



Takács Quartet

Beethoven, Bartók, Mendelssohn

Sunday, Oct. 27, 4 p.m.

Monday, Oct. 28, 7:30 p.m.

Program

String Quartet No. 3 in D Major, Op. 18, No. 3

- I. Allegro
- II. Andante con moto
- III. Allegro
- IV. Presto

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

String Quartet No. 2, Sz. 67, Op. 17

- I. Moderato
- II. Allegro molto capriccioso
- III. Lento

Béla Bartók
(1881-1945)

String Quartet No. 2, Op. 13

- I. Adagio – Allegro vivace
- II. Adagio non lento
- III. Intermezzo. Allegretto con moto – Allegro di molto
- IV. Presto – Adagio non lento

Felix Mendelssohn
(1809-1847)

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 No. 3 in D Major, Op. 18, No. 3

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

When he arrived as a permanent resident of Vienna in 1792, young Beethoven had a long way to go in becoming an earth-shaking composer. He was welcomed immediately as a virtuoso pianist and brilliant improviser, but those attributes did not extend to writing music away from the keyboard. To tackle the string quartet, as it had been elevated by Haydn and Mozart, would require serious study and some serious labor. In Vienna, he befriended the outstanding, roly-poly violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh, six years his junior but a major musical force in the city. That friendship would last through the composer's life. Schuppanzigh introduced Beethoven to Vienna's best musicians as well as its music-loving patrons. Significantly, the violinist formed the very first professional string quartet and gave the premieres of many of Beethoven's 16 quartets, including the first six of Op. 18, published in 1801. Over the course of two years, the composer worked feverishly on this set, completing the D-major quartet first (though it would be published as No. 3). There is an inviting, youthful freshness and clarity here. Consider the quartet's first movement, written in easy-to-follow *Sonata-Allegro* form. The opening theme, introduced by two whole notes (and recognized with each reappearance), is followed by a properly contrasting second tune. The exploratory development section leads back to the start, and those two familiar whole notes. The following *Andante* is built on a similar simplicity, with a four-note phrase introduced by the second violin. A bit of a surprise ends the *Andante* with an episode of agitated unison chords. The third movement is a gentle minuet (though marked *Allegro*) succeeded by a jolly finale that contains hints of a tarantella—all ending not with a bang, but a gentle smirk.

String Quartet No. 2, Sz. 67, Op. 17

Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

Before the outbreak of World War I, Bartók and his friend Zoltán Kodály visited military camps to

collect traditional Hungarian folk songs from the troops. (Poor health had prevented Bartók from being sent off to combat). He had already done similar folkloric research, traveling throughout the region with his cumbersome recording equipment. Those experiences proved life-altering, revealing fresh musical languages that broke many of the rules drummed into him at the Budapest Academy. Suddenly, there were new scales, harmonies and rhythms that would find their way into his music. As the war began, Bartók settled in a small town near Budapest, where he wrote the ballet "The Wooden Prince" (1914-16) and the String Quartet No. 2 (1915-17). It was no surprise that the creative process turned out to be long and arduous, as he searched for his musical voice. One can hear traces of prevailing trends (Debussy's post-romantic explorations, notably), but in the vivacious *Allegro*, Bartók breaks free with a delicious mixture of Hungarian dance styles and rhythms. Premiered in March 1918, the quartet avoids any clear-cut program, though Kodály viewed the work's three movements as "life episodes." The opening *Moderato* is seen as a description of "peaceful life," which it certainly appears to paint. Loyal to the traditions of quartet construction established by his predecessors, Bartók builds this movement in sonata form. Folk tunes abound in the following *Allegro molto capriccioso*, laid out as a sort of medley. In the final movement, *Lento*, a mood of introspection unfolds, labeled by Kodály as "suffering"—an appropriate sentiment for those terrible times. The sadness is captured in the movement's concluding whispered pizzicatos by the viola and cello.

String Quartet No. 2, Op. 13

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

At the tender age of 18, Felix Mendelssohn carried all the passions of a youth living in a passionate time—and it shows in his early works. For an example of the romantic era at its early peak, look no further than Mendelssohn's exquisite A-minor quartet. As one might expect, there's a woman at the center of things. But there's another source of inspiration—Beethoven. The year was 1827, and the great composer had died in March, leaving young Felix to grieve and to continue his intense exploration of the master's music. Later that year, Mendelssohn wrote the first of two string quartets, Op. 13. (Op. 12 was completed in 1829, though

it was published first.) Even a casual glance at the A-minor quartet reveals innumerable touches of Beethoven: subtle nods to the late quartets, which occupied the young composer in his perusal of scores—some of which hadn't even been published. The use of dramatic pauses, several soliloquy-like recitatives and brief motifs reveal Beethoven's presence. But then, also present is that young lady, a friend of his sister Rebekah named Betty Pistor. Typical of a young man's fancy, he fell madly for Betty, while she just wanted to be friends. And typical of those times, Mendelssohn poured his feelings into a poem titled "Frage" ("Question"), with an alternate title, "Ist es wahr?", asking, "Is it true that you are always there?" He then turned his poem, which he ascribed to "H. Voss," into a song, affixed to the quartet's title page. Both the song (Op. 9, No. 1) and Op. 13 were published in 1830. Evidently, Betty Pistor left quite a mark on Felix, since his companion quartet, Op. 12, carried a dedication to "B.P." and had been jokingly referred to by friends as his "Quartet in B.P. Major." Pistor later married another, thus necessitating a change in the dedication to "B.R." Regardless, the song's melancholy tune serves as the basis for the A-minor quartet. It's heard in the plaintive opening (the words "Ist es wahr" are represented by a three-note phrase just prior to the agitated *Allegro's* start). This touching beginning will return as a final acceptance of loss in the quartet's subdued conclusion. The tender second movement is marked by an unexpected fugue, introduced by the viola, that becomes anxious until a violin recitative brings the calming *Adagio* full circle. Mendelssohn, the lover of fluttering forest fairies, emerges in the middle section of the otherwise gentle *Intermezzo*. More angst surfaces in the galloping finale, launched by yet another recitative from the first violin, with more episodes of dramatic introspection culminating in an extended bit of weeping from the solo violin and a reprise of the opening movement's question of longing. Don't pity Mendelssohn: In 1837 he began a happy and fruitful marriage to the lovely and loving Cécile Jeanrenaud.

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.

Takács Quartet announces appointment of violist Richard O'Neill, retirement of Geri Walther after 15 years

By *Jessie Bauters*

As the Takács Quartet enters its 45th year, the internationally acclaimed string quartet—in residence at the College of Music since 1986—will soon see a new musician enter its esteemed ranks. Violist and Ralph E. and Barbara L. Christoffersen Faculty Fellow Geraldine Walther will retire from the group and from the CU Boulder faculty this May, after a remarkable 15 years. Korean-American viola player and award-winning chamber musician Richard O'Neill will join the quartet in June.

"We feel extremely grateful to have been able to share our musical lives with Geri since 2005, benefitting from her wonderful sound and vibrant musicianship in concerts and numerous recordings," say the continuing members of the Takács. "We are excited to welcome Richard, who is a friend and colleague of ours at the Music Academy of the West, and whose artistry we have admired for many years."

Reflecting on her time in the quartet, Walther says, "I have loved being a member of the Takács Quartet and am grateful for all the friends I've made along the way. I am very happy to hand the baton over to the wonderful violist and musician, Richard O'Neill, and wish the group every success for their future together!"

The quartet's latest appointment celebrates the extraordinary journey of the Takács since its foundation in 1975 by four Hungarian students at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest. Each member is steeped in the Hungarian/Central European roots and traditions of the quartet, absorbed over decades of collaboration and commitment, and they are now fêted as "arguably the greatest string quartet in the world" (The Guardian, May 2018).

O'Neill joins founding member, cellist András Fejér, English first violinist Edward Dusing and American second violinist Harumi Rhodes, who is of Japanese-Russian descent. The Takács affirms the power of the string quartet to foster communication and cooperation across cultures, nationalities and generations.

Richard O'Neill, who is renowned as both a chamber musician and Grammy-nominated soloist, adds, "Joining the Takács Quartet is the greatest honor of my life. I am thrilled to follow in the footsteps of one of my heroes, the great Geraldine Walther, whom I have listened to and adored since I was a child. I look forward to the joy of making music with Ed, Harumi and András and will do my best to uphold the esteemed tradition of the Takács Quartet."

O'Neill will now join the College of Music faculty alongside the current members of the Takács, coaching string students and working closely with the graduate string quartet-in-residence, the Ivalas Quartet.

College of Music Dean John Davis says Walther is not only a world-class musician, but a world-class individual. "Geri Walther, whose exceptional artistry has contributed to the long-standing success and reputation of the Takács Quartet, will be sorely missed by the many people who have been impacted by her music, friendship, teaching and warm spirit. She has been a treasured part of the College of Music family, and her immense contributions here will be felt for many years to come.

"The addition of Richard to the quartet is to be celebrated. Richard is a musician of the highest caliber and we are beyond thrilled that he will become the newest member of the Takács Quartet and contribute to the ongoing stellar level of the group. We welcome him to the College of Music!"

Walther's final performance in front of Boulder audiences will be the quartet's season-closing concert on May 4, 2020.

For more information, including a full bio for Richard O'Neill, please visit cupresents.org.