

Sunday, March 16, 2008, 3pm
Hertz Hall

Takács Quartet



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

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Takács Quartet

PROGRAM

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1826) String Quartet in C major, Op. 59, No. 3,
“Razumovsky” (1806)

Introduzione: Andante con moto —
Allegro vivace
Andante con moto. Quasi allegretto
Menuetto grazioso
Allegro molto

INTERMISSION

Beethoven String Quartet in B-flat major, Op. 130
(1825–1826)

Adagio ma non troppo — Allegro
Presto
Andante con moto, ma non troppo
Alla danza tedesca: Allegro assai
Cavatina: Adagio molto espressivo — attacca:

Beethoven *Große Fuge*, Op. 133 (1825–1826)

Sightlines

Takács Quartet

Sunday, March 16, 2–2:30 pm
Hertz Hall

Pre-performance talk by Paul M. Ellison, Lecturer in Music History,
San Francisco State University, and Assistant Editor, *The Beethoven Journal*

This *Sightlines* talk is free to event ticket holders.

On Beethoven's Quartets

The swiftness with which the genre of the string quartet developed was one of the most remarkable outcomes of the many stylistic changes that occurred in the middle of the 18th century, when the waning Baroque style, epitomized by Bach and Handel, began to be replaced by the rise of the new *style galant*—the refined style of early Classical composers. Within a 60-year period—a comparatively short time in music history—the quartet genre was transformed from the relative simplicity of its early repertoire to the astounding achievement of Beethoven's late quartets, including Op. 130, and the unique *Große Fuge* with which it originally concluded.

While four-part writing for string ensemble can be seen in the early symphonic works of such composers as Sammartini, no direct precursor for the string quartet can readily be identified. Early examples of music written for this ensemble can be seen in Austria and Bohemia by composers such as Dittersdorf, Vanhal, Holtzbauer and, of course, Haydn, the first great exponent of the genre. Initially, these works were described as divertimentos, the title string quartet not achieving currency until the 1780s. Two of its most distinctive features were that it employed solo instruments rather than whole sections of players, and that the keyboard continuo which had provided inner harmony since the early 17th century was no longer present. At first, these divertimentos varied in length and number of movements, only achieving the stability of the much familiar four-movement format in 1769 with Haydn's Op. 9 quartets. It was this format that both Haydn and Mozart followed in their significant contributions to the quartet repertoire, and which formed the mantle Beethoven inherited when he began composing quartets in 1798. The results of his first essay in the genre were the six quartets that form his Op. 18, a project that was to occupy him for some 18 months. Interestingly, it was in these works that he first experimented with the contrapuntal techniques of canon, double counterpoint and fugue that would feature so prominently in his later works, culminating, of course, in the unique *Große Fuge*.

Between the composition of his Op. 18 and Op. 59 quartets, Beethoven was immensely prolific,

writing three symphonies, an oratorio, an opera, a mass and many piano works, including the famed *Pathétique* and “Waldstein” sonatas. Of these, it was *Fidelio* that preoccupied him from 1804 on, to the detriment of other composing projects. Not until the spring of 1806 with the second version of his sole opera finally behind him, was he able to begin work on his Op. 59 quartets, completing them later that year, although they were not published until 1808. They were commissioned by the Russian ambassador to the Imperial Court, Count Andreas Kyrillovitch Razumovsky, himself an amateur violinist. Razumovsky was able to make a real difference in 1808, when he became patron of the famed Schuppanzigh Quartet, by placing the group at Beethoven's disposal. Gone were the days of *gentil soirée*, with cultured amateurs performing such works, and the virtuosity of Op. 59 reflects the fact that they were written for a professional ensemble.

Although the Op. 59 quartets were conceived as a set, they are actually very different pieces. Joseph Kerman describes them as “a trio of sharply characterized, consciously differentiated individuals.” The first—in F major—is the longest of the three. The second—in E minor—far more succinct, while the third—in C major, which will be heard this afternoon—is perhaps the most approachable. It follows what had become by that time the standard plan for the string quartet—a four movement form, commencing with an opening *Allegro* (in this case preceded by a slow introduction); a slower *Andante con moto*, a *Menuetto grazioso*, and a breathless *Allegro molto* finale. In the opening slow *Introduzione*, clear parallels can be seen with the beginning of Mozart's “Dissonance” quartet, K. 465. Both share the same key—C major—and both open ambiguously, as far as establishing this key is concerned. Here a diminished seventh chord, one of the most unstable harmonies available to Beethoven, opens the movement, and leaves the listener in a complete tonal haze! It is important to note that the key of a work had an affective significance both to composers and theorists of the period, and Beethoven was no exception in this regard. C major was frequently seen as a key of purity and innocence—an emotional ground zero as it were. Thus, to open a movement so far away from the tonic key is significant, foreshadowing,

in some respects, the feelings expressed in the slow movement. It is certainly not the way slow introductions to sonata form movements are supposed to begin! The initial appearance of the first subject is also unusual. It is introduced as a quasi-recitative, shorn of all accompaniment save punctuating harmonies for the lower strings, and played quietly. It is not until the 44th measure of the movement that it is finally repeated, now played loudly and fully harmonized in a form that makes the listener comfortable, ushering in a now more traditional sonata form movement.

The extensive *Andante con moto quasi allegretto* is set in A minor—a rare key for Beethoven—and one which signified plaintive and tender feelings. The opening texture, where a gently lamenting first violin melody is ushered in above a pizzicato cello, introduces a movement that becomes more intensely lamenting as it progresses, reaching the distant keys of F minor and even E-flat minor—both signifying differing degrees of depression and extreme grief—enhanced by frequent expressive sigh motives on the violins. There are momentary flickers of hopeful respite in a briefly emerging major mode melody, heard on two separate occasions, but it is soon submerged both times into the ocean of sorrow that forms the overriding affect of this movement. At the end of the charming *Menuetto grazioso*, which recalls the quartet tradition of Haydn and Mozart, a coda ensues which echoes some of the tonal instability first heard in the *Introduzione*. It ushers in the last movement, an *Allegro molto* which is a cunning combination of sonata and fugal elements, in what becomes a dazzling virtuosic display of driven *perpetuum mobile*.

In a letter to his publishers, Breitkopf & Härtel, dating from 1806, Beethoven mentioned his latest string quartet [the first of Op. 59]: “Furthermore, you may discuss...the question of new violin quartets, one of which I have already finished; and indeed I am thinking of devoting myself almost entirely to this type of composition.” Now, finally, from 1824 to 1827, in the twilight of his life, he was finally able to realize this goal with the composition of a series of string quartets that proved to be his last great creative endeavor. The impetus came through a commission from Prince Nikolay Golitsin, a music lover and cellist living in St. Petersburg. As early as November 1822, the Prince had commissioned

Beethoven to compose as many as three quartets, requesting that they be dedicated to him. In the end, Beethoven was so taken with the set that he wrote a further two quartets, forming a series of five that make a truly monumental addition to the quartet repertoire. While Beethoven accepted the Prince's invitation with the intention of beginning work right away, he had failed to account for the amount of time needed to complete the *Missa Solemnis*, the “Diabelli” Variations and the Ninth Symphony. Thus, it was not until May 1824, when the Ninth Symphony had finally received its premiere, that he was able to begin work. The first of the series, Op. 127 in E-flat major, was completed in February 1825, followed by the second, Op. 132 in A minor, in July, and then by Op. 130 in B-flat, which was finished in December. Between the composition of Op. 127 and Op. 132, Beethoven fell ill with a serious abdominal complaint, which lasted a month. While such a traumatic experience took valuable time away from his quartet project, it also had the effect of touching deeply him on an emotional level, directly inspiring the *Heiliger Dankesang* (“The Song of Thanksgiving”) of Op. 132. Op. 130 was composed at a particularly difficult time emotionally for Beethoven. In addition to this recent recovery, relations with his nephew, on whom he absolutely doted as a surrogate son, were strained, and would soon lead to Karl's failed suicide attempt, and he perhaps sensed too that his long-term health prognosis was not good. Balancing all this with his belief in God and the greater good must have proved immensely. It is against this emotional background that the composition Op. 130 took place. In his late quartets, Beethoven experimented with multi-movement form; thus, for Op. 130 there are actually six movements rather than the usual four. The slow introduction and first subject of the first movement are in the key of B-flat major, Beethoven's *amoroso* key—a key that signified feelings of kindness, tenderness and affection for him. Yet, as early the first measure, the note A-flat is introduced—a seemingly a small gesture, perhaps speaking of his desire to continue give thanks to God for his recovery, and even for life itself. E-flat major, the key touched upon here was, for many writers, the key of intimate conversation with God. It is as if he cannot quite decide the appropriate way to do so.

Should thanks be expressed in a quiet, almost sublime manner, as in the slow introduction, or should it be shouted from the rooftops, as the ensuing violin melody does? This conflict continues to play out during much of this movement. Another significant event is the appearance of the second subject in the remote key of G-flat major—a key rarely used by Beethoven, and always at a quiet dynamic level, signifying, in the words of 18th-century theorist C.F.D. Schubart “triumph over difficulty, [a] free sigh of relief when hurdles are surmounted”—almost an exact characterization of his ongoing situation. The second movement—*Presto*—functions as a scherzo in the overall scheme of things, the *alla breve* time signature and tempo marking clearly indicative of this character. It begins in the remote key of B-flat minor, a key signifying discontent and pain—Kerman aptly describes it as a “furious whisper”—but perhaps at this tempo and dynamic level there is also an element of grumbling discontent present, simmering beneath the surface. As with the first movement, this scherzo is about conflicting and contrasting emotions, and in the second section, discontent is swept aside, replaced with a dance-like paean to joy, again in the *amoroso* key of B-flat major. English poet William Wordsworth captures brilliantly the uncanny way abrupt mood swings can affect the soul, in his poem *Resolution and Independence* in 1807:

But, as it sometimes chanceth, from the might
Of joy in minds that can no further go,
As high as we have mounted in delight
In our dejection do we sink as low

It is as if these immortal lines were written for Beethoven! And so, all too soon the joy evaporates and the grumbling pain of the scherzo returns. Beethoven had originally intended the melody which eventually became the fifth-movement Cavatina to form the third movement of this quartet, but when he reached an impasse in its composition, he ended up composing a more lively movement, *Andante con moto, ma non troppo* in D-flat major. The opening, which is actually a written-out transition between movements is arresting, prolonging the affect of the scherzo with an expressive sigh. As the movement proper begins, it projects more positive emotions, and has, for the most part, a charming, airy feel to it. Yet it is not

without its more pathetic moments, having a sense of longing and urgency, enhanced by the frequent use of the sigh motive heard earlier. After all the emotional angst of the previous movements, and in anticipation of the ensuing Cavatina’s intensity, Beethoven realized that a brief respite was needed, both tonally and emotionally. The fourth movement—*Alla danza tedesca*, meaning “in German dance style”—provides just that. Set in the tranquil, gentle key of G major, this simple dance functions like a second scherzo, recalling both the voice of Haydn and an emotional world that exudes calmness and satisfaction. There is an appropriately rustic feel to the melodic writing, enhanced by the longtime pastoral connections of G major.

The designation of the fifth movement as a “Cavatina”—a slow, expressive type of aria—speaks volumes in emphasizing the vocal nature of the melodic writing here—an elegiac melody that is suffused with a sense of nostalgia and yearning. This movement forms the emotional core of Op. 130, and can be seen as serving a similar function to the *Heiliger Dankgesang* in Op. 132. Such was the intensity of this emotion, clearly enhanced by the marking *adagio molto espressivo*, that, in the words of Beethoven’s friend Karl Holz, the Master was brought to tears when writing it and even by its memory. The key of E-flat major is quite deliberate, expressing as it does, in the words of Schubart “love, devotion, of intimate conversation with God.” What is unparalleled here is the use of the remote key of C-flat major—a key off the emotional spectrum as far as theorists were concerned, and indicative of the depth of Beethoven’s feelings. He gives us a hint of the meaning here with the use of the word “*beklemmt*,” meaning anguished or oppressed, feelings made all the more powerful for being set in the major rather than the minor mode.

Prior to discussing the sixth movement, the relationship of the *Große Fuge* to this quartet needs to be put in context. This *tour de force* was the original finale of Op. 130, and received its first performance in this context on March 21, 1826. While both the second and fourth movements received encores, audience and critics alike failed to understand the fugue. Beethoven’s publisher, Matthias Artaria, first broached the idea of having him compose a new finale, shearing the *Große*

Fuge from the quartet and establishing it as a work in its own right as Op. 133. He left the unenviable task of approaching the Master to his friend Holz. Beethoven, never one for taking note of his critics, initially refused to make the change but soon succumbed. The new movement was delivered to his publishers in November that year, and, while he probably did not realize it, it was the last composition he would ever complete. It is hard to imagine a movement that contrasts more greatly to the Great Fugue! The delicate opening, with detached repeated notes for the viola, above which a charming melody appears for the first violin, harks back to Haydn in its grace and balance. Needless to say, it was a hit with his publisher, Artaria, although not every writer since then has expressed unqualified satisfaction with the result.

Some of the most distinguished names in musicology have debated the question as to whether to include the *Große Fuge* in its original position, or to substitute this new movement with which he replaced it. Reasons have been proffered for Beethoven’s agreeing to such a change, ranging from his preoccupation with his nephew Karl’s attempted suicide to his desire to receive extra payment for the composition of the new movement. Ultimately, it will never be known, and trust has to be placed in Beethoven’s judgment that the fugue be severed from the rest of the quartet and become a unique entity in its own right. Nevertheless, the *Große Fuge* is undoubtedly one of the most individual and amazing movements in the whole of western music. Its history and genesis is fascinating, its scope and expressive power truly enormous. Various analyses of its form have been offered over the years, an explanation of which could easily extend to many pages. Suffice it to say that none completely captures the originality of such a profound work, while all manage to capture elements of it. Beethoven gives a hint of the form in the score’s famous heading: *tantôt libre, tantôt recherchée*, meaning “sometimes free, sometimes learned.” It is thus not a strict fugue in the Bachian sense. Rather, as French composer Vincent D’Indy saw it: “It is a fugue with two subjects and variations. The work is unified by a principal theme, the countersubject of the first fugue, which is used as the subject of

the second.” In the most simplistic terms, it is the playing out of these two opposing themes that constitutes the work’s core content. Beethoven’s technical mastery of fugal form is stunning, using techniques including inversion, *stretto*, and augmentation to superb effect. Yet, such is its originality that mingled with fugal writing is an opening *Overtura*, two march-like episodes, two passages of fugato (quasi-fugal writing not strict enough to be termed fugue), two codas and more! What none of these views manages to express fully is the depth and power of the visceral emotion generated here. The two main themes are completely contrasted with one another, yet are also able to be combined, strengthening the argument that they are two sides of the same coin—two aspects of a single personality. The main theme is a chromatic melody, beginning and ending on the note B-flat, and incorporating a series of angular half steps in between. The fact that there are four of these sighs gives it a deep sense of melancholy, and greatly adds to its potency on the affective spectrum. In complete contrast, the second theme is absolutely bursting with positive energy both rhythmically and tonally, thus providing a dramatic affective contrast with its alter ego. Highly significant is the fact that the note A-flat is again included, just as it was in the opening of the first movement! Again this suggests, albeit briefly, the influence of E-flat major—of giving love and devotion to God—hovering over the epic battle in which these themes engage as they strive for ascendancy during the course of the work. Ultimately, as the battle concludes, all sense of melancholy is swept aside in a dance-like paean in *amoroso* B-flat major, affirming that what is good and loving and true will indeed triumph. What mere words cannot do is express the depth of passion that Beethoven unleashes on the listener. And perhaps that is as it should be, for music is a language that transcends words, reaching places deep within the human psyche that are almost impossible to describe.

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Recognized as one of the world's premier string quartets, the **Takács Quartet** is renowned for the ability to fuse four distinct, expressive musical personalities into gripping, unified interpretations. Commenting on their latest Schubert recording for Hyperion, *Gramophone* magazine noted; "The Takács have the ability to make you believe that there's no other possible way the music should go, and the strength to overturn preconceptions that comes only with the greatest performers."

Based in Boulder at the University of Colorado, the Takács Quartet perform 80 concerts a year worldwide, performing throughout Europe as well as in Australia, New Zealand, Japan and Korea. The Quartet are Associate Artists at the South Bank Centre in London, performing several concerts there each year. Their 2007–2008 season highlights include four concerts at Carnegie Hall: *Everyman*, inspired by Philip Roth's novel, in which they performed with Academy Award-winning actor Philip Seymour Hoffman, and a three-concert series focusing on Haydn and Brahms. They also will tour with pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet. In North America, they will perform in over 30 cities, and European tours include performances in Vienna, Amsterdam, Lisbon, Frankfurt and Brussels. In May 2008, the quartet will perform a new piece by James Macmillan, commissioned by South Bank.

The Quartet's multi-award winning recordings include the Late Quartets by Beethoven, which in 2005 won Disc of the Year and Chamber Award from *BBC Music Magazine*, a Gramophone Award and a Japanese Record Academy Award. Their recordings of the Early and Middle Beethoven quartets collected a Grammy Award, another Gramophone Award, a Chamber Music of America Award and two further awards from the Japanese Recording Academy. Of their performances and recordings of the Late Quartets, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* wrote, "The Takács might play this repertoire better than any quartet of the past or present."

In 2005, the Takács Quartet signed a contract with Hyperion Records, for whom their first recording, of Schubert's D.804 and D.810, was released in 2006. A disc featuring Brahms' Piano Quintet with Stephen Hough was released in November 2007. The Quartet has also made 16 re-

cordings for the Decca label since 1988 of works by Beethoven, Bartók, Borodin, Brahms, Chausson, Dvořák, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert and Smetana. The ensemble's recording of the six Bartók String Quartets received the 1998 Gramophone Award for chamber music and, in 1999, was nominated for a Grammy. In addition to the Beethoven String Quartet cycle recording, the ensemble's other Decca recordings include Dvořák's String Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 51, and Piano Quintet in A major, Op. 81, with pianist Andreas Haefliger; Schubert's "Trout" Quintet with Mr. Haefliger, which was nominated in 2000 for a Grammy Award; string quartets by Smetana and Borodin; Schubert's Quartet in G major and Notturmo Piano Trio with Mr. Haefliger; the three Brahms string quartets and Piano Quintet in F minor with pianist András Schiff; Chausson's Concerto for violin, piano and string quartet with violinist Joshua Bell and pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet; and Mozart's String Quintets, K.515 and K.516, with violist György Pauk.

The Takács Quartet is known for innovative programming. The group collaborates regularly with the Hungarian folk ensemble Muzsikás, performing a program that explores the folk sources of Bartók's music. The Takács performed a music and poetry program on a 14-city U.S. tour with poet Robert Pinsky. Upcoming commissions include works by Wolfgang Rihm and Daniel Kellogg.

At the University of Colorado, the Takács Quartet has helped to develop a string program with a special emphasis on chamber music, in a small, tightly knit community where students work in a nurturing environment best designed to help them develop their artistry. The Quartet's commitment to teaching is enhanced by summer residencies at the Aspen Festival and at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara. The Takács is a Visiting Quartet at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, 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. It first 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. Violinist Edward Dusinberre joined the Quartet in 1993 and violist Roger Tapping in 1995. Violist Geraldine Walther replaced Mr. Tapping in summer 2005. Of the original ensemble, Károly Schranz and András Fejér remain. In 2001, the Takács Quartet was awarded the Order of Merit of the Knight's Cross of the Republic of Hungary.

Edward Dusinberre (*violin*) was born in 1968 in Leamington Spa, England, and started learning the violin at the age of four. After studying at the Royal College of Music in London, he continued his studies at The Juilliard School and joined the Takács Quartet in 1993. Mr. Dusinberre lives in Boulder, Colorado, with his wife, an archaeology professor at the University of Colorado, and their young son. He enjoys reading, theatre, hiking and chess.

Károly Schranz (*violin*) was born in 1952 in Budapest, Hungary. His first musical experiences were listening to the gypsy bands in restaurants, which he has always admired for their virtuosity and musicianship. He began playing the violin at the age of four, and at the age of 14 he entered the Béla Bartók Secondary Music School, where he met his future wife, also a violin student at the school. He was the recipient of the Franz Liszt Prize in 1983. Since 1986, Mr. Schranz and his wife and three daughters have made their home in Boulder, Colorado, where they often go hiking. He also loves to play tennis.

Geraldine Walther (*viola*) joined the Takács Quartet in August 2005. She grew up in Tampa, Florida, and studied at the Curtis Institute and the Manhattan School of Music. She was Principal of the San Francisco Symphony from 1976 to 2005 and performed many works as soloist with the orchestra, including several U.S. premieres. Before joining the Takács Quartet she played regularly at leading chamber music festivals and as a guest artist with the Guarneri, Lindsay, St. Lawrence, Tokyo and Vermeer Quartets. She lives in Longmont, Colorado, with her husband and has two daughters. She enjoys reading and the cinema, and is an avid runner.

András Fejér (*cello*) was born in 1955 into a musical family. His father was a cellist and conductor, and his mother was a pianist. At the age of seven, he began playing the cello, apparently because his father was unwilling to listen to an upstart violinist practicing. Mr. Fejér was admitted to the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in 1975, and that year he founded the Takács Quartet with three fellow classmates. Although the quartet has been his sole professional focus since then, he does occasionally perform as a soloist. Mr. Fejér is married with three children, and lives in Boulder, Colorado. When he is not on tour, he enjoys reading, photography, tennis and hiking.