

Sunday, January 25, 2026, 3pm
Hertz Hall

Takács Quartet with Jordan Bak, *viola*

Takács Quartet
Edward Dusinger, *violin*
Harumi Rhodes, *violin*
Richard O'Neill, *viola*
András Fejér, *cello*

PROGRAM

Franz SCHUBERT (1797–1828) *Quartettsatz*, D. 703 (1820)
Allegro assai

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756–1791) *Viola Quintet No. 3 in C major*, K. 515 (1787)
Allegro
Menuetto. Allegretto
Andante
Allegro

INTERMISSION

MOZART *Viola Quintet No. 4 in G minor*, K. 516 (1787)
Allegro
Menuetto. Allegretto
Adagio ma non troppo
Adagio – Allegro

*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*

Jordan Bak is represented by Arts Management Group, Inc.

*Leadership support for this performance is provided by Nadine Tang.
Additional support is provided by the E. Nakamichi Foundation.*

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FRANZ SCHUBERT

Quartettsatz, D. 703

If Mozart's death at age 35 was a terrible loss for music, the close of Franz Schubert's life at 31 may have been a still greater tragedy. At least Mozart had been able to work in the full maturity of his powers for a decade and a half, leaving behind a rich, artistically complete legacy. At his premature demise, Schubert was surging ahead, constantly experimenting with the technical and emotional content of his music, reshaping the Classical tradition into a powerfully individualistic expression that fused it with the new Romanticism. Where his music would have gone if he had lived longer is one of music's most tantalizing "what-ifs."

In listening to the Allegro assai movement known as the *Quartettsatz*—the first movement of a projected string quartet in C minor—we feel this frustration especially intensely. Even the similar situation of the Schubert's *Unfinished* Symphony is less disturbing because that work's two completed movements seem to form a harmonious whole. But the *Quartettsatz* ushers us into an extraordinary new world—musically advanced and psychologically tormented—where neither Schubert nor any of his predecessors had ventured. Enthralled, we enter only to find the road stops after less than 10 minutes. Schubert scholar Brian Newbould calls it "the first work in which Schubert reached full maturity as an instrumental composer."

Death did not rob us of the rest of this quartet, just as it didn't end the *Unfinished*: the composer still had almost eight years more to live when he wrote this movement in December 1820. At age 23, he was experiencing a turbulent period of artistic growth. So strong did his creative flame burn that he often left off one work to begin another. Frequently, he returned to complete the first work, but in this case, for reasons we'll never know, he did not. However, he did compose

40 measures of a second movement, described by Alfred Einstein as "an indescribably rich and tragic Andante."

When he was in the mood, Schubert could be the most lovable and *gemütlich* of composers. But he also had a dark, demonic side, and that is what animates the *Quartettsatz*. Its opening is startling. Out of silence emerges an eerie, barely audible tremolo figure in the first violin, which quickly crescendos to a savage fortissimo as, one by one, the other instruments join in. Chromatically twisting, this deeply disturbing idea bedevils the entire movement. Less than a minute later, the key of C minor shifts to the unexpected key of A-flat major, and the first violin launches a yearning second theme—pure Schubertian melody at its most touching. But the buzzing tremolo soon routs it. Eventually, another lyrical melody in G major emerges in the first violin; chromatically twisting like the tremolo figure but very soft and ethereal (especially in its high-register repeat), it is one of Schubert's most haunting inspirations. After repeating this exposition section, the composer then merges development and recapitulation into one seamless whole. At the end, he reprises the buzzing C-minor crescendo that opened the work, then cuts it off with three savage chords.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Viola Quintet in C major, K. 515*Viola Quintet in G minor*, K. 516

Like Haydn and Beethoven, Mozart was a master of that quintessential chamber ensemble the string quartet, as his six superb "Haydn" quartets show. But it was in the more unusual string quintet ensemble of two violins, two violas, and cello that he created what many consider to be his greatest chamber works. He wrote six in all, of which four—including the two we will hear this afternoon—rank among his most outstanding masterpieces.

There were many reasons why Mozart may have been attracted to this larger ensemble. Though as a youth he had been a talented violinist, by adulthood he preferred to play the viola, where he could luxuriate in the warm center of his harmonies. He seems to have loved this instrument's dusky, complex sound, for he featured it as soloist along with a violin in his wonderful *Sinfonia Concertante*, K. 364. And in his orchestral and chamber writing, he generally lavished much attention on his interior parts, which included the viola. The five voices of a quintet gave him a richer sound as well as many more instrumental combinations to exploit.

In 1773, Michael Haydn—younger brother of the great Joseph—wrote three quintets using two violas. These were clearly Mozart's initial inspiration because in that same year, at age 17, he created his First String Quintet, K. 174 in the informal *divertimento* style.

By the time Mozart returned to the string quintet genre in the spring of 1787, he was at the height of his powers and now saw the string quintet as an expansion of the string quartet—able to carry the profound expressive and formal ideas associated with the quartet medium. Within six weeks, he composed a pair of mighty yet contrasting quintets: one in C major (K. 515) and another in G minor (K. 516). They bear an uncanny relationship to the two equally mighty symphonies he wrote in the same brief time period about a year later: his Symphony No. 40 in G minor and Symphony No. 41 in C major, *Jupiter*, using the same combination of keys. The Quintet in C major is the longest of all Mozart's chamber works for strings.

In keeping with this breadth of expression, the first movement is a sonata form of unusually generous proportions that looks ahead to the practices of Beethoven. As we find so often in Beethoven's works, the principal theme is more of a spare, yet pregnant motive than the kind of full-blown singing melody we would expect from Mozart.

Over pulsing inner parts, the cello creeps upward over two octaves outlining the notes of the C-major triad, to which the first violin gives a pleading response. This bare-bones idea will prove to be ideal material for development and harmonic exploration. Indeed, the exploration begins almost immediately: after a sudden pause, the upward creep resumes but now in the key of C minor and with the roles of the cello and violin reversed. Mozart spends an exceptional amount of time with his principal theme before moving on to two more: an understated swirling idea led by first violin and, more significantly, a rocking closing theme elaborated in wonderful counterpoint between all five instruments.

The development section—built around the creeping first theme and the rocking closing theme—is one of Mozart's richest in terms of harmonic interest and craftsmanship. And, as is often the case with this composer, the development process doesn't stop there, but continues throughout the recapitulation and even into a marvelous coda based on the rocking theme.

The second movement is a wonderfully strange and enigmatic minuet, very distant from its strongly rhythmic court-dance origins. By beginning his phrases on the upbeat, Mozart even obscures the familiar 3/4 beat, and the irregular phrase lengths thwart rhythmic clarity still more. In this dance, the middle or trio section—far longer in proportion to the minuet than was customary—is the most important element. Mozart shades his melodies and harmonies here with dramatic chromaticism, most notably in an arresting motive that rocks upward and downward by plaintive half steps.

During 1787, Mozart's creativity was also focused on opera, producing his monumental tragic-comedy *Don Giovanni*. Thus, it is not surprising that in the sublime Andante third movement we hear the instruments treated like singers of what sounds like an impassioned love duet between a soprano first vio-

lin and a tenor first viola. Here the serenely beautiful opening melody of the two violins is interrupted by pleading phrases from the first viola—colored by sighing *appoggiatura* dissonances—that imitate operatic recitative. Gradually this solidifies into a duet between first violin and first viola in which both adopt those yearning *appoggiaturas*. The other three instruments provide subtle, sympathetic support. Near the end, the two instruments' rapture climaxes in an ecstatically soaring phrase initiated by the viola.

The quintet closes with a spacious, eventful finale in sonata rondo form, in which a blithely innocent refrain theme becomes the basis for extensive developments. Mozart uses all the members of his enlarged ensemble to create superb counterpoint throughout.

Viola Quintet in G Minor, K. 516

The beginning of 1787 was one of the most difficult periods in Mozart's life. His search to find a wealthy noble sponsor had not succeeded, and his challenging music had made him less popular with the Viennese public, thus receiving fewer performances. His financial difficulties forced him to move to a smaller and less expensive apartment outside the center of Vienna. On top of this, his father, Leo, against whom he'd often rebelled but still deeply loved, was seriously ill and in fact died just after Mozart finished the Quintet in G minor. That the usually ebullient composer was now sunk in depression and grief is attested to by his choice of the key, one always associated in his mind with oppression and tragedy. In his masterful recent biography of Mozart, Jan Swafford comments that this quintet is "in some ways the most tragic piece Mozart ever wrote." It is also generally ranked as one of his greatest creations in any genre.

In Swafford's description, the first movement "begins with simmering anxiety in the top three voices, no [cello] bass line as a foundation in the low register, and uneasily shifting harmonies. The opening theme will persist throughout the movement like an ob-

session." Usually, Mozart would modulate to the major for his second theme, but here he stays firmly in G minor for a first-violin theme that leaps yearningly upward, but cannot reach its goal. Using both subjects, the development section is rather brief because development will continue throughout the recapitulation section. A closing coda "presents the leading themes jammed together like a surge of pain and its atmosphere" (Swafford).

Still in G minor, the second movement is a minuet no one could dance to. One can hardly discern the $\frac{3}{4}$ beat, and Mozart keeps adding violent chords on the third beat that sound like a cry of protest. Finally moving to G major, the Trio section is more lyrical but hardly consoling. Filled with chromatic shifts, it still sounds melancholy and dragging.

In E-flat major, the Adagio ma non troppo slow movement, despite its major key is music of grief. Expressing choked emotions, all the instruments are muted throughout this beautiful, introspective movement. The melodic line is broken off by little sighing motives, such as we heard in the first movement. A second theme of long descending scales in the first violin is intensified by an agitated accompaniment.

Haydn often wrote slow introductions to his finales, but Mozart rarely did. However, here he clings to the G-minor mood with another Adagio, even slower than that of the third movement. Nevertheless, Mozart typically reverted to his bright, optimistic nature, and after another few minutes of mourning, he finally embraces G major with a bright-spirited rondo in dancing 6/8 meter and an Allegro tempo that points hopefully to the future.

—Janet E. Bedell © 2026

Janet E. Bedell is a program annotator and feature writer who writes for Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Caramoor Festival of the Arts, and other musical organizations.



In recognition of its fiftieth anniversary, the world-renowned **Takács Quartet** was recently the subject of an in-depth profile by the *New York Times* and featured on the cover of *Strad* magazine. The Takács released two anniversary season albums in 2025 for Hyperion Records to glowing reviews. *Flow* by Ngwenyama, composed for the ensemble, was followed by an album of piano quintets by Dvořák and Price with Marc André Hamelin. In August 2025, for Musica Viva in Australia, the ensemble played a new work, *Sonnet of an Emigrant* for quartet and narrator by Cathy Milliken with texts by Bertolt Brecht.

Edward Dusinberre, Harumi Rhodes (violins), Richard O'Neill (viola), and András Fejér (cello) are excited about upcoming projects including the current performances throughout the US of Mozart viola quintets with Jordan Bak and a new string quartet, *NEXUS*, written for them by Clarice Assad. (This work, co-commissioned by Cal Performances, will be heard at the quartet's February 22 concert here at Hertz Hall.) The group's North American engagements include concerts in New York's Carnegie Hall, Vancouver, Philadelphia, Boston, Princeton, Ann Arbor, Washington DC, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Phoenix and Portland.

The Takács enjoys a busy international touring schedule. As Associate Artists at London's Wigmore Hall, the group will present four concerts featuring works by Haydn, Assad, Debussy, and Beethoven, as well as two Mozart viola quintets with Timothy Ridout that will also be recorded for Hyperion. Other European appearances include the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, Konzerthaus Berlin, and concerts in Florence, Bologna, and Rome.

The members of the Takács Quartet are Christoffersen Fellows and have been Artists in Residence at the University of Colorado, Boulder since 1986. During the summer months, the Takács join the faculty at the

Music Academy of the West, running an intensive quartet seminar. This season the ensemble begins a new relationship as Visiting Artists at the University of Maryland.

The Takács has recorded for Hyperion since 2005 and all their other recordings are available to stream at www.hyperion-streaming.co.uk In 2021, the Takács won a Presto Music Recording of the Year Award for its recordings of string quartets by Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn, and a *Gramophone* Award with pianist Garrick Ohlsson for piano quintets by 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 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 honors 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.

The Takács Quartet is known for its innovative programming. In July 2024, the ensemble gave the premiere of *Kachkaniraqmi* by Gabriela Lena Frank, a concerto for solo quartet and string orchestra. Since 2021–22, the ensemble has partnered regularly with bandoneon virtuoso Julien Labro in a program featuring 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 again with her at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto in 2015. They first performed *Everyman* at Carnegie Hall in 2007 with the late Philip Seymour Hoffman. They have toured 14 cities with the poet Robert Pinsky, and played regularly with the Hungarian Folk group Muzsikás.



IN APPRECIATION

András Fejér

The Takács Quartet recently announced the impending retirement of cellist András Fejér, the last remaining member of the original Takács Quartet (founded in 1975). Fejér will step down at the end of the 2025–26 season, after a remarkable 51-year tenure.

The ensemble's newest member, cellist Mihai Marica, will join the Takács as of September 1, 2026.

The quartet's two performances at Cal Performances this season (January 25 and February 22) mark Fejér's final Berkeley appearances as a member of the ensemble.

Cal Performances salutes András Fejér on the accomplishments of his long and remarkable career. We join his many Bay Area friends and admirers in congratulating him on the occasion of his retirement, and extend all good wishes as he turns the page and begins this new chapter.

In 2014 the Takács became the first string quartet to be awarded 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.

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 first North American tour in 1982. Members of the Takács Quartet are the grateful beneficiaries of an instrument loan by the Drake Foundation and are grateful to be Thomastik-Infeld Artists.

Award-winning Jamaican-American violist **Jordan Bak** has achieved international acclaim as a trailblazing artist, praised for his radiant stage presence, dynamic interpretations, and fearless power. Critics have described him as "an exciting new voice in Classical performance" (*I Care If You Listen*), "a powerhouse musician, with a strong voice and compelling sound" (*The Whole Note*) and lauded his "haunting lyrical grace" (*Gramophone*). The recipient of the London Philharmonic Orchestra's Alexandra Jupin Award and a former Young Classical Artist Trust's (YCAT) Robey Artist, Bak was also a prize winner in the Sphinx, Lionel Tertis, and Concert Artists Guild competitions, and has received accolades from *ClassicFM*, *Musical America*, and *WQXR*.

Along with his current performances with the world-renowned Takács Quartet on a tour of rarely-performed Mozart viola quintets, this season will also see Bak making his concerto debuts with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and Houston Symphony Orchestra. And he will give the world premiere of composer Michael Frazier's new viola concerto, *Los quetzales*, commissioned by Eastman School of Music, the Sphinx Organization, and American Composers Orchestra.

Bak's well-received sophomore album, *Cantabile: Anthems for Viola* (Delphian Records), has garnered significant international attention, featuring works by Arnold Bax, Benjamin Britten, and Ralph Vaughan Williams, paired with contemporary compositions by Jonathan Harvey, Bright Sheng, and Augusta Read Thomas. A proud new-music advocate, Bak has given numerous world premieres, including Kaija Saariaho's *Du gick, flög* for viola and mezzo-soprano; Jessica Meyer's *On fire...no, after you* for viola, mezzo-soprano, and piano; Augusta Read Thomas' *Upon Wings of Words* for string quartet and soprano; and Jeffrey Mumford's *stillness echoing* for viola and harp.

Bak has appeared as soloist with orchestras including the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Sarasota Orchestra, London Mozart Players, New York Classical Players, Juilliard Orchestra, and Brandon Hill Chamber Orchestra, and has performed under such esteemed conductors as Howard Griffiths, Stephen Mulligan, Keith Lockhart, Gerard Schwarz, and Ewa Strusíńska. As a recitalist and chamber musician, he has been heard at some of the world's greatest performance venues, including at Carnegie Hall, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, Wigmore Hall, Jordan Hall, Alice Tully Hall, Merkin Concert Hall, Perelman Theater at the Kimmel Center, Elgar Concert Hall, and Helsinki Musiikkitalo.

Bak has been a presence at chamber music festivals including the Marlboro



Music Festival, Tippet Rise, Chamber Music Northwest, and Newport Classical, and has appeared during the year at Chamber Music Detroit, Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Emory University's Candler Concert Series, and Shriver Hall Concert Series. He has collaborated frequently with the Escher Quartet, Verona Quartet, Catalyst Quartet, Merz Trio, and Hermitage Piano Trio and has performed with such artists as Jonathan Biss, Lara Downes, Jennifer Frautschi, Ani Kavafian, Soovin Kim, Charles Neidich, Marina Piccinini, and Gilles Vonsattel.

Passionate about education, Bak currently serves as Assistant Professor of Viola at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts and as an Ambassador for UK Music Masters in London. Additionally, he has given master classes at the Manhat-

tan School of Music, NYU Steinhardt, Oberlin Conservatory, Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire (UK), and Conservatorio del Tolima (Colombia).

Only the third violist to earn the Artist Diploma from the Juilliard School, Bak holds a bachelor's degree in music from the New England Conservatory and a master's degree in music from the Juilliard School, where he was awarded the prestigious Kovner Fellowship. His principal teachers were Dimitri Murrath, Hsin-Yun Huang, and Samuel Rhodes.

Jordan Bak plays on two violas, both made by Jon van Kouwenhoven. He is married to violist Rubina Bak and shares two cats, Bartok and Walton.