

Sunday, December 4, 2022, 3pm  
Hertz Hall

## The Takács Quartet

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

### PROGRAM

Franz Josef HAYDN (1732–1809) String Quartet in F major,  
Op. 77, No. 2, *Lobkowitz* (1799)  
Allegro moderato  
Menuet: Presto  
Andante  
Finale: Vivace assai

Fanny MENDELSSOHN-HENSEL String Quartet in E-flat major (1834)  
(1805–1847) Adagio ma non troppo  
Allegretto  
Romanze  
Allegro molto vivace

### INTERMISSION

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770–1827) String Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 127 (1825)  
Maestoso – Allegro  
Adagio ma non troppo e molto cantabile  
Scherzando  
Finale: Allegro

*The Takács Quartet appears by arrangement with Sely 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.*

COVID-19: Masking is required inside the auditorium, and is strongly recommended, though not required, for indoor lobby/waiting areas as well as outdoor spaces. Up-to-date vaccination is strongly recommended, though not required for entry. The latest information on Cal Performances' COVID-19 safety policies is available at [calperformances.org/safety](https://calperformances.org/safety).  
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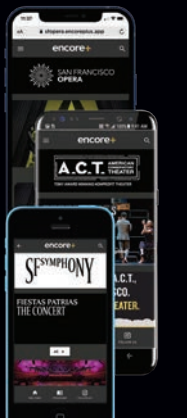
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## PROGRAM NOTES

### Franz Joseph Haydn String Quartet in F major, Op. 77, No. 2, *Lobkowitz*

Franz Joseph Haydn, as prolific as composers come, wrote almost 70 string quartets. For Haydn, composing seems to have proceeded as inevitably as respiration. Consider the spontaneity of his last quartet, which opens this concert. Haydn composed it in 1799, the first of a pair of quartets for Prince Franz Joseph von Lobkowitz, the music-loving patron who proved so important a supporter of Beethoven.

A celebratory sense reigns in the Allegro moderato, which opens with an upbeat, singable tune that never strays far from the surface. Even the movement's contrasting sections wear their more serious mien lightly. Seemingly effortless, this allegro is concentrated music, not a note out of place or wasted.

We think of the minuet as a courtly dance, but this one could provide background to a rustic scene, perhaps as envisioned by Pieter Breughel the Elder. Imagine this music as accompaniment to William Carlos Williams' poem "The Dance": "In Breughel's great picture, The Kermess,/the dancers go round, they go round and/around, the squeal and the blare and the/tweedle of bagpipes, a bugle and fiddles/tipping their bellies,.../their hips and their bellies off balance/to turn them..." In the rhapsodic central section, the dancers take a break, maybe also a sip.

In duet, the first violin and cello state the Andante's elegant theme, and soon all four members are examining this music, varying it but never straying too far afield, so it remains recognizable throughout. This movement is a lovely example of how Haydn distributes his material equally among four independent voices, something we take for granted in string quartets but which was not a given before Haydn.

The vivacious finale is a nonstop romp, feelgood music of the highest order, a beast to play but pure delight for listeners.



Amanda Tipton

### Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel String Quartet in E-flat major

Abraham Mendelssohn liked to say that he was best known as the son of his father, philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, and as the father of his son, composer Felix. Fanny Mendelssohn, Abraham's daughter, has suffered a similar indignity, since she is generally introduced as Felix's older sister. But Fanny was a composer, too, author of more than 450 works (primarily songs and piano pieces), and she possessed such taste and artistry that her brother leaned on her for advice and criticism. Fanny's gender was not the only thing that sabotaged her musical ambitions. As a member of upper-class Berlin society, she was expected to pursue only two roles, those of wife and mother. She filled both, but she never stopped composing, not after her 1829 marriage to painter Wilhelm Hensel—an enlightened man who encouraged her artistic career—nor after the birth of their son, Sebastian. She also remained her brother's closest musical confidante and his soulmate, and when a stroke suddenly

ended her life, the despairing Felix survived her by only six months.

The E-flat major String Quartet is Fanny's sole venture into the genre. She much admired Beethoven's late music, whose many oddities may have led her to break with convention. She does not feel bound by the rules of sonata form or tradition, and here she opens her quartet with an adagio. After a few introductory bars the first violin introduces a keening figure taken up by the others. Even as the mournful music assumes a faster pace, it remains reflective. With brief forays into the major mode, the poignance hidden beneath the surface becomes explicit, but nothing is dwelt on for long, and just as the movement reveals its vulnerability, it withdraws into silence.

The scurrying Allegretto is still anchored in the minor. Passion grows in a fugal passage, from which the music develops a new level of intensity. Like the first movement, this one refuses to overstay its welcome.

The lamenting Romanze, in G minor, is the quartet's longest movement. After a somber opening, a songlike passage fol-

lows, and from this grows an oscillating figure explored by all the players. They pursue it until it crests in a climax. Calm returns with a reprise of the opening statement, and at last the music subsides in a serene denouement.

The final *Allegro molto vivace* is all sunshine in the major mode. It opens with a virtuosic run for the first violin, a passage tossed back and forth between the players. This is at last joyful music, the breathless kind that Fanny's brother loved.

### Ludwig van Beethoven

#### String Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 127

In 1825, the year of Beethoven's Op. 127, the composer was a very old 55 and had only two more years to live. The works from late in his life emerge from the interior world of a man totally deaf, and on that canvas of silence he now conceived of ways to push music's expressive possibilities even further than he had already pushed them over the past three decades. The results speak for themselves, never in obvious ways. Consider Beethoven's five late string quartets. Since they first appeared, they have puzzled and fascinated musicians and lay listeners. In length and structure, in their strangeness, passion, beauty, and invention, in what they ask of performers and listeners, and in what they repay those who grapple with their demands, the quartets are like no music heard before them, and whether they have gained peers over time is a question I am not equipped to answer.

The late quartets have led many commentators to speak of them in terms you might encounter in philosophical inquiry, as though the music addresses issues of the spirit. Timothy Judd tells us that the slow movement of Op. 127—the first of the late quartets—is filled with “a sense of aching emotional intensity, lament, and cosmic mystery.” “For Beethoven in the late quartets,” writes Mark Steinberg, “the self is dissolved into a broader and more inclusive

vision. Effort is replaced with acceptance and the profoundest love.” Everyone who loves music will recognize such reflections, yet how music leads to them is unclear. We all have our ways of perceiving what the sound creates, our individual ways of trying to grasp what lies beyond the notes. Beethoven's late string quartets are ideal for such an exercise, for each of them is somehow larger than itself, which is to say that we want this music to possess *meaning* and we believe it does. To our search for what that meaning might be, we bring as much experience and attention as we can muster, developing a relationship with the music just as we get to know others, growing to love them, or not. Art offers the possibility of forming a bond with it. And what we hope for from that bond is what we hope for from any relationship, a way of discovering truths about ourselves.

Op. 127 opens with a grand statement that immediately retracts its promise, for while it leads us to expect majesty, it introduces a serenely dreamlike theme. Pay attention to this theme, for in various though always recognizable forms it will dominate the *Allegro*. With a passage marked by nervous energy, the movement's blueprint is complete. The music moves between the dreamy and the agitated, punctuated by returns of the grand opening gesture. Serenity has the final say.

Beethoven gave his late string quartets hymnlike adagios, and this sort of music has led many commentators to conclude that the composer was focused on an otherworldly or extra-worldly realm that only he could perceive. For all their beauty, these late adagios can seem meandering on first acquaintance, their felicities episodic. A few careful hearings will reveal not just the music's logic, but also the consistency of its quiet and concentrated splendor. The adagio of Op. 127 is a case in point. If you want to know what rapture sounds like, listen now.

Led by the cello, then the viola, then violins, this slow movement opens with a drone, from which a glorious tune emerges. The tune is explored in a series of variations. First the theme's lines are deconstructed, seeming to lead in different directions, as though seeking to expand the melody. With a change of tempo the mood turns playful, suggesting a country dance. The dance gives way to deliberate and searching music—I want to use that word *hymnlike* again—tricking us into believing that time can be suspended. The mood lightens and the music begins a steady pace against the constant throb established by the cello and taken up by the higher voices. The coda, itself made up of two further variations, begins slow and trancelike, then gathers momentum, the theme becoming all but obscured. A throbbing returns, and the movement closes as the music falls silent.

The scherzo plays with a four-pulse theme now frenzied, now whispered. This

is Beethoven the prankster at work, injecting the humor that, like the jokes in *Hamlet* or the knocking on the door in *Macbeth*, tempers the lofty with the sinew of wit, a strategy that makes the late quartets sublime.

An arresting gesture opens the finale, the kind of fanfare-like announcement that began the quartet. It leads here to music of immense resolve and thrust, the energy as present in the quiet moments as in the more assertive passages. A sudden drop in dynamics signals the coda, volume and energy developing gradually until the end, which recollects the fanfare that launched the work.

—Larry Rothe

*Larry Rothe writes for Cal Performances and the San Francisco Opera and has written about music for the orchestras of Boston, Chicago, New York, and San Francisco. Visit [www.larryrothe.com](http://www.larryrothe.com).*

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

The world-renowned **Takács Quartet** is now in its 48th season. Edward Dusinberre, Harumi Rhodes (violins), Richard O'Neill (viola), and András Fejér (cello) are excited about the 2022–23 season, which began with a tour of Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea, and includes the release of two new CDs for Hyperion Records. A disc of Haydn's Opp. 42, 77, and 103 is followed by the first recording of an extraordinary new work written for the quartet by Stephen Hough, *Les Six Rencontres* (heard here in Hertz Hall last February, in its Bay Area premiere), presented with quartets by Ravel and Dutilleux. As Associate Artists at London's Wigmore Hall, the Takács will perform four concerts there. In addition to programs featuring Beethoven, Schubert and Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, one concert consists of works by Britten, Bartók,

and Dvořák that highlight the same themes of displacement and return explored in Edward Dusinberre's new book *Distant Melodies: Music in Search of Home*. The book is published this fall by Faber and the University of Chicago Press. The quartet will perform the same program at several venues in the United States, complemented by book talks. Also this season, the quartet will continue its fruitful partnership with pianist Jeremy Denk, performing on several North American series.

Throughout 2022 and 2023 the ensemble will play at prestigious European venues including the Edinburgh and Schwetzingen festivals, Madrid's Auditorio de Música, Bilbao's Philharmonic Society, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, and the Bath Mozartfest. The group's North American engagements include concerts in New York, Toronto,

Vancouver, Philadelphia, Ann Arbor, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, Seattle, Tucson, and Portland, and the Beethoven Center at San Jose State University.

The Takács Quartet is known for innovative programming. In 2021–22, the ensemble partnered with bandoneon virtuoso Julien Labro to premiere new works by Clarice Assad and Bryce Dessner, commissioned by *Music Accord*. In 2014, the Takács performed a program inspired by Philip Roth's novel *Everyman* with Meryl Streep at Princeton, and the artists repeated the program at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto in 2015. It first performed *Everyman* at Carnegie Hall in 2007 with Philip Seymour Hoffman. The quartet has toured 14 cities with the poet Robert Pinsky, and played regularly with the Hungarian Folk group Muzsikás.

The Takács records for Hyperion Records, recently winning awards for its recordings of string quartets by Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn, and—with pianist Garrick Ohlsson—piano quintets by Amy Beach and Elgar. Other releases for Hyperion feature works 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 and Dvořák (with Lawrence Power). For its 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.

In 2014 the Takács became the first string quartet to receive the Wigmore Hall Medal. In 2012, *Gramophone* announced that the Takács was the first string quartet to be inducted into its Hall of Fame. The ensemble also won the 2011 Award for Chamber Music and Song presented by the Royal Philharmonic Society in London.

Based in Boulder at the University of Colorado, the members of the Takács Quartet are Christoffersen Faculty Fellows and the grateful beneficiaries of an instrument loan by the Drake Foundation. The members of the ensemble are on the faculty at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, where they run a summer string quartet seminar, and 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. The group 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.

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