

Takács Quartet

Friday, October 11, 8 pm, 2002

Zellerbach Hall

Edward Dusinger, violin

Károly Schranz, violin

Roger Tapping, viola

András Fejér, cello

with Maxim Philippov, piano

PROGRAM

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart String Quartet in B-flat major, K. 589

Allegro

Larghetto

Menuetto – Trio: Moderato

Allegro assai

Béla Bartók String Quartet No. 6

Mesto – Più mosso, pesante – Vivace

Mesto – Marcia

Mesto – Burletta: Moderato

Mesto

INTERMISSION

Robert Schumann Piano Quintet in E-flat major, Op. 44

Allegro brillante

In modo d'una marcia (Un poco largamente)

Scherzo – Molto vivace

Allegro ma non troppo

with Maxim Philippov, piano

The Takács Quartet appears by arrangement with Cramer/Marder Artists
and records exclusively for Decca/London Records.

The Takács Quartet is Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Colorado in Boulder
and Fellow of The Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London.

The Takács Quartet's attire courtesy of VESTIMENTA, Milan.

www.takacsquartet.com

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String Quartet in B-flat major, K. 589

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

Given the steady deterioration in Mozart's health, finances, and prospects in Vienna at the beginning of 1789, it is not surprising that he eagerly accepted the invitation of a fellow Mason and former student, Prince Karl Lichnowsky, to assess the career possibilities in Berlin. Lichnowsky, an officer in the Prussian army, regularly visited the court at Berlin, and suggested that he could arrange an audience with King Frederick William II, nephew and successor of the immensely cultured Frederick the Great and an avid music lover and a cellist of more than modest accomplishment. Mozart bade farewell to Constanze—it was the first time he had traveled without

her since their marriage seven years before—and left Vienna with Lichnowsky on April 8th. Two days later, they arrived in Prague, where Mozart gave a concert and discussed the possibility (not realized) of writing an opera for Domenico Guardasoni, the local impresario. On April 12th, the pair began a week's stay in Dresden, attending the opera and taking part in a busy round of musical evenings; the last portrait of Mozart from life, a drawing by Doris Stock, was done in Dresden on April 17th. After a stop in Leipzig, where Mozart improvised on the organ commanded a generation earlier by Johann Sebastian Bach at the Thomaskirche and marveled at the choir's performance of Bach's motet *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*, prince and composer arrived in Berlin on April 25th.

In Berlin, Mozart met with the King's director of chamber music, the French cello virtuoso Jean Pierre Duport, and renewed his acquaintance with the oboist Friedrich Ramm, who had won the composer's friendship in Mannheim a dozen years earlier by performing the Oboe Concerto (K. 314) five times in 10 days. Duport and Ramm were apparently not able to arrange a meeting with Frederick William for Mozart immediately (despite Mozart's thinly veiled bribe of writing a set of piano variations on a minuet by Duport

[K. 573]), so he went back to Leipzig for a few days to give a concert of his own music at the Gewandhaus and jot down a little *Gigue*

(K. 574) for Friedrich Doles, an aging pupil of Bach and the Cantor at the Thomaskirche who had directed *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied* for him two weeks before. Back in Berlin on May 19th, Mozart attended a performance of *The Abduction from the Seraglio* at the Imperial Theater in his honor, and heard a concert by his student, the 11-year-old Johann Nepomuk Hummel, whose ambitious father was then shepherding him through an extensive concert tour of Europe. On May 26th, Mozart was finally granted an audience with the King, which went well enough for Frederick William to commission from the Viennese visitor a set of six string quartets for himself and a half-dozen piano sonatas for his eldest daughter, Fredericka. (Many years later, Constanze claimed that her husband was also offered a lucrative position at court during that interview, but this story has never been corroborated and is probably not true.) As down payment, Mozart was presented with 100 Friedrichs d'or in a fine gold box.

Mozart arrived home in Vienna on June 4, 1789, and immediately set to work on the commission for the Prussian court. Sometime in July (the manuscripts were not dated precisely), he completed the Quartet in D major (K. 575) and one of the piano sonatas

(K. 576)—and then stopped. His health was poor that summer, his finances worse, and his worry about Constanze, pregnant for the fifth time in seven years, acute (in his sad letter of July 12th to his fellow Mason Michael Puchberg, he complained about “my unfortunate illness . . . my wretched condition . . . my poor sick wife”), and most of what energy he could muster was channeled into preparing the revival of *Figaro* ordered by Emperor Joseph II for the end of August. The commission for *Così fan tutte* followed that production, and Mozart could not return to the Berlin commission until May 1790, when the Quartet in B-flat major (K. 589) was completed and offered with K. 575 at a chamber music party in his lodgings at which the composer probably played the viola. The Third “Prussian” Quartet (K. 590 in F major), Mozart's last work in the form, was finished in June. Unable to fulfill the balance of the commission and desperate for cash, Mozart sold the three quartets to Artaria for a pittance later that year. Artaria waited, in vain, for the three quartets that would complete the set, and did not announce their publication until December 28, 1791, three weeks after Mozart had died. Frederick William probably never saw or heard these works, which his patronage had inspired. Artaria's announcement in the *Wiener Zeitung* still serves as an appropriate summary of Mozart's last string quartets: “These quartets are among the most estimable works of the composer Mozart, who was torn untimely from this world; they flowed from the pen of this great musical genius not long before his death, and they display all that musical interest in respect of art, beauty, and taste that must awaken pleasure and admiration not only in the amateur, but in the true connoisseur as well.”

It is one of the miracles of Mozart's genius that he insulated his art so thoroughly from his life. Little of the pain and frustration of the time of their creation mars the “Prussian” Quartets, nor is what he called the “troublesome” nature of their composition evident in their pellucid strains. (The manuscripts of Mozart's quartets bear more corrections than those of any other of his compositions.) “Few late works of Mozart's are as unburdened and free from doubt as these three quartets,” wrote Homer Ulrich in his survey of the chamber literature. As would be expected in a composition made to order for a cello-playing king, that instrumental part is given a featured prominence throughout the works, a technique that causes the viola and second violin to be thoroughly drawn into the music's unfolding argument in order to achieve tonal balance and textural homogeneity. This conversational characteristic is heard in the opening page of the Quartet in B-flat major, in which the first violin begins the principal theme, shares it in duet with the viola in the

second measure, and passes it on to the cello five bars later. The music is led through a transition that introduces a motive of arching shape and a glistening triplet figuration before it arrives at the formal subsidiary subject, a suavely flowing melody entrusted to the cello. The development section is largely concerned with the main theme and the triplet motive from the transition. The recapitulation of the earlier themes brings formal balance and harmonic closure to the movement.

The Larghetto, one of the inimitable manifestations of the grace and lucidity that mark Mozart's finest creations, is begun by a melody floated in the silvery high register of the cello. The first violin appropriates this lovely theme, and leads to the passage of rippling scales that serves as the second subject. These two thematic inspirations return to form the second half of the movement.

The third movement contains one of the most inventive episodes in Mozart's chamber music. The Menuetto heard to open and close the movement, which allows the first violin a concertante importance, proceeds largely according to expectations. The central Trio, however, comprises a remarkable anthology of unusual compositional techniques: elaborate accompaniments in mechanistic ticking rhythms; feather-stitched melodic decorations; amazing dynamic and chordal surprises; harmonic slippages that are almost eerie in their restlessness; even a dramatic silence that stops the music dead in its tracks. Such remarkable and potentially iconoclastic music-making spurs thoughts about the direction that Mozart's creativity might have taken had he lived into the encroaching age of Romanticism.

The rondo-form finale, though generally light and vivacious in style, is touched, particularly in its middle regions, with the sophistication of harmony and thematic development that invest the works of Mozart's maturity with their subtlety and range of expression.

String Quartet No. 6

Béla Bartók (1881–1945)

"Yes, those were horrible days for us, too, those days when Austria was attacked," Bartók responded from Budapest on April 13, 1938, to his loyal friend in Basle, Switzerland, Mrs. Oscar Müller-Widmann. "The most frightful thing for us at the moment is that we face the threat of seeing Hungary also given over to this regime of bandits and murderers. I cannot imagine how I could live in such a country Strictly speaking, it would be my duty to exile myself, if that is still possible. But even under the most favorable auspices, it would cause me an enormous amount of trouble and moral anguish to earn my daily bread in a foreign country All this adds up to the same old problem, whether to go or stay."

Given the unsettled and frightening political situation under which all eastern Europeans found themselves during the terrible days of 1938 and 1939, it is little wonder that Bartók's creativity was undermined. He managed to complete the Violin Concerto No. 2 in December 1938, but then found himself too preoccupied to undertake any further original work. Paul Sacher, the conductor of the Basle Chamber Orchestra and a close friend who had commissioned the Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta two years before, recognized that Bartók needed to leave Budapest if his creativity was to be revived. Sacher invited the Bartóks to spend the summer of 1939 at his chalet at Saanen in the massif of Gruyère in Switzerland, and he commissioned the Divertimento for his orchestra. Bartók accepted both of the invitations, and arrived at Saanen in July. Even in Switzerland, however, Bartók could not escape the ominous European political situation. "The poor, peaceful, honest Swiss are being compelled to burn with war-fever," he wrote to his son Béla in Hungary on August 18th. "Their newspapers are full of military articles, they have taken defense measures on the more important passes, etc.—military preparedness. I saw this for myself on the Julier Pass; for example, boulders have been made into road-blocks against tanks, and such like attractions. It's the same in Holland. I do not like your going to Rumania—in such uncertain times it is unwise to go anywhere so unsafe. I am also worried whether I shall be able to get home from here if this or that happens."

Once installed at Saanen, however, Bartók retreated into a welcome isolation to undertake Sacher's commission. "Fortunately I can put this [war] worry out of my mind if I have to—it does not disturb my work," he continued in his letter to Béla. "Somehow I feel like a musician of olden times—the invited guest of a patron of the arts. For here I am, as you know, entirely the guest of the Sachers; they see to everything. However, I have to work: a piece for Sacher himself (something for a string orchestra). Luckily the work went well, and I just completed it yesterday." The work was the Divertimento for String Orchestra, one of Bartók's most immediately accessible compositions. The halcyon Swiss interlude during which he produced this piece was not to last, however. Almost as soon as he had begun the Quartet No. 6 at Saanen, word came from Budapest of his beloved mother's death. He returned home, where he completed—though with considerable difficulty—the quartet in November 1939. It was the last work that he wrote in Europe, and his last

until the Concerto for Orchestra four years later. His situation in Budapest became untenable during the following months, and in April 1940, he sailed to America for a concert tour with Joseph Szigeti. After an arduous journey home that summer to settle his affairs and collect his wife, he went back to New York in October and never again saw his native Hungary. The Quartet No. 6 was premiered in New York on January 20, 1941, by the Kolisch Quartet.

Harry Hallreich wrote that the Quartet

No. 6 "appeals to us as an intensely moving human document with a foundation that is at least autobiographical, if not also that of 'program music.' Bartók's iron grip, which formerly kept under control every outburst, however violent, of the composer's temperament, here gives way to a subjectivity and directness of expression that make this one of the most moving and easily appreciated of Bartók's works." The quartet takes as its motto an arching, step-wise melody marked *mesto*—"sad"—given at the beginning by the unaccompanied viola. This theme unifies the whole composition by reappearing in different settings at the beginnings of the second and third movements, and by serving as the principal subject of the finale. The first movement is a sonata form based on a flying main theme and a second theme grown from the vibrant rhythms and winding melodic leadings of Hungarian folksong. The dotted-rhythm *Marcia*, savagely ironic and unsettlingly diabolical, is strongly contrasted by the gapped-scale melody and rustling accompaniment of the central Trio.

The bitter, menacing humor of the *Burletta* ("Burlesque") is ameliorated, though not overcome, by the pastoral music of the movement's internal episodes. The finale unfolds dolefully from the *mesto* theme, allowing ghostly reminiscences of the two themes from the first movement before giving one final loud wail and ebbing into silence. Each successive movement of the Quartet No. 6 is more melancholy in mood and slower in tempo—*Vivace*, *Marcia*, *Moderato*, *Mesto*—so that the work ends with a feeling of bleak resignation, perhaps indicating the growing pessimism that overcame Bartók during the time of its creation. "Nowhere in all Bartók's music is there a movement so restrained and at the same time with such a powerful impact," wrote Halsey Stevens of the finale in his study of the composer. "It is as if this music had always existed, requiring only to be drawn up from the collective unconscious of mankind, not to be composed."

Piano Quintet in E-flat major, Op. 44

Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

In 1842, Schumann turned from the orchestral genres that had occupied him during the previous year to concentrate with nearly monomaniacal zeal on chamber music. Entries in his diary testify to the frantic pace of his inspiration: "June 4th: started the Quartet in

A minor. June 6th: Finished the Adagio of the Quartet. June 8th: My Quartet almost finished. June 11th: A good day, started a Second Quartet. June 18th: The Second Quartet almost finished up to the *Variazioni*. July 5th: Finished my Second Quartet. July 8th: Began the Third Quartet. July 10th: Worked with application on the Third Quartet." Schumann's three string quartets, published together under the single opus number 41, were completed in a frenzy of creative activity within just two months, after which he never wrote another work in the form. Having nearly exhausted himself, he and Clara took a holiday at a Bohemian spa in August, but he again threw himself into composition soon after his return: the Piano Quintet (Op. 44) was begun in September and the Piano Quartet (Op. 47) on October 24th; both were finished before the *Phantasiestücke* for Piano, Violin, and Cello (Op. 88) were created in December. Schumann, drained by three months of feverish work, then slumped into a state of nervous collapse, and was unable to compose again until the following February, though his achievement of 1842—the composition of six chamber music masterpieces in five months—stands as one of the greatest bursts of creative inspiration in the history of the art.

Schumann sketched the Quintet for Piano, Two Violins, Viola, and Cello, the first work ever written for that combination of instruments, in just five days during September 1842, and completed the score only two weeks later. He held a trial run-through of the piece at his home the following month; Clara played the piano part, and the ensemble parts were taken by a string quartet from the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, which was headed by that ensemble's distinguished concertmaster, Ferdinand David (for whom Mendelssohn was to write his Violin Concerto two years later). Schumann arranged another performance of the work for December 6th at the home of Carl and Henriette Voigt, who were among the most influential local patrons of the arts, but Clara fell ill that morning, and Mendelssohn, though never having seen the manuscript, agreed to fill in for her. Upon Mendelssohn's suggestion, Schumann revised the slow movement and added a second trio to the Scherzo after the reading at the Voigts, and it was in this version that the piece was heard

publicly for the first time, at the Gewandhaus on January 8, 1843. The performance was so successful that it had to be repeated on February 9th to satisfy audience demand.

The Quintet in E-flat major opens with a striding, heroic theme played by the full ensemble. A gentler motive is posited by the piano and the violin as a transition to the second theme, a lovely scalar melody initiated by the cello. A recall of the vigorous opening theme closes the exposition. The development section, led by the piano (as is most of the work—the keyboard has only six measures of rest in the entire composition), deals mostly with permutations of the main theme. The recapitulation provides balance and closure by recalling the earlier thematic material in appropriately adjusted tonalities. The second movement is in the mode and manner of a solemn funeral march into which are inserted two contrasting episodes. The first intervening paragraph is a lyrical effusion for the violin and cello in duet supported by a restless accompaniment from the inner strings and the keyboard. The second episode is a tempestuous passage of angry triplet rhythms that are not soothed until the lyrical melody from the earlier episode returns in a heightened setting. The funeral march, nearly exhausted, is heard one final time to bring the movement to a dying close. The Scherzo, called by one commentator “the glorification of the scale,” is strewn with long ribbons of ascending and descending notes. Two trios, one sweet and flowing, the other impetuous and Gypsy-inspired, provide contrast. The finale, one of Schumann’s most masterful formal accomplishments, begins in the shadow of defiant tragedy but, before its end, achieves a soaring, life-affirming proclamation through an expertly constructed double fugue based on the conjoined main themes of the finale and the opening movement.

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The Takács Quartet is recognized as one of the world’s greatest string ensembles. Since its formation in 1975, the group has appeared regularly in every major music capital and prestigious festival. The Takács is based in Boulder, Colorado, where it has held a residency at the University of Colorado since 1983. The group is a resident quartet at the Aspen Festival and its members are also visiting fellows at The Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London.

The first volume of the Takács Quartet’s Beethoven cycle (the middle quartets) was released last May. The group’s recording of the Bartók cycle received the Gramophone Chamber Music Recording of the Year award (1998), and in 1999, it was nominated for a Grammy Award. The ensemble’s subsequent recording release for Decca/London, with which it signed an exclusive recording contract in 1988, includes the Schubert Trout Quintet with Andreas Haefliger, piano (Grammy nominee, 2000), and Dvořák’s Quartet Op. 51 and Piano Quintet Op. 81, also with Haefliger. Volume two (early quartets) of the Beethoven cycle will be released next spring, and the final volume (the late quartets) is to appear in early 2005. The ensemble’s discography ranges from Schubert’s Quartet in G major and his Notturmo, to quartets by Smetana and Borodin; Haydn’s Op. 76, 77, and 103 quartets; the three Brahms quartets and the Piano Quintet in F minor with Andras Schiff; Chausson’s Concerto for Violin, Piano, and String Quartet with Joshua Bell and Jean-Yves Thibaudet; Mozart’s string quintets, K. 515 and 516, with Gyorgy Pauk; and Schubert’s Quartettsatz, Rosamunde, and Death and the Maiden.

During the 2002–2003 season, the Takács Quartet performs over 40 concerts in the United States, and tours extensively in Europe. Special projects include a tour with the famed Hungarian gypsy ensemble Muzsikás; several concerts with pianist Garrick Ohlsson; and a Beethoven cycle presented by the Cleveland Orchestra.

In addition to its annual residency at the Aspen Festival and a residency at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, worldwide 2002–2003 tour cities include Washington, Miami, Montreal, Honolulu, Ann Arbor, Berkeley, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, London, Paris, Amsterdam, Zurich, Copenhagen, and Berlin. Last season, the Takács toured in 15 cities with former US Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky, culminating in a concert at Lincoln Center. Their program of music and poetry was centered around the theme of Love.

Recent Takács seasons have included Bartók cycles in London, Madrid, and Seville; Schubert cycles in London, Lisbon, Utrecht, and Spain; and a Brahms cycle in London. The ensemble has performed Beethoven cycles in Paris, London, Zurich, Sydney, New York, and at Middlebury College, and numerous concerts surrounding the Mozart anniversary year in 1991. During the summer of 1993, the Takács gave a cycle of three concerts at the Salzburg Festival featuring the quartets of Bartók and Brahms. The ensemble made its Lincoln Center debut on the Great Performers Series in 1989, and performed a six-concert Haydn festival in 1991 with pianist Andras Schiff at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (repeated in London’s Wigmore Hall). The Quartet made its Carnegie Hall debut in 1992.

The Takács Quartet was formed by Gabor Takács-Nagy, Karoly Schranz, Gabor Ormai, and Andras Fejer in 1975, while all four were students at Budapest's Liszt Academy. It first received international attention in 1977, winning First Prize and the Critics' Prize at the International String Quartet Competition in Evian, France. Thereafter, the Takács won the Gold Medal at the 1978 Portsmouth and Bordeaux competitions and First Prize at the Budapest International String Quartet Competition (1978) and the Bratislava Competition (1981). The Takács Quartet made its North American debut tour in 1982.

Maxim Philippov (piano) was named silver medalist at the Eleventh Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in June 2001, his performances distinguished by deft musicianship and natural elegance. The Moscow-born pianist was awarded two years of concert engagements and career management, as well as a compact disc recording of his award-winning performances for the Harmonia Mundi label.

Philippov has performed recitals throughout his native Russia, Europe, and North America, highlighted by appearances at important concert venues such as Queen Elizabeth Hall in London and the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. He has collaborated with the Calgary Philharmonic, the City of Birmingham Symphony, the Edinburgh Symphony, and the Moscow Philharmonic, among others. In the United States, Philippov has performed with numerous symphony orchestras as well as in recital. His 2002–03 concert season includes performances of six different concertos.

Also the recipient of a Steven De Groote Memorial Award for Best Performance of Chamber Music during the semifinal round of the Cliburn Competition, Philippov has collaborated with the American String Quartet and this season joins the Takács Quartet for performances at Cal Performances and the University of Connecticut in Storrs.

Emerging as one of today's most engaging interpreters of Rachmaninoff, Philippov has recorded two discs devoted to the solo works of this composer. The Harmonia Mundi disc featuring his Cliburn Competition performance of several Rachmaninoff Preludes, Op. 32, was released to much critical acclaim. He was featured in *Playing on the Edge*, the Peabody Award-winning documentary on the Eleventh Van Cliburn Competition, and will also appear in the forthcoming PBS Concerto series, which showcases his final round Cliburn Competition performances with the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra and Maestro James Conlon.

Philippov began studying the piano at the age of five and made his public debut when he was eight. A laureate of several major international piano competitions—including the Leeds, Rachmaninoff, Rubinstein, and Tchaikovsky competitions—he won first prize at the 1996 Esther Honens Calgary International Piano Competition. A former pupil of Vera Gornostaeva, Philippov now resides in Moscow, where he serves on the faculty of the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory.

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