

tapestries of music

Sundays with Coleman

116th Season

2019-2020

Presented in cooperation with the Caltech Committee on Institute Programs



Photo: Amanda Tipton

THE TAKÁCS QUARTET
MARCH 22, 2020

Sunday, March 22, 2020
3:30 pm
Beckman Auditorium, Caltech



Coleman Chamber Music Association presents

The Takács Quartet

Edward Dusingberre, *violin* Geraldine Walther, *viola*
Harumi Rhodes, *violin* András Fejér, *cello*

Josef Haydn
(1732 - 1809)

Quartet in C Major, Op. 54, No. 2

Vivace
Adagio
Menuetto – Trio
Adagio – Presto – Adagio

Fanny Mendelssohn
(1805 - 1847)

Quartet in E-flat Major

Adagio ma non troppo
Allegretto
Romanze
Allegro molto vivace

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770 - 1827)

Quartet in C-sharp minor, Op. 131

Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo
Allegro molto vivace
Allegro moderato – Adagio
Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile –
Più mosso – Andante moderato e lusinghiero –
Adagio – Allegretto – Adagio, ma non
troppo e semplice – Allegretto
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 ■■■ www.takacsquartet.com

Program Notes

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FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN (1732-1809) Quartet in C Major, Op. 54, No. 2

This quartet is one of Haydn's most original, a seminal work containing prophetic innovations as well as a bold exploration of new harmonic practices. It opens with the violins playing a virtuosic part, taking the first violin to unexpected high points in its range, probably with violinist Johann Tost in mind. In 1783, Tost was hired to lead the Esterházy orchestra's second violin section. He was soon dealing in handwritten copies of unpublished music, most thought to be Haydn's and ostensibly from the Esterházy library. While this was not illegal in that pre-copyright era, Haydn was annoyed with Tost's somewhat unethical commerce. Eventually the two made peace and transacted business.

In 1788, Tost journeyed to Paris with two of Haydn's symphonies and six string quartets, of which this was one. Haydn entrusted the pieces to him, with the expectation that they would both profit from any deal; however, Tost initially had difficulty because of the convention that made such works marketable only in multiples of three. Being resourceful as well as unscrupulous, he added a symphony by an eminently forgettable composer, Adalbert Gyrowetz (1763-1850), to the grouping of eight and affixed Haydn's name to it. He sold the publishing rights to these and the six quartets to Sieber, a French publishing house, but Haydn had trouble collecting his profits from Tost. Nevertheless, the six string quartets (Opp. 54 and 55) were published in 1789, dedicated to "dem grosshandler Tost." These and the next six (Op. 64), also dedicated to Tost, are now known as the Tost Quartets.

The first movement, *Vivace*, in a brilliant sonata form, opens with a virtuosic violin part. The opening statement has five measures instead of the usual four, and ends with a measure of silence, making a forceful, penetrating statement. The second theme has a contrasting character with a much lighter, more pleasant spirit. The movement ends in a long coda.

The hauntingly beautiful slow movement, an *Adagio* in C minor, is unusual for Haydn. An extraordinary passacaglia, with a solo violin part containing *rubatos* (meaning with expressive and rhythmic

freedom), that delay the melodic line enough to produce startling cross-harmonic dissonant effects, not only assimilates Hungarian gypsy style, but transforms it into something profound and provides continuity between it and the light, graceful minuet, *Allegretto*, which follows without a pause. This became a special favorite of the Esterházy court: the Prince even requested that its melody be used instead of a chime for a mechanical clock. Haydn uses the minuet's trio section as an occasion to explore harsh dissonance and display technical mastery, contrapuntal ingenuity, and formal simplicity.

The most inventive movement is the finale, which has a slow tempo instead of following the typical and expected structure of an *Allegro*, like the second movement. It is an extended *Adagio*, with a very fast middle section, *Presto*. The opening contains two themes, the second of which has a strong resemblance to "In Native Worth," an aria made famous from its use in Haydn's later composition, *The Creation*. The voicing is also noteworthy: the cello, going often into its high treble range, crosses above the middle voices of the second violin and the viola. The *Presto* section humorously ends suspended on a dominant seventh, which then is followed by the *Adagio*, now repeated in condensed form, concluding quietly and peacefully. All in all, in this work Haydn has achieved an entirely new type of quartet sound.

FANNY MENDELSSOHN HENSEL (1805-1847) Quartet in E-flat Major

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, Felix Mendelssohn's talented sister, dedicated much effort to composing short song-like piano pieces throughout her life. At the time, the *lied* for piano, as these pieces were called, was deemed an appropriate genre for women composers; these were short works thought to be feminine as well as effective for house concerts. An early critic noted in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* that, in comparison to works by her brother in the same genre, Fanny's "fantasy is permitted a freer reign, and form is applied with broader brush strokes."

As she did not compose for the public sphere, she allowed her works to juxtapose unrelated harmonies

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and unusual chromatic progressions. Many were simple and songlike, with a clear homophonic texture, but some were too technically challenging to have met the needs of the market of her time. She charmed her audiences at the salons at which she played, performing her own more difficult works, which highlighted her virtuosic piano technique.

The origins of the Quartet (not published until 1988, though composed in 1834) lay in Fanny's abandoned piano sonata of 1828. For this work, one of the first significant string quartets composed by a woman, she revived and revised the first two movements, substituted a new third movement, *Romanze*, for what had been a *Largo*, and fitted it with a swift finale to expand it to the full four movements. Although he liked the third movement, her brother Felix criticized this work overall: "I must take to task the compositional style of the work in general or, if you wish, the form. I would advise you to pay greater heed to maintaining a certain form, particularly in the modulations - it is perfectly all right to shatter such a form, but it is the contents themselves which must shatter it, through inner necessity; without this, such new or unusual formal turns and modulations only make the piece more vague and diffuse." In her reply, although she thanked him for the "well-founded critique," she also asked if he might have the quartet played sometime, and then in a statement that is completely self-deprecating, admitted, "It is not so much a certain way of composing that is lacking as it is a certain approach to life, and as a result of this shortcoming, my lengthy things die in their youth of decrepitude; I lack the ability to sustain ideas properly and give them the needed consistency. Therefore lieder suit me best, in which if need be, merely a pretty idea without much potential for development can suffice." This thinking could certainly help explain why she never wrote another quartet.

The Quartet begins by giving Hensel's imagination free rein, rather unconventionally with a slow movement, *Adagio ma non troppo*, written more as a free form fantasia than as a conventional sonata form. This choice caused a disagreement between Fanny and Felix, who criticized her writing as "mannered." She borrows the opening phrase of Beethoven's "Harp" quartet and uses it to generate an opening of the first movement. Two main themes are developed in this tonally ambiguous movement, while extra non-thematic material is considered simultaneously. The movement is characterized by a forward drive, which

continues in the second movement, *Allegretto*, a scherzo said to have been inspired by Paganini's "Bell Rondo" from his Violin Concerto No. 2, which Fanny heard in 1829. The form of this movement is much clearer; it has a ternary ABA form, with a contrasting trio, a sort of *fugato* that goes through modulations with harmonic turbulence. The movement ends very softly with pizzicato chords.

The intense third movement, *Romanze*, begins with a lovely, poignant theme with repeated notes and sigh-like descending motives. A feeling of resignation is palpable. The movement has a dissonant, harmonically free middle section; repeated chords bring back the initial music for recapitulation with the theme now transferred to a high tessitura. In her lack of emphasis on tonal centers and her expressive use of harmony, Fanny has begun to separate herself from Classical composers, not only here where she shows signs of Romantic intensity, but also in each of the first three movements of the quartet; nevertheless, allusions to her brother's music can still easily be found.

The quartet concludes with an energetic finale, *Allegro molto vivace*, which not only regains the drive of the opening movements, but also has a firm tonal center. With its inventiveness, this brilliant and boisterous movement follows the traditional finale rondo form. Its first theme, announced by the violins in thirds, becomes the refrain that reappears, with slight alterations each time, and then concludes the work.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770 - 1827) **Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp minor, Op. 131**

Quartet No. 14 belongs with the group of Beethoven's final chamber masterpieces. While he was composing it, he considered writing other types of works, specifically large works with chorus, like an oratorio, a requiem, or an opera, but when he had completed a commission for three quartets, he went on instead to write two more works for string quartet, this one and his last work, Op. 135.

Beethoven made his earliest sketch for Op. 131 during the last few days of 1825; he completed it the following July. The writing of the quartet required an intense effort at a time when he was already totally deaf and deeply troubled by his failing health as well as by the

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misadventures of his nephew, for whom he was responsible, and who was then threatening to commit suicide. Beethoven's concern for his nephew was so great that he changed the dedication of the quartet, which he had intended for a personal friend, inscribing the work instead to Lieutenant Field Marshal Baron Joseph von Stutterheim, who took Beethoven's nephew into one of his regiments as an officer cadet. In late summer, when he gave the completed score of this quartet to his publisher, he said that it was "stolen and assembled from various bits of this and that."

The publisher, in alarm, wrote to him demanding assurance that the work was, in fact, new and original. He had apparently not looked at the music, for if he had, he would certainly have understood Beethoven's ironic jest. There could not have been anything as new as this quartet. It was totally without precedent. Huge in size and cast entirely in original shapes invented in the course of the writing, it was the final example of how far Beethoven had outgrown the forms he had inherited from Haydn and Mozart. To invent and assemble this composition in six or seven months was an astonishing creative feat. Beethoven's notes and sketches for the work occupy three times as much paper as the finished work.

This quartet seems somehow to be a leap forward into the expressive world of the early 20th century. Although only four instruments play it, it creates much of the same kind of grandeur and profundity that larger works of Strauss and Mahler were striving for in their huge orchestral scores.

The first movement is a sad but majestic slow fugue, *Adagio, ma non troppo e molto espressivo*, which

the composer Wagner was to say, "shows the most melancholy sentiment ever expressed in music." The second movement, *Allegro molto vivace*, begins with a key-shift that was astonishing at that time; its form still puzzles music analysts today who continue to search for the mold in which it was cast. It has been variously identified as a truncated sonata form or even as a dance comparable to those in Baroque suites. All that remains important, however, is that it exists as a form of Beethoven's own devising, which contains lyrical, wistful music of great appeal.

The third movement begins energetically, *Allegro moderato*, with two rapping chords, but it soon becomes an *Adagio* recitative introducing the glorious theme-and-variation fourth movement. This music starts with a new, flowing theme, *Andante, ma non troppo e molto cantabile*, which goes through seven variations. Only some of them are elaborations; others concentrate and reduce the theme to its very essence.

The fifth movement, an expanded scherzo, *Presto*, has savage force. Following the *Presto*, a brief slow song, *Adagio quasi un poco andante*, runs into the finale, *Allegro*, the quartet's only more-or-less regular sonata-form movement. The finale, a wild, dancing movement, has as its ancestor the finale of Beethoven's Symphony No. 7. Some of the material also sounds distantly derived from this quartet's own opening fugue. Here, as elsewhere in the work, there are tempo changes within phrases that are labeled *rubato*, but instead of leaving them to the performers' emotion of the moment, Beethoven has actually written them into the music. Great themes simply flash by. The music races on until just before the end, when it slows, then speeds up again, closing with a few slashing chords.



The Takács Quartet

The The Takács Quartet, now in its 45th season, performs 80 concerts a year worldwide. In 2014 it 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 thus far include Andras Schiff, 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.

Aspects of the quartet's interests and history are explored in Edward Dusinberre's book, *Beethoven for a Later Age: The Journey of a String Quartet*, which takes the reader inside the life of a string quartet,

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melding music history and memoir as it explores the circumstances surrounding the composition of Beethoven's quartets.

For its CDs on the Decca/London label, the Takács 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 to develop a string program with a special emphasis on chamber music. 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 also faculty at the Music Academy of the West in

Santa Barbara 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 Ports-mouth and Bordeaux Competitions, and First Prizes at the Budapest International String Quartet Competition in 1978 and the Bratislava Competition in 1981.

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.



coleman's history

Previous Coleman performances of today's repertoire:

Haydn

Quartet in C Major, Op. 54, No. 2

January 1939 Curtis String Quartet
November 1997 Ysaye Quartet
November 2015 Elias String Quartet

Beethoven

Quartet in C-sharp minor, Op. 131

March 1935 Budapest String Quartet
October 1939 Budapest String Quartet
January 1943 Pro Arte String Quartet of Brussels
October 1946 Budapest String Quartet
February 1951 Hungarian String Quartet
February 1964 Juilliard String Quartet
October 1967 Amadeus String Quartet
May 1980 Amadeus String Quartet
April 1996 Tokyo String Quartet
November 2001 Orion String Quartet
March 2007 Takács Quartet

Premiere performance at Coleman Chamber Music Association Concerts:

Mendelssohn, Fanny Quartet in E-flat Major