



**2024/2025
77th SEASON**

**Friends of Chamber Music present the Takács Quartet in concert
at the Vancouver Playhouse, Sunday, December 8, 2024 – 3:30 pm**

Takács Quartet

Edward Dusinberre - Violin
Harumi Rhodes - Violin
Richard O'Neill - Viola
András Fejér – Cello



The world-renowned Takács Quartet, formed in 1975, is now entering its fiftieth anniversary season. After winning six major international string quartet competition prizes, the Quartet made its North American debut tour in 1982, including a Vancouver concert for Friends of Chamber Music. 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 maintains a busy international touring schedule. In 2025, the ensemble will perform in South Korea, Japan, and Australia. The Australian tour features a new piece by Kathy Milliken for quartet and narrator. As Associate Artists at London's Wigmore Hall, the group will present four concerts featuring works by Haydn, Britten, Ngwenyama, Beethoven, Janáček, and two performances of Schubert's great C Major quintet with cellist Adrian Brendel. During the season the ensemble will play at other prestigious European centres including Barcelona, Budapest, Milan, Basel, Bath Mozartfest, and Bern. The group's North American 2024-2025 engagements include concerts at centres from the West Coast (including Vancouver) to the East Coast and include collaborations with pianists Stephen Hough and Jeremy Denk.

The members of the Takács Quartet are Christoffersen Fellows and Artists in Residence at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and are grateful beneficiaries of an instrument loan by the Drake Foundation. During the summer the Takács join the faculty at the Music Academy of the West, running an intensive quartet seminar.

The Takács has recorded for Hyperion since 2005. Their summer 2024 album includes Schubert's final quartet, D887. In November, the group released "Flow", by American composer Nokuthula Ngwenyama, available as a CD-R. This and all their other Hyperion recordings are available to stream at <https://www.hyperion-streaming.co.uk>

In 2021 the Takács won a Presto Music Recording of the Year Award for their Mendelssohns recordings, and the same year, a Gramophone Award with pianist Garrick Ohlsson for piano quintets by Amy Beach and Edward Elgar. Other Hyperion releases feature works by Haydn, Schubert, Janáček, Smetana,

Debussy, and Britten, plus piano quintets by Franck and Shostakovich (with Marc-André Hamelin), and viola quintets by Brahms and Dvorák (with Lawrence Power). Their Decca CDs from before 2005 (including celebrated Beethoven and Bartok quartet cycles) 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.

The Takacs Quartet is represented by Thomastik-Infeld Artists.

Programme

String Quartet in C Major, Opus 54, No. 2. Hob III.57 *Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)*

Vivace

Adagio

Menuetto: Allegretto

Finale: Adagio - Presto – Adagio

Between 1788 and 1790, Haydn wrote twelve quartets for Johan Tost, who was a violinist in Prince Esterhazy's orchestra and a prosperous merchant. Opus 54 No 2 was second in the first set of three quartets, and in it Haydn explored new harmonic paths and introduced elements of true Romanticism to the music. From then on, his quartets combined both Classical and Romantic features. Understandably, the first violin part is prominent, demanding technical virtuosity that lends fire and eloquence to the music, especially in the first two movements.

The Vivace starts with a strong phrase of five measures ending in a dramatic bar of silence. In the third statement of the phrase, it develops into a full melody. The first violin and viola introduce the second contrasting theme, which has an interesting development.

The Adagio begins with all instruments playing in their low registers introducing a maturing, intense theme. The theme is repeated three more times by the three lower instruments, while the first violin plays a Hungarian-Gypsy lament, embellishing the melody with passionate arabesques.

The light, rhythmic Menuetto follows without pause. A powerful Trio set with bold harmonies follows, before the return to the graceful rhythms of the opening section.

The unusual Finale could be described as a slow movement with a Presto episode. Following the introduction, each instrument assumes the role it is to maintain throughout the slow section. The violin plays a dignified theme, the second violin and viola a throbbing, repeated note accompaniment, and the cello a melodic line that moves from the bottom to the top of its range, lending a spiritual quality to the music. After a scurrying Presto, the movement ends with a brief slow reminder of the opening section.

String Quartet No. 2 in C, Opus 36

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Allegro calmo, senza rigore

Vivace

Chacony: sostenuto

On November 21, 1945, the 250th anniversary of the death of English composer Henry Purcell, Britten's string quartet No. 2 was given its premier at London's Wigmore Hall. Britten's tribute to Purcell in this

quartet is oblique given that he does not quote any music by Purcell. However, the last movement, which dominates the structure, makes use of a compositional technique that Britten associated with the earlier composer.

The first movement, centred on C major, is highly original. Rather than using the standard sonata form, which opposes and contrasts material, Britten built the opening allegro on three themes, all similar in structure, beginning with an upward leap of a tenth, and all announced in the first measures of the movement. The first statement of the theme begins on middle C, with each successive statement rising higher in the quartet's register. The exposition of these three themes becomes so complex that a clear division of the movement into development and recapitulation is lost, and at the climax, Britten makes all three themes coalesce into one simultaneous statement before the music falls away to a quiet close.

The Vivace, played with mutes throughout, is a brief, blistering scherzo in ternary form. The harmony moves to C minor in the outer sections where the music feels consciously nervous, skittering and driving constantly ahead. The central section, in F major, is based on a variant of the scherzo theme. It offers little relaxation, and the sense of nervous energy continues even in the major tonality.

The massive final movement is nearly as long as the first two movements combined. Britten very much admired Purcell's *Chaconne in G Minor*, and in tribute to the older composer, he wrote a chaconne (Chacony) as a finale for this string quartet. It is built on 21 repetitions of a nine-bar ground bass, which is presented in unison (in B-flat major) at the start of the movement. Britten grouped his variations imaginatively: the first six are followed by a cello cadenza, the next six by a viola cadenza, the next six by a violin cadenza, and the final three drive to a conclusion that ringingly affirms C major.

Intermission

String Quartet No.16 in F major, Opus 135

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Allegretto

Vivace

Lento assai, cantabile e tranquillo

Der schwer gefasste Entschluss:

Grave, ma non troppo tratto; Allegro

Opus 135, the last complete string quartet Beethoven wrote, was composed in the late summer of 1826 and first performed in Vienna by the Schuppanzigh Quartet almost one year after Beethoven's death. A brief work, it has less emotional intensity and spirituality than the other late quartets, but it has a deeper sense of calmness and peaceful respiration. For some listeners it represents a return to middle-class taste. But the light and humorous Op. 135 following the profundity of Op. 131 (in chronological order of composition) seems to fit Beethoven's penchant for writing a more buoyant work after creating music of great depth and personal involvement.

The Allegretto's warm conversational tone derives in part from its first subject, a group of five separate motifs, each with its own inflection and character which are tossed from instrument to instrument. An ascending staccato arpeggio and a frolicsome descending run are pitted against each other in the second theme. Beethoven then develops this material, brilliantly expanding the various motifs and presenting them in intriguing new guises and combinations, before bringing them back for the recapitulation. A coda based on motifs from the first subject ends the movement.

The scintillating Vivace, which functions as the Scherzo movement, is propelled forward by its pointed syncopation and cross-accents. The breakneck tempo continues in the contrasting middle section, sending the violin into death-defying leaps which the others repeat as an ostinato measure a full forty-seven times! The movement closes with a shortened reprise of the opening section.

The Lento assai, a sublime example of Beethoven's most inspired "interior music", was added as an afterthought to what he originally conceived as a three movement quartet. On sketches of the main melody Beethoven wrote: *Susser Ruhegesang, Friedengesang, Friedengesang* ("sweet, restful, peaceful song"). Simply and lovingly, he puts his eight-measure melody through four variations, played without pause, that never rise above a "piano" level, creating a section of rich, satisfying beauty and repose.

The final movement, *Der Schwer gefasste Entschluss* ("the difficult resolution") asks the question "*Muss es sein?*" ("Must it be?"). The answer is the ringing affirmation "*Es muss sein! Es muss sein!*" ("It must be! It must be!"). The origins of this exchange were simple, even humorous. Karl Holz (a member of the Schuppanzigh quartet) recounted that Beethoven refused to give Ignaz Dembscher, a friend, a set of the parts for his quartet, Opus 130, because Dembscher had not attended the premiere performance. Wanting to set matters right, Dembscher asked Holz, another mutual friend, to intervene. Holz suggested that Dembscher send the musician Schuppanzigh, whose quartet gave the first performance of Opus 130 (and of which quartet Holz was a member), the cost of a subscription: 50 florins. Dembscher asked, "*Muss es sein?*" and Holz replied, "*Es muss sein!*". When Holz told the story of this exchange to the composer, Beethoven burst into laughter and immediately sat down to compose a canon on the dialogue which he expanded into the quartet's last movement. In slow solemn tones the two lower strings pose the question, and in forceful joyful phrases the two violins deliver the response.

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Next Concerts, both at the Vancouver Playhouse:

Schumann Quartet

February 11, 2025 – 7:30 pm

Mozart: String Quartet No. 20 in D Major, K499 "Hoffmeister"

Prokofiev: String Quartet No. 1 in B Minor, Opus 50

Smetana: String Quartet No. 1 in E Minor "From my life"

Han Finckel Setzer Trio

February 18, 2025 – 7:30 pm

Haydn: Piano Trio in A Major, HOB XV:18

Beethoven: Piano Trio in G Major, Opus 1, No. 2

Dvořák: Piano Trio No. 4 in E Minor, Opus 90 "Dumky"