



Celebrity Series of Boston

Friday | March 23, 2018 | 8pm | NEC's Jordan Hall

Takács Quartet

Edward Dusinberre violin

Károly Schranz violin

Geraldine Walther viola

András Fejér cello

W. A. Mozart

Quartet in G Major, K.387

Allegro vivace assai

Menuetto

Andante cantabile

Molto allegro

Dmitri Shostakovich

Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Opus 122

Introduction: Andantino -

Scherzo: Allegretto -

Recitative: Adagio -

Etude: Allegro -

Humoresque: Allegro -

Elegy: Adagio -

Finale: Moderato - Meno mosso - Moderato

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van Beethoven

Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp minor, Opus 131

Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo

Allegro molto vivace

Allegro moderato

Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile

Presto

Adagio quasi un poco andante

Allegro


The Takács Quartet appears by arrangement with Seldy Cramer Artists, and records for Hyperion and Decca/London Records.

The Takács Quartet is Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Colorado in Boulder and are Associate Artists at Wigmore Hall, London.

Takacsquartet.com

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Notes on the program

W. A. Mozart (1756-1791)

Quartet in G Major, K.387 (1782)

Not long after Mozart moved to Vienna to begin a freelance career, Joseph Haydn released his latest set of groundbreaking string quartets. Mozart had not composed quartets since he was a teenager (when he produced 13 of them), but Haydn's efforts inspired Mozart to return to the genre late in 1782. He completed the Quartet in G Major (K. 387) by the end of the year, and he placed it first in the set of six quartets that he published in 1785 with a loving dedication to Haydn.

The *Allegro vivace assai* first movement attests to Mozart's mastery of a signature genre of Haydn. Mozart, with his finely attuned ear for opera, always knew how to craft beautiful and memorable themes, but the real artistry in using sonata form (the structure found here and in most opening movements of Classical-era quartets) lies in the transitions and connective tissue that stitch two contrasting key areas into a satisfying arc of tension and release. Mozart's solution here is to play with slippery neighbor-notes and chromatic runs, using those off-key tones to slide in and out of harmonic stability. A similar chromatic trick appears in the second-movement *Menuetto*, except here the momentary disorientation is exaggerated for comic effect, with alternating *piano* and *forte* notes phrased so as to contradict the underlying three-beat pulse. Even the exceedingly peaceful *Andante cantabile* incorporates subtle, drawn-out clashes of neighboring chromatic tones as it weaves in and out of its C-major key center.

The finale exploits a different strategy to build and dissipate tension—the formal counterpoint of fugue—although there are still ample splashes of chromaticism to unify this quartet's four impeccably constructed movements. If Mozart was trying to impress Haydn with all the compositional cleverness, he succeeded: after hearing the quartets dedicated to him, Haydn told Mozart's father, "Before God, and as an honest man, I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by name. He has taste, and, what is more, the most profound knowledge of composition."

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Opus 122 (1966)

Shostakovich wrote his first string quartet in 1938, when he was already well-established (and targeted by Stalin) as the preeminent composer of progressive symphonies and theater pieces in Soviet Russia. Shostakovich didn't write his first quartet for the Beethoven Quartet, but that group of Moscow Conservatory graduates learned the work and performed the Moscow premiere, launching perhaps the greatest collaboration ever between a composer and ensemble. Chamber music took on increasing importance in Shostakovich's output, growing to include 15 string quartets, of which the Beethoven Quartet debuted all but the last. Besides the quartets, Shostakovich also joined the group as a pianist for two more seminal works of chamber music, the Piano Quintet and the Second Piano Trio.

After playing for four decades with their original membership intact, tragedy struck: Vasily Shirinsky, the second violinist of the Beethoven Quartet, passed away. Shostakovich helped convince the group to continue with a new violinist, and he wrote his String Quartet No. 11 for this newly configured Beethoven Quartet, as a tribute to their fallen colleague. Shostakovich went on to dedicate his next three quartets to the other founders of the Beethoven Quartet.

The Eleventh Quartet follows an unusual plan, with seven short movements linked together to form a single composite lasting about 16 minutes. Starting with an austere introduction, the structure recalls Baroque dance suites or Classical divertimentos, but Shostakovich's treatment of these light-hearted traditions comes with a dark edge. Even the sections most inclined toward cheerful music, the *Scherzo* and *Humoresque*, are dour and sharp-tongued. The emotional impact peaks in the sixth and longest movement, an *Elegie* built around an incantation-like motive pronounced in resonant octaves by the cello and viola. The finale uses recollections from earlier movements to underscore this quartet's mission of solemn reflection.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp minor, Opus 131 (1825-26)

Between 1824 and 1826—a time of failing health, personal crises and total deafness—Beethoven completed five string quartets, plus the massive "Grand Fugue." The quartet Beethoven considered his greatest (an opinion seconded by Schubert, Wagner, and countless others) was the Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp minor, composed fourth among the five late quartets, when Beethoven had less than a year to live.

After writing the three previous quartets on commission for a noble patron, Beethoven began the next quartet of his own volition, with an eye toward publishing it. In a letter to his publisher asking for an advance of 80 gold ducats (about \$15,000 worth of gold in today's market), Beethoven wrote, "Quartets are now in demand everywhere, and it really seems that our age is taking a step forward." Work progressed slowly during the first half of 1826, hampered by Beethoven's abdominal and joint pain and trouble with his eyes. It was also a period of escalating worry over the composer's nephew and sole heir, Karl, over whom Beethoven had served as guardian since the boy was nine. Karl, then a young man of 20, had been struggling in school and falling into debt. That July, he pawned his watch, bought two pistols, and fired them both at his temple, missing with one bullet and grazing his skull with the other. In the aftermath of the suicide attempt, a friend of Beethoven helped secure Karl a military position in the regiment of one Baron von Stutterheim, for which Beethoven was so grateful that he dedicated his newest quartet to the officer.

Built in seven continuous movements that span approximately 40 minutes, the Quartet No. 14 is a world apart from the polite, four-movement quartet template that Beethoven inherited from Haydn and Mozart. The first movement, marked "Slow, but not rushed, and very expressive," provides an introspective point of access to the quartet's wonders to come. The last lingering C-sharp rises without a fuss to the neighboring D, and the second movement begins, ever so nonchalantly, at a *pianissimo* dynamic. This airy dance in a lilting triplet meter gives way to a brief, transitional third movement.

The heart of the quartet is its fourth movement, a theme and variations introduced in a tempo marked as “At a walking pace, but not rushed, and very songlike.” While two last chords still hang in the air, the cello launches the fifth movement with a rude four-note gesture in the bottom of its range. The sixth movement serves as a reflective interlude, recalling the somber tone of the quartet’s opening fugue. A unison C-sharp, hammered at a *fortissimo* dynamic, completes the return to the home key and sets off the swashbuckling finale.

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Celebrity Series of Boston

MAURIZIO POLLINI PIANO

PROGRAM:
FREDÉRIC CHOPIN
 Prelude in C-sharp minor, Opus 45
 Barcarolle in F-sharp Major, Opus 60
 Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor, Opus 35

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The Takács Quartet first appeared on the Celebrity Series in March 2000 and have appeared many times since, often in collaborative situations: with U.S. Poet Laureate and B.U. faculty member Robert Pinsky (April 2002); with pianist Andreas Haefliger (February 2004); with traditional Hungarian folk ensemble Muzsikás and Marta Sebestyén (November 2008); with violist James Dunham (December 2005); and with pianist Marc-André Hamelin (November 2012). Among their quartet programs were two in the 2013-14 season over which they performed all six of Bartók’s quartets. Their most recent engagement on the Series was in December 2015, and today’s performance marks their eleventh engagement on the Series.

Takács Quartet



The Takács Quartet, now entering its forty-third season, is renowned for the vitality of its interpretations. Based in Boulder at the University of Colorado, the Takács Quartet performs eighty concerts a year worldwide.

In Europe during the 2017-2018 season, in addition to their 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 return to New Zealand and Australia, perform at Tanglewood with pianist Garrick Ohlsson, at the Aspen Festival, and in more than forty other concerts in North American venues. They will also tour with pianist Marc-Andre Hamelin. The latest Takács recording, released by Hyperion in September 2017, features Dvořák’s viola quintet, Opus 97 (with Lawrence Power), and his string quartet, Opus 105.

Last season, the Takács presented complete 6-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.

They became the first string quartet to win the Wigmore Hall Medal in May 2014. The Medal, inaugurated in 2007, recognizes major international artists who have a strong association with the Hall. Recipients so far include András Schiff, Thomas Quasthoff, Menachem 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. They have toured 14 cities with the poet Robert Pinsky, 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 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), viola quintets by Brahms, and chamber works by Dvořák (both with Lawrence Power). Future releases for Hyperion include the Dohnanyi 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. Full details of all recordings can be found in the Recordings section of the Takacs Quartet's website: takacsquartet.com.

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 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. 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 Dusing joined the Quartet in 1993 and violist Roger Tapping in 1995. Violist Geraldine Walther replaced Mr. Tapping in 2005. Károly Schranz announced his retirement from the Takács Quartet as of the end of next month, and he will be replaced by violinist Harumi Rhodes. In 2001, the Takács Quartet was awarded the Order of Merit of the Knight's Cross of the Republic of Hungary, and in March of 2011, each member of the Quartet was awarded the Order of Merit Commander's Cross by the President of the Republic of Hungary.



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