



**TAKÁCS
QUARTET**

Takács Quartet

Haydn, Bartók and Beethoven

Sunday, April 28, 4 p.m.
Monday, April 29, 7:30 p.m.

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Edward Dusinberre and Harumi Rhodes, violins
Geraldine Walther, viola
András Fejér, cello

Program

String Quartet in C Major, Op. 33, No. 3

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Scherzo: Allegretto
- III. Adagio ma non troppo
- IV. Finale: Rondo – Presto

Franz Joseph Haydn
(1732-1809)

String Quartet No. 5

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio molto
- III. Scherzo: Alla bulgarese
- IV. Andante
- V. Finale: Allegro vivace

Béla Bartók
(1881-1945)

Intermission

String Quartet in C Major, Op. 59, No. 3

- I. Andante con moto – Allegro vivace
- II. Andante con moto quasi Allegretto
- III. Menuetto (Grazioso)
- IV. Allegro molto

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Program notes

By Marc Shulgold

String Quartet in C Major, Op. 33, No. 3

That was quite a Christmas celebration at Vienna's Hofburg Imperial Palace in 1781. On Christmas Eve, Mozart and Clementi competed in a keyboard duel enjoyed by Emperor Joseph II and his guests, including Grand Duke Paul of Russia (the son of Catherine the Great, himself a future tsar), and the Duchess Maria Feodorovna. Then, on Christmas Day, Haydn arrived with some musician friends and entertained the emperor and honored guests with excerpts from Op. 33, his newest collection of string quartets. On receiving lavish gifts from the visiting couple, Haydn responded by dedicating the set of six to them. But in a quiet bit of entrepreneurship, he'd already offered the "Russian Quartets" to a dozen or so of Europe's wealthiest music lovers, who were invited to acquire the scores, priced at 6 ducats (around \$870).

In his pitch, the composer observed that these works were penned "in a new and special way," adding that

he'd not written a quartet in 10 years. This raises a couple of questions: What *is* new in these quartets, and why did they take so long? Over the span of two decades, Haydn and Mozart had pretty much invented the string quartet, exploring and experimenting with every possibility and polishing every page. So, yes, there are new elements and fresh wrinkles in Op. 33, such as replacing the traditional minuet movements with scherzos and introducing an overall buoyant lightness and transparency. Haydn's sales pitch, then, sought to boost interest for works that were simply continuing the rapid maturity of the string quartet.

Haydn's collection from a decade earlier, Op. 20, had laid the groundwork for all that would follow, establishing an equality among the four voices, showing the potential of emotional depth, solidifying many of the rules of Sonata form, etc. The significance of Op. 33 might in fact be overshadowed by how that collection impacted Mozart. Having settled in Vienna in 1781 and befriending Haydn

soon after his arrival, the young composer was clearly excited by his colleague's latest quartets. (It's possible he attended that Christmas Day reading at Hofburg.) Mozart's enthusiasm for Op. 33 inspired his return to the genre and to creating the six masterful quartets dedicated to Haydn. As for the long lapse between quartet publications, Haydn had been very busy with his obligations to the Esterházy palace, composing dozens of symphonies and chamber works for the prince, creating marionette shows for the entertainment-hungry Esterházys and supervising some 50 opera productions (only five of which were Haydn's own).

But back to today's work in question. The third of Op. 33 is nicknamed "The Bird," after the charming entrance of the chirping first violin in the opening movement. Instantly, we are taken to a musical world of joy and wit. The following *Scherzo* mutes the jovial nature of the previous movement, presenting the four voices in their dark, lower register, contrasted by a *Trio* section in which the violins alone call up more bird sounds while they playfully interact on their two high strings. The *Adagio* consists of a gracious two-part melody followed by three fragrant variations. Rather than impress with a complex fugue for the quartet's finale, Haydn delivers a folksy *Rondo* that is a nonstop amusement park ride, heavy on the amusement—particularly in those false endings.

String Quartet No. 5

A half-dozen years, 1928-1934, separate the fourth and fifth of Bartók's six string quartets, a period that saw the creation of such works as the Second Piano Concerto (1931) and the 44 Violin Duos (1931)—the latter serving to enhance the composer's interest in the folk music of Eastern Europe. Despite the passage of time, the fourth and fifth quartets share a kinship: Each is built on five movements, laid out in an arch-like symmetry. The opening and closing movements mirror each other, as do the second and fourth, with the third standing alone as the centerpiece (a concept continued a decade later in his Concerto for Orchestra).

As usual, Bartók is not out to repeat himself. Consider that the fourth quartet's mirror-image second and fourth movements are quick Scherzos, surrounding a slow middle movement—the exact opposite of how the fifth quartet is constructed. String Quartet No. 5 was written in late summer of 1934 and premiered by the Kolisch Quartet in Washington, D.C., in April the following year. The work resulted from a commission by the American arts patron Elizabeth Sprague-Coolidge (1864-1953), who also financed numerous chamber and orchestral works by European and American composers, most famously Copland's *Appalachian Spring*.

Bartók begins this quartet with a furious, repeating unison statement of B-flat, the work's principal tonality. Yet, far from being another angry and violent piece, as was the case with many of his compositions that preceded, the fifth is welcoming in its clearly delineated construction and occasional folk-like touches—plus a hilarious surprise near its conclusion. In the two slow movements, each a reflection of the other, we get a taste of the composer's "night music." Here, the atmosphere is calm and quiet, suggesting the sounds of insects and the

occasional bird call—though at times the mood turns a bit creepy. (Who isn't afraid of the dark now and then?)

Notice the unexpected prayer-like hymn that appears early in the second movement. In the quartet's center comes a lively, rhythmically intricate *Scherzo*, based on the uneven pulse of Bulgarian folk dance. If you're counting along, a measure of nine eighth-notes is divided as 4+2+3. Completing the mirror-image structure of the quartet, its finale recalls elements of the opening movement, here cast in energetic dance rhythms, featuring such unusual effects as bouncing on the strings with the wood of the bow (*col legno*) and some near-comic slides (*glissando*). Suddenly, without warning, the second violin launches into a brief, silly barrel-organ ditty (marked *Allegretto con indifferenza*) that quickly stumbles out-of-tune when the first fiddle enters. Order is restored, however, in a short, furious finale.

String Quartet in C Major, Op. 59, No. 3

The three Beethoven works of Op. 59 are known collectively as the "Razumovsky" Quartets, dedicated, like Haydn's Op. 33, to a Russian—in this case that nation's ambassador to Vienna. For all their explosiveness and brilliance, one element of Op. 59 should not be overlooked: its length. Beethoven's first set, Op. 18, was published in 1801 and comprised six works—the traditional number employed by Haydn and Mozart. The influence of those two also showed in Op. 18's similar brevity: Each averages about 26 ½ minutes. A mere five years later came Op. 59, numbering only three this time, each one expanded by an additional 10 minutes. Yes, it's clear that Beethoven now had more to say, but it's also likely that he'd lost his desire to publish pleasant, bite-size music for at-home amateurs—in earlier days a welcome source of income for composers. Why would he leave those buyers behind? Perhaps because he now had at his disposal the services of the world's first fully professional quartet, led by the comically portly but widely admired violin virtuoso Ignaz Schuppanzigh.

Upon its publication in 1807, Op. 59 led one reviewer to complain, "Three new, very long and difficult Beethoven string quartets ... are attracting the attention of all connoisseurs. The conception is profound and the construction excellent, but they are not easily comprehended." By then, Beethoven had become accustomed to such instant befuddlement. A potential buyer of Op. 59, No. 3 might have been intimidated by its obvious length and constant changes in dynamics—crescendos, decrescendos, sudden forceful notes immediately followed by quiet ones, etc. The mercurial Beethoven loved such challenging, out-of-the-blue contrasts. One can also imagine puzzled reactions to those strange opening chords, struggling, it seems, to arrive at the elementary key of C. And then there's the super-fast fugal finale, one of Beethoven's most exciting, and one surely not for the faint of heart. Still, an amateur player could have been attracted to the charming, short *Minuet* and *Trio* (a nice throwback to Haydn and Mozart). The seemingly innocent lilt of the *Andante*, calling for the plucked cello to serve as genial, if mysterious time-keeper, soon travels to places unknown and unexpected. Best to leave this music to the pros.

Some observers have suggested that the Andante's melody is rooted in Russian folk song. Nothing in the score is indicated as such, though the first two of Op. 59 included tunes specified "Thème russe"—an homage, no doubt, to Mr. Razumovsky. The three quartets of Op. 59, the first of five that occupied the composer's so-called Middle Period, usher in a new approach to the genre. Beethoven's growing canvas of possibilities for the string

quartet pointed to the future, continuing an expanse into uncharted territory that culminated in the final masterpieces from his Late Period. There are, we should point out, some nods to the past in this last of Op. 59: The presence of a *Minuet*, as we noted, and a charming false ending in the finale—reminding of a similar playful moment in the Haydn quartet heard earlier.

About the Takács Quartet

The Takács Quartet, now entering its 44th 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 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 Dusinger, Harumi Rhodes (violins), Geraldine Walther (viola) and András Fejér (cello) perform 80 concerts a year worldwide.

During the 2018-19 season, the ensemble will continue its four annual concerts as associate artists at London's Wigmore Hall. In August 2018, the quartet appeared at the Edinburgh, Snape Proms, Menton and Rheingau festivals. Other European venues later in the season include Berlin, Cologne, Baden-Baden, Bilbao and the Bath Mozartfest. The quartet will perform extensively in the U.S., including two concerts at New York's Lincoln Center and at the University of Chicago, Princeton and Berkeley. A tour with Garrick Ohlsson will culminate in a recording for Hyperion of the Elgar and Amy Beach piano quintets. The latest Takács CD, to be released in summer 2019, features Dohnányi's two piano quintets and his second string quartet, with pianist Marc-André Hamelin.

In 2014, the Takács became the first string quartet to win the Wigmore Hall Medal. The medal, inaugurated in 2007, recognizes major international artists who have a strong association with the hall. Recipients so far include Sir Andras Schiff, Thomas Quasthoff, Menahem Pressler and Dame Felicity Lott. 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 in 2014 and again with her at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto in 2015. The program was conceived in close collaboration with Philip Roth. The quartet is known for such innovative programming. They first performed "Everyman" at Carnegie Hall in 2007 with Philip Seymour Hoffman. The quartet has toured 14 cities with the poet Robert Pinsky, collaborates regularly with the Hungarian Folk group Muzsikás, and in 2010 collaborated with the Colorado Shakespeare Festival

and David Lawrence Morse on a drama project that explored the composition of Beethoven's last quartets. Aspects of the quartet's interests and history are explored in Edward Dusinger's book, *Beethoven for a Later Age: The Journey of a String Quartet*, which 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 Quartet records for Hyperion Records, and their releases for that label include string quartets by Haydn, Schubert, Janáček, Smetana, Debussy and Britten, as well as piano quintets by Franck and Shostakovich (with Marc-André Hamelin), and viola quintets by Brahms (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.

The members of the Takács Quartet are Christoffersen Faculty Fellows at the University of Colorado Boulder. The quartet has helped 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. 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. 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.