

FRIENDS OF
CHAMBER MUSIC
50th Anniversary

Fifty-First Season

THE TAKÁCS QUARTET

Edward Dusinberre, *violin*
Károly Schranz, *violin*
Geraldine Walther, *viola*
András Fejér, *cello*

2:30 PM, October 1, 2006

Faye Spanos Concert Hall

In cooperation with University of the Pacific
Conservatory of Music
Stockton, California

Program

String Quartet No. 6

Mesto—Più mosso, pesante—Vivace
Mesto—Marcia
Mesto—Burletta: Moderato
Mesto

Béla BARTÓK
(1881–1945)

String Quartet No. 15 in d Minor, K. 421

Allegro moderato
Andante
Menuetto: Allegretto
Allegretto ma non troppo—Più allegro

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART
(1756–1791)

—intermission—

String Quartet in a Minor, Op. 51, No. 2

Allegro non troppo
Andante moderato
Quasi minuetto, Moderato—Allegretto vivace
Finale: Allegro non assai

Johannes BRAHMS
(1833–1897)



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
and are Associate Artists at the South Bank Centre, London
www.takacsquartet.com

The Takács Quartet

Opening the Friends of Chamber Music's 51st Season and launching National Arts Month, the Takács Quartet makes its second appearance in Stockton. Entering their 31st season, the Takács is Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Colorado at Boulder and the Associate Artists at the South Bank Centre in London.

Recognized as one of the world's premiere string quartets, the Takács Quartet plays with virtuosic technique, intense immediacy, and consistently burnished tone. Since their debut in Budapest in 1975, they have appeared on many worldwide tours, including virtually every music capital in North America, Europe, Australasia and Japan, and at music festivals, including Aspen, Berlin, Cheltenham, City of London, Mostly Mozart, Ravinia, Salzburg, Schleswig Holstein and Tanglewood. Their award-winning recordings have ranked them among the most highly praised quartets. Most recently, their recording of the complete Beethoven Quartet Cycle has been awarded a Grammy Award, two Gramophone Awards, the BBC Music Disc of the Year Award, the Classical Brits Award for Ensemble Album of the Year, and three Japan Record Academy Chamber Music Awards.

Takács is also one of the most innovative groups, premiering new works and collaborating with other artists. They recently completed a 14-day tour of America with the 39th Poet Laureate of the United States, Robert Pinsky.

The Program

Bartók—Quartet No. 6

Béla Bartók was interested in folk melodies even as a child; reportedly his first composition, *The Danube River*, traced the river's path using melodies from each country through which it passed. In the summer of 1904, Bartók first had the idea of collecting genuine Hungarian peasant folk songs; over the following years he trekked the country-

side collecting, recording and transcribing examples he found, in the process becoming a pioneer ethnomusicologist. Notably, the treasures of this music became an integral part of his work.

Bartók's music was largely rejected during his lifetime by both performers and audiences. Though bitter and angry over this, he never strayed from his musical path and only after death is Bartók recognized for both his amazing music and ethnomusicology. Many rank him as making the greatest contribution to chamber music since Beethoven.

Bartók's six quartets are some of the most successful chamber music of the 20th century. His flexible, atonal language yields a variety of sonorous effects with a powerful rhythmic appeal rich in expressive dissonance. In the sixth quartet, sheer dissonance is replaced with a more melodic dissonance that permits some degree of warmth.

Bartók began his final quartet in August 1939 in Switzerland but abandoned composition almost immediately after learning of the German-Russian nonaggression pact. Deeply disturbed by the war, he composed intermittently, completing the quartet in November. It was the final European composition he would write before moving to America.

Premiered by the Kolisch Quartet on January 20, 1941, the sixth quartet clearly shows the anguish Bartók felt as he watched the world teeter on the brink of war. Observe the linear progression of the four movements: each is slower than the prior and the work ends in bleak resignation. The single theme marked '*Mesto*' (sad, mournful) introduces each movement and unites the work.

The *Mesto* is introduced by the viola, the other instruments joining for a forceful unison passage that is transformed into the short-lived, ascending first theme. A folk theme follows as the second theme with long-short/short-long rhythms. He brings these two themes back in a light, playful manner for a varied recapitulation.

The *Mesto* opens the second movement in the cello together with a counter melody in the first violin and a tremolo in the second violin and viola. The movement is a fiery march full of irony and satire. The solitary cello resolves this with an intense melody in the middle section. The march returns with an ethereal insinuation of a *march macabre*.

The first violin opens the third movement playing the *Mesto* theme with counter melodies in the second violin and cello. This is a bitter and acerbic caricature with elements of humor but the underlying spirit is mocking and sarcastic. Listen for the two violins playing the same notes but a quarter-tone apart intensifying the satire with a jarring dissonance. The middle section, reflective and longing, provides a welcome change of mood before the finale section returns to the opening mood. There is extensive jeté and pizzicato with tastes of the second theme from the first movement.

All four instruments join to present the *Mesto* theme in the fourth movement. Here, however, it is not just introductory but is the principal theme. Both themes of the first movement are recalled but in grave tones missing their earlier energy. This highly emotional movement communicates a sense of acceptance until the viola offers a final taste of the *Mesto* theme at the quartet's end.

Mozart—Quartet No. 15, K. 421

It was in the ten years after being dismissed (with a boot to the backside) from the Archbishop Colloredo's service in 1781 and his death in 1791 that Mozart finally fulfilled his innate musical gift: a series of undeniable works of genius for operatic stage, soloist, orchestra, and chamber group.

Mozart composed this quartet (one of the six "Haydn Quartets") in the same room that his wife Constanze was giving birth to their

first son. It would be natural to look for similarities between this circumstance and the profoundly sad and communicative quartet, but most agree with Eric Blom that Mozart instead shows "his amazing power of emotional detachment" and the "callousness of genius."

The initial *Allegro* is a brief, intense movement of extremely ardent restraint. The principle theme, made up of many motifs, leaps up and down in the first violin while the secondary subject is confined in range and consequently sounds agitated or uneasy. At the end of the exposition, there is a lonely figure, played twice by the first violin ending with three repeated notes and later appearing in each of the following movements, serving as a unifying mechanism. The remainder of the movement is in common sonata form, but the music is far from common.

The *Andante* is in A-B-A form and would be tender but for the agitation and flurry standing in its way. Soon after the start of the A-section and then several more times, the first violin plays the 3-note motif heard in the first movement, but at slower tempo. This repeated 3-note theme dominates the B-section. Blom notwithstanding, some believe the two loud outbursts heard in this section represent the cries of Constanze in labor. The movement ends with a shortened A-section.

The *Mennetto* includes that 3-note motif as an important part of its rebellious theme. The trio is all sweetness and light, with the first violin playing a lighthearted refrain over a simple pizzicato. The good times do not last as the movement ends with a repeat of the *Mennetto*.

The finale notably cheers up the mood with a set of four variations and coda based on a naïve-sounding theme with the rhythm of an Italian pastoral dance. Variation I features the first violin in an ornate amplification of the rhythmic pattern of the dance. The two violins cooperate in variation II, energizing the melody with offbeat accents. The mournful viola sets the

mood early on for variation III, recalling the 3-note motif. These three variations move far away from the original theme, but the fourth shifts back by smoothing out the rhythms, modulating to the major key, and adding a fluid countermelody in the cello and viola. The coda moves back to minor and speeds up slightly, bringing us back even closer to the original theme. Listen again for the 3-note figure and watch it grow in importance so that the entire quartet ends with three determined repetitions of that unifying motto.

Brahms-Quartet Op. 51, No. 2

As Brahms' reputation grew, he developed a predilection for biting, sarcastic remarks. After studying a manuscript a young composer brought him, he is said to have asked, "Tell me, where did you get this splendid music paper?" He was as brutal with his own works, revising them extensively before publication or even discarding them. There were almost two dozen quartets written and destroyed before Brahms felt he had achieved satisfactory results with this piece we hear today. It was begun in the 1850s but not premiered by the Joachim Quartet until 1873. More than with any other musical form, Brahms presents his string quartets as fully developed masterworks without any examples of his cautious approach to his musical loftiness.

Brahms did provide some hints to his musical influence: from Bach his interest in polyphony and from Bismarck's unification of Germany his use of folk songs. Early in his career, he adopted the notes F-A-F as his musical motto, the three letters representing the words *frei, aber froh* (free, but glad). Listening carefully, one can hear this motto and the similar motto, F-A-E, *frei, aber einsam* (free, but lonely), of his friend Joachim in this quartet.

The A minor quartet is a delicate, gentle composition. Lyric charm contrasts with reflective passages and passionate cries are contrasted with

sophisticated melodies. A sense of reserve is rarely missing and not until the finale do we hear vigorous playing.

An elegantly arcing F-A-E theme opens the quartet and is followed by a 3-note upbeat, which also appears in the theme of the last movement. The development features an outstanding example of polyphonic music, stuffed with melody imitated, played backwards, and turned upside down. The viola plays the F-A-F motto at the beginning of the recapitulation and then, just before the coda, the second violin plays it overlying Joachim's F-A-E.

A twisting line in the viola and cello lovingly sings the second movement's lyrical theme. As this melody extends, a canon in the first violin and cello interrupts with an operatic outburst. The opening melody returns in the first violin but it is a false return in the wrong key. Finally, the cello resolves this problem by bringing the melody back in A Major, as expected.

The *Quasi Mennetto*, distinguished by a charming, old-fashioned quality, is interrupted by two radiant interludes upsetting the calm. Passages featuring Brahms' talent for writing canon follow each. Listen for an amazing double canon where the first violin and viola play a slowed-down augmentation of the interlude theme in imitation, while the second violin and cello have a variant of the *minuetto* theme, also in imitation.

The finale glows with the melodic energy of a Gypsy folk dance. A waltz-like melodious strain alternates with the dance. The coda begins ethereally with the cello and first violin reprising the opening melody in canon. This is followed by the entire quartet playing the same even more quietly and with notes of longer duration. Finally, the full quartet picks up the pace and volume, bringing the piece to a radiant end.

—Notes by Dr. Michael Spencer

FIFTY-FIRST SEASON

2006-2007

*Presented in Cooperation with
University of the Pacific Conservatory
of Music; Stephen Anderson, Dean*

The Takács Quartet

2:30 PM Sunday, October 1, 2006

Faye Spanos Concert Hall

RECEPTION FOLLOWING

The Peabody Trio

2:30 PM Sunday, November 5, 2006

Faye Spanos Concert Hall

RECEPTION FOLLOWING

Strata

2:30 PM Sunday, December 3, 2006

Faye Spanos Concert Hall

RECEPTION FOLLOWING

The Streicher Trio with Dance

2:30 PM Sunday, February 18, 2007

Faye Spanos Concert Hall

RECEPTION FOLLOWING

The Ying Quartet

7:30 PM Saturday, March 24, 2007

Faye Spanos Concert Hall

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