

Takács Quartet

Haydn, Mendelssohn and Brahms

Sept. 24-25, 2017



TAKÁCS
QUARTET

Program

String Quartet, Op. 76 No. 2 “Fifths”

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

- I. Allegro
- II. Andante o più tosto allegretto
- III. Menuetto. Allegro ma non troppo
- IV. Vivace assai

String Quintet No. 2 in B-flat Major, Op. 87

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

- I. Allegro vivace
- II. Andante scherzando
- III. Adagio e lento
- IV. Allegro molto vivace

Erika Eckert, viola

—Intermission—

String Sextet No. 2 in G Major, Op. 36

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

- I. Allegro non troppo
- II. Scherzo – Allegro non troppo – Presto giocoso
- III. Poco Adagio
- IV. Poco allegro

Erika Eckert, viola
David Requiro, cello

Program Notes

Program Notes by Marc Shulgold

Music for Four, Five and Six

Here is chamber music as spectator sport—a visual treat, as well as a banquet for the ears. Watch the way each composer handles (and juggles) his gathered forces, as players are added to the original foursome. Starting with the Haydn Quartet, observe in the third movement how the lower strings chase after the violins. Fingers and bows fly about in the Mendelssohn when a second viola joins the quartet, creating new sonorities and new pairing possibilities (at one point, the cello reaches up high, seeming to add a third viola to the mix). When Brahms presents pairs of violins, violas and cellos, who gets to introduce each melody? How are passages tossed from one group to another? Use your eyes as well as your ears—and please, don't read during the music!

String Quartet, Op. 76 No. 2 “Fifths”

Franz Joseph Haydn

You can learn a lot about late 18th century chamber works by knowing a little about their intended audiences. And a journey through Haydn's 83 string quartets offers ample proof of how listeners impacted his compositions. During 30 years in the employment of the Esterházy family at their palace not far from Vienna, Haydn had the opportunity to experiment with the unlimited potentials of writing for two violins, viola and cello—sharing his thoughts with young Mozart, who returned the favor in his quartets. But Haydn also knew the tastes of his hosts, and crafted music that was intellectually stimulating but not overly difficult for them to follow. And, no doubt, many of those chamber works were intended merely as accompaniment to meals and card games. That long, fruitful relationship ended in 1790, when the composer was released from his Esterházy contract and became a free spirit, so to speak. By then, all of Europe knew of his greatness.

The late quartets, of which the six comprising Op. 76 would be his final completed collection, were penned in 1795 and published two years later. They reveal more than a maturity and mastery of the string quartet—they suggest that Haydn was now interested in engaging his listeners (as well as players, many of them home-bound amateurs). The second of the six, set in D minor, demands a focus from all in attendance. It's likely the composer had Mozart in mind with this work, perhaps consciously expanding on the possibilities of Mozart's own D minor Quartet, written in 1783 as one of six dedicated to Haydn. Though it was common that a collection of six quartets would include one not set in a major key, this late work digs deeply into the darkness and mystery of D minor. For reference, consider Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 20, his *Requiem* and Bach's *Art of the Fugue*, all set in that imposing key. There's more than a touch of Bach in the opening movement of Op. 76, No. 2. The first violin offers two pairs of notes, each showing a drop of five tones (A down to D, E down to A), giving the work its nickname of “Quinten” (Fifths). Not to worry if you don't immediately pick up on that interval—you'll hear it shared by the four players a few dozen times in the opening *Allegro*, those fifths occasionally turned upside down, or overlapping or played in reverse (Bach would approve).

The second movement, a pleasant theme and variations, bears the wordy title *Andante o più tosto allegretto*, meaning that it's not too slow or too fast. It's a relatively simple tune, introduced by the first violin over plucked accompaniment, expressed with elegant reserve and charm. Quite a contrast to the following *Menuetto*, a strange, minor-key work that is known as the “Hexen-menuett” (Witches' Minuet) launched with the violins playing a heavy-footed tune in octaves, followed closely note-for-note by the lower strings, also in octaves. This undanceable minuet is contrasted by a smiling D Major trio marked by choppy repeated notes. Soon, though, our grins vanish when the stern minuet returns. As one might expect, Haydn can't help finishing up with a happy, folk-like *Vivace* cast, almost imperceptibly, in D minor. Here, we're reminded of Haydn's Hungarian roots and his irrepressible wit (watch for those donkey brays).

String Quintet No. 2 in B-flat Major, Opus 87**Felix Mendelssohn**

As his brief, whirlwind life neared its end, Mendelssohn needed a break. He had become exhausted from his conducting and performing obligations in Berlin, Leipzig and London, so he headed to a Frankfurt apartment for some family time, turning down an invitation to conduct in New York City. “These are happy days,” he wrote. It was the summer of 1845, and those pleasant months witnessed the creation of one of his final chamber pieces, the String Quintet No. 2. (The first had come back in 1826, the year of his magical overture to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*). Not surprisingly, there is plenty of joy in Op. 87—but also some deep sadness, heard most tellingly in the Schubert-like *Adagio*. It seems almost like a premonition of the tragedy that would strike Mendelssohn two years down the road, with the sudden death of his sister Fanny, followed closely by his own.

But there is also a hidden frustration that the composer felt with this work. He never published it (that would come posthumously in 1851), expressing particular displeasure with the last movement, and seeming to view the manuscript as a rough draft. Not that it sounds that way to our ears. Its opening is pure, perfect Mendelssohn, his trademark energetic tremolos supporting a buoyant ascending figure in the violin. When Mozart approached this genre, he augmented the quartet with a second viola—the same approach taken here and in Mendelssohn’s Quintet No. 1 (Schubert’s String Quintet added a second cello). That addition brings richness to the mid-range, clearly heard in passages of almost orchestral thickness. But then, there is the modestly sweet, waltz-like *Andante* scherzando, featuring some charming pizzicato touches (watch for violin phrases that are copied in succession by the other players). Despite the composer’s misgivings, the Quintet’s final *Allegro* bubbles with enthusiasm—not to mention more violin virtuosity and accompanying tremolos, plus some wonderful harmonized duets by the violins and violas. Not bad for a rough draft.

String Sextet No. 2 in G Major, Op. 36**Johannes Brahms**

Becoming an important composer demands a lifetime of learning, experimenting and just plain living. A glance at Brahms’ list of early works shows him developing the techniques necessary to gain confidence and, eventually, public acceptance. That list is dominated by chamber and piano pieces, choral works and songs sprinkled around such early ventures into orchestral writing as the two Serenades and the Piano Concerto No. 1—along with preliminary sketches for the Symphony No. 1. In producing two string sextets within a few years of each other, he was improving his skills as a contrapuntalist, setting one or two solo voices against intricate accompaniments.

In Op. 36, we sense his excitement at giving the cello fresh prominence, and, in the finale, nimbly managing multiple musical lines. (In avoiding the string quartet, it should be mentioned, he was also escaping comparisons with Beethoven.) Not that the studious Brahms was locked away from the outside world: As he worked on the Sextet No. 2 in 1864, he was wrestling with his passionate feelings for two women. Most famous was his complex lifelong relationship with Clara Schumann, who’d earlier received a letter bearing a theme that would reappear in the new Sextet’s slow movement. And then, there was Agathe von Siebold (1835-1909), a young soprano with a lovely figure and long black hair he’d met in Göttingen during the summer of 1858 (Brahms’ companion Joachim was also smitten). So deep were their feelings for each other that Agathe and Johannes soon agreed to marry. Friends felt this was the proper choice, though Clara could not hide her jealousy.

But the public humiliation Brahms suffered at the Leipzig premiere of his Piano Concerto No. 1 in 1859 made him realize that marriage to a struggling composer was not the ideal life for a young woman—though it was Agathe who would break things off. Despite the Second Sextet’s bright key of G Major, there is an element of moodiness here. Even the lovely melody that opens the work, sung over a disquieting ostinato in the viola, is hardly joyous. As this movement ends, Brahms salutes Agathe with a musical phrase based on her name. At its completion, he wrote to a friend, “Here I have freed myself from my last love.” And so it would be.

The Sextet continues with a charming, surprisingly restrained *Scherzo* that contrasts with its middle trio section offering a rousing Hungarian dance. The intricate, expressive slow movement—Clara’s theme with five variations—leads to a vigorous finale that seems cathartic, if one views this work as an ode to lost love, or as an exercise in counterpoint by a young composer learning his craft. Or both.

Biographies



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.

First Prize winner of the 2008 Naumburg International Violoncello Competition, **David Requiro** has emerged as one of today's finest American cellists. After winning First Prize in both the Washington International and Irving M. Klein International String Competitions, he also captured a top prize at the Gaspar Cassadó International Violoncello Competition in Hachioji, Japan, coupled with the prize for the best performances of works by Cassadó.

Mr. Requiro has appeared as soloist with the Tokyo Philharmonic, National Symphony Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, and numerous orchestras across North America. His Carnegie Hall debut recital at Weill Hall was followed by a critically acclaimed San Francisco Performances recital at the Herbst Theatre. Soon after making his Kennedy Center debut, Mr. Requiro also completed the cycle of Beethoven's Sonatas for Piano and Cello at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. Actively involved in contemporary music, he has collaborated with many composers, including Krzysztof Penderecki and Bright Sheng, and gave the Dutch premiere of Pierre Jalbert's Sonata for cello and piano at the 2010 Amsterdam Cello Biennale. Mr. Requiro has performed with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Seattle Chamber Music Society, Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players, and is a founding member of the Baumer String Quartet. The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center recently appointed Mr. Requiro to its prestigious CMS Two residency beginning in 2018.

In 2015, Mr. Requiro was appointed Assistant Professor at the University of Colorado Boulder and has previously served as Artist-in-Residence at the University of Puget Sound as well as Guest Lecturer at the University of Michigan. His artist faculty appointments include the Bowdoin International Music Festival, Giverny Chamber Music Festival, Innsbrook Music Festival and Institute, Maui Classical Music Festival and Olympic Music Festival.

Erika Eckert, Associate Professor of Viola at the University of Colorado Boulder and summer faculty member at Brevard Music Center in North Carolina, has also served on the faculties of The Cleveland Institute of Music and Chautauqua Institution in New York. As a member of the Eckert-McDonald Duo, she has performed recitals in Alabama, California, Colorado, Minnesota, Ohio and Tennessee. Last season, the duo performed in Cremona, Italy at the International Viola Congress and at Palazzo Tornabuoni in Florence and presented a recital and master classes at the Johann Sebastian Bach Musikschule in Vienna. The Duo has presented Colorado premieres of works by Richard Toensing, Carter Pann, Daniel Kellogg, Chen Yi, Libby Larsen and Peter Seabourne and can be heard on the Meridian Label performing Luis Jorge González's *Sonata Elegiaca*. As co-founder of the Cavani Quartet, she performed on major concert series worldwide and garnered an impressive list of awards and prizes, including first prize at the Naumburg Chamber Music Competition.

In recent seasons, Ms. Eckert has performed as guest violist with the Takács Quartet, appearing with them in Canada, California, Colorado, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Oregon and Vermont. She has soloed with the Music in the Mountains Purgatory Festival Orchestra, Four Seasons Chamber Orchestra, the University of Colorado Symphony Orchestra, the Boulder Bach Festival and the Boulder Chamber Orchestra. Other performing engagements include the 400th Galileo Anniversary at the American Academy in Rome, El Paso Pro Musica International Chamber Music Festival, Australian Festival of Chamber Music, Sitka Summer Music Festival and Niagara International Chamber Music Festival. Teaching engagements include the North American Viola Institute in Orford, Canada, ASTA International Workshops in Australia and Norway, Perlman Music Program and Quartet Program. Ms. Eckert also served as adjudicator for the NFAA Arts Recognition and Talent Search, the exclusive nominating agency for the Presidential Scholars in the Arts, and appeared in their Academy Award-nominated documentary, *Rehearsing a Dream*.



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Mozart, Mendelssohn and Vine

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