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Jeremy Geffen

Words cannot express my pleasure in welcoming you to this afternoon's recital with the brilliant Takács Quartet, returning to campus for the first of two appearances this season. I'd be remiss if I didn't share with you that today's concert includes one of my very favorite movements in all of classical music, the achingly beautiful—and technically demanding—slow movement of Beethoven's String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132, otherwise known as the *Heiliger Dankgesang*.

Beethoven rarely provided programs for his music, but here we have a clear idea of what he intended, his subtitle translating (in part) to "Holy Song of Thanksgiving from a Convalescent to the Deity."

For a couple of years, the composer hadn't written much due to ill health (some kind of gastric illness, it seems), and he was concerned on several occasions that he might die. Beethoven wrote this music following a period of recovery that left him both thoughtful and filled with gratitude.

The longest movement in any of his quartets, this is music of uncommon power and depth—comprised of reflective and beautiful chorale sections that alternate with more lively dance-like music—and the overall effect is like a benediction coming down to us through the centuries. I find the cumulative effect in the final few minutes of the movement, as Beethoven communicates his journey towards gratitude, unlike anything else in music. It's really hard to hold back the tears.

• • •

Along with Beethoven, today's concert features works by Haydn and the too-rarely heard Samuel Coleridge-Taylor; it's a terrific program, but best of all, it's simply wonderful to be able to gather together again to listen to great music under the same roof!

When the pandemic forced Cal Performances to close its doors in March 2020, no one could have imagined what lay ahead. Since then, we've witnessed a worldwide health crisis unlike any experienced during our lifetimes, an extended period of political turmoil, recurring incidents of civil unrest and racially motivated violence, and a consciousness-raising human rights movement that has significantly—and forever—changed how each of us views social justice in our time.

Of course, the pandemic remains with us to this date and future challenges—including many adjustments to "normal" procedures and policies—can certainly be expected. I encourage you to check Cal Performances' website regularly for the most current information regarding our COVID-19 response. First and foremost, I assure you that there is nothing more important to us than the health and safety of our audience, artists, and staff. (And I remind one and all that proof of vaccination is mandatory today, as is protective masking throughout the event.)

Our season continues this month with our old friends at **Pilobolus** dance company (Oct 21–22) and a very special vocal recital with superstar tenor **Jonas Kaufmann** and pianist **Helmut Deutsch** (Oct 24), and our full schedule offers more of the same, packed with the kind of adventurous and ambitious programming you've come to expect from Cal Performances. In particular, I want to direct your attention to this year's *Illuminations*: "Place and Displacement" programming, through which we'll explore both loss and renewal, disempowerment and hope, while seeking paths forward for reclaiming and celebrating vital cultural connections that can fall victim to political and social upheaval.

continued on p 20



Sunday, October 17, 2021, 3pm
Zellerbach Hall

Takács Quartet

Edward Dusinberre, *violin*
Harumi Rhodes, *violin*
Richard O'Neill, *viola*
András Fejér, *cello*

PROGRAM

Franz Joseph HAYDN (1732–1809) String Quartet No. 23 in F minor,
Op. 20, No. 5, Hob.III:35
Allegro moderato
Minuetto
Adagio
Finale: Fuga a due Soggetti

Samuel COLERIDGE-TAYLOR (1875–1912) *Fünf Fantasiestücke*, Op. 5
Prelude: Allegro ma non troppo
Serenade: Andante molto
Humoresque: Presto
Minuet and Trio: Allegro moderato
Dance: Vivace

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770–1827) String Quartet No. 15 in A minor, Op. 132
Assai sostenuto—Allegro
Allegro ma non tanto
Molto adagio—Andante
Alla marcia, assai vivace
Allegro appassionato

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

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809)
String Quartet No. 23 in F minor,
Op. 20, No. 5, Hob.III:35

Accustomed to the breadth and expressiveness of string quartets by those who followed Franz Joseph Haydn, we may not recognize his own quartets as groundbreaking. They are. In his Opus 20, Haydn began defining what a quartet could be—giving composers new ways of thinking about the genre, demonstrating strategies that enabled them to communicate. Here Haydn relies on each individual voice, and all four members contribute to the whole. He develops his material with a thoroughness and flexibility that allow him to embrace an expanded emotional range.

Haydn composed the six quartets of his Opus 20 in 1772, while serving Prince Nikolaus Esterhazy as palace music director, a secure position that allowed him the leisure and freedom to experiment. Around this time, the extravagant postures of the European Baroque gave way to *Sturm und Drang*, a movement that would morph into Romanticism, with its elevation of human feelings and instabilities, and a love of dark forests and craggy mountain ranges. In two years, Goethe would publish his novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which in Western literary history ruptured past from future as surely as Haydn's Opus 20 bade earlier quartets farewell.

Over a throbbing accompaniment in the other instruments, the first violin sings a lament, its phrases supple and long-limbed. Soon the music sheds its melancholy as it modulates from the minor mode to the major, then reverts to the opening, to begin restating the exposition. The first violin again takes the lead in the development, with a variation of the opening lament, sung in a lower register. The mood in what remains of this movement is serious, its passion balanced with restraint. Until the coda, the leader's virtuosity has been spotlighted. Each member rises to the fore as the music ends.

The reflective tone of the first movement continues in the Minuetto. We might expect to find some contrast in the central trio, but not even there does the atmosphere brighten noticeably. Which is not to characterize the

minuet as somber. The elegance with which the individual lines of the instruments interweave offers a darkly sensuous pleasure that seduces the ear.

The mood brightens as the major mode takes over in the Adagio. A sweetly lilting melody runs through the movement from start to finish, not so much a rondo as a good tune whose possibilities Haydn explores. That tune becomes an accompaniment to the first violin's virtuosic flights.

The short finale is a fugue whose two subjects proceed nervously, *sotto voce* until the final moments, when the music explodes.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875–1912)
***Fünf Fantasiestücke*, Op. 5**

Based on the way the world of concert music has ignored composers of color, you might imagine the cards were stacked against Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, who was of mixed race. But from the start of his career and even after his early death, he was revered (if not compensated adequately, but he shared that fact of an artist's life with many of his white colleagues). Coleridge-Taylor's early work won the admiration of Edward Elgar, whose friend August Jaeger, the music critic and publisher immortalized as Nimrod in the *Enigma Variations*, described him in a single word: genius. New York musicians, comparing him to the Philharmonic's music director, called him the African Mahler. In 1900, as a delegate to the first Pan-African Conference, which exposed the British Empire's treatment of those in its African colonies, he aligned himself with the African-American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar and scholar W.E.B. DuBois. Theodore Roosevelt invited him to the White House in 1904. Every year between 1928 and 1939, British conductor Malcolm Sargent led mega-productions (with a chorus of as many as 800) at Royal Albert Hall of Coleridge-Taylor's best-known work, *The Song of Hiawatha*, an oratorio based on Longfellow's poem. In the aftermath of two global wars that reshaped how artists interpreted the world, the significance of the composer's music felt diminished, and, despite its many beauties, it faded from view.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (he was named after the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge) seems not to have suffered from what Victorian London considered a stigma, his birth to unwed parents. His father, Daniel Taylor, a Creole physician from Sierra Leone, returned to Africa to accept an administrative post before Alice Martin, his British girlfriend, realized she was pregnant. Daniel kept in touch with Alice and even went on to promote his son's career, but after her baby's birth Alice and Coleridge, as she called him, moved in with her father and his large family. The boy's maternal grandfather introduced him to the violin and soon paid for professional lessons, his own pedagogical capacity having quickly been exceeded. At 15, Coleridge entered the Royal College of Music, alongside fellow students such as Gustav Holst and Ralph Vaughan Williams. Soon he was publishing short pieces. By the time of *The Song of Hiawatha*, whose various sections were completed in 1900, he was known as Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, with a hyphen between his middle name and surname—the result of a printer's error he apparently found appealing enough to adopt.

Proud of his African roots, the composer also learned more about his US heritage in three visits to this country. His father was descended from African-American slaves freed by the British at the end of the Revolutionary War and resettled in Nova Scotia, from where they emigrated to the British colony of Sierra Leone. Coleridge-Taylor felt a powerful attraction to the United States and it is no accident that his most popular work, *The Song of Hiawatha*, is based on a quintessentially American story immortalized by an American poet. He considered resettling here, but, in a society befouled by Jim Crow, it is doubtful he would have repeated the success he enjoyed in his native land, despite the quality of his music. And his work is indeed the real thing—lyrical, impassioned, assured, and, even within the conventions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, distinctively original. In addition to *Hiawatha*, his genius found its outlet in an enormous amount of chamber music, a symphony, a violin concerto, and tone poems. Like

so many composers, however, Coleridge-Taylor struggled financially. He succumbed to pneumonia at 37—victim, his friends believed, of overwork and anxiety about money. He left behind a son, a daughter, and a widow on whom King George V settled an annual pension of £100 pounds (about \$16,000 today), evidence of the esteem in which her late husband was held.

The *Fünf Fantasiestücke*—five fantasy pieces—from 1895, is a student opus whose German title reflects a 19-year-old composer's attempt to align his work with the dominant musical tradition of the day, a practice that his contemporaries in this country also adopted from time to time. (Coleridge-Taylor never adopted it again and gave English titles to the 80-odd works that followed this one.) The German title might suggest these pieces are derivative. They are not. As a critic for London's *Musical Times* wrote after the work's premiere, "Mr. Coleridge-Taylor is a *rara avis* amongst students, for he has something to say that is worth saying, and he does so in his own individual way."

The Prelude opens with a low drone, from which a rocking theme emerges. Textures are rich, and initially low strings predominate, but gradually the music rises into a higher register. The tempo relaxes in a contrasting section of sweet lyricism, giving way to reminiscences of the rocking theme, which rises once again in full flight before it descends and vanishes among more somber earthbound sounds.

We might expect conventional salon music from the way the Serenade opens, but almost immediately the piquant harmonies and melodic trajectories force us to reconsider that assessment. We are kept off-balance, not quite sure of where we stand.

The Humoresque is a forward-driving scherzo (with a lyrical central section) that might have been inspired by Dvořák.

In the Minuet and Trio, Coleridge-Taylor parodies an 18th-century dance with sharp accents and unexpectedly quirky harmonies. In the trio section, conspiratorial, dark music alternates with lighter yet mocking passages.

Opening with a drone, as did the Prelude, the concluding Dance, tense and nervous, might be a kind of ghostly folk music, incisive, and filled with brittle melodic lines.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132

By the mid-1820s, when Beethoven wrote his last string quartets, he had long since made deafness work in his favor. Without the reality of sound to confine his imagination, new musical possibilities opened. Unconventional his late works may be, but the challenges they present to a listener are their own reward. And while Beethoven's contemporaries may have found his late works odd, the 200 years between then and now have been filled with so many wonders and horrors that rhythmic displacements and unexpected harmonies seem more part of the world than alien to it. Beethoven's late quartets express a kind of manifesto that make a case for living. Try to explain what ignites such music, given the circumstances Beethoven faced while creating it—ill health, a social isolation imposed in part by deafness and in part by his own less than gracious demeanor, and who knows what other wretchedness brews in a mind too immersed in sickness and misanthropy, forced too long to accommodate the loss of the one sense (as he himself put it) in which he ought to have excelled. His Opus 132 refuses even to hint at such misery. And it includes a slow movement for which the word *sublime* might have been invented.

Beethoven's physicians were faced with a wreck. Even today, the medical world marvels at the composer's many ailments—deafness, of course, but also kidney and liver disease, deteriorating bones, and cardiac arrhythmia, a malady that in recent years captured the imagination of researchers from the University of Michigan and University of Washington, who speculated that the Cavatina of the Opus 130 Quartet may owe its shape to a notated interpretation of an irregular heartbeat. A few months after Beethoven began composing his Opus 132 Quartet, in 1825, a bout of inflammatory bowel disease threatened to finish him, or so he believed. When he was able to work

again, he gave thanks in this music for his recovery.

Beethoven's hymn of gratitude, the third movement of this five-movement work, could well stand alone, it is so complete a statement. But it lies embedded between some other extraordinary music, beginning with a remarkable essay in ambiguity. Starting in the cello and moving up one by one, through the viola, then the second violin, then the first, each player intones a four-note figure whose effect achieves something other than its apparent aim. Seemingly, Beethoven intends to establish a forbidding atmosphere, and yet, even if you do not see the musicians as they enter, low strings to high, he creates an effect of slowly rising, as though from shadow into light. After this compact introduction, the first violin begins the push forward, switching abruptly from *assai sostenuto* to *allegro*. Then the cello states a theme—taken up immediately by the first violin—made up of closely spaced intervals, a phrase of three rising tones plus four falling tones. This main theme will serve as a primary reference point, recurring and binding the movement.

Throughout the exposition, impassioned writing is spelled by lyrical episodes, the serious and the buoyant interlacing, much as the introduction drew light from dark. We hear recollections of the introduction, explorations of the rising-falling reference theme, the charm of Beethoven's songful inclinations—all of this emphasizing the delicate balance of shade and sun. In the coda, passion dominates until all falls to a whisper. Out of this near-silence, with a gradual rise into a sudden *forte*—mirroring the levitation we sensed in the quartet's first moments—the ensemble joins in final, lacerating figures while the first violin injects rapidly pulsing strokes, concluding the movement in a brilliant flash of sound.

The *allegro* that follows is the quartet's most conventionally structured movement, two outer sections framing a central part. After four introductory bars, we hear a rustic dance, distributed (along with its accompaniment) among the musicians in a way that keeps the simple tune fresh throughout its many appear-

ances. The central section starts as the first violin plays another dance-like tune along with a lower-string drone. The second violin accompanies this with a trembling ostinato. Individually, these sounds are not out of the ordinary. Combined, they create an oddly beautiful shimmer.

Next comes the movement, *Molto adagio*, that Beethoven inscribed *Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart*—“Holy Song of Thanksgiving from a Convalescent to the Deity, in the Lydian Mode.” The Lydian is an ancient mode associated with sacred music. In simplest technical terms, it is a major scale with the fourth degree raised a half-step. Who knows why Beethoven felt compelled to mention it in explaining his prayer? The *Heiliger Dankgesang* can easily overwhelm you. Whether or not you’re familiar with the Lydian mode is irrelevant.

The *Dankgesang* is a meditation. Succumb to it. Note the movement’s first four-tone phrase, so different from the phrase that opened the quartet, and yet so reminiscent of it. A little more than three minutes into the music, tempo and meter shift (to *andante* from *adagio* and from 4/4 time to 3/8) and a new theme enters, bright and optimistic. *Neue Kraft fühlend*, Beethoven writes at this point in his score—“feeling new strength.” He alternates this “recovery” music with his hymn. When he brings the hymn back for its final appearance (about 11

minutes into the movement), it is to be played *Mit innigster Empfindung*—“with the deepest feeling.” This seems an impossible direction, for Beethoven appears already to have spent the supply of emotion. And yet new depths open as the music grows increasingly hypnotic, seeming to stand still before vanishing.

One of the marvels of this quartet is how Beethoven avoids sentimentality. We inhabit his song of thanksgiving only while it unfolds. We have no time to dwell on it—or wallow in it—for what follows immediately is a short, upbeat march. Take this as evidence that the convalescent has convalesced or as a song of triumph—or simply as a palette-cleanser that now leads with no break into the finale.

After a transitional passage that offers the first violin the opportunity to dazzle and that mirrors a similar passage starting nine bars into the opening movement, the fifth movement proper begins with a swaying, confident song that sounds two centuries ahead of its time. It is the continuation of the first movement’s main theme. The music grows harsh and disjointed—the opposite of the *Dankgesang*. The volume dials down, then swells as the pace accelerates, rushing to the end.

—Larry Rothe

Larry Rothe’s books include *For the Love of Music* and *Music for a City, Music for the World*.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

The **Takács Quartet**, now in its 47th season, is excited to bring to fruition several innovative projects for the 2021–22 season. With bandoneon/accordion virtuoso Julien Labro, the musicians will perform throughout the USA new works composed for them by Clarice Assad and Bryce Dessner. This season also marks the world premiere of a new quartet written for the Takács by Stephen Hough, *Les Six Rencontres*. The Takács will record this extraordinary work for Hyperion Records, in combination with quartets by Ravel and Dutilleux. *Les Six Rencontres* will receive its Bay Area premiere by the quartet in Hertz Hall in February 2022.

During the last year, the Takács marked the arrival of Grammy-award-winning violist Richard O’Neill by making two new recordings for Hyperion. Quartets by Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel and Felix Mendelssohn will be released this fall, followed next year by a disc of Haydn’s Opp. 42, 77, and 103.

In 2021–22, the Takács Quartet continues its role as Associate Artists at London’s Wigmore Hall, performing four concerts there this season. In addition to many concerts in the UK, the ensemble will play at prestigious European venues including the Paris Philharmonie, Berlin Konzerthaus, and Teatro Della Pergola,



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Florence. The Takács will perform throughout North America, including concerts in New York, Boston, Washington (DC), Princeton, Ann Arbor, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Vancouver, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Cleveland, and Portland.

In June 2020 the Takács Quartet was featured in the BBC television series *Being Beethoven*. The ensemble's 2019 CD for Hyperion of piano quintets by Amy Beach and Elgar, with pianist Garrick Ohlsson, won a Presto Classical Recording of the Year award.

In 2014, the Takács became the first string quartet to receive the Wigmore Hall Medal. The award, inaugurated in 2007, recognizes major international artists who have a strong association with the hall. Past recipients include András Schiff, Thomas Quasthoff, Menahem Pressler, and Dame Felicity Lott. In 2012, *Gramophone* announced that the Takács was the first string quartet to be inducted into its 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 is known for innovative programming. The ensemble performed a program inspired by Philip Roth's novel *Everyman* with Meryl Streep at Princeton in 2014, and again with her at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto in 2015. The musicians first performed *Everyman* at Carnegie Hall in 2007 with the late Philip Seymour Hoffman. They have toured 14 cities with the poet Robert Pinsky, collaborate 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), Amy Beach, and Elgar (with Garrick Ohlsson), and viola quintets by Brahms and Dvořák (with Lawrence Power). For their CDs on the Decca/London label, the quartet has 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 quartet's website.

Based in Boulder at the University of Colorado, the members of the Takács Quartet are Christoffersen Faculty Fellows. 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 are also on the faculty at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, where they run an intensive summer string quartet seminar, and they are Visiting Fellows at the Guildhall School of Music, 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. In 2001, the members of the Takács Quartet were awarded the Order of Merit of the Knight's Cross of the Republic of Hungary, and in March 2011 the Order of Merit Commander's Cross by the President of the Republic of Hungary.

Angélique Kidjo *Remain in Light*

"Remain in Light feels like an album that Kidjo was born to sing; never has she sounded so convincing, so powerful."

—Songlines

The four-time Grammy Award winner kicks off her 2021–22 Berkeley residency as Cal Performances' first season-long artist-in-residence with this ecstatic and bold retake on the Talking Heads' classic 1980 album.

Oct 29
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Please take the opportunity to explore the complete schedule through our website and season brochure and begin planning your performance calendar; now is the perfect time to guarantee that you have the best seats for all the events you plan to attend.

Throughout history, the performing arts have survived incredible challenges: periods of war, economic collapse, and, yes, terrible disease. And if it will take time for us—collectively and individually—to process the events of the past 18 months, I'm certain that the arts have the power to play a critical role as we come to terms with what we have experienced and move together toward recovery.

I know you join us in looking forward to what lies ahead, to coming together once again to encounter the life-changing experiences that only the live performing arts deliver. We can't wait to share it all with you during the coming year.

Cal Performances is back. Welcome home!

Jeremy Geffen

Executive and Artistic Director, Cal Performances

COVID-19 Information

Proof of vaccination status is required for entrance and masking is mandatory throughout the event.

COVID-19 information is updated as necessary; please see Cal Performances' website for the most up-to-date policies and information.

UC Berkeley does not promise or guarantee that all patrons or employees on site are vaccinated.

Unvaccinated individuals may be present as a result of exemptions, exceptions, fraudulent verification, or checker error.

None of these precautions eliminate the risk of exposure to COVID-19.