

Takács Quartet

Sunday, March 25, 2018 at 3:00pm

Pre-concert Talk at 2:00pm

This is the 813th concert in Koerner Hall

Takács Quartet

Edward Dusinberre, violin

Károly Schranz, violin

Geraldine Walther, viola

András Fejér, cello

PROGRAM

Joseph Haydn: String Quartet in E flat Major, op. 76, no. 6

- I. Allegretto – Allegro
- II. Fantasia: Adagio
- III. Menuetto: Presto
- IV. Finale: Allegro spiritoso

Dmitri Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 11 in F Minor, op. 122

- I. Introduction: Andantino –
- II. Scherzo: Allegretto –
- III. Recitative: Adagio –
- IV. Etude: Allegro –
- V. Humoresque: Allegro –
- VI. Elegy: Adagio –
- VII. Finale: Moderato

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van Beethoven: String Quartet No. 14 in C sharp Minor, op. 131

- I. Adagio, ma non troppo e molto espressivo
- II. Allegro molto vivace
- III. Allegro moderato
- IV. Andante, ma non troppo e molto cantabile
- V. Presto
- VI. Adagio, quasi un poco andante
- VII. Allegro

Joseph Haydn

Born in Rohrau, Lower Austria, March 31, 1732; died in Vienna, Austria, May 31, 1809

String Quartet in E flat Major, op. 76, no. 6 (Hob. III:76) (1797)

Haydn finished writing the six ground-breaking op. 76 quartets in 1797, in his twilight years, when he had been composing for a half century. Nevertheless, the E flat Quartet is forward-looking and its originality is clear from the start. The opening movement, unusually, is a theme and variations, building through increasingly elaborate variations to a sprightly concluding fugue – it is an idea that the young Beethoven was soon to explore. The slow movement is even more probing. Its hymn-like main theme is presented several times, without key signature, and travels through an extraordinary range of keys before settling into B major. A spirited *Menuetto* is more modern scherzo than old-fashioned minuet – and this is another idea that Beethoven would soon adopt. Its distinctive middle section wittily scurries up and down the major key. Beethoven filed this scheme in his memory and drew on it when writing the minuet of his First Symphony. In the finale, Haydn spins an intricate web out of the five notes we hear at the very beginning. This is virtuoso writing that, in many ways, represents Haydn's final thoughts in the medium of the string quartet.

Dmitri Shostakovich

Born in St. Petersburg, Russia, September 12/25, 1906; died in Moscow, Russia, August 9, 1975.

String Quartet No. 11 in F Minor, op. 122 (1965-6)

At the end of January 1966, the year of his 60th birthday, Shostakovich put the finishing touches to his Eleventh Quartet, dedicating it to the memory of Vasily Shirinsky, the recently deceased second violinist of Moscow's Beethoven Quartet. Quartets 11 to 15 were to include dedications to members of this ensemble, which had given the premieres of all but his First Quartet over the past two decades. The Beethoven Quartet, with its new violinist, gave the first public performance of the Eleventh at a 60th anniversary concert, in Leningrad on May 28, 1966. The new piece was encoored and performed together with another new work, a vocal piece which recites and thereby parodies the many official jobs and honorific titles that Shostakovich received from the Soviet regime. Shostakovich himself accompanied the singers, despite a chronic and increasing problem with the control of his right hand. The stress of the situation made it the last time he appeared onstage as a pianist. The following night, he suffered a major heart attack and ill health was to plague him for the rest of his life.

As he confronted the bleak prospects of both personal mortality and state repression in the world around him, Shostakovich sought out private truth and eternal spiritual values through the small-scaled, intimate and often complex works he wrote. His journey, increasingly through the medium of the string quartet, was profound and, as the composer himself realised, one that was comparable with that of the late Beethoven. Yet where Beethoven offers hope, optimism, and a transcendent vision, these qualities are in shorter supply in the music of Shostakovich.

Although the Eleventh Quartet ends quietly with a note of resignation – at least for the passing of Vasily Shirinsky – the composer offers little resolution in its pages. Its seven short movements are played without break. The longest and profoundest movement is an Elegy, written to the memory of Shirinsky, and containing a veiled reference to the *Marcia funèbre* movement from Beethoven's "Eroica" symphony. Many of the movements are cryptic and there is a certain austerity and spareness to the part-writing, which often moves in stark, parallel lines. After directing the main weight of the violin writing to the first violin, Shostakovich suddenly pushes the second violin to the front in the *Humoresque*. But the second violin only gets to play two notes from beginning to the end of the movement. The humour seems wry; our reaction to it, uncertain. As to the work's unity there can be no doubt. A melody first introduced low on the cello in the opening movement forms the kernel from which the entire quartet grows. It recurs in one form or another, transformed, in all subsequent movements. After three months of recuperation, a very weak Shostakovich managed to attend a jubilee concert celebrating his 60th birthday in Moscow. Three more honorifics were added to the list he had already set to music for the earlier concert – 'Hero of Socialist Labour,' the Order of Lenin, and gold medal 'Hammer and Sickle.'

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born in Bonn, Germany, December 15 or 16, 1770; died in Vienna, Austria, March 26, 1827

String Quartet No. 14 in C sharp Minor, op. 131 (1825-6)

This, the greatest of Beethoven's quartets, was the music that the gravely ill Franz Schubert asked to be played five days before his death. More than any other work, it epitomizes the profundity, inwardness, idiosyncrasy, and timelessness of Beethoven's late compositions. When he sent the score to his publisher, Beethoven rather flippantly scribbled an extraordinary note in the margin. "Patched together from pieces filched from here and there," he declared in one of the biggest understatements of all time. Indeed, this quartet does contain themes and ideas that he worked with in other quartets he had written. But what ideas! What themes! And what working-out of their potential he reveals in its 40-minute expanse. Beethoven was less ambiguous in his true feelings for the work when he spoke to a violinist friend, Karl Holz. "My mind has been struck by some good ideas that I want to exploit," he said. "As for imagination, thank God, it abounds more than ever."

Throughout his later works, Beethoven tended less and less to cast his music in the traditional three or four movements. Op. 131 contains seven. Unusually for Beethoven, it begins with a slow movement, a calm yet gently forceful fugue that Wagner said 'floats over the sorrows of the world.' It gradually builds in intensity and prepares the listener for the scale and depth of what is to follow. The movement appears to explore every aspect of a four-note theme: G#, B#, C#, A. But then these four notes go on to provide the thematic underpinning of the entire quartet. They are, moreover, the recurring *motto* theme of two other late string quartets, opp. 130 and 132, which Beethoven had already completed, and, additionally, the very bedrock of the *Grosse Fuge*.

A chromatic shift upwards leads to the second movement. It forms a bright and optimistic balance to the first, tempered by frequent hesitation. Two sharp chords herald a brief, recitative-like third movement, which is just 11 measures long. The slow movement follows without break. This is the emotional centre of gravity of the entire quartet. It begins with another gentle theme marked *dolce* (sweetly) that Wagner called the 'incarnation of innocence.' The scale of the movement is huge: a theme with six variations and a coda. Contrast again follows with the *Presto*, a brilliant scherzo.

With its calm, ethereal mood, the brief *Adagio* enters another world. It serves as an introduction to the extended movement that follows. This final *Allegro* is the only movement written in sonata form. The profusion of themes, however, and the power of their utterance strain at the boundaries of the edifice. Wagner thought that the movement expressed "the fury of the world's dance – fierce pleasure, agony, ecstasy of love, joy, anger, passion, and suffering, lightning flashes and thunder rolls."

- Program notes © 2018 Keith Horner

Takács Quartet

The Takács Quartet, now entering its 43rd season, is renowned for the vitality of its interpretations. Based in Boulder at the University of Colorado, the Quartet performs 80 concerts a year worldwide.

In Europe during the 2017-18 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 over 40 other concerts in prestigious North American venues. They also tour with pianist Marc-André Hamelin. The latest Takács recording, released by Hyperion in September 2017, features Dvořák's Viola Quintet, op. 97 (with Lawrence Power) and String Quartet, op. 105.

Last season, the Takács presented complete six-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. 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 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 Takács is also a Visiting Quartet at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London.

Takács Quartet made its Royal Conservatory debut on March 11, 2012, and tonight marks its fourth appearance in Koerner Hall.