is pleased to present

Takács String Quartet

Edward Dusinberre, violin
Harumi Rhodes, violin
Geraldine Walther, viola
András Fejér, cello

Saturday, October 20, 2018
Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York
Who We Are
Friends of Music Concerts, Inc. is an award-winning, non-profit, volunteer organization now celebrating its 65th season of showcasing, right here in Westchester, artists chosen from among the finest in today’s diverse world of chamber music. Additionally, our Partners in Education program in the public schools and free student admission to our concerts give young people enhanced exposure to and appreciation of classical music.

In order to help sustain what one of our artists called this “legendary series,” we would welcome people who can join the volunteers listed above, either as Board members or equally valued off-Board committee members. Specifics we are looking for include, but are not limited to, people with networking, editorial, business development, and/or fund-raising skills. Call us at 914-861-5080 or contact us on our website (see below); we can explore the range together.

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*as of October 3, 2018
Program

String Quartet in D minor, Op. 76, No. 2 (“The Fifths”)  
Franz Joseph Haydn (1712-1809)

Allegro
Andante o più tosto allegretto
Menuetto: Allegro ma non troppo
Finale: Vivace assai

Quartet No. 4 in D Major, Op. 83  
Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Allegretto
Andantino
Allegretto
Finale: Allegretto

Intermission

Quartet in F minor, Op. 80  
Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Allegro vivace assai
Allegro assai
Adagio
Finale: Allegro molto

The Takacs String Quartet appears by arrangement with Seldy Cramer Artists, 601 Van Ness Avenue, #15, San Francisco, CA 94102, and records for Hyperion and Decca/London Records. The Takacs Quartet is Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Colorado in Boulder and are Associate Artists at Wigmore Hall, London. www.takacsquartet.com.

Next concert
Saturday, November 3, 2018, 8:00 pm at Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York

Nathan Lee, piano
In 1795 Joseph Haydn had completed his second visit to London. At age sixty-three, he already had attained unusual longevity for his time. England had showered wealth and honors on him; following his last concert, he lingered there for two months before going home to Vienna to live out his remaining years.

No one at the time could have predicted how different the work of Haydn’s last years would be from what had preceded them. He had written more than a hundred symphonies, but after the dozen masterpieces that he had composed expressly for London audiences, he never wrote another. Yet with the knowledge of Handel’s oratorios that he had acquired in London, he now modernized and revitalized that form in his own The Creation and The Seasons. He also composed six masses and some other sacred music for the princely Esterházy family for whom he had served as staff conductor and composer for thirty previous years.

His remaining instrumental works were confined almost solely to some string quartets, music that sums up a lifetime of supreme invention. In 1797 he wrote the six quartets we know as Opus 76; in 1799, the two of Opus 77. In doing them he wrote with the kind of controlled freedom that comes only with great maturity; their rich instrumental texture is very modern for its time.

Count Joseph Erdödy, Chamberlain and Privy State Counselor to the Emperor, commissioned the six Opus 76 quartets; of course, Haydn dedicated them to him. The Erdödys were an important family, noble and musical, related by marriage to the Esterházs. Count Ladislaus Erdödy is listed among the subscribers to Mozart’s 1783 concerts in Vienna, and Beethoven dedicated his two Trios, Op. 70 (1808) and two Cello Sonatas, Op. 102 (1815), to his pupil, the Countess Maria, wife of Count Peter Erdödy.

The D minor Quartet, Op. 76, the second of the set, takes its nickname (the Fifths) from the opening motif of the Allegro first movement, whose first and second pairs of notes are spaced five steps apart. Haydn uses this simple interval rather than a full-length melody as the movement’s principal theme. He then allows his imagination to roam, fully exploiting his contrapuntal skill and the virtuosity of the string players for whom he was writing. Next comes a three-part slow-ish movement, Andante più tosto allegretto, whose third part is a brilliant variation on the first.

The next movement, Minuetto: Allegro ma non troppo, is a canon for two instrumental “voices” that has a contrasting central section formerly called “The Witches Dance.” The quartet ends with a Finale: Vivace assai in the Gypsy style that Viennese composers often used so brilliantly in music written for their Hungarian benefactors. During its course, Haydn reintroduces the motif in fifths with which the quartet began.
Quartet No. 4 in D Major, Op. 83
Dmitri Shostakovich

The Communist Committee of the Soviet Union directly attacked Shostakovich and his music in 1948. He was stripped of his teaching position at the Conservatory, and his music was banned from both study and performance. He had begun his String Quartet No. 4, composed between April and December 1949, shortly after his return from New York, where he had experienced humiliation by being identified by Stalin as a member of the Soviet delegation to the Peace Congress. The Soviet secretary in charge of ideological matters, Andrei Zhdanov, issued a decree accusing Shostakovich, Prokofiev, and Khachaturian, among others, of “formalist and decadent” tendencies, “unhealthy individualism,” and “pessimism.” Shostakovich was forced to confess publicly and admit his contrition.

He then appeared to conform completely by releasing populist music and writing for the state-run film industry. He composed the populist oratorio The Song of the Forests and other works, but kept working on Quartet No. 4. Some commentators suggest that the first movement of the quartet, with its initial folk-like theme, is reminiscent of Sibelius or Nielsen, seeming both Scandinavian and bucolic. It is unquestionably a very lyrical piece that contrasts strongly with the very dramatic quartet that had preceded it. It was not premiered until 1955, two years after Stalin’s death; it now is one of the most frequently performed Shostakovich quartets in Russia.

The opening movement, Allegretto, in a kind of rondo form, mixes the pastoral with a unique sound that resembles that made by folk instruments of the Far East. Yet this music is characteristic of Shostakovich; the use he makes of the modal inflections takes the work quickly to a frenetic pitch of intensity. The first violin announces the theme, while the second provides a calm counterpoint. These are played over a sustained pedal note on viola and cello that lasts for more than sixty measures. The theme then expands in a glorious, warm espressivo.

The second movement, Andantino, is a lyrical romance that again creates a folk-like atmosphere. Throughout this movement Shostakovich gives voice to ardent lyricism; the elegiac theme most prominent in the first violin initially is accompanied only by the second violin in a kind of trio until the cello enters. After the melodious development section, the instruments reprise the first theme, but now muted, continuing through a long coda that not only introduces new aspects of the theme but also reintroduces material from the first movement.

Instead of a scherzo in the third movement, Allegretto, Shostakovich offers a delicate Haydnesque Classical movement in a minor tonality, related only subtly to the earlier movements. It includes both humor and sarcasm, using a rondo form and some ostinato patterns that link it to the final movement. The viola takes the spotlight at the end in order to introduce the finale.

The unique Finale: Allegretto, the most extended movement, again includes the kind of quasi-eastern or perhaps Caucasian folk music sound that some commentators also have call Hebraic because of the use of an augmented interval associated with that genre. These folk elements bring this original, fascinatingly subtle work to its quiet conclusion.
Felix Mendelssohn was an extraordinary child prodigy, a composer who had his first public performance at the age of nine. His wealthy banker father spared nothing to help bring his son to artistic maturity. The musicales held on alternate Sundays in the Mendelssohns’ great house were a must for any musician visiting or living in Berlin, and almost every time something the young composer had written was performed.

Although Mendelssohn wrote a great deal of music in his childhood (thirteen symphonies and several concertos, for example), he never released them for publication; instead, he developed and polished his skill in his privileged home workshop. Then, at age sixteen he wrote his nearly perfect **String Octet in E-flat Major** and, at seventeen, the **Midsummer Night’s Dream Overture**.

In contrast, the **Quartet in F minor**, a mature work, was his last major composition, written in his final year of life and not published until three years after he died. Most commentators feel that its inspiration was the death of his beloved sister Fanny, seeing it as an impassioned lament of anguish. He wrote it in Switzerland, to which he had repaired in an attempt to recover from overwork. His long-time friend, Joseph Benedict reflected: “It would be difficult to cite any piece of music that so completely impresses the listener with a sensation of gloomy foreboding, of anguish of mind, and of the most poetic melancholy, as does this masterly and eloquent composition.” Joseph Stevenson wrote: “There are few works in music that seem so firmly linked to its composer’s death,” adding “It is not out of bounds to say that he died of grief for his sister, and his quartet expresses that grief and pessimism so strongly that, for once, Mendelssohn reveals more of himself than even Schumann would have.”

The first movement, **Allegro vivace assai**, contains a feeling of anxiety and unease from the beginning. The themes wrangle with despair. An initial denial of grief is evident as is a feeling of suffering. Passages of great dramatic intensity and turbulence alternate with music of calm and grace, detailing the poignancy of the composer’s mental anguish.

The tense second movement, **Allegro assai**, is characterized by the emotional cantabile of the first violin floating over the churning of the other instruments. There is no lightness here, but rather an impassioned outburst of driving rhythms with syncopations and jarring accents as well as an harmonic instability indicative of Mendelssohn’s emotional turmoil. Its texture, especially of the trio section, is dark, lean, and desolate. The poignant third movement, **Adagio**, is deeply felt, bringing with it a calm sense of grief, coupled with tender, perhaps even nostalgic remembrance of good times. The beginning of the **Finale: Allegro molto** is syncopated; it then grows into a great state of agitation, with all four instruments seeming to attempt to break the bonds that hold them. The quartet ends with continued assertiveness and drama, perhaps symbolic of a feeling of rage and anger, while despair again speaks forth from the coda.

--notes provided by Susan Halpern
About the Artists

Formed in 1975 at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest, the Takács Quartet first received international attention in 1977, winning First Prize and the Critics’ Prize at the International String Quartet Competition in Evian, France. Now, many awards and honors later and based in Boulder at the University of Colorado, the Quartet is in its forty-fourth season, during which it will perform eighty concerts around the world. They will continue their four annual concerts as Associate Artists at London’s Wigmore Hall in addition to performing in Berlin, Cologne, Baden-Baden, and Bilbao, and at the Bath Mozartfest. The Quartet also will perform extensively in the United States. In addition to this appearance with Friends of Music Concerts, their schedule includes two concerts at Lincoln Center and at the University of Chicago, Princeton, and Berkeley. A tour with Garrick Ohlsson will culminate in a recording for Hyperion of the Elgar and Amy Beach piano quintets. The latest Takács cd, to be released next spring, features Dohnanyi’s two piano quintets and his second string quartet, with pianist Marc-André Hamelin.

As 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 also are on the faculty at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, where they run an intensive summer string quartet seminar, and are Visiting Fellows at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London.

Aspects of the Quartet’s interests and history are explored in violinist 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, melding music history and memoir as it explores the circumstances surrounding the composition of Beethoven’s string quartets.
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