

63rd Concert Series 2016-2017



is pleased to present

# **The Takács Quartet**

**Edward Dusingberre, violin**  
**Károly Schranz, violin**  
**Geraldine Walther, viola**  
**András Fejér, cello**

Saturday, November 12, 2016  
Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York



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## **Acknowledgments**

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\* as of October 17, 2016

# Program

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## **String Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1**

Ludwig van Beethoven  
(1770-1827)

*Allegro con brio*

*Adagio affettuoso et appassionato*

*Scherzo: Allegro molto*

*Allegro*

## **String Quartet No. 10 in E-Flat Major, Op. 74 (“Harp”)**

Ludwig van Beethoven

*Poco adagio - Allegro*

*Adagio, ma non troppo*

*Presto – attacca:*

*Allegretto con variazioni*

## **Intermission**

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## **String Quartet No. 14 in C Sharp minor, Op. 131** Ludwig van Beethoven

*Adagio, ma non troppo e molto espressivo – attacca:*

*Allegro molto vivace – attacca:*

*Allegro moderato – attacca:*

*Andante, ma non troppo e molto cantabile*

*Andante moderato e lusinghiero – Adagio – Allegretto –*

*Adagio, ma non troppo e semplice - Allegretto*

*Presto – Molto poco adagio – attacca:*

*Adagio quasi un poco andante – attracca:*

*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](http://www.takacsquartet.com).

## **Next Concert**

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Saturday, April 22, 2017, 8:00 pm at Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York  
Lise de la Salle, piano

Program: Schumann/Liszt: Liebeslied-Widmung; Schumann/Liszt: Frühlingsnacht (from 12 Lieder, Op. 39); Schubert/Liszt: Ständchen (after Schubert D.957); Schumann: Fantasie in C Major, Op. 17; Prokofiev: Complete Romeo and Juliet Suite.

# Program notes

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## **String Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1**

Ludwig van Beethoven

“Some excellent works by Beethoven are outstanding among recent publications,” a reviewer wrote shortly after the first three Op. 18 quartets appeared. “They give perfect proof of this art – but the need to be played well and heard often, for they are very difficult to perform and are in no sense ‘popular’.” Since then they have become very nearly the most popular works in all the string quartet literature. We now hear them as Beethoven’s summation of the accomplishments of Haydn and Mozart, and his preparation for the great technical and expressive advances that were to come in his later works.

Beethoven published the six quartets of Op. 18 in two books of three, in the order in which we now know them, which probably is not the order in which they were composed. Their order of composition remains a minor mystery in the history of music, but it’s most likely that No. 1 was composed second, and No. 3 first. In 1799 Beethoven sent a copy of No. 1 to his friend Carl Amenda saying, “Accept this Quartet as a souvenir of my friendship, and whenever you play it, remember our shared experiences and how true and close a friend I have been and always will be.” When it was published in 1801, Beethoven had reworked it thoroughly; in 1800 he wrote to Amenda, “Don’t play your Quartet any more. I have changed it greatly, because I have just now learned how to write quartets.”

The first movement of **Quartet No. 1**, *Allegro con brio*, is devoted principally to an intense development of its little opening motif, which occurs no less than 102 times. There is a second theme, but it is of comparatively minor importance, for it is usually heard only as an extension of the opening motif or as a counterpoint to it. For contrast in the development, Beethoven seizes on the scale passages that first appear as mere transitional material.

The second movement, *Adagio affettuoso et appassionato*, is a rich, romantic Lied in the form of a sonata. Its long main theme with its throbbing accompaniment has a beauty that Beethoven would rarely surpass in his later works. Paganini, whose free and flashing virtuoso style rarely is associated with the Classical manner of the Viennese master, is said to have played this slow movement with an emotional intensity that brought tears to the eyes of those present. Third comes a *Scherzo, Allegro molto*, in which Beethoven, with great wit, manipulates uneven rhythms and phrases of odd lengths. The quartet closes with a playful rondo finale, *Allegro*.

## **String Quartet No. 10 in E-Flat Major, Op. 74 (“Harp”)**

Ludwig van Beethoven

Beethoven wrote this quartet in the summer and autumn of 1809. Its first performance probably took place shortly after the composition was completed, at the Vienna palace of Prince Franz Joseph von Lobkowitz, to whom it was dedicated. The major compositions that still occupied Beethoven while working on this score were two other pieces in the same key of E-Flat Major: the *Emperor Concerto*, which was not yet quite complete, and the *Leberwohl* (“Farewell”) *Sonata, Op. 81a*.

1809 was a difficult year for Beethoven and for all Vienna. For months, Napoleon’s army blockaded and bombarded the city. For a while, Beethoven hid in a cellar, hoping to escape further damage to his hearing. The Imperial Court fled from the capital and even Lobkowitz’s means were strained by the expense of raising a company of riflemen. Beethoven had an

additional problem: that of being separated from his beloved Thérèse von Brunsvik. But just as significantly as all this, the composer was facing an artistic crisis. It was becoming clear to him that his imagination was outgrowing the classical musical forms that he now was stretching as far as they could go and that he needed to discover or invent new musical shapes in which to cast his creations. It has been only a few years since his previous quartet, and he would write another in 1810, but after that there was to be a gap of fifteen years before he returned to this difficult medium.

Still, no sign of earthshaking thunder or of emotional turmoil appears in Op. 74. It is a calm, lyrical, fluent, even intimate work. At some time during the 19th century it acquired a nickname, the “Harp” Quartet. The explanation commonly offered is that it came from the frequent passages in which the strings are played *pizzicato*, plucked as the harp’s are. However, it’s more likely that it originated in Beethoven’s use of what musicians call *arpeggio* figures: broken, spread-out chords that are the principal characteristic of harp music.

The quartet opens with a long, slow introduction, *Poco adagio*, that establishes the mood of the whole work and hints at the movement’s main *Allegro* section. A measure of chords immediately suggesting a slow, forceful arpeggio calls for attention, and a flowing phrase is heard. Then, after a brief second subject, Beethoven devotes most of his energies to the development of the opening material.

The slow second movement, *Adagio ma non troppo*, is based principally on a long melody, as noble and serene as any from the great works to come in his last years. It returns twice, in alternation with contrasting musical material, making an extraordinary slow rondo with a delicate, mysterious, quiet ending.

Third is a great, expanded scherzo, *Presto*. The principal theme is a rhythmic figure like the one that pervades the Fifth Symphony; Beethoven uses it in countless ways, even as mere accompaniment to a great leaping melody. There is a rushing, contrasting section, played twice as fast as the rest of the movement, that functionally resembles the central trio section of the old, classical scherzo. However, Beethoven does not use it only as a centerpiece but brings it, and the opening music, back another time before the movement is over.

The finale, *Allegretto con variazioni*, follows without pause. It is a theme with six contrasting variations, the last of which is extended huge coda. After a powerful rushing passage for the four instruments in octaves, the quartet closes quietly.

### **String Quartet No. 14 in C-Sharp minor, Op. 131.**

Ludwig van Beethoven

Beethoven made his earliest sketch for Op. 131 during the last few days of 1825; he quickly completed it during July 1826. Composing it required an intense effort at a time when he already was totally deaf, deeply troubled by his failing health and by the misadventures of his nephew, for whom he was responsible, who at the time was 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. Instead, he inscribed it to Lieutenant Field Marshal Baron Joseph von Stutterheim, who had taken the nephew into one of his regiments as an officer. At the same time, for no reason apparent to history, the composer spent much time cajoling a case of expensive old wine out of his publisher. In late summer, when he gave the completed score to that publisher, he said it was “stolen and assembled from various bits of this and that.”

Alarmed, the publisher wrote to Beethoven demanding assurance that the work, was, in fact, new and original. He apparently had not looked at the music, for if he had he certainly would have understood the composer's ironic jest. There could not have been anything as new as this quartet. It was totally without precedent. Huge in size and cast in entirely original shapes invented during 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 had been an astonishing creative feat. His 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 just four instruments play, it creates much of the same kind of grandeur and profundity that some larger works of Strauss and Mahler were striving for in their huge orchestral scores. In 1860 a German conductor even made a full orchestral version of this quartet with the intention of expanding the audience for this great music; it proved to be a clumsy travesty and since has disappeared.

The quartet has seven distinct parts, knit together into a continuous whole. Some scholars have claimed to reveal a nearly traditional four-movement structure as its base, but it seems more reasonable to accept Beethoven's demarcations and consider the seven separately.

The first movement is a sad but majestic, slow fugue, *Adagio, ma non troppo e molto espressivo*, which Wagner said "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 looking for the mold in which it was cast. It has been variously identified as a truncated sonata-form or even a dance comparable to those in Baroque suites. In truth, it is a form of Beethoven's own devising, containing 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. There, the music starts with a new, flowing theme, *Andante, ma no troppo e molto cantabile*, that goes through seven variations. Only some of them are elaborations; other concentrate and reduce the theme to its very essence.

The fifth, and expanded scherzo, *Presto*, has savage force. There follows a brief, slow song *Adagio quasi un poco andante*, that runs into the finale, *Allegro*, the quartet's only more-or-less regular sonata-form movement. That 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* (meaning with expressive and rhythmic freedom), 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.

# About the Artists

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Since its founding in 1975 at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest, the **Takács Quartet** has become one of the world's great ensembles, accruing honor after honor. After being appointed as the first-ever Associate Artists at Wigmore in London, in 2014 it became the first string quartet to win the Wigmore Hall Medal. In 2012 *Gramophone* announced that the Takács was the only string quartet to be inducted into its first Hall of Fame, together with Jascha Heifetz, Leonard Bernstein, and Dame Janet Baker. The group also won the 2011 Award for Chamber Music and Song presented by the Royal Philharmonic Society in London. In 2001 the Takács was awarded the Order of Merit of the Knight's Cross of the Republic of Hungary, and in 2011 each member of the Quartet was awarded the Order of Merit Commander's Cross by the President of the Republic of Hungary.

Now based at the University of Colorado Boulder, where they are Christoffersen Faculty Fellows, the Quartet has helped develop there a string program with a special emphasis on chamber music. The Quartet's commitment to teaching is enhanced by summer residencies at the Aspen Festival and at the Music Academy of the West, Santa Barbara. The ensemble is a Visiting Quartet at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London.

During the 2016-17 season, the Takács will perform complete six-concert Beethoven quartet cycles in Wigmore Hall and at Princeton, the University of Michigan, and UC Berkley. Other engagements this season take them to Florence, Milan, Geneva, Amsterdam, Paris, Singapore, Japan, Hong Kong, New Zealand, and Australia. A recent tour to South America included concerts in Chile and Brazil.

The Quartet's award-winning recordings include the complete Beethoven Cycle on the Decca label. In 2006 the Takács Quartet made its first recording for Hyperion Records, of Schubert's String Quartets D 804 and D 810 (Death and the Maiden). Up-coming on that label is the Dvořák Op. 105 Quartet and his Viola Quintet Op. 97, with violist Lawrence Power, to be followed by the Dohnányi Piano Quintet Nos. 1 and 2 plus the Dohnányi Quartet No. 1. The Quartet also made sixteen recordings on the Decca label starting in 1988; that of the six Bartók quartets received the 1998 *Gramophone* Award for chamber music.

Members of the Takács Quartet play on instruments generously loaned to them by the Schwayder Foundation.

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