

Sunday, December 10, 2017, 3pm
Zellerbach Hall

Takács Quartet **Garrick Ohlsson, *piano***

Takács Quartet

Edward Dusinger, *violin*

Károly Schranz, *violin*

Geraldine Walther, *viola*

András Fejér, *cello*

PROGRAM

- Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756–1791) String Quartet No. 21 in D Major, K. 575
Allegretto
Andante
Menuetto and Trio. Allegretto
Allegretto
- Dmitri SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975) String Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Op. 122
Introduction: Andantino –
Scherzo: Allegretto –
Recitative: Adagio –
Etude: Allegro –
Humoresque: Allegro –
Elegy: Adagio –
Finale: Moderato – Meno mosso – Moderato

INTERMISSION

- Johannes BRAHMS (1833–1897) Piano Quintet in F minor, Op. 34
Allegro non troppo
Andante, un poco adagio
Scherzo: Allegro
Finale: Poco sostenuto – Allegro non troppo –
Presto, non troppo
Garrick Ohlsson, *piano*

*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 the musicians are Associate Artists at Wigmore Hall, London.*

www.takacsquartet.com

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Music recaptures the time that gave it birth. Its re-creation in concert duplicates the gestures—the bow strokes, the touch of the keys—that its first performers used, past entering present. Almost a hundred years ago, T.S. Eliot voiced one of those seemingly self-evident truths: every new work of art is born of a tradition and in turn casts light on the tradition that spawned it, changing that tradition and thus laying the foundation for future works. In today's performance, three composers re-emerge as individuals, and also as part of a tradition, one that began before 1789, when Mozart wrote the music that opens this program, and that continues today, as we approach these three from our perspective, on a Sunday afternoon in December 2017.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
String Quartet No. 21 in D Major, K. 575

People's quirks can burden them with unfortunate nicknames, and music's perceived content can saddle it with irrelevant subtitles. In 1785 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart composed a song called "The Violet." The second movement of his String Quartet, K. 575, written four years later, resembles the song, so (inevitably) the quartet is sometimes referred to as *The Violet*. Another of its subtitles, *Prussian*, reflects the circumstances of its composition. K. 575 is the first of three string quartets Mozart composed on commission from the music-loving Frederick William II, King of Prussia. Mozart produced this work quickly, before money troubles, his wife and son's ill health, and his new opera, *Così fan tutte*, diverted his attention, and he completed only two more of the six quartets originally planned for the king. Mozart himself attached no titles to these quartets, the last he wrote.

K. 575 opens with an allegretto free of the emotional ambiguity Mozart often creates with his special brand of piquant harmony. We hear first a broad melody, generous and elegantly relaxed, establishing a mood that saturates the rest of the movement.

Whether or not Mozart had "The Violet" in mind when writing the Andante, this second movement is indeed songful, more aria than

simple Lied. Here we encounter that essence of Mozart, the elegant craftsmanship and exquisite balance of sensibility, the music's gentle pathos stopping just at the brink of melancholy.

The three-part minuet (A–B–A) opens with a poised tune that gives way (twice before the central section, once afterward) to a passage that hints at sterner stuff, then reverts quickly to character via a six-note, offbeat staccato figure that rises and falls, reintroducing the cheerful first theme. A gently swaying, lush tune makes up the movement's middle episode.

The finale returns to the temperament of the first movement, and what we hear at the outset is cousin to the theme that opened the quartet. Pay special attention to the first six notes, for this figure recurs again and again, like a rondo but also like a set of simple variations. Brief flirtation with the minor mode is dispensed with quickly, and this open-hearted quartet concludes in the affirmative.

Mozart's abundant gifts and his facility can lead us to mistake his music's beauty for superficiality, and over the centuries he has sometimes been thought an effortless artist of sunshine, a Thomas Kinkadee of music. But one part of his greatness resides in his music's frequent *appearance* of ease, which is what we find in this quartet.

Dmitri Shostakovich
String Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Op. 122

When a Russian émigré violist once told me that "Shostakovich tells the story of the 20th century in his music," he was talking about the symphonies, all 15 of which he had played with the Leningrad Philharmonic. Dmitri Shostakovich never lived to see Leningrad re-named Saint Petersburg (as the city was called when he was born there), but we can imagine that his pleasure at the USSR's breakup would have been subdued. He understood fortune's rapid changes and remained wary of celebration. Alternately condemned and feted by the authorities—condemned for "bourgeois" music and feted with the Stalin Prize after making artistic amends—he never knew what would bring glory or a visit from the secret police. His symphonies, big public statements, sometimes



got him in trouble. The somber Eighth, from the dark days of World War II, earned a verdict as “defeatist,” while the lighthearted Ninth, from 1945, failed to please those looking for a paean to Mother Russia after the Great Patriotic War. Shostakovich reserved his most private thoughts and pessimism for more intimate mediums, especially the string quartet. He wrote 15 quartets, necessary listening if you want to know this composer.

The String Quartet No. 11 dates from 1966 and was introduced that year by the Beethoven Quartet, the ensemble that had premiered all of Shostakovich's quartets since No. 2, in 1944. Long indebted to these musicians, Shostakovich had been shaken when the Beethoven's second violinist, Vasili Shirinsky, died in 1965. Opus 122 is dedicated to Shirinsky, but the music reflects more than the pain of loss. The brief cultural thaw that USSR Party Chairman Nikita Khrushchev had initiated came to an end with his ouster in 1964. The new party chief, Leonid Brezhnev, was no friend of expressive freedom, forcing artists to tread carefully. Sadness permeates this quartet, and so does anger.

Seven short sections comprise the work, played without pause. (1) The Introduction opens with the lament of a solo violin. Soon the others join this keening prelude. (2) In the Scherzo, a nervous chugging figure is passed around, fugue-like, and punctuated by glissandi that sound increasingly like fingernails on a blackboard. (3) A furious low grinding opens the Recitative, twice repeated after brief pauses. The outraged energy spends itself and dies in a subdued recollection of the Scherzo. (4) A skeletal dance dominates the Etude, solo violin in highest register. (5) A tick-tock begins the Humoresque and grows into a pounding ostinato, above which a violin screams. (6) The dark-hued Elegy hints at the funeral march of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony. (7) The Finale opens *sotto voce*, with deep-voiced murmurs. Recollections of earlier sections ghost through the music, among them the Scherzo with its glissandos, the opening lament, and the Etude's eerie dance. Fury ebbs, and the music fades, gone.

Johannes Brahms

Piano Quintet in F minor, Op. 34

Johannes Brahms concentrated Romantic sincerity into classical structures. Those structures led him toward concision and directness, much as the restrictions of the sonnet forced Shakespeare and Milton and Keats to plunge deeper into their wells of imagination. To say that Brahms found his emotion in the form is overstatement, but structural demands sparked expressive discoveries.

The harshest critic of his own work, Brahms honed his material until he was satisfied. His F-minor Piano Quintet is an example. It began life in 1862 as a string quintet. Brahms' friend the violinist Joseph Joachim praised the ideas but warned that they were buried in the sonic texture. So Brahms recast the quintet as a sonata for two pianos. He liked that version. Still he couldn't win. Hearing the two-piano work, Clara Schumann urged the composer to orchestrate it. Instead, he rewrote the piece for piano and string quartet. In the contrasting sounds of keyboard and strings, he believed he had finally found the form that realized his ideas most perfectly. This was in 1864. At age 31, he was already a composer to be reckoned with. (If you are not familiar with this music in its version for two pianos, you owe yourself the treat of hearing it that way and can access recordings via YouTube. The resonant writing for the keyboard duo produces a sonority that lovers of Brahms will find utterly characteristic, a sound such as Schumann must have had in mind when he called Brahms' piano sonatas “veiled symphonies.”)

Brahms could write music of heart-piercing sweetness and poignancy. Not here. The quintet is a big, tightly built drama dominated by the minor mode. In it, Brahms assumes his King Lear posture, gritty and serious.

The Allegro non troppo begins with a stern theme, outlined slowly and quickly gathering momentum. The lyrical second theme transforms into a march-like passage, re-emerges in its lyrical guise, and leads to a chorale that rounds out the exposition. In the development, these themes enter myriad byways, revealing

dramatic possibilities Brahms continues to explore in the recapitulation. The extended coda starts in wistful reserve and grows into a great tragic capstone.

The piano begins the Andante with a tune that becomes the foundation of this movement, which is so songful you may be tempted to hum along.

Angry plucked cello strings open the Scherzo, which quickly knots itself into a ball of concentrated force, giving way to a heroic march. A nervous figure intrudes, crazed and obsessive. At its height it exhausts itself, introducing a lyrical episode—a brief respite, for again the fierce cello leads to a reprise of the opening section, tension rising to its most fevered.

A grave introduction recalls the first movement's opening, now at a glacial pace, and introduces a finale built on that movement's scale. The Allegro proper is a clipped dance with distant Gypsy roots. Mournful strings offer contrast. The coda returns to the movement's slow introduction, builds in speed and volume, and compacts the emotional strands of this movement into a projectile. Its explosion marks the end.

Jan Swafford, in his 1998 biography *Johannes Brahms*, points out how, in this work, the composer matched formal means and expressive ends, moving forward in his creative evolution. Swafford continues: "Of the subtleties composers aspire to and only occasionally manage to achieve over the course of long pieces, [the] feeling of unity—within emotional variety—is one of the most elusive. It has little to do with technique as such, or motivic and tonal relationships as such; it cannot be taught, can hardly be analyzed, only felt intuitively by composer and listener alike. For Brahms this began to happen, perhaps, with the F-minor Quintet.... [T]he emotional intensity he achieved in it seems at times anguished, at times (in the scherzo) demonic, at times tragic. Yet the whole quintet remains a unified dramatic plot without becoming monochrome: one story."

—Larry Rothe

Larry Rothe is the author of Music for a City, Music for the World: 100 Years with the San Francisco Symphony and co-author of For the Love of Music.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

The **Takács Quartet**, now entering its 43rd season, is renowned for the vitality of its interpretations. The *New York Times* recently lauded the ensemble for "revealing the familiar as unfamiliar, making the most traditional of works feel radical once more," and the *Financial Times* described a recent concert at the Wigmore Hall: "Even in the most fiendish repertoire these players show no fear, injecting the music with a heady sense of freedom. At the same time, though, there is an uncompromising attention to detail: neither a note nor a bow-hair is out of place." Based in Boulder at the University of Colorado, the Takács 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, 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, and perform at Tanglewood with pianist Garrick Ohlsson, at the Aspen Festival, and in more than 40 other concerts in prestigious North American venues. They will also tour with pianist Marc-André Hamelin. The latest Takács recording, released by Hyperion in September, features Dvořák's String Quintet, Op. 97 (with Lawrence Power) and String Quartet in A-flat Major, Op. 105.

Last season, the Takács presented complete six-concert Beethoven quartet cycles here at Cal Performances, in London's Wigmore Hall, and at Princeton and the University of Michigan. Complementing these cycles, Edward Dusing'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 professional string quartet, melding music history and memoir as it explores the circumstances surrounding the composition of Beethoven's quartets.

The Takács became the first string quartet to win the Wigmore Hall Medal in May, 2014. Inaugurated in 2007, the honor recognizes major international artists who have a strong association with Wigmore Hall. Recipients so far include András Schiff, Thomas Quasthoff, 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.

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 quartet is known for such innovative programming, and this particular presentation was conceived in close collaboration with Roth. The quartet first performed *Everyman* at Carnegie Hall in 2007 with Philip Seymour Hoffman. The ensemble has toured 14 cities with the poet Robert Pinsky, collaborates regularly with the Hungarian Folk group Muzsikás, and in 2010 collaborated with the Colorado Shakespeare Festival and David Lawrence Morse on a drama project that explored the composition of Beethoven's last quartets.

The Takács records for Hyperion Records, and their releases for that label include string quartets by Haydn, Schubert, Janáček, Smetana, Debussy, and Britten, as well as piano quintets by César Franck and Shostakovich (with Marc-

André Hamelin), and viola quintets by Brahms (with Lawrence Power). Future releases for Hyperion include a Dvořák disc with Lawrence Power, the Dohnányi piano quintets with Marc-André Hamelin, and piano quintets by Elgar and Amy Beach with Garrick Ohlsson. For their CDs on the Decca/London label, the musicians have 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. Full details of all recordings can be found in the recordings section of the Takács Quartet's website: www.takacsquartet.com.

The members of the Takács Quartet are Christoffersen Faculty Fellows at the University of Colorado at Boulder and play on instruments generously loaned to them by a family foundation. 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. The Takács is also a Visiting Quartet at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London.

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 Portsmouth and Bordeaux competitions and First Prizes at the Budapest International String Quartet Competition in 1978 and the Bratislava Competition in 1981. The quartet made its North American debut tour in 1982. Violinist Edward Dusing joined the Takács in 1993 and violist Roger Tapping in 1995. Violist Geraldine Walther replaced Tapping in 2005. In 2001 the Takács Quartet was awarded the Order of Merit of the Knight's Cross of the Republic of Hungary, and in March of 2011 each member of the quartet was awarded the Order of Merit Commander's Cross by the President of the Republic of Hungary.

Garrick Ohlsson (*piano*) has established himself worldwide as a musician of great interpretive and technical prowess. Although long regarded as one of the world's leading exponents of the music of Chopin, Ohlsson commands an enormous repertoire ranging over the entire piano literature and he has come to be noted for his masterly performances of the works of Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert, as well as the Romantic repertoire. To date he has at his command more than 80 concertos, ranging from Haydn and Mozart to works of the 21st century.

This season that vast repertoire can be sampled in concertos ranging from Chopin, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Barber, and Busoni in cities including St. Louis, Washington (DC), Cincinnati, San Francisco, Portland (OR), Prague, Stockholm, Wrocław, and Strasbourg. In recital he can be heard in New York (Alice Tully Hall), Seattle, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, and Puerto Rico. He will appear twice during the season with the Indianapolis Symphony—first playing two Prokofiev concertos in a weekend in which all five will be pro-

grammed, and returning later in the season with Tchaikovsky's Concerto No. 1.

An avid chamber musician, Ohlsson has collaborated with the Cleveland, Emerson, and Tokyo string quartets, and is currently touring with the Takács Quartet. Together with violinist Jorja Fleezanis and cellist Michael Grebanier, he is a founding member of the San Francisco-based FOG Trio. Ohlsson can be heard on the Arabesque, RCA Victor Red Seal, Angel, BMG, Delos, Hänssler, Nonesuch, Telarc, Hyperion, and Virgin Classics labels.

A native of White Plains (NY), Ohlsson began his piano studies at the age of eight, at the Westchester Conservatory of Music; at 13 he entered the Juilliard School, in New York City. He has been awarded first prizes in the Busoni and Montreal piano competitions, the Gold Medal at the International Chopin Competition in Warsaw (1970), the Avery Fisher Prize (1994), the University Musical Society Distinguished Artist Award in Ann Arbor (MI, 1998), and the Jean Gimbel Lane Prize in Piano Performance from the Northwestern University Bienen School of Music (2014).