

The Takács Quartet

Edward Dusingberre, Violin // Harumi Rhodes, Violin

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Vilar Performing Arts Center | Sunday, March 7, 2021 | 7pm

Performance Underwritten by:

Tim & Barbara Kelley

Program

String Quartet No. 66 in G Major, Op. 77, No. 1, Hob.III:81 "Lobkowitz" Franz Josef HAYDN
(1732 – 1809)

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Adagio
- III. Menuetto: Presto
- IV. Finale: Presto

String Quartet No. 67 in F Major, Op. 77, No. 2, Hob.III:81 "Lobkowitz" Franz Josef HAYDN
(1732 – 1809)

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Menuetto: Presto, ma non troppo
- III. Andante
- IV. Finale: Vivace assai

String Quartet No. 3 in B-flat Major, Op. 67 Johannes BRAHMS
(1833 – 1897)

- I. Vivace
- II. Andante
- III. Agitato (Allegretto non troppo)—Trio—Coda
- IV. Poco Allegretto con Variazioni

The Takács Quartet appears by arrangement with Seldy Cramer Artists, and records for Hyperion and Decca/London Records. www.takacsquartet.com

The Takács Quartet is Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Colorado in Boulder and are Associate Artists at Wigmore Hall, London.

Introduction: Joseph Haydn (1732 – 1809) is widely credited with inventing the string quartet. If not utterly without precedent, he certainly established that such works should have four movements, the first and last being the most energetic, the middle ones providing song-like or dance-like contrast. Coming along a century later, Johannes Brahms (1833 – 1897) took that venerable art form and sought new things to do with it that would be innovative while still proving that he knew the rules of best practice. Tonight's Vilar Center program with the Takács Quartet will set the two masters one against the other, giving listeners the chance to hear in the later composer the lasting influence of the earlier.

Haydn: the Lobkowitz quartets

Haydn's last two string quartets were composed at the request of Prince Joseph Franz von Lobkowitz (1772 – 1816). The prince's name appears frequently in discussions of classical music, though usually for his role as a patron of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827). That he also engaged the services of Haydn is less widely known. Lobkowitz's request was for six quartets, though Haydn only delivered two. It was 1799; well into his 70s, Haydn was not yet short of compositional ideas. Perhaps he just found that he was busy with requests from his long time employers, the aristocratic Esterhazys. Equally likely, he may have been enjoying a well-earned semi-retirement. However, what is clear is that he had decidedly not lost his touch. The two strings quartets of his op. 77 (a gross underestimation of his total catalog, but such is the number by which they are known) were published in 1802; they would be his final completed works in the genre.

- String Quartet no. 66 in G major, op. 77, no. 1

The G major Quartet no. 66 offers a first movement *Allegro moderato* of jaunty and playful demeanor. Requisite modulations to other keys provide variety without ever long departing from the general mood of good cheer. The second movement *Adagio* brings what might be moonlit serenity, largely restful of spirit, though comparatively more impassioned moments burst in from time to time. It takes little imagination to construct a love scene that would fit the music.

With the third movement, Haydn presents a dance-like *Minuetto*; leave it to Beethoven to prefer the more modern *Scherzo* plan. However, the energies that Haydn has chosen seem less suggestive of ballroom dancing, and more of Hungarian folk dancing (or perhaps Croatian). Opening and closing pages are spirited; by contrast, the central portion is more sober and driven, though still lacking in darkness. The quartet concludes with a nimble *Finale: Presto*, scampering and eager, frequently driven forward by long passages of rapid sixteenth notes. Having kept his musicians busy for nearly half an hour, Haydn is clearly sure that they yet have more to give.

- String Quartet no. 67 in F major, op. 77, no. 2

Structurally speaking, the F major Quartet no. 67 (Haydn's last) offers one particular difference from its immediate predecessor, and indeed, from the great majority of the composer's previous quartets. Here, he places the dance-like *Menuetto* movement second, rather than third, and the gentle *Andante* movement third, rather than second. It may seem a minor difference. However, one might suppose that, given the sometimes urgent colors of the opening movement *Allegro moderato*, Haydn thought that stepping the intensity of the action down gradually, rather than subtly would be for the best. So from the graceful, if at times anxious, first movement, one moves not to restfulness, but to playfulness with the *Menuetto*. Its central pages are peaceful by comparison, making the return to greater eagerness in the closing pages all the more striking.

The third movement *Andante* brings gracefully flowing passages for second violin, viola, and cello. Meanwhile, the first violin is kept well occupied with quick moving lines of delicate figurations. The tempo has slowed, but the number of notes is higher, so there is still no rest



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for first violin. High spirits return with the *Finale: Vivace assai*, which, after a single opening chord- firm, though not dark – scampers eagerly along. Such friskiness might almost be an invitation to get up and dance to the music, at least in one's heart.

Brahms: String Quartet no. 3 in B-flat major, op. 67

Haydn composed 67 string quartets, Brahms only three. Let us not imagine that Brahms was a lazier man. Rather, as his correspondence makes clear, he was somewhat intimidated by the pressure of measuring up to his mighty predecessors, not only Haydn, but also Mozart and Beethoven. Wary of what observers might judge, Brahms continually rewrote pieces, occasionally burning them when he felt they were beyond repair. One genre that fell particular victim to these self-generated purges is the string quartet. Evidence suggests that Brahms wrote at least a dozen quartets, possibly as many as twenty, yet only three were ever published, all dating from the 1870s, when the composer was past the age of forty.

Last of the three survivors is the String Quartet no. 3 in B-flat major. Its two predecessors had been based on minor keys (c minor and a minor); here, at last, Brahms chooses to think more cheerfully, with B-flat major. It was the summer of 1875, and the composer was vacationing near Heidelberg. Perhaps in light of a holiday mood, he chose to write a quartet, rather than the long considered but deeply intimidating Symphony no. 1, which after twenty years on the drawing board would have to wait for the next opus number in his catalog.

The first movement *Vivace* is of rather boisterous mood, with nimble rhythms, rushing lines and a lively 6/8 meter – occasionally interrupted by brief meter changes. Its central pages are generally restful, but otherwise, the movement prances out the door and ultimately will dash to its close. With the second movement *Andante*, Brahms offers a sweet romance with first violin in the spotlight over sustained lower tones from the other ensemble members. Brighter bursts appear, though the overall sense is one of a quiet afternoon.

The third movement *Agitato – Allegretto non troppo* is perhaps more wary than agitated; certainly, it is not music rife with anxiety. The mellow colors of the viola, ever prominent here, may have played a role there. Often, Brahms creates conversation between the players, so that one will present a phrase that then reappears in one of the other parts.

Particularly notable in the Quartet no. 3 is its last movement theme and variations, in which one main melody is heard in various and diverse re-imagined moods. Brahms has crafted eight variations on his theme. Often, these are of tender demeanor, though with brief bursts of exuberance, especially in the closing measures. Brahms had only recently published the beloved *Variations on a Theme of Haydn*, op. 56, and here proves again that he knows what to do with a good tune.

Program notes © Betsy Schwarm

Group Bio: The **Takács Quartet**, now entering its forty-sixth season, is renowned for the vitality of its interpretations. The Guardian recently commented: "What endures about the Takács Quartet, year after year, is how equally the four players carry the music." BBC Music Magazine described their recent Dohnányi recording with pianist Marc André Hamelin as "totally compelling, encapsulating a vast array of colours and textures." Based in Boulder at the University of Colorado, **Edward Dusingberre**, **Harumi Rhodes** (violins), **Richard O'Neill** (viola) and **András Fejér** (cello) perform eighty concerts a year worldwide.