larghetto*, but notice how Mozart explores its upper range—thereby awarding the instrument, traditionally relegated to low accompaniment, the role of solo voice. The four marvelously constructed movements of K.589 unfold with an inviting naturalness. One after the other, the melodies carry an immediate sweetness and simple pleasure, a fact that must have added to the anguish Mozart felt in his inability to generate hoped-for income. Later, he wrote sadly of the quartets' eventual sale to his publisher Artaria thusly: "I have now been forced to give away my quartets, that laborious work ... for a mere song." A final irony: They remained unpublished until Dec. 28, 1791—23 days after Mozart's death.

String Quartet No. 6 "Child's Play"

Carl Vine (b. 1954)

The inaugural commissioners of this work, Mike and Frédérique Katz, wanted to help create music that uplifted, edified and elated. Blind optimism invariably palls, and the challenge was to find a more subtle solution.

The playfulness of children is a perfect example of the unbridled exuberance natural to our physiology, and although it is often fuelled in the young by poor risk assessment, a sense of fun and limitless potential is innately available to us all. When children concentrate, at its best it is complete and unselfconscious, and an ideal template for mental focus. The friendships that children make, similarly, are object lessons in openness and acceptance, and should remind us to continually reevaluate the prejudice and bigotry with which our minds inevitably become cluttered.

Children have the chance to enjoy the most committed, uninterrupted deep sleep, and aging bodies can but envy the restorative power available to creatures so close to the start of their lives. Finally, the intimate link between mind and body is rarely better exemplified than in the elation experienced when running—the sheer joy of wind and speed and feeling truly within one's self, and within the world.

—Carl Vine

String Quartet No. 6 in F minor, Op. 80

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

It's no exaggeration to suggest that Mendelssohn's life ended on May 14, 1847—six months prior to his actual death on Nov. 4. On that dark day in May, his beloved sister Fanny died suddenly in Berlin while rehearsing her brother's secular cantata, *Walpurgisnacht*. She was 41. When news reached Mendelssohn, he reportedly screamed and collapsed on the floor. Fanny, he had written, "was present at all times, in every piece of music, and in everything that I could experience, good or evil." In the months that remained, Mendelssohn, his health rapidly deteriorating, described life as having turned to "gray on gray." Encouraged by friends and his beloved wife Cécile to carry on, he traveled to Lucerne, where he painted a bit and managed to compose. He wrote some songs—the last of which, *Altdeutsches Frühlingslied*, completed less than a month before his death and published posthumously, ends with these words: "Only I suffer in pain, I will suffer without end, since, most beloved, you must part from me and I from you." In September, during his time in Switzerland, he completed his sixth and final string quartet, a powerful work that captures his grief at Fanny's passing. For all its intense darkness, this piece should not be heard simply as a journey through Mendelssohn's state of mind. Yes, we can sense his anguish in the devastating opening pages of the *Allegro assai*, a fury that continues (in the same key of F minor) in the following *Allegro*—which, if anything, expresses deeper anger, concluding with the hopeless wisp of quietly plucked strings. Indeed, emotion pours out of every phrase throughout this piece. And yet, step back and admire the sheer brilliance here, the incredible control he shows in the handling of his four players, the even distribution of voices, particularly in the nonstop wave of whirlwind tremolos in the *Finale*. This concluding *Allegro molto* is breathtaking and breathless music that cannot be contained until the last two chords. As one might expect, the *Adagio* serves as a relief from the fury of its surrounding movements. A touching elegy to Fanny (Mendelssohn had described the quartet as a requiem for her), it begins with a low mournful phrase in the cello, followed by a plaintive sigh from the violin. This movement may bear the same tragic key signature of F minor as the other three, but here, the music unfolds in the brighter relative major, A-flat. That said, there is no solace to be found. Only a heartbreaking expression of profound love and loss.

Biographies

TAKÁCS QUARTET · OCT. 29-30



The **Takács Quartet**, now entering its 43rd 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 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, the Takács Quartet performs 80 concerts a year worldwide.

In Europe during the 2017-2018 season, in addition to its four annual appearances as Associate Artists at London’s Wigmore Hall, the ensemble returns to Copenhagen, Vienna, Luxembourg, Rotterdam, the Rheingau Festival and the Edinburgh Festival. They perform twice at Carnegie Hall, presenting a new Carl Vine work commissioned for them by Musica Viva Australia, Carnegie Hall and the Seattle Commissioning Club. In 2017, the ensemble joined the summer faculty at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara. They will return to New Zealand and Australia, and they will perform at Tanglewood with pianist Garrick Ohlsson, at the Aspen Festival and in more than 40 other concerts in prestigious North American venues. They will also tour with pianist Marc-André Hamelin. The latest Takács recording, to be released by Hyperion in September 2017, features Dvorák’s viola quintet, Op. 97 (with Lawrence Power) and String Quartet, Op. 105.

Last season, the Takács presented complete six-concert Beethoven quartet cycles in London’s Wigmore Hall, at Princeton, the University of Michigan and at UC Berkeley. Complementing these cycles, Edward Dusinberre’s book, *Beethoven for a Later Age: The Journey of a String Quartet*, was published in the UK by Faber and Faber and in North America by the University of Chicago Press. The book 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 became the first string quartet to win the Wigmore Hall Medal in May 2014. 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 University in 2014, and again with her at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto in 2015. They first performed *Everyman*, conceived in close collaboration with Roth himself, at Carnegie Hall in 2007 with Philip Seymour Hoffman. The Quartet is known for such innovative programming: They have toured 14 cities with the poet Robert Pinsky; they collaborate regularly with the Hungarian Folk group Muzsikás; and in 2010 they collaborated with the Colorado Shakespeare Festival and David Lawrence Morse on a drama project that explored the composition of Beethoven's last quartets.

The Takács Quartet's releases with Hyperion Records 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). Future releases for Hyperion include the Dvořák disc with Lawrence Power, the Dohnányi Piano Quintets with Marc-André Hamelin, and piano quintets by Elgar and Amy Beach with Garrick Ohlsson. 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 and play on instruments generously loaned to them by a family foundation. The Quartet has helped develop a string program at CU with a special emphasis on chamber music, where students work in a nurturing environment designed to help them develop their artistry. The Takács is a Visiting Quartet at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, 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. 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. Violinist Edward Dusinberre joined the Quartet in 1993 and violist Roger Tapping in 1995. Violist Geraldine Walther replaced Mr. Tapping in 2005. 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.

Carl Vine is one of Australia's best known and most often performed composers, with an impressive orchestral catalogue featuring seven symphonies and 11 concertos. His piano music is performed frequently around the world, and recordings of his music on more than 60 CDs play regularly on Australian radio. He has an extensive range of chamber music alongside various work for film, television, dance and theatre. Although primarily a composer of modern art music, he has undertaken such diverse tasks as arranging the Australian national anthem and writing music for the closing ceremony of the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta.

Born in Perth, he studied piano with Stephen Dornan and composition with John Exton at the University of Western Australia. Moving to Sydney in 1975, he worked as a freelance pianist and composer with a wide range of ensembles, theatre and dance companies over the following decades.

Among his most acclaimed scores are *Mythologia* (2000), *Piano Sonata* (1990) and *Poppy* (1978) for the Sydney Dance Company and *Choral Symphony* (No. 6, 1996) for the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. His first six symphonies are available on the ABC Classics double-CD set, *Carl Vine: The Complete Symphonies*, performed by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Much of his chamber music is available on three discs from Tall Poppies Records.

Since 2000, Carl has been the artistic director of Musica Viva Australia, the world's largest entrepreneur of chamber music. Since 2006, he has also been the artistic director of the Huntington Estate Music Festival, Australia's most prestigious chamber music event. His recent compositions include *Five Hallucinations*, commissioned by the Chicago and Sydney Symphonies, *Wonders* for the Sydney Philharmonia Choirs, *Our Sons* for the Australian Chamber Orchestra and *Concerto for Orchestra* for the West Australian Symphony. In 2014, Carl was appointed an Officer of The Order Of Australia in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.



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