



# Takács Quartet

With Julien Labro, bandoneón and accordina

4 p.m., Sunday, April 16, 2023

7:30 p.m., Monday, April 17, 2023

Grusin Music Hall

*Streaming April 16-24*

## Program

### Circles

Bryce Dessner (b. 1976)

*with Julien Labro, bandoneón*

### Meditation No. 1

Julien Labro (b. 1980)

*with Julien Labro, bandoneón*

### Minguito

Dino Saluzzi (b. 1935)

*with Julien Labro, bandoneón and accordina*

### *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme, S645*

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

*with Julien Labro, bandoneón and accordina*

### Astoración

Julien Labro

*with Julien Labro, bandoneón and accordina*

### String Quartet in F Major

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

### Clash

Clarice Assad (b. 1978)

*with Julien Labro, bandoneón*

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## NEED TO KNOW FOR THE SHOW

- Masks are optional in public indoor spaces on the CU Boulder campus.
- 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.

# Program notes

By Henry Michaels

Conversation. It's an integral aspect of daily life. It's one of the primary ways we communicate with one another, one of the defining elements of our humanity. When the opportunities for conversation are suddenly curtailed, then, or the primary means by which we engage in them are suddenly altered, the impact is massive. Bryce Dessner's *Circles* is a work that was written during precisely one such moment: the height of the COVID-19 lockdown. Dessner describes *Circles* like this:

This piece was an expression of the creative process slowly starting to turn again, each individual voice searching for a line and searching for one another and eventually falling into a pattern or dance together, which weaves in and out of this collective rhythm and individualist polyphony. This theme of the individual versus the collective voice is something I have been exploring a lot in my work, especially when writing for a soloist. What does it mean to write for the individual, is it not more important than what we have to say as a group—the voice of many as opposed to the voice of one?

Written as it was at a time when the ways in which we communicate were so fundamentally altered, it is perhaps not surprising that *Circles* is a bit like a musical conversation. After all, what is a conversation if not a give and take between the collective and the individual voices?

*Circles* is also a conversation of sorts between each musician and the group, as well as the musicians and Dessner, whose score is purposefully light on certain musical instructions. For Dessner, this indeterminacy allows “the players of the quartet and Julien to find their own expressions and dynamics, to bring their own voice to these skeletal notes.”

This idea of finding voice, of adding to a kind of ongoing conversation is a useful way to understand music making. On a purely practical level, any musician can attest that playing music with others requires constant communication: discussion with one's musical partners, questions about the articulation on this or that note, and non-verbal

gestures such as breaths or subtle eye contact are part and parcel of the music making experience. On a more poetic level, conversation provides a useful metaphor for understanding some of the broader implications of music. Unlike a book or a painting, music is an artform that requires a mediator in order to fully realize it. The compositions—the notes themselves—of a Bryce Dessner or a Maurice Ravel exist in written form for as long as they remain preserved, but their full impact requires them to be sonically produced during the act of a performance. Translating what's written on the page into sound requires some level of interpretation. The result is a sort of dialogue with the past, a constant give and take between a musician's individual voice and the collective weight of history.

Like Dessner's *Circles*, Julien Labro's **Meditation No. 1** is also a product of the COVID-19 era. But although the compositional circumstances and performing forces are the same, Labro's *Meditation*—the first in a planned series for bandoneón and string quartet—foregrounds not conversation, but rather the lack of it.

In dealing with the tumultuous events over the past year, I started a habit of waking up early in the morning and preserving small windows of time for myself before allowing the craziness of the world to descend upon me. This series captures and reflects these precious moments in time, without disruptions from news outlets, social media, phones, etcetera, where I was able to escape into an oasis that opened a new window for peace and creativity.

Yet in many ways, the very existence of a work for bandoneón and string quartet is evidence of a dialogue or conversation. The fusion of the quartet—one of classical music's most prestigious genres—with the bandoneón—one of the central instruments of Argentinian tango—shows a willingness to involve other voices in an effort to broaden the horizons of *both* traditions.

The history of the bandoneón—an instrument similar to a concertina or a button accordion—is itself a story of dialogues, borrowings and broadening horizons. Developed in 1840s Germany by Heinrich Band (hence the name),

the bandonion was intended by its inventor to serve as a sort of hand-held organ in communities whose churches were too modest for the real thing. But in what surely would've been an enormous surprise to Band, the instrument achieved its greatest and most enduring success half a world away from the small churches of rural Germany. After being introduced to South America by European immigrants, the bandonion (or bandoneón in Spanish) became a staple of popular music, particularly in Argentinian tango. In fact, by the early 1900s German manufacturers were beginning to produce the instrument solely for export to South America!

Argentinian composer Dino Saluzzi's *Minguito* is a wonderful musical encapsulation of this dialogue across cultures and genres. A bandoneón player from the age of seven, Saluzzi's earliest musical training was itself a sort of dialogue or conversation. "There weren't books, or schools or radio—nothing," says Saluzzi.

Nevertheless, my father was able to transmit a musical education to me; music that, later, when I was studying, I realized that I already knew—not from the point of view of reason or rationality, but rather in a different way, a strange way, the way that is produced by oral transmission.

Since then, Saluzzi's career has seen him inhabit the worlds of tango, jazz, the avant-garde, and Argentinian folk music, and he has collaborated with musicians from a variety of genres. Originally composed for bandoneón and cello, *Minguito* immediately announces itself as a work in the tango tradition. The title of the work refers to the Argentinian television character Minguito Tinguítella, portrayed by Juan Carlos Altavista. Portrayed as the working-class son of Italian immigrants, Minguito is, much like the bandoneón, another example of the impact of immigrants on Argentinian culture. (That the character, who spoke a type of vernacular slang, was both praised and criticized for the way he *spoke* is just too good of a coincidental tidbit to pass up mentioning in a program note where conversation is being used as the framing device.)

There are many layers to J.S. Bach's *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, BWV 645, which is heard on this concert in the form of an arrangement

of an arrangement of a setting of an existing tune. (Say that five times fast.) The existing tune is the Lutheran hymn "Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme" by the German hymnodist Philipp Nicolai, which was then famously used by J.S. Bach as the foundation of his 1731 church cantata *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, BWV 140. BWV 645, though, is a transcription of the cantata's fourth movement, "Zion hört die Wächter singen." Originally a chorale for tenor voice and unison strings, Bach included this transcription in a book of six chorales titled *Six chorales of diverse kinds, to be played on an organ with two manuals and pedal*, but more commonly known as the Schübler Chorales. As the oh-so-creative title of the collection suggests, this work was originally intended for organ, meaning that Labro's arrangement brings the bandoneón full circle, returning the instrument to its intended origins in German liturgical music. Heinrich Band would surely be proud.

Bringing the bandoneón back to Argentina, it's time to address the elephant in the room. No discussion of the instrument and its importance to Argentinian culture would be complete without significant mention of the great virtuoso bandoneón player and father of "nuevo tango": Astor Piazzolla. Piazzolla's style of tango was complex. It both drew inspiration *from* and provided inspiration *to* other genres, and Piazzolla became one of the twentieth century's great influential musicians. Julien Labro's *Astoración* was inspired by Piazzolla's immense legacy.

*Astoración* is an imagined duet and conversation with Nuevo Tango master Astor Piazzolla. I discovered his music at age 12 and it changed my life. It enlightened me that music was not only about written notes on a page but a means of expression. His passionate music moved me like none other and he became one of my biggest inspirations. I always dreamt that perhaps one day I could thank him in person, but fate decided otherwise as Piazzolla passed away in July 1992, the same month and year I discovered his music.

Although this musical conversation with Piazzolla is imagined, their dialogue is in many ways still quite real. In the learning of someone's

music, there is again that element of dialogue, of transmission of ideas, and of the give and take between yourself and a sometimes distant other. Labro's conversations with Piazzolla or, for that matter Bach, are as real, then, as his conversations with Bryce Dessner or with Edward Dusinberre, Harumi Rhodes, Richard O'Neill or András Fejér. True, they may not be face-to-face, but they are no less substantive and certainly no less musically impactful.

The 28-year-old Maurice Ravel was in his final years (of many) at the Paris Conservatory when he wrote his **String Quartet in F Major**. Completed in 1903 and premiered the following year, this work was one of a string of Ravel's compositions that quite infamously failed to win the prestigious Prix de Rome scholarship.

It has been noted—both by later generations and at the time (more on that in a bit)—that the quartet bears some resemblance to Claude Debussy's String Quartet in G minor, Op. 10 written a decade earlier in 1893, both in terms of their overall style and because both Debussy and Ravel tied their four-movement works together by using certain themes throughout. Ravel, however, executed this thematic unity quite differently; whereas Debussy continuously varied the character of his themes, Ravel did not. Although they certainly aren't just musical copies, the overall character of the repeated themes (particularly two themes from the first movement that are heard again in both the third and fourth) remains generally the same. While Debussy may have been an influence, and a completely understandable one at that, this quartet is nonetheless distinctively Ravel.

Don't let the fact that Ravel was completing his studies when he composed his quartet fool you, though. He was at this point no mere student. In fact, by the time of the quartet's premiere in 1904, Ravel was increasingly recognized as perhaps his generation's greatest French composer. (This is partly why his repeated failure to win the Prix de Rome became so infamous, eventually culminating in one of the Paris Conservatory's greatest PR disasters.)

Being recognized as perhaps his generation's greatest French composer meant that he was now worthy of mention as one of France's greatest living composers *period*, a list of luminaries that

also included, of course, Debussy. That these two living composers were being discussed in the same breath naturally invited comparison. It was, shall we say, not always entirely flattering for either of them. Pierre Lalo, music critic for the Parisian newspaper *Le temps* and son of composer Edouard, wrote of Ravel's quartet that, "In all the elements it contains and all the sensations it evokes it offers an incredible resemblance to the music of M. Debussy." Now, it should be noted here that Pierre Lalo made snarky critiques of Ravel's music a key element of his public persona in the early 1900s, and other critics, even those who also recognized shades of Debussy in some of Ravel's music, were not nearly so dismissive.

Regardless of the tenor of critical debate, these ongoing comparisons between Ravel and Debussy did their part to spark plenty of conversation in Paris. As Ravel's fame continued to grow in the years following the premiere of his String Quartet, so too did the debate. If certain members of the Parisian intelligentsia felt they needed to, perhaps, take sides in this discussion, they were certainly encouraged by continued articles from Lalo, especially a particularly spicy bit of invective from 1907. Although neither Ravel nor Debussy harbored any real personal animus toward the other, the journalistic debate that had in many ways begun with the discourse surrounding Ravel's String Quartet would ultimately lead to the notably icy relationship between the two peers.

As musical arguments go, Clarice Assad's *Clash* is quite a bit different from the pedantic but mostly polite turn-of-the-century conversations about Ravel and Debussy. Written between 2020 and 2021, *Clash* in many ways sonically represents humanity's collective emotional state during that difficult time. "I modeled the composition on imaginary friction between two human beings," writes Assad, "basing much of the musical material and phrasing in human speech and predictability on human behavior, such as behavioral matching and contrast."

Emotions influence language, and as listeners, we react to the speaker's emotional state, later adapting our behavior depending on what emotions the speaker transmits. On one side we have a person who argues, throws violent insults, interrupts, and yells—and on the

other side; another who either retaliates or retreats, appeals to guilt, pleads and indulges in oversentimentalism. These are constant themes in this work.

Like Dessner's *Circles* or Labro's *Astoración*, this is a musical representation of a conversation, albeit one that has a markedly different tone. Assad toggles between discordant passages representing "willfulness and stubbornness" and consonant passages that display a "quasi-diplomatic character." *Clash* is a dramatic work, one filled with a sense of anxiety and uncertainty, and Assad writes that the work "gravitates towards tension more than understanding." This makes its brief moments of respite and resolution all the more sweet (albeit ultimately inconclusive).

It doesn't take more than a glance at this concert program to see that something *different* is being put forth here. There is assuredly more than enough music written for string quartet or for bandoneón to fill a greater combination of concerts than one could ever reasonably hope to produce or attend in a single lifetime. But this program is clearly about more than that. It also advances the repertoire. It features new works, new combinations, new voices added to already rich musical tapestries.

One might even be tempted to say that this is the kind of concert program that shows the evolution of classical music. After all, writers about music are often so tempted to describe things as evolving, a metaphor for the way genres slowly morph and change over time. But the evolutionary metaphor tends to impart a kind of inevitability to the processes it describes, recognizing certainly the sometimes-accidental way that things unfold but overlooking the conscious creative choices that underlie much of the "growth."

What if there was a better metaphor?

In his 1941 book, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, writer, thinker, and literary theorist Kenneth Burke described a sort of imaginary unending conversation:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion

too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.

Perhaps it is Burke's unending conversation that is the better metaphor for music. Whether the conversations are real or imagined, whether they're taking place between critics and fans or composers and performers, whether they're conversations across borders, genres, or even centuries—perhaps all of music history right up to this moment (and the next, and then the next) are part of a continuously and eternally developing conversation. Each musician, each composer, each lover of music adds their voice for whatever time they spend in that metaphorical parlor, then make their exit as the conversation continues to unfold in new and magical ways in perpetuity.

## About the performers

### Takács Quartet

The world-renowned **Takács Quartet** is now entering its 48th season. **Edward Dusinberre**, **Harumi Rhodes** (violins), **Richard O'Neill** (viola) and **András Fejér** (cello) are excited about the 2022-2023 season that begins with a tour of Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea, and includes the release of two new CDs for Hyperion Records. A disc of Haydn's opp. 42, 77 and 103 is followed by the first recording of an extraordinary new work written for the Takács by Stephen Hough, *Les Six Rencontres*, presented with quartets by Ravel and Dutilleux. As Associate Artists at London's Wigmore Hall, the Takács will perform four concerts there. In addition to programs featuring Beethoven, Schubert and Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, one concert consists of works by Britten,

Bartók and Dvořák that highlight the same themes of displacement and return explored in Edward Dusinberre's new book *Distant Melodies: Music in Search of Home*. The book is published by Faber and the University of Chicago Press in the Fall of 2022. The quartet will perform the same program at several venues in the U.S., complemented by book talks. During this season the quartet will continue its fruitful partnership with pianist Jeremy Denk, performing on several North American series.

Throughout 2022 and 2023 the ensemble will play at prestigious European venues including the Edinburgh and Schwetzingen Festivals, Madrid's Auditorio de Música, Bilbao's Philharmonic Society, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw and the Bath Mozartfest. The group's North American engagements include concerts in New York, Toronto, Vancouver, Philadelphia, Ann Arbor, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, Seattle, Tucson, Portland and the Beethoven Center at San Jose State University.

The Takács Quartet is known for innovative programming. In 2021-22 the ensemble partnered with bandoneon virtuoso Julien Labro to premiere new works by Clarice Assad and Bryce Dessner, commissioned by Music Accord. In 2014 the Takács performed a program inspired by Philip Roth's novel *Everyman* with Meryl Streep at Princeton, and again with her at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto in 2015. They first performed *Everyman* at Carnegie Hall in 2007 with Philip Seymour Hoffman. They have toured 14 cities with the poet Robert Pinsky, and played regularly with the Hungarian Folk group Muzsikás.

The Takács records for Hyperion Records, recently winning awards for their recordings of string quartets by Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn, and—with pianist Garrick Ohlsson—piano quintets by Amy Beach and Elgar. Other releases for Hyperion feature works 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 and Dvořák (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. Full details of all recordings can be found in the Recordings section of the Quartet's website.

In 2014 the Takács became the first string quartet to be awarded the Wigmore Hall Medal. In 2012, Gramophone announced that the Takács was the first string quartet to be inducted into its Hall of Fame. The ensemble also won the 2011 Award for Chamber Music and Song presented by the Royal Philharmonic Society in London.

Based in Boulder at the University of Colorado Boulder, the members of the Takács Quartet are Christoffersen Faculty Fellows, and the grateful beneficiaries of an instrument loan by the Drake Foundation. The members of the Takács are on the faculty at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, where they run a summer string quartet seminar, and Visiting Fellows at the Guildhall School of Music, 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. The group 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.

## Julien Labro

Heralded as "the next accordion star" by Howard Reich of the Chicago Tribune, Julien Labro has established himself as one of the foremost accordion and bandoneón players in both the classical and jazz genres. Deemed to be "a triple threat: brilliant technician, poetic melodist and cunning arranger," his artistry, virtuosity, and creativity as a musician, composer and arranger have earned him international acclaim and continue to astonish audiences worldwide.

Picking up the accordion at 9, French-born Labro was influenced early on by traditional folk music and the melodic, lyrical quality of the French chanson. Upon discovering the music of jazz legends, he quickly became inspired by the

originality, freedom, creativity, and the endless possibilities in their musical language. After graduating from the Marseille Conservatory of Music, Labro began winning international awards, taking first prize in the Coupe Mondiale in 1996 and the Castelfidardo Competitions in 1997. After sweeping first place in the Marcel Azzola, Jo Privat and Medard Ferrero competitions in 1995 and 1998, respectively, Labro moved to the United States, where he further pursued his musical dream. As a musician and artist, Labro is constantly evolving. Equipped with advanced degrees in classical music, jazz studies, and composition, Labro draws from his diverse academic background and eclectic musical influences as he searches for new themes and untried concepts, transforming and developing his creative ideas into new projects.

*Piazzolla*, a major influence and the reason Labro picked up the bandoneón, is also the title of his album with classical guitarist and Grammy-award winner Jason Vieaux and A Far Cry chamber orchestra. Other releases include Grammy-award winning vocalist Cassandra Wilson's *Another Country* and critically acclaimed Hot Club of Detroit's *Junction*. In 2012, Labro embarked on an exciting long-standing collaboration with Spektral Quartet, with whom he performed at NYC's Subculture in 2014, the International Latino Festival in Chicago, and Wheaton College, just to name a few. Their work has drawn increasing attention and was featured in a 2015 Chamber Music America article entitled "Art of Opportunity" by Paul Brady, who described Labro as an "A-list star" with "deep jazz cred." Their 2014 album *From This Point Forward*, which was included in the Chicago Tribune's list of ten new significant classical album releases, is a genre bending collection of compositions from South America. In these arrangements, Labro delicately melds different genres, styles, and sounds with intricate craftsmanship that not only preserves the original essence of the pieces but also brings in fresh new twists and perspectives that introduce a new understanding and appreciation of the music for the modern day audience. Alto sax great and McArthur Fellow Miguel Zenón joined on a couple tracks. *Infusion* (2016), marks his second collaboration with Grammy winner Jason Vieaux. It explores and stretches the repertoire with original arrangement of pieces by Brouwer, Gnattali, Metheny, and the British pop band Tears

For Fears. Labro's latest release *Rise & Grind* (2017) with Finnish jazz guitarist Olli Soikkeli primarily features Labro's jazz compositions written especially for the project and some fresh arrangements of classical and country tunes.

Labro has collaborated with numerous professional symphonies and chamber ensembles, often playing the dual roles of solo artist as well as composer/arranger. These include the conductorless Boston-based chamber orchestra, A Far Cry, Spektral Quartet, Ensemble Vivant of Toronto, and Curtis On Tour from the Curtis Institute of Music faculty of Philadelphia. He has been a guest artist with numerous symphonies and chamber ensembles such as the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of St Luke's, New World Symphony, the Hartford Symphony, the Arkansas Symphony, the Grand Rapids Symphony, the Cape Cod Symphony, the Crested Butte Symphony, the Cleveland Pops Orchestra, the Ocean City Pops Orchestra, the Lebanese Philharmonic Orchestra, the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra, The Bijou Orchestra, A Far Cry, the Linden String Quartet, the Arneis String Quartet, the Prairie Ensemble, and many more.

Labro's musical journey has taken him all across North and South America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East. His classical collaborations include A Far Cry, Spektral Quartet, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of St Luke's, New World Symphony, the Qatar Philharmonic and the New York City Ballet. Labro has written for numerous ensembles, from quartets to full symphony orchestras. He has premiered works by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Du Yun, Bryce Dessner, Angélica Negrón, Clarice Assad, Ethan Iverson, and Avner Dorman. Labro has collaborated with Cassandra Wilson, Maria Schneider, Anat Cohen, João Donato, Marcel Khalife, Paquito D'Rivera, Pablo Ziegler, Uri Caine, Miguel Zenón, James Carter, John Clayton, guitarists Larry Coryell, Tommy Emmanuel, and John and Bucky Pizzarelli.

His past performances include venues such as Dizzy's, Birdland, SFJAZZ, Blue Note, Yoshi's, The Green Mill, The Stone, and Sculler's, and festivals such as Newport Jazz Festival, Lincoln Center's Midsummer Festival, NYC Winter Jazz Festival, Vail Jazz Festival, Detroit Jazz Festival, Tri-C JazzFest Cleveland, Jazz Salt Lake City, Jazz Aspen Snowmass, Caramoor Music Festival,

SF Performances, Phillips Collection, Fontana Chamber Arts Summer Festival, Soave Guitar Festival (IT), Quebec City Summer Festival (CA), Inchad International Cultural Festival in Constantine (AL), Byblos International Music Festival (LB), Beiteddine Art Festival (LB), Al-Qurain Culture Festival (Kuwait), Jerash International (JD), Daejeon Chamber Music Festival (ROK) and many more.

Labro's passion for promoting the understanding and love of music has well been recognized through his master classes at renowned institutions such as the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, Princeton University, Hope College, the Cleveland Institute of Music, and many more.

After a busy summer touring the U.S. performing at the Strings Music Festival, Gretna Music, the Vail Jazz Festival and premiering his latest orchestral work *The Django Fantasy* at the Berks Jazz Festival, Labro opened the 2021 season performing with the Maria Schneider Orchestra at the DC Jazz Festival. In the fall and spring of 2022, Labro zigzagged the U.S. with the world-renowned Takács Quartet performing new works written for them by Clarice Assad and Bryce Dessner.

In his free time, Labro is working on composing a new bandoneón concerto that will be a sequel to his accordion concerto *Apricity*.

# CU ★ PRESENTS

## Join us for the 2023-24 season!

See **page 24** of this program for details