



Amanda Tipton

Saturday, December 7, 2019, 8pm  
Sunday, December 8, 2019, 3pm  
Hertz Hall

## Takács Quartet

# The Complete String Quartets of Béla Bartók

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

*This performance is made possible, in part, by Patron Sponsors Charles and Helene Linker.  
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## PROGRAMS

### Saturday, December 7

String Quartet No. 1, Sz. 40 (Op. 7)

Lento

Allegretto—Introduzione

Allegro vivace

String Quartet No. 3, Sz. 8

Prima parte: Moderato

Seconda parte: Allegro

Recapitulazione della prima parte: Moderato

Coda: Allegro molto

#### INTERMISSION

String Quartet No. 5, Sz. 102, BB 110

Allegro

Adagio molto

Scherzo: alla bulgarese

Andante

Finale: Allegro vivace

### Sunday, December 8

String Quartet No. 2, Sz. 67 (Op. 17)

Moderato

Allegro molto capriccioso

Lento

String Quartet No. 4, Sz. 91

Allegro

Prestissimo, con sordino

Non troppo lento

Allegretto pizzicato

Allegro molto

#### INTERMISSION

String Quartet No. 6, Sz. 114, BB 119

Mesto—Più mosso, pesante—Vivace

Mesto—Marcia

Mesto—Burlatta—Moderato

Mesto

*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;  
the members are Associate Artists at Wigmore Hall, London.*

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

## The Complete String Quartets of Béla Bartók (1881–1945)

There is a particular exhilaration that comes with performing the six Bartók string quartets that make up the complete cycle. Our performances have been influenced by working regularly with the Hungarian folk group Muzsikás, whose sense of adventure and joyful abandon has, we hope, crept into our performances of these monuments of 20th-century quartet literature.

As with Beethoven cycle programs, we arrange the order of the quartets to give a sense of Bartók's musical journey. In the first program, the late Romanticism of the Quartet No. 1 is rudely shattered by the explosive modernist tendencies of No. 3. To conclude the program, No. 5 shows Bartók at the peak of his compositional powers, with its extraordinary spectrum of colors, rhythmic vitality, and range of emotion. The second program begins with the Quartet No. 2, which presents melancholy and yearning lyricism in the outer movements and a capricious second movement giddy with excitement and momentum. We follow this with No. 4, itself a striking journey from its rigid, uncompromising first movement and spectral, nightmarish second to the humanizing cello solo in the middle movement. The humorous fourth movement and festive dance finale leave performers and audience alike in a completely different place from where we began.

Of course, the cycle must end with the Sixth Quartet, where Bartók achieved an unprecedented degree of emotional depth—a sense of resignation and even withdrawal from the world.

—*Takács Quartet*

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The string quartets of Béla Bartók are monuments of music, virtually unsurpassed by any body of work of any other composer: unimpeachable in their form and technique, with the tiniest motivic atom set spinning elegantly through the universe of an all-embracing structure; ingenious yet masterful in their use

of sonority; daring harmonically yet grounded in tradition; enormous in their range of expression. They are fundamental documents of modern music, integral to the study of the discipline and the subject of many learned treatises. But the true importance of these masterpieces lies not in their demonstrable mastery of the craft of composition, not in the fierce intellect that attended their creation, but in the way they allow us to share the spirit of one extraordinary man who affirmed his life—and ours—by wresting order from change and contradiction.

Change and contradiction came to Bartók both as a Hungarian, with the waning of the old ways of life that provided the bedrock of the nation's culture, and as a musician, with the erosion of the traditional tonal system upon which compositions had been founded for nearly three centuries. Bartók confronted both of these potential threats in the quartets by drawing melodic, rhythmic, and textural inspiration from the indigenous songs and dances that he collected during his decades of field research on the subject, and then forging those musical elements into logical forms molded from new tonal alloys that melded convention and innovation.

In so doing, he mirrored his own life: by showing in the Quartets Nos. 1 and 2 (composed when he was 27 and 34, and the only two of the quartets bearing opus numbers) how the folk sources to which he had devoted his early years could affirm his coming of age by providing the basis for establishing his distinctive creative voice; by showing in the Quartets Nos. 3 and 4 (ages 46 and 47) how that musical speech could be made to encompass the most rigorous discipline and individualism; and by showing in the Quartets Nos. 5 and 6 (ages 53 and 58) how the experience of life (and art) could both sharpen and mellow the personality to reflect the wisdom of maturity. Bartók's six string quartets transcend the mere notes that are their medium to record the unfolding and renewing of a human spirit, a process of creativity and communication that perfectly embodies the composer's artistic credo: "I cannot conceive of music that expresses absolutely nothing."

**String Quartet No. 1, Sz. 40 (Op. 7)**

The year 1907, when he was 26, was a crucial time both personally and professionally for Béla Bartók. In January, he was appointed to the faculty of the Budapest Academy of Music as a teacher of piano, and he soon became recognized as one of Hungary's most talented keyboard virtuosos and pedagogues. By 1907, he had begun to establish himself as a composer and a folk music researcher, though his original works to that time, largely under the sway of late German Romanticism, had not yet revealed his distinctive creative personality. He was then also much occupied with thoughts of Hungarian nationalism (he even eschewed business suits for a short period in favor of traditional peasant dress), and the manner in which the music he was documenting on his research trips through the Transylvanian countryside could be most effectively incorporated into his original works.

The String Quartet No. 1, Bartók's first published chamber work and his earliest generally recognized masterpiece, is an important document of that formative time in his life. Though certainly touched by elements of programmatic autobiography (Ernö Lendvai found in it "first descent—then ascent. The entire work possesses a dramatic [progression] because the 'return to life' [Kodály's description of the finale] is brought about by catharsis, a purifying fever"), the quartet is, above all, a purely musical record of the profound evolution of Bartók's stylistic language from its Germanic, Romantic origins to its mature basis in the quintessential elements of Hungarian folk song. Elliott Antokoletz paired it with Strauss' *Elektra*, also completed in 1909, as "epitomizing late Romantic music on the threshold of a new chromatic idiom."

The first movement is a darkly emotional essay grown from the harmonic richness of Wagner's *Tristan*, and not unrelated to the ripe Expressionism of Schoenberg's 1899 *Verklärte Nacht*. The work begins with a close canon in slow tempo on a lamenting theme, whose imitative technique was probably influenced by the fugue that opens Beethoven's C-sharp

minor Quartet, Op. 131. Formal contrast is provided by the movement's central section, based on a descending theme in worried rhythms (marked "very impassioned") initiated by the viola above a drone in the cello. (As a means of unifying the overall structure of the quartet, the opening interval of this melody—a falling half-step—serves as the germ from which the themes of the two later movements grow.) A return of the opening canon, floating high in the violins, rounds out the movement's form. An inconclusive harmony leads without pause to the next movement.

The form of the spectral Allegretto is related to Classical sonata-allegro with three themes: a falling melody of short phrases introduced by the second violin after a hesitant introduction; a flowing waltz-like strain given by the inner strings above an ostinato murmur from the cello and first violin; and a quiet, subdued motive accompanied by pizzicato notes from the cello. After a tightly woven development section, however, the themes are recapitulated not in their expected order, but in reverse, a technique that creates a structural symmetry (1–2–3–development–3–2–1) for which Bartók showed great fondness in many of his later compositions.

It is in the finale that Bartók moved beyond the extended Romantic style of the earlier movements toward the characteristic compositional idiom, grown from the distinctive melodic leadings and fiery dance rhythms of Hungarian folk music, that informs his greatest works. The movement is introduced by a prelude paragraph in which the cello makes bardic pronouncements that are separated by excited punctuations from the upper strings. The main part of the movement is a sort of modern sonata-rondo whose structural demarcations are often blurred by the continuous thematic working-out. The movement's second theme, however, a folkish tune similar to the one on which Kodály based his "Peacock" *Variations* of 1939, is placed in high relief by its slow tempo and Impressionistic trilled accompaniment. (Bartók was much interested in the music of the new French composers during

the work's composition. He purchased a copy of Debussy's String Quartet in October 1907.) Though the First String Quartet is among the earliest of Bartók's works to exhibit the stylistic gestures that were to place him among the great composers of the modern era, it is music of undeniable personality and remarkable artistic vision and craftsmanship.

### String Quartet No. 2, Sz. 67 (Op. 17)

During the early years of the 20th century, Bartók became obsessed with the folk music of his native Hungary. He and his friend and colleague in composition Zoltán Kodály trooped the hinterlands with, at first, pen and paper, and, later, a primitive phonograph to record the indigenous songs and dances that differed substantially from the four-square melodies that had been passed off for decades as authentic. What they found was music whose rhythms exhibited an invigorating irregularity, whose modes eschewed conformity to the commonly accepted scale patterns in favor of a dizzying variety of pitch organizations, and whose method of performance allowed for inflections and expressions that not only enhanced the basic song but also displayed the individuality of the singer. With the dedication of a religious zealot, Bartók spent 40 years collecting, transcribing, and codifying Central European and North African folksongs, always mindful that these ages-old but fragile remnants of evolving cultures might vanish forever before he could preserve them.

Bartók's own music absorbed the impact of his research, and by the time of the First World War, the influence of folk idioms on the rhythms, melodies, and moods of his works had become pervasive. "The question is, what are the ways in which peasant music is taken over and becomes transmuted into modern music?" he asked in a 1920 article. "We may, for instance, take over a peasant melody unchanged or only slightly varied, write an accompaniment to it and possibly some opening and concluding phrases. ... Another method by which peasant music becomes transmuted into modern music is the following: The composer

does not make use of a real peasant melody but invents his own imitation of such melodies. ... There is yet a third way in which the influence of peasant music can be traced in a composer's work. Neither peasant melodies nor imitations of peasant melodies can be found in his music, but it is pervaded by the atmosphere of peasant music." The String Quartet No. 2 is among the earliest examples of this last method of incorporating folk influences into concert music. The work was composed in the Budapest suburb of Rákoskeresztúr between 1915 and 1917, the war years when Bartók largely withdrew from public concert life. Unable to travel to continue his research in folk music, he spent much of that time organizing the mountain of information on the subject that he had collected during the previous decade, and composed little. His only important original works of that time were the ballet *The Wooden Prince* and the Second Quartet, which marked a significant advance in his creative language through its permeation by subtitled folk idioms. "The whole direction of Bartók's later writing might be deduced from this one work," wrote Halsey Stevens in his biography of the composer. The Second was the first of Bartók's six quartets to be recorded (in 1925 by the Amar Quartet, with Paul Hindemith as violist), and has probably enjoyed more performances than any other composition in the set.

Kodály said that the three strongly profiled movements of the Second Quartet represent: "1. A quiet life. 2. Joy. 3. Sorrow." The sonata form of the opening movement is worked out with Bartók's characteristic rigor. The main theme, given by the first violin, begins with a quick leap upward followed by a long note and a phrase descending through chromatically inflected melodic leadings. The other instruments are drawn into the discussion of this subject, and lead directly to the second theme, a melody in smoother motion in which is imbedded a little turn figure in triplet rhythm. The development section is largely occupied with tightly reasoned permutations of the principal theme. The recapitulation returns the earlier material, though the second theme is truncated to just

a brief reminiscence, with the balance of the movement devoted to a developmental coda grown from the main subject.

The Allegro that occupies the center of the quartet bears the immediate imprint of folk music: its form is a chain of continuous sections arranged as a loose rondo, like a peasant dance with a returning refrain; its rhythm is ferocious (the *Allegro barbaro* was composed only four years before; the *Rumanian Dances* of 1915 include a *Stamping Dance*); its melodic material is contained within a limited range and circles around a few central pitches; its phrasing consists of small repeated units. The movement ends with an extraordinary coda that plays a quiet transformation of the main theme at such breakneck pace that the music becomes a buzzing murmur.

The finale is bleak and sorrowful, music of intense expression that may reflect the grief of the time of its composition. Though the movement seems to unfold freely, pausing occasionally for a thoughtful breath, it is carefully generated from a small cache of melodic gestures: tiny, two-note motives, given by the second violin, that use the intervals of a third (in its conflicting minor and major versions) and a fourth; a brief arching phrase, posited by the first violin, that recalls the principal theme of the first movement; and a falling figure of two short notes followed by a longer note.

### String Quartet No. 3, Sz. 8

After the fiendish winds of the First World War had finally blown themselves out in 1918, there came into music a new invigoration and an eagerness by composers to stretch the forms and language of the ancient art. Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Webern, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Copland, and other of the most important modern masters challenged listeners and colleagues throughout the 1920s with their daring visions and their brilliant iconoclasm. It was the most exciting decade in the entire history of music. Bartók, whose folksong researches were severely limited geographically by the loss of Hungarian territories through the treaties following the war, was not immune

to the spirit of experimentation, and he shifted his professional concentration at that time from ethnomusicology to composition and his career as a pianist. He was particularly interested in the music of Stravinsky, notably the mosaic structures and advanced harmonies of the Diaghilev ballets, and in the recent Viennese developments in atonality and motivic generation posited by Arnold Schoenberg and his friend/disciple Alban Berg. A decided modernism entered Bartók's music with his searing 1919 ballet, *The Miraculous Mandarin*, and his works of the years immediately following—the two violin sonatas, the piano suite *Out of Doors*, the First Piano Concerto, and the String Quartets Nos. 3 and 4—are the most daring that he ever wrote. He was reluctant to program them for any but the most sophisticated audiences.

Bartók wrote the Third Quartet quickly in Budapest at the end of the summer of 1927, immediately following a concert tour of Germany during which he performed his new Piano Concerto No. 1 with Furtwängler in Frankfurt and his Piano Sonata in Baden-Baden. In December 1927, Bartók began his first visit to the United States, concertizing nationwide for three months after making his American debut with the New York Philharmonic and Willem Mengelberg in Carnegie Hall on December 22nd in his own Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra. (It was one of the ironies of Bartók's life that both his last home and the hospital in which he died in 1945 were just across the street from the famed auditorium that hosted his introduction to this country.) Before returning to Hungary in February 1928, Bartók learned of a lucrative competition for new chamber works sponsored by the Musical Fund of Philadelphia, and he submitted his Third Quartet for consideration after he arrived home. He heard nothing for some time, however, and so sent a copy of the work to Universal Edition in Vienna, inquiring if that firm would be willing to publish the score and help promote its first performance. Then, on October 2nd, news arrived that Bartók's piece and a string quartet by the Italian composer Alfredo Casella had been chosen by a panel

(which included Mengelberg, Fritz Reiner, and Frederick Stock) from over 600 entries to share the considerable first prize of \$6,000. In view of the international recognition accorded the work, Universal agreed to issue the score immediately; the piece was premiered at London's Wigmore Hall by the Waldbauer Quartet on February 19, 1929.

Bartók's Third Quartet is among the great masterworks of modern music—brilliant, challenging, cathartic, one of the most difficult yet rewarding pieces in the entire chamber literature. Though the music is Bartók's furthest adventure into modernity, it is founded solidly on the confluence of two traditional but seemingly opposed musical streams—the folk music of Eastern Europe, a subject on which Bartók was a scholar of the highest accomplishment, and the elaborate contrapuntal constructions of Johann Sebastian Bach and other Baroque composers. By 1927, the time of the Third Quartet, Bartók had so thoroughly absorbed the quirky intervals, tightly circling motivic phrases, snapping rhythms, and ornate decorations of indigenous Hungarian music into his original work that his themes constitute a virtual apotheosis of native folksong. “The melodic world of my string quartets does not essentially differ from that of folksong,” he said, “only the framework is stricter.” For the working-out of his folk-derived thematic materials (Bartók never quoted existing melodies unless specifically noting that they were arrangements), he turned to the highly organized models of canon and fugue postulated by Bach and his contemporaries. The Third Quartet therefore represents a marvelous synthesis of West and East—the structural integrity and emotional range of Bach wedded to the melodic and rhythmic exoticisms of Slavic folksong.

One of Bartók's most tightly constructed works, the Third Quartet is disposed as a large single span divided into four sections. Part I opens with a mysterious harmonic curtain that serves as an introduction to the work's germinal theme—a tiny fragment comprising a rising fourth and a falling minor third initiated by the violin in measure six, at the point

where the lower strings remove their mutes. The first section is largely based on the extensive permutations of this pregnant thematic kernel through imitation, inversion, augmentation, diminution, and other processes that Bartók learned from Bach. Part II, which follows without pause, is a free, continuously unfolding variation of an arch-shaped folk-dance melody presented in pizzicato multiple stops by the cello. A passage of dizzying slides and almost brutal dissonance bridges to Part III, which is a thoroughly reworked version of Part I (Bartók marked this section “Ricapitolazione della prima parte,” but also noted, “I do not like to repeat a musical idea without change”), a distillation of the essence of the quartet's earlier material. The concluding Coda starts as a vague bow-tip buzzing, but soon develops into a furious altered restatement of the folk dance of Part II. The quartet culminates in a powerful, viscerally compelling cadence.

#### String Quartet No. 4, Sz. 91

Folk influence pervades the Fourth Quartet, composed during the summer of 1928, soon after Bartók returned from his first tour of America as pianist and composer. It is evident in the small-interval melodic leadings, gapped scales, and snapping rhythms of the first movement; in the whirling motion and fiery syncopations of the two scherzos; in the florid, chromatic melody of the central movement, which evokes the melancholy pastorales of the *tárogató*, a Hungarian single-reed woodwind instrument (the composer's biographer Halsey Stevens wrote that it was “somewhat like a straight wooden saxophone”) that Bartók encountered during his field researches. The tendency of themes constructed from these tiny folk gestures when subjected to the developmental and harmonic pressures applied by Bartók is, however, to fragment and fly apart. To counterbalance this problem, Bartók used for this work a rigorous overall formal structure that describes an arch shape centered upon the third of its five movements: fast–scherzo–slow–scherzo–fast. The first and fifth movements are paired in their mood, tempo and

thematic material, an association further enhanced by sharing the same music in their closing pages. The second and fourth movements, both scherzos, are related in their themes, their head-long rhythmic propulsion and their use of novel effects from the strings: the second movement is played throughout with mutes, while the fourth movement requires a continuous pizzicato, including the percussive snapping of the strings against the fingerboard that Bartók was among the first composers to use. The slow movement, the mid-point of the structure, is itself organized symmetrically in three parts (A–B–A) around the twittering “night music” of its central section.

#### **String Quartet No. 5, Sz. 102, BB 110**

The movements of the Quartet No. 5, like those comprising the Fourth Quartet, the Second Piano Concerto, and the Concerto for Orchestra, are arranged according to a broad, symmetrical plan, a so-called “arch form,” in which the central movement is flanked, mirror-fashion, by parallel balancing movements: fast–slow–scherzo–slow–fast. The integrity of this structure is enhanced by having a theme from the first movement reappear in the finale, and by making the fourth movement a free variation of the second. Symmetrical procedures extend as well to the internal working-out of individual movements. The opening sonata-form movement is based on three themes: a motive of hammered repeated notes; a brusque rhythmic figure upon which are superimposed short, winding melodic phrases; and a smoothly flowing strain in triplet rhythms. Following the development section, the three motives are recapitulated in reverse order and in inversion, and the movement is capped by a vigorous coda: A–B–C–development–C–B–A–coda. The Adagio, a fine example of the rustling “night music” that Bartók favored for many of his slow movements, follows a similar plan, though with different proportions and expressive effect: A (trills and two-note atoms)–B (chorale)–C (pizzicato glissandos, tremolos, and evanescent scale fragments)–B (abbreviated)–A (abbreviated). The conventional form

of the Scherzo and Trio is already symmetrical (A–B–A), and Bartók drew the symmetry into the smallest levels of the movement by echoing the upward-arching, one-measure theme with its descending inversion. The central Trio is distinguished by its quicker tempo, incessant ribbon of violin notes, and rustic folk dance in limping rhythms. The Andante posits three thematic ideas that transform motives from the Adagio (repeated pizzicato; bouncing bows; murmured scales and canonic treatment of the Adagio’s third theme) and their truncated returns to round out the movement. At the center stands a new snapping theme that is developed and woven with the movement’s other ideas. The finale is a free rondo with sonata elements based on a fiery dance melody constructed from small, twisting intervals. Just as the movement reaches its climax (in a passage whose ferocious rhythms recall Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony), the music stops for a grotesque, barrel-organ transformation of the first episode’s theme before a blazing epilogue closes the quartet.

#### **String Quartet No. 6, Sz. 114, BB 119**

“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 Decem-



ber 1938, but then became too preoccupied with the deteriorating life around him 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, so he invited the composer and his wife to spend the summer of 1939 at his chalet at Saanen in the massif of Gruyère in Switzerland and then asked him to write a new work 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.

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,” he continued in his letter to Béla. “I have to work: a piece for Sacher himself (something for a string orchestra). Luckily the work went well, and I finished it in 15 days. 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 Sixth Quartet 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 the violinist 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 Hungary. The quartet was

premiered in New York on January 20, 1941 by the Kolisch Quartet.

The noted French musicologist Harry Halbreich 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 Sixth Quartet takes as its motto an arching, stepwise 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 Sixth Quartet 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.

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The **Takács Quartet**, now in its forty-fifth season, is renowned for the vitality of its interpretations. The *New York Times* recently praised 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 London’s 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, Edward Dusinberre, Harumi Rhodes (violins), Geraldine Walther (viola), and András Fejér (cello) perform 80 concerts a year worldwide.

During the 2019–20 season, the ensemble will continue its four annual concerts as Associate Artists at Wigmore Hall. Other European appearances include Budapest, Florence, Milan, Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw, Geneva, Salzburg’s Mozartwoche, and Prague. The quartet’s extensive list of American engagements includes a performance at New York’s Mostly Mozart Festival with Jeremy Denk and complete Bartók cycles in New York, Vancouver (BC), Middlebury (VT), and Washington (DC). Other venues include Toronto, Atlanta, Portland, Pasadena, Philadelphia, and the University of Illinois. The quartet will also perform two concerts in Hong Kong and two concerts in Tokyo. The group’s most recent recording, released in October 2019, features Dohnányi’s two piano quintets with Marc-André Hamelin, and his second string quartet. A recent tour with Garrick Ohlsson culminated in a recording for Hyperion of the Elgar and Amy Beach piano quintets (to be released in 2020).

In 2014, the Takács became the first string quartet to win the Wigmore Hall Medal. The honor, inaugurated in 2007, recognizes major international artists who have a strong association with the 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 group is known for such innovative programming, and this program was conceived in close collaboration with the author. They first performed *Everyman* at Carnegie Hall in 2007 with Philip Seymour Hoffman. The Takács 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. Aspects of the quartet’s interests and history are explored in Edward Dusinberre’s *Beethoven for a Later Age: The Journey of a String Quartet*, a book that 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 Quartet records for Hyperion Records, and its 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). For its CDs on the Decca/London label, the quartet has won three *Gramophone* Awards, a Grammy, 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 ensemble’s website.

The members of the Takács Quartet are Christoffersen Faculty Fellows at the University of Colorado Boulder. The quartet has helped to develop a string program with a special empha-

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

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 at-

tention 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 ensemble made its North American debut tour in 1982. In June 2020, violist Richard O'Neill will join the Takács. In 2001, the quartet was awarded the Order of Merit of the Knight's Cross of the Republic of Hungary, and in March 2011, each member of the ensemble received the Order of Merit Commander's Cross from the President of the Republic of Hungary.