Takács Quartet



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Takács Quartet
Edward Dusinberre, violin; Harumi Rhodes, violins;
Richard O'Neill, viola; Mihai Marica, cello
2026-2027 Biography

As the world renowned **Takács Quartet** embarks upon the 2026-2027 season, **Edward Dusinberre**, **Harumi Rhodes** (violins) and **Richard O'Neill** (viola) welcome new cellist **Mihai Marica**. The ensemble is excited about varied projects that include a recording project of works by Gabriela Lena Frank and a tour of César Franck's piano quintet with Jeremy Denk. For Hyperion Records the Takács will release an album of two Mozart viola quintets with violist Timothy Ridout. In August 2026 the ensemble was awarded Chamber Music America's most prestigious honor, the Richard J. Bogomolny National Service Award, honoring those who have made significant and lasting contributions to enrich and foster a greater appreciation for chamber music.

The Takács maintains a busy international touring schedule. As Associate Artists at London's Wigmore Hall, the group will play four concerts that include performances with pianist Steven Osborne and works by Haydn, Schubert, Carlos Simon, Gabriela Lena Frank, Mendelssohn, and Brahms. During the season the ensemble will play at other prestigious European centers including the Konzerthaus Vienna, Vilnius, Bergen, and Utrecht.

The group's North American engagements include concerts in New York at Carnegie Hall and for the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, University of Chicago, Pittsburgh, Santa Monica, Vancouver, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Berkeley, Ann Arbor, Portland, and at the University of Maryland where the quartet continues its position as Visiting Artists. The quartet will become Official Chamber Music Ensemble at the Segerstrom Center.

The members of theTakács are Artists in Residence at the University of Colorado and during the summer months join the faculty at the Music Academy of the West, running an intensive quartet seminar there.

The Takács has recorded for Hyperion since 2005 and all their other 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 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 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 Philip Seymour Hoffman. They have toured 14 cities with the poet Robert Pinsky, and played regularly with the Hungarian Folk group Muzsikas.

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

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Takács Quartet

Critical Acclaim

"There are not many chamber-music combos with the assurance and vibrant elegance of this ensemble; they're exactly the musicians you'd want to hear playing Franck's hot-blooded Piano Quintet [with Jeremy Denk].

New York Magazine



"The warmth of [Mihai] Marica's tone and his ability to perform as an equal partner are major assets. Especially notable… was his cello's edgeless, grain-free blend with O'Neill's viola. …With its new member, the 51-year-old Takács remains one of the great quartets of our time."

Classical Voice North America

"[Mihai Marica's] presence seems to have come with a burst of new energy. The Takács has always been a top-tier quartet — but…the Tuesday night program exploded with pent-up energy…There was no doubt about the ability of the new Takács to communicate at the highest level."

Oregon Artswatch

"After more than half a century at the forefront of chamber music, the Takács Quartet has a new cellist….[Mihai Marica's] warm, singing tone was evident…while his rhythmic precision contributed to the driving energy of the Scherzo and finale…The four musicians displayed a shared musical vision while allowing individual expression to emerge..."

Seen & Heard International

"Perhaps what struck most, though, was just how constantly and generously each of the players...was physically and aurally in dialogue with the others, and through them, the listener. It's that ability to communicate, among many other talents, that makes the Takacs the essential quartet of our time."

The New York Times

"When chamber musicians of this caliber are at their best, you can sense the thoughts whip around the ensemble, an extra bit of weight on an accent in the first violin prompting an answering push from the cello. Familiarity breeds excitement, and an old score feels suddenly spontaneous."

New York Magazine / Vulture

"Right from the start of this concert it was clear that we were in for more of the kind of superlative music-making we have come almost to take for granted from the Takács Quartet."

The Guardian

"The Takacs' ensemble skills were very much in evidence...clearly the result of painstaking preparation. The reading [of Beethoven's Op. 59 Razumovsky Quartet] exuded no less

spontaneity, however, as if the ink was still wet on the page and making the two centuries since its writing seem to vanish."

Musical America

"The Takács are impressive on this album: every micro-phrase, every note is considered. Their sound draws you in from the first moment. The opening chords and sinuous lines vibrate and thrill on many levels; this is of course to do with their rich and subtle playing but also the fantastic recorded balance."

Gramophone

"One thing is certain about this new recording by the Takács Quartet: you will not hear better string quartet playing anywhere in the world today."

BBC Music Magazine

"Classical music doesn't get much more life-enhancing than this."

The Guardian

"They are a class act, if ever there was one, marrying aristocratic elegance and red-blooded energy to everything they play."

Seen and Heard International

Features

The New York Times

April 27, 2025



By David Allen

Recently, the Takacs Quartet gave a recital at the University of Colorado Boulder. In many ways, it could have been perfectly routine: some Bartok and Beethoven before an adoring audience at the college where the group has taught in residence since 1986.

But the Takacs simply does not do routine.

The Beethoven was a perfect example, an exceptional account of the Opus 135 Quartet that was astonishingly vivid even when watched on a livestream. You could have taken any of its four movements and written pages in their praise. Perhaps what struck most, though, was just how constantly and generously each of the players — Edward Dusinberre, first violin; Harumi Rhodes, second violin; Richard O'Neill, viola; and Andras Fejer, cello — was physically and aurally in dialogue with the others, and through them, the listener.

It's that ability to communicate, among many other talents, that makes the Takacs the essential quartet of our time. It's also one of the qualities that has kept the group so identifiably itself as time has passed: The quartet marks its 50th anniversary this year. As part of a season of celebrations, it appears with the pianist Jeremy Denk at the Frick Collection on Thursday.

The name Takacs has become a synonym for assured, collective excellence, but its story is one of evolution, not stasis. Read either of Dusinberre's eloquent memoirs relating the history of the quartet, and it becomes clear that it has been a personal drama, played out through the scores that its members rehearse and perform.

Time certainly has remade the Takacs. Only one of the four young Hungarians — Gabor Takacs-Nagy, Karoly Schranz, Gabor Ormai and Fejer — who stepped into their first lesson in communist Hungary, ready with a Mozart quartet, remains. Both Roger Tapping and Geraldine Walther, the violists who followed Ormai in turn, have come and gone.



"Changing a player in a string quartet is a trauma that must be played out under the watchful eye of an expectant public," Dusinberre has written. Some of those traumas have been more painful than others, above all the death of Ormai from cancer, in 1995. Change, though, has also brought the Takacs renewal, adaptation, promise — and even, for the two current violinists, marriage.

Along the way, the Takacs that once carried forward the great Hungarian tradition of string quartets has morphed into something else, entirely its own. "It's interesting," the Attacca Quartet violinist Amy Schroeder said admiringly, "because they have such a unique voice that I can't really pinpoint whether it's European, American, a combination of both or just the Takacs thing."

The Takacs thing. "They have always been one of the world's pre-eminent string quartets, and they have a unique approach to the repertoire," said John Gilhooly, the director of Wigmore Hall in London. "Whatever they have, they have it in abundance."

ORMAI AND FEJER were teenagers when they decided to form a quartet. In 1973, a year before they entered the fabled Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest, they asked Takacs-Nagy to be their first violinist, but they had to content themselves playing trios for the two years it took them to find a second. Takacs-Nagy eventually found Schranz at a soccer match.

Hear Takacs-Nagy and Fejer talk about their education now, and it becomes obvious how lasting its imprint has been. Their teachers — Andras Mihaly, Ferenc Rados and, intriguingly, Gyorgy Kurtag — tried to instill a sense of musical morality in their students. "It was not aimed at chasing mistakes; they were looking for values," Takacs-Nagy said. "We knew that behind every bar, every note, there are gold mines, diamond fields."

Fejer recalled that they "thought we knew, if not everything, most things, and these three wonderful teachers made that confident feeling disappear in a matter of hours."

"That was the last time any one of us thought we knew anything," he added.

Despite the travel difficulties imposed by life behind the Iron Curtain, the Takacs rose quickly, winning a series of competitions. They studied Bartok with Zoltan Szekely, who had premiered the composer's Second Violin Concerto and still called his old friend Bela. They also found a mentor in Denes Koromzay, who, like Szekely, had played in the legendary Hungarian String Quartet. In time, Takacs-Nagy said, they became more aware of themselves as part of a distinguished national lineage.

"The Takacs offered all the virtues of Central Europe's string-playing tradition and only occasionally its defects," Bernard Holland of The New York Times wrote after hearing them on their first U.S. tour, in 1982. Other quartets might be more precise, he went on, but with the Takacs, "one felt always in the presence of music."

After a series of shorter stays in the United States, the Takacs members defected in 1986 and moved to Boulder, where Koromzay taught. The Hungarian String Quartet had once been in residence there, and the Takacs found a community proud to give personal and professional aid. One local philanthropist, Fay Shwayder, eventually bought it four new instruments; after Takacs-Nagy left the quartet with hand trouble in 1992,

another benefactor offered Dusinberre, fresh from his studies at the Juilliard School, a loan to buy a house.

The Takacs was already a fine quartet, with a lyrical, emotionally frank sensibility that rarely underplayed the character of a phrase. Soon after Dusinberre and Tapping joined Schranz and Fejer, though, critical admiration turned into critical adulation. In 1998, the Takacs released a set of visceral Bartok quartets on Decca that remains a reference today. Even more celebrated was a later Beethoven survey that the New Yorker critic Alex Ross judged "the most richly expressive modern account of this titanic cycle." Showered with awards, it showcased the kind of playing — daring yet secure, humane yet heaven-bound — that listeners could spend a lifetime with. Indeed, it shaped entire careers.

"I had their cycle, and I was just so amazed by it," recalled O'Neill, who first auditioned for the quartet while he was a student at Juilliard two decades ago, before eventually replacing Walther after her retirement 15 years later. "It started this lifelong obsession of wanting to play the entire cycle because of them."

HOW, THEN, HAS the Takacs so reliably stayed the Takacs?

There are small things, like the way that the players sit a little farther apart than the norm, or the means they have found to conclude arguments, including sending a player out into a hall to give a verdict on a phrase.

Perhaps more important is the Takacs's fundamentally inquisitive nature, a professed desire to stay humble in front of the music and one another. All great quartets have had a similar curiosity, but it remains remarkable that you can select almost any of the Takacs's recordings — especially those it has made since a savage Schubert "Death and the Maiden" announced the group's move to the Hyperion label in 2006 — and find playing that takes nothing for granted.

Stephen Hough, the English pianist and composer who wrote his first quartet for the group, recorded the Brahms Piano Quintet with the Takacs in 2007 and toured the piece again with the current foursome this year. "Each of them was injecting new ideas, night by night," Hough said of those concerts.

Dusinberre felt something similar from the earliest hours he spent in Boulder, rehearsing during his audition. "'Playing it safe' didn't seem to form any part of the Takacs's musical philosophy," he wrote of that experience. Rhodes cites the "good, healthy danger" of Schranz's playing as one of the main reasons she decided to become a second violinist at all. When she first heard the quartet, she said, "all the pieces had this feeling of exploration and adventure, and there was this overall feeling of mischief, like children having fun together."

Even if every new player subtly changes the character of the quartet, their predecessors are palpable through the scores they left behind. Still, that can work both ways. As a young, introspective player, Dusinberre found the thick markings on Takacs-Nagy's parts too intimidating to use, despite the respect he had for such a charismatic musician. O'Neill, however, has found the visual history of the quartet he has at his disposal more helpful, from the careful, almost mathematical precision of Ormai's red and blue pencil lines, to the creativity of Tapping's fingerings, to the single words with which Walther distilled hours of rehearsal debate.

Over time, there has also been a shift in the music that the Takacs has chosen to play. It has always been more than the Bartok-and-Beethoven foursome of lore; consult its discography and you will find Franck, Dutilleux, Britten, Shostakovich and Dohnanyi alongside Haydn and Brahms. But its increasing interest in music by contemporary composers like Clarice Assad and Nokuthula Ngwenyama has been a welcome surprise, as have its superb recordings of scores by Amy Beach, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and, on an album released last month with the pianist Marc-André Hamelin, Florence Price.

"If you look at our quartet, we're clearly a multigenerational group," Rhodes said. "We come from completely

different cultures and backgrounds. I guess from my point of view, it would be weird if we weren't representing that in some way."

Eventually, there will come a time when Fejer departs and the transformation of the Takacs will be complete. Although the quartet is careful to promise nothing, Fejer suggested that it would be an "extreme pity" if the Takacs did not endure, even without the last of its founding members.

"But luckily," he added, "we are not there yet."

the Strad

October 13, 2026

‘No two concerts are alike’: Mihai Marica on joining the Takács Quartet

By Thomas May



Romanian-born cellist Mihai Marica grew up in Cluj, Transylvania, where he began playing chamber music while still at school. He moved to the US in 2001 to study with Aldo Parisot at Yale and became a regular presence on the New York chamber music scene, including through the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. He had known Takács violist Richard O’Neill for decades before an unexpected invitation arrived to audition for the quartet.

Marica succeeded founding cellist András Fejér this season after Fejér’s 51 years with the ensemble. His first public performance with the Takács, at Music on the Strait in Port Angeles in Washington State, plunged him straight into Mendelssohn’s op.80 and Schubert’s ’Death and the Maiden’ – ‘a great way to hit the ground running’, he recalls.

Marica spoke to US correspondent Thomas May during his first tour with the quartet, ahead of the ensemble’s **Carnegie Hall appearance** on 16 October, about finding his place within one of the world’s most established string quartets.

You had admired the Takács for years. How did that suddenly turn into an invitation to join them?

Mihai Marica: Completely unexpectedly. I would never have imagined receiving such an invitation. I had been an avid fan for so long, and I’ve been thinking recently that the Takács – and András specifically – shaped the trajectory of my life without me even being aware of it.

I came to the US in 2001, and not long afterwards their Beethoven cycle started coming out. Several of my friends had the recordings playing repeatedly in their cars, and I was listening to them at home. Later, when I began exploring string quartets, their recordings became an important point of reference.

Then, early in 2025, I saw an email from [Takács violinist] Harumi Rhodes. We had played together once before, soon after Elliott Carter died, in his Piano Quintet. When I saw her name in my inbox, my heart stopped a little. She asked whether, without telling anybody, I would consider coming to Boulder to

read with them. I thought: does this really happen?

I was nervous, of course, but they were incredibly welcoming. Most of the repertoire was music I had explored before, and we had a great time.

You knew the Takács for years through recordings and performances. What has it been like discovering the quartet from the inside?

Mihai Marica: Recordings are an interesting phenomenon for a performing musician. When you listen to something over and over, you can develop a sense that there is a set way of playing it. The real revelation for me after joining the Takács is that no two concerts are alike.

As an audience member, you might hear a performance and think: they rehearsed it, and that is how it goes. But from the inside, it is such a fluid and exploratory way of presenting the repertoire. It is based on our last performance, on the acoustics we are playing in – everything gets built from the ground up pretty much every time.

I'm still in the middle of my first tour, but it is inspiring to see how much exploration happens. It keeps the music feeling very much alive.

There is another thing I find hard to articulate. I've been very lucky throughout my career to walk on stage with mentors and wonderful musicians. But with the Takács, maybe for the first time, when I'm on stage and going through some sort of emotion, I think: this is how we feel. I haven't felt like my feelings were my own once since we started playing together.

You are succeeding András Fejér after more than 50 years. How do you approach that legacy while establishing your own voice?

Mihai Marica: When I have a second to think about it, I am extremely aware that András's shoes are very difficult to fill. But when we are rehearsing or on stage, trying to keep up takes my entire bandwidth.

The audiences have been very warm and welcoming, but naturally they miss András. It takes a lot of energy to continue what I see as the Takács tradition of bringing fresh interpretations every time they walk on stage, while being aware of the expectations without letting them overwhelm me.

Part of joining the quartet was inheriting the cello that András chose for the group and played for more than three decades. During the audition process I met them in Princeton to try different instruments. My own cello is a beautiful modern instrument by Ryan Soltis, which I love, but because the other instruments in the quartet are much older, we explored some older cellos as well.

András's cello was among them. We began with Beethoven's op.59 no.1, and when I started playing it, I felt as though the instrument sounded more like him than me.

I admire András not only as a musician but as a cellist coming from the Hungarian tradition. I can take inspiration from that, but it is impossible simply to emulate him. I try to translate that inspiration into my own way of playing.

And now we happen to live not far from each other in Boulder. If I need bowings, a score or a part, I can stop by – and I have. There are still practical things I can learn from him.

What is the Takács cello like?

Mihai Marica: It's a beautiful Giorgio Serafin cello. It is very comfortable being a cello: it has a beautiful tenor voice up top, a very supportive bottom, and it moves a lot of air, which is something I admire in cellos. But it moves that air rather slowly – it's not a sports car.

Playing it also involves a greater physicality than some other instruments. That was something I always admired about András: how physically involved he is in the process of music making. That didn't come naturally to me, but now I understand that playing it takes quite a bit of putting your body into it.

Are you consciously adapting to an established Takács sound, or does

the quartet inevitably start to change because you are there?

Mihai Marica: I try to find inspiration and translate that into my own way of playing the cello that has been with the quartet for so long.

As for whether the others are adapting to me, that would be easier for them to answer. But if they are adapting, the way they are doing it feels seamless to me. Otherwise I don't think I would feel this group dynamic in the way we feel it on stage.

Has any particular repertoire helped you understand how the four of you communicate?

Mihai Marica: Beethoven's op.18 no.6 perhaps stands out a little more, partly because of my nerdiness about having listened to the Takács recordings so many times. But I've felt a sense of connection with all the pieces we've played. With op.18 no.6, we rehearsed it and thought: 'Wow, okay, great.'

I also love that in almost every programme this season we have music by Carlos Simon or Gabriela Lena Frank. Harumi's enthusiasm for living composers really shows, and I feel very grateful to be part of that.

Gabriela came to Port Angeles this summer when we played her 2007 string quartet *Quijotadas*, inspired by Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. It is very demanding and takes work to make it happen, but it is a wonderful piece of string quartet writing. To play it for her before putting it out in public for the first time was deeply rewarding, and her comments were very valuable.

Now that you're actually part of Takács, does it feel real yet?

Mihai Marica: I still can hardly believe it. I'm about to head to the rehearsal space and prepare for tonight's concert. It's wonderfully busy, so there isn't much time to worry about it. When I get home and unpack my suitcase – that's when I have a moment to think: wow, that really happened. I couldn't have dreamt this up. I feel extremely lucky, and I feel the responsibility.

The last time the Takács played at Carnegie Hall, I was sitting with my wife in the audience. At intermission, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned around and a woman looked at me and said, 'Are you the new cellist?' I said yes, with a nervous smile. She just said: 'I'll be watching you.'

I'll do my best to convince her. It's a great responsibility, but it's a thrilling experience.

July 7, 2025

Takács Quartet: Tiny Desk Concert

By Tom Huizenga



Planning a concert tour is a big deal, and choosing just the right venues is crucial. The esteemed Takács Quartet, mapping out its 50th anniversary tour, made several dozen stops, including Seoul, London, Milan, Vancouver, plus a special visit to play behind a desk in our Washington, D.C. office. Needless to say, we were honored.

Takács cellist András Fejér is the sole original member of the string quartet. He commands a goldmine of institutional memory, from co-founding the group in communist Hungary in the early 1970s, to the band's 1986 defection to Boulder, Colo. (where the members continue to teach), to winning a Grammy in 2003, to the departure of band members (from death and retirement), to the addition of violist Richard O'Neill in 2020.

This Takács set is a microcosm of the band's broad-minded programming creed. They begin in the 18th century with Haydn, the pioneer of the string quartet, finding humor in his false cadences, while passing themes to each other like delicious canapes on a tray. Then it's a quirky waltz, from a new quartet written for Takács by Nokuthula Ngwenyama. And finally, a shimmering gem of the repertoire, a plucky and magical movement from Ravel's 1903 String Quartet in F.

"We feel lucky to play string quartets," violinist Edward Dusiberre, who joined the group 32 years ago, tells the NPR audience. "Somehow the medium inspires composers to express themselves in their most daring, imaginative and humorous ways." And for 50 years, the Takács Quartet has been the eloquent voice of those expressive composers.

GRAMOPHONE
THE WORLD'S BEST CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEWS

April 17, 2025

Takács Quartet at 50: a legacy of reinvention, artistic vitality, and expanding horizons

By Lindsay Kemp



When you join an established string quartet, you're living with all the spirits that have gone before you,' says Richard O'Neill. 'They hang over you, and gosh, the pressure!' But he is not talking about just any quartet here. Viola player O'Neill is the newest member of the one many consider to be the current world's finest, the Takács, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year.

Half a century is time enough for any ensemble to get set in its ways, start playing on autopilot, begin relaxing the intensity of its playing. You can hear quartets out there who seem to be doing just that; but listening to some live recordings of the Takács on BBC Radio 3 recently, I was struck not just by their keen energy, tightness of ensemble and vibrant sound, but also by the combination of concentration, in-the-moment flexibility, intensity of communication and incisive interpretative detail. At 50, the Takács is fit as a fiddle.

Like most quartets, the Takács has undergone a number of changes since it was founded in 1975 by four students at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest, such that only one of those original members, cellist András Fejér, is still in the group. (The other originals were the violinists Gábor Takács-Nagy and Károly Schranz, and viola player Gábor Ormai.) 'We were determined to be serious about it,' Fejér recalls of those formative days in a crucible of string quartet greatness. 'We were very lucky because we got support and help from players in quartets from previous generations, like the Tátrai and the Bartók, and our professors were kind and affectionate and smiling, showering us with extra lessons and enjoying the way that we were charging ahead. We also learnt immeasurable things from the Amadeus Quartet, our idols. We got coaching from them, we attended seminars with them, got friendly with them. That was a heartwarming connection.'

Charge ahead they did. Within six years of its formation the Takács had won competitions in Evian, Portsmouth, Bordeaux, Budapest and Bratislava – current first violinist Edward Dusinberre recalls hearing a nice story from Roger Tapping (the group's viola player, 1995-2005), who as a teenager was in the audience when the Takács won in Portsmouth in 1979 and retained from the experience 'a vivid memory of wonderful risk-taking, no playing safe'. The quartet was also touring internationally already, and generally making the music world take notice: 'by far the finest young string quartet

around and set to be one of the finest anywhere', announced the *Financial Times*; 'technically perfect, unanimous in ensemble, blended and balanced to a degree that induces shudders of pleasure', reported the *Daily Telegraph*; 'magic with every note', purred the *Evening Post*.

Since that time the group has duly ascended to the heights predicted for it and produced a recorded legacy for the ages, fronted by the two great pillars of complete cycles on Decca of Bartók and Beethoven quartets but holding incisive accounts of much of the mainstream quartet repertory within. Nowadays, it records for Hyperion, with the most recent of its five *Gramophone* Awards coming in 2021, when its album of Elgar and Beach piano quintets (with pianist Garrick Ohlsson) was praised by Richard Bratby for its 'fierce intelligence and open-hearted emotional commitment … a performance that takes opposites and fuses them, at furnace heat, into an absolutely compelling whole'.



Original lineup, from left: Takács-Nagy, Schranz, Ormai and Fejér

As it happens, the first release of the quartet's anniversary year is also of piano quintets, this time by Dvořák and Price, with Marc-André Hamelin at the piano. Dusinberre admits that the 'real motivation' for the album was the quintet by the American Price, and that the coupling seemed a good idea 'given the rich story of Dvořák's time in New York, and how his mission as director of the city's National Conservatory of Music of America was to try to inspire American composers in various ways'.

Born in Arkansas in 1887, Price studied at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston before returning home to become a music teacher. After marriage, she and her husband moved away from the racially troubled South to Chicago, where Price went on to become the first African American woman to have a symphony performed by an American orchestra. Her works, covering a healthy range of genres, faded from view following her death in 1953 but in recent years have begun to make headway again.

Price's idiom is essentially a Romantic one, but finds a place for the kind of American folk influences Dvořák had used in works such as the *American* Quartet and the *New World* Symphony, and which can be heard in some of the melodic shapings and harmonic shadings of her Piano Quintet, written in the 1930s. For both composers, these folk influences have a common source in so-called plantation songs and Native American melodies, and so there are places where their music can sound similar. 'Dvořák's goal was not to have a lot of people sounding like him, it was to encourage American composers to explore their own roots and influences,' says Dusinberre, pointing to Price's third movement, Juba (a type of syncopated dance developed by plantation workers and not unlike a cakewalk), as an example of her going her own way. 'You can hear the influence of Dvořák to some extent, but also a very distinct musical voice. That's what's so interesting about this piece, and why we've really loved working on it.'

Second violinist Harumi Rhodes goes further. 'Personally, I don't really hear Dvořák in Price's music; it's more of a Romantic genre sentiment.' Rhodes cites the second movement, a beautifully rich and contemplative *Andante con moto*, as the highlight of the piece. 'That lullaby feel, the songlike quality of it! Ironically, one of my favourite parts is the extended piano solo, which I know is a weird thing to say as a string quartet member, but how exploratory it is, and how imaginative the music is in ways so different from Dvořák! And that last movement – so short, but fast and furious, super-lively. That's her own voice, for sure.'

The release is the latest in a run that has included music by once-marginalised composers alongside more familiar names. Beach's Piano Quintet is one of

these, as well as Fanny Mendelssohn's String Quartet and Coleridge-Taylor's *Fantasiestücke*. 'Our quartet has always been interested in a sparky conversation between contrasting pieces,' explains Dusinberre. 'Given the current political climate, we're really excited to be programming a wider range of voices.' Such inclusivity has also become part of the Takács's commissioning strategy. Last year alone they premiered a concerto grosso for string quartet and string orchestra by Gabriela Lena Frank entitled *Kachkaniraqmi* (Quechua for 'I still exist'), and issued a 'single' of *Flow* (2023) by Nokuthula Ngwenyama, an American composer of Zimbabwean (specifically Ndebele) and Japanese descent, after audiences kept asking for CDs of it after live performances. Rhodes, who plays a prominent role in the commissioning process, describes the quirky 22-minute piece as 'full of colour and excitement. Nokuthula has a million interests – she studied the viola at major conservatoires and theology at Harvard, and she's interested in the sciences and biology. She really understands what it's like to be on stage, and the idea of communication with the audience, and she's extremely open and fun and extrovert.'

All this may seem a long way from the firm European tradition into which the Takács Quartet was born, and which it still upholds so eloquently. But then the group has acquired a very different make-up and look since those first days. First to leave was Takács-Nagy in 1992, victim of a long-term hand injury; he was replaced by Dusinberre. Illness forced the departure two years later of viola player Ormai (he died in 1995), who was succeeded by Tapping (who died in 2022), who in turn was succeeded by Geraldine Walther in 2005; finally, O'Neill took the viola chair in 2020. When Schranz left in 2018, Rhodes replaced him. From being solidly Hungarian, the quartet has morphed into an ensemble comprising a British-American first violin, a Japanese-Russian-Romanian-American second violin, a Korean-American viola player and a Hungarian cellist. It also long ago moved away from Europe itself, accepting as far back as 1983 a teaching residency (which became a full-time engagement in 1986) that it still holds today at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Looked at from this chronological end of things, it may indeed appear that the Takács could now be called a classically American ensemble.



The Takács (from left: Dusinberre, Rhodes, Fejér, O'Neill) recording their latest album with pianist Marc-André Hamelin, Wyastone Concert Hall, Monmouth, May 2024 (photography: David Hinitt)

Dusinberre has written in his two fascinating and highly individual books on quartet playing and quartet life – *Beethoven for a Later Age: The Journey of a String Quartet* (2016) and *Distant Melodies: Music in Search of Home* (2022) – about the process of recruiting and assimilating new players for a full-time ensemble, including his own experiences as the quartet's first non-Hungarian. 'I was amazed when I joined the group how kind and adaptable they all were,' he says of it now. 'They gave me lots of chances to try things out, even if they were stupid ideas, and nobody said, "That's not going to work."' Fejér concurs: 'It was never a question of trying to stay in the same rut, of us making faces and saying, "Gábor wouldn't have played it like this." No, Ed had charisma and his own style, and we tried to mix and combine with his expressivity, adapting to the situation in a way that meant the music could still be convincing and true.'

Rhodes, too, felt nothing but support when she joined: 'I felt right away that whenever I tried to challenge myself personally to be creative about my second-violin role, it was celebrated by the three people around me. They liked that about me, and so I felt I could be myself. To celebrate someone and feel

like they're bringing in something new and imaginative, that's the way to encourage change. One thing that surprised me, though, was that I thought it was going to be more serious, but actually there was lots of laughing and jokes at the rehearsals. I feel like I've had a better sense of humour since I joined!'

For O'Neill, a self-confessed CD nerd who grew up in a rural part of America listening to the great quartet ensembles on record with his friends, joining the Takács was like a fan's dream. 'That Decca recording of the Bartók quartets was a game changer for us. Those early Juilliard recordings, they were mind-blowing! The Emerson's was a digital marvel of recording virtuosity! The Végh Quartet – colourful, amazing! But when the Takács recording came along it felt so *human*, the music just felt like it made sense. Earlier in my life, everything had to be about that pristine digital experience – blended, perfect, in tune. I remember early on with the quartet I was trying to get something to work, to fit in and blend, and Ed just asked, "Well, how do you feel about it?" I said, "I don't know how I feel because I don't know if I'm allowed to feel." And Ed just said, "Of course you are." I think that really embodies the feeling of being in this quartet – the humanity, the uniqueness of the individual and the music at the forefront. Yes, the DDD technology and the competence and perfection are important, but the delivery of the music in a characterful, meaningful manner, with five hundred per cent commitment, is paramount.'

It rather invites the question of what type of person you need to be to join a great string quartet. The players smile cautiously when I ask it, before Dusinberre jumps in. 'This may sound a little facetious, but *I* find I have to be a nicer person than I am. You have to be always empathetic with the others, able to take criticism and find nice ways to express your own comments. That's taxing on a personal level, but incredibly rewarding when it's going well.'

'I think as a string quartet player you're in the profession of bringing out the best in the others around you,' adds Rhodes. 'Maybe I'm saying this because I'm a second violin, but you have to make a musical atmosphere that allows other people to feel liberated and which also extends to the audience. You have to be someone who wants to share, to have that as part of your spirit of music-making. Not everyone's into that, I guess. A more boring answer would be that you have to be willing to do the work – really hard work. There are no quick fixes in quartet playing, nothing moves quickly.' O'Neill agrees: 'You have to really love this crazy gift of being in a quartet because it's kind of a special thing, right? – a life commitment that requires everything of anyone who takes the deep dive into it. You have to have a complete understanding of all the parts and how they work together, but also be very open to the limitless ways of coming to solutions and agreements. Sometimes these can be conflicting but still agreeing. There's nothing more transformative or meaningful than this venture.'

Fejér looks back to the early years, when the quartet was forging its identity. In his still-heavy, measured Hungarian accent he explains, 'You have to be convincing, and if you feel secure in your ideas, go from there. Your colleagues will have their own input and it's this wonderful and ever-changing amalgam which finally gives something that is convincing and enjoyable. When we were a start-up quartet, we didn't realise this; but finally we came to recognise that there's no one truth, no one valid solution to anything, and you can approach from different directions and arrive at different results, but many things can work. The moment you realise that you have to fight less, the quartet's economy is much better and it comes down to teamwork – and a reduced ego.'

Dusinberre ends *Beethoven for a Later Age* with an affectionate imagining of Takács founders stretching their legs by the roadside en route to a gig somewhere, playing keepy-uppy with a football, passing it from one to another 'like a musical phrase, buoyant, vital and expectant. Now they consult maps, arguing about the choice of route – a string quartet will always find something to debate – and squeeze instrument cases and players into cars. Luggage piled high, rear-view mirrors

obscured, they press forward, hoping to complete their long journey west before nightfall.' How far they and their successors have come!

the Strad

December 3, 2025

Takács Quartet announces retirement of founding cellist



The Takács Quartet, **which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary**, has announced the retirement of cellist András Fejér, the last remaining member of the original group, founded in 1975.

Fejér will step down at the end of the 2025-26 season, after a 51-year tenure. He will be replaced by Romanian-born cellist, Mihai Marica, who will join current quartet members violinists Edward Dusinberre and Harumi Rhodes, and violist Richard O'Neill from 1 September 2026.

Marica will also join the faculty of the University of Colorado, Boulder, as part of the ensemble's long-standing residency there.

Marica won first prize at the Dr. Luis Sigall International Competition in Viña del Mar, Chile, and the Irving M. Klein International Competition, and is a recipient of Charlotte White's Salon de Virtuosi Fellowship Grant.

As a chamber musician, he was a member of the Amphion Quartet and the Apollo Trio. He has performed at the Chamber Music Northwest, Norfolk, and Aspen music festivals, collaborating with artists including Ani Kavafian, Ida Kavafian, David Shifrin, André Watts, and Edgar Meyer.

He is an alumnus of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's Bowers Program for extraordinary early-career artists, and continues to perform on the CMS roster.

The current members of the Takács Quartet acknowledged Fejér's service to the group: 'We are so very grateful to András for the fulfilling and fun quartet work we've been lucky enough to share,' said Dusinberre, Rhodes, and O'Neill, adding, 'for the strength and integrity of his cello playing and musicianship sustained over more than five decades, for his friendship, support and humour.

'While cherishing András's extraordinary legacy, we are thrilled to welcome Mihai as our new cellist. From the very first notes we played together with Mihai, we felt an instant musical connection, and we eagerly look forward to the future.'

Marica commented on his appointment: 'I am profoundly honoured and humbled to be joining the Takács Quartet, he said. 'I have been deeply inspired by the quartet's recordings and performances over the years; joining the group is truly a dream come true.

’As an ardent admirer of András Fejér’s musicianship, it has been a joy already to spend some time with him. I eagerly look forward to joining Ed, Harumi, and Richard in continuing the Takács’ time-honoured tradition and exploring new paths ahead.’

Fejér said, ’After 51 years this feels like it’s the right time – I’ve had a beautifully rewarding quality of life; working endlessly on the most inspiring music, with wonderful colleagues who became great friends, seeing the world and performing all over for appreciative audiences who always kept us honest.

’Heartfelt thanks to all the friends, supporters and presenters over the years – I’ll miss you like mad but I’m excited for the quartet’s future with Mihai. The pleasure has truly been mine!’

The first Takács season with Marica (2026-27) will include a focus on the music of Gabriela Lena Frank and a North American tour with Jeremy Denk, performing César Franck’s Piano Quintet.

The Takács will also appear next season at Carnegie Hall and the Chamber Music Society Lincoln Center. As associate artists at Wigmore Hall, the quartet will perform four concerts, to include works by Schubert, Carlos Simon, Brahms and Haydn.

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The Takács Quartet: András Fejér, Harumi Rhodes, Richard O'Neill, Edward Dusinberre.

In the Middle of It Together

For a half-century the Takács Quartet has epitomized string-quartet artistry, not to mention an ability to endure and evolve. How do they pass this ethos on?

BY Emery Kerekes



Photo: Amanda Tipton

RECIPIENT OF CHAMBER MUSIC AMERICA'S 2026 RICHARD J. BOGOMOLNY NATIONAL SERVICE AWARD

This award is presented to an individual or organization who has made a significant and lasting contribution to the chamber music field and enriched our national culture by fostering a greater appreciation for chamber music.

IN 2025, THE TAKÁCS QUARTET celebrated fifty years since their formation at Budapest's Franz Liszt Academy of Music. Though only one member, cellist András Fejér, has kept his chair for the full half-century, the quartet's ubiquity remains staggering. They typically clock 80 concerts a year, often distributed over three or more continents; no major metropolis dweller need wait more than a few seasons for the Takács to come around. Their turn-of-the-millennium CD-boom recordings of Bartók, Beethoven, and Schubert remain authoritative, and their most recent albums are studded with world premieres, as well as collaborations that seem both likely (an ongoing quintet series with pianist Marc-André Hamelin) and unlikely (new works for string quartet and bandoneón, a concertina most commonly associated with tango music, featuring Julien Labro).

Most importantly, the Takács keep their signature sound alive. Their slow movements still swell with the old-school lyricism and lush, wide vibrato that made them a household name. Their fast movements are unpredictably explosive in an almost giddy way, full of pop and fizz, jabs and jokes. "They always sound like they're having so much *fun*," my father—a first-generation Hungarian-American, and one of my primary childhood string-quartet coaches—would always say with a sly smile, popping their luscious Brahms into his car's CD slot.

That gift for nuanced communication is one reason *The New York Times* declared the Takács "the essential quartet of our time" upon their golden jubilee. Indeed, as a young cellist I associated the Takács with the art of the string quartet itself—a name of similar weight to the recently disbanded Emersons, whose performances I never found half as gripping.



The original Takács Quartet (Gábor Takács-Nagy, Károly Schranz, Gábor Ormai, András Fejér) in Boulder, 1987.

The Takács' educational activities are often overshadowed by their performances and recordings, yet they've been equally vital to the quartet's history. The four original members of the quartet defected from communist Hungary to Boulder, Colorado, in 1986, where they took up residency and professorships at the University of Colorado Boulder. Eleven years and several personnel shifts later, in 1997, the Takács established a graduate residency for early-career quartets in Boulder, an opportunity for developing players to study and grow under their watchful eye. The program blossomed into a dedicated Artist Diploma in 2009, with the first resident quartet—the now-acclaimed Tesla Quartet—graduating in 2012.

I've encountered many musicians who have studied with Takács members—in Boulder, and at the Music Academy of the West, in Santa Barbara, California, the quartet's summer post. They all mention the quartet's warmth and kindness, as well as their diagnostic precision and tag-team effectiveness. "It feels like you're watching chefs in a kitchen," says Leah Pernick, second violinist of the Koa String Quartet, CU Boulder's current quartet in residence. "They're all doing different tasks and asking, 'Hey, can you taste this? Does it need more lemon? Let me add a little salt.' It feels very collaborative and so baked into the core of who they are as a group."

I spoke with the members of Takács, who were fresh off a whirlwind European tour, via Zoom. During my hour with cellist Fejér (who plans to retire this June, to be replaced by Mihai Marica), first violinist Edward Dusinberre (who joined the group in 1992), second violinist Harumi Rhodes, and violist Richard O'Neill (both



Mihai Marica will join Takács in June.

Photos: Amanda Tipton (Marica); Courtesy András Fejér (group)

The art of string quartet playing has never been in better hands. My question is: Have we, as artists, created a system where these young groups will have opportunities to flourish and ride their potential?

Occasionally, there are glamorous moments as a string quartet, but generally, it's not glamorous work.

joined the quartet within the last decade), we discussed the group's teaching philosophy, the future of the string quartet at large, and how best to help the string quartets of tomorrow prepare for an environment that has changed drastically during the last half-century.

Emery Kerekes: Tell me a bit about the philosophy behind the Takács graduate quartet program at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Why do you favor pre-formed groups?

Edward Dusinberre: There's a certain commitment involved in deciding, as young people, that you're going to throw in your lot together and move to Boulder, Colorado. And once you're in a program like this, you find out surprising things about each other—so a pre-formed group provides a certain glue and motivation. An extreme example: the Orava Quartet, who not only came pre-formed from Australia, but rented a house and lived together for two years. I wouldn't have necessarily recommended that course of action, but fifteen years later, they're one of Australia's most successful string quartets.

Kerekes: How do you help a group grow together over such an intense two-year period?

Harumi Rhodes: First, you hope that if the group is having a problem, that it's musical and not personal. But of course, these things are intertwined. One thing we try to work on with each group is finding common passions. If they're going to have heated discussions about something, it should be on a topic that they all care about deeply—like Ed was saying, that's a type of glue.

A lot of the quartets come in excited about putting together an outreach program, or commissioning new works—sometimes, what they're excited about is something that we haven't explored. All the groups we've coached sound completely different, not like mini Takács Quartets, and there's something really beautiful in that.



The original Takács Quartet in London, 1989.

Kerekes: Obviously, a quartet's sound morphs and refreshes and shifts over time. How do you, as teachers, guide a group toward their collective sound?

András Fejér: We are trying to lead them into a groove, where the utmost question is about the character of the ensemble. If they agree on a character, everyone will try to realize that with their individual sound. It might be a rough idea, a rough diamond, but with time, it will morph into something convincing. And one needs to be patient. I think of how the Takács Quartet started, and gauging how many years it took to get from point A to point B, and then to point C. It immediately makes us more patient and forgiving, as long as we feel their quest to get there eventually.

Dusinberre: One of the things we try to help students with is how to follow and lead at the same time. Sometimes, a group needs to mix up who's leading a rehearsal—maybe split the hour up, and have each person take control for fifteen minutes, and everyone else just responds to that one person. As a discipline, it's very hard to try to make an idea work that doesn't convince you, but in the process of doing that, you might become convinced.

Kerekes: How have you seen the string quartet world change over the course of your careers? What are some things you tell your young quartets that you might not have been told?

Richard O'Neill: Well, the circle spins very quickly. When I was young, the legacy quartets were all very active. I remember getting the Emerson Quartet's first discs, or the Takács' second cycle of Bartók quartets...Vermeers, Juilliards, Guarneris, Amadeus. As a young person, I felt that if they were here now, then they'd be here forever.

But as I've traveled around the circle, I've seen that it's much harder to keep a quartet going than it is to quit. A lot of these quartets shaped who I am as a human being, and for them to stop one by one has been a lot. And on the other side, there are so many young groups out there who have so much incredible potential. The art of string quartet playing has never been in better hands, and the groups are getting younger. My question is: Have we, as artists, created a system where these young groups will have opportunities to flourish and ride their potential?

Rhodes: When I was a young conservatory student finding my way in chamber music, I remember this strong message of needing to be unique—"Find your niche!" one of my teachers said repeatedly. That hasn't changed much, but the emphasis these days is having a video camera in your face at all times to record and share everything you do on Instagram thirty seconds after you do it. So there's this element of broadcasting your process so everyone can see what you're doing, even in the practice room.

Photo: Courtesy of András Fejér

One of the things that young quartets often ask is: How do you slow down? How can you do this work without it being a public event? Occasionally, there are glamorous moments as a string quartet, but generally, it's not glamorous work. It's a commitment to a way of life. That's an odd thing to broadcast all the time. One of the things I love about our program at CU Boulder is that there isn't this fast-paced pressure. You can really roll up your sleeves and do the hard, unglamorous work, and enjoy life in a way that's nurturing to the quartet.

Kerekes: Do you feel that the career prospects for a string quartet have changed over time? Have quartet careers necessarily become more multifaceted?

Fejér: When we started the quartet, we gave our all to that unit—as did our peers and competition. But there were also major chamber music-loving sponsors, so we could really concentrate. When I look at some of the prominent quartets these days, many members take teaching jobs apart from their ensembles, locally and afield. I hope that sooner or later, there will be a younger generation of sponsors growing up or coming forward who could help a worthy group so they wouldn't need to do that.

Dusinberre: The main advice we give to quartets is that there will be opportunities for groups that stay together. It's interesting that sometimes the wonderful-sounding groups with four brilliant players can win a competition, but when life intervenes they go in different directions for many good reasons. But if a quartet can carve out time to rehearse and learn repertoire—even if they're making ends meet by different jobs—ten years from now, they're a group that's still together and can land a residency somewhere. There are many different ways to make a quartet work. It's a wonderful realm of possibility.

Rhodes: Being a string quartet used to mean a very specific thing with regard to repertoire, and now, it's a bit larger than that. It can be a vehicle to create new works, or a bridge between an institution and a local community. Or it could even be a group that enjoys a genre of music that you don't associate with string quartets, but they transcribe it into a new, magical sound world.

Kerekes: How does teaching enhance your own playing as a quartet? Are there things you learn about each other through the experience of teaching together that translates to the practice room or the concert hall?

O'Neill: In Santa Barbara, Harumi and I are linked as coaches—because there are three groups, we teach together for three weeks. It's one of my favorite parts of the year. It's fascinating to sit next to somebody that you play with all the time, to hear their perspective and try your best to listen with a group in front









Photo: Courtesy of University of Colorado Boulder (Fejér, Dusinberre, Rhodes); Phil Channing, courtesy of Music Academy of the West (O'Neill)

Takács members instruct students at CU Boulder and the Music Academy of the West, 2025.

We have to be careful: Am I really listening to what he's doing now, rather than reacting to what I'm used to hearing?



The Takács Quartet performs at Music Academy of the West, June 2025.

of you. I find those three weeks very enlightening, and I wish in some ways that we as a group could team-teach more in general.

Rhodes: Actually, we've never talked about this, but I really like teaching together, because it's kind of fascinating. We try not to interrupt each other and do silly things like that. We take turns, and then we sort of join forces, and then we back off. It's a little bit of a dance. That process is really interesting for me because Richard and I have known each other for a very long time—we went to school together, and summer festivals, and, of course, now the quartet. We're both inner voices, but when it's just the two of us teaching, we also address many issues that are more outer-voice topics. It's so cool to see Richard with a different hat on.

Dusinberre: We just taught this summer for the first time at the wonderful chamber music festival called Madeline Island, out in Wisconsin. I certainly felt at the end of that week, after teaching for hours each day about character and communication, there was a particular sense of being under a microscope onstage—am I actually doing what I said the students should do? There's a vibrancy when the students are sitting there, listening to you in that way.

You can think that because you're a professional chamber musician, you're collaborative and listen to people—it's a little bit of a trap. That's not something one should *ever* take for granted. It's like any other relationship: you have to constantly refresh the listening process. András and I, for example, have played some of the same phrases together for 32 years. So we have to be careful: am I really listening to what he's doing now, rather than reacting to what I'm used to hearing?

Kerekes: We think of the mentorship as teaching how to *play* in a string quartet. But what proportion of your teaching is about how to *be* in a string quartet, how to shoulder that load?

Rhodes: One of the things with young quartets is mentoring them in how to communicate. In my life, some of the most painful moments in chamber music have been where I've said something that didn't really represent how I felt, or I said something that miscommunicated what was in my heart. It's hard to find the right words, and harder to take words back. A big part of our mentorship is making the quartets feel like they can come to us and talk things out, because there's not any one answer.

O'Neill: One of my best friends is a radio-oncologist and violinist—he trains generations of residents with whom people are trusting their lives. But he said that these residents, when they're looking at you and they're learning from you, they're not just listening to what you're saying in the lesson. They're looking at everything: your attitude, the way you treat other people. So in some ways, I feel like it holds you to a higher standard. You really have to live the life, talk the talk, and walk the walk, even when you're not onstage. You can't just bloviate and pretend.

In the traditional conservatory setting, a lot of times you're trying to teach someone from the outside, so they can enter into a new situation—so they can win an orchestra job, or solo in front of an orchestra. But I think that's the joy of a quartet: you're in the middle of it. You have to learn constantly, because you're living it, and it's the four people on the inside, floating on this ocean together, who really need to do the hard work.

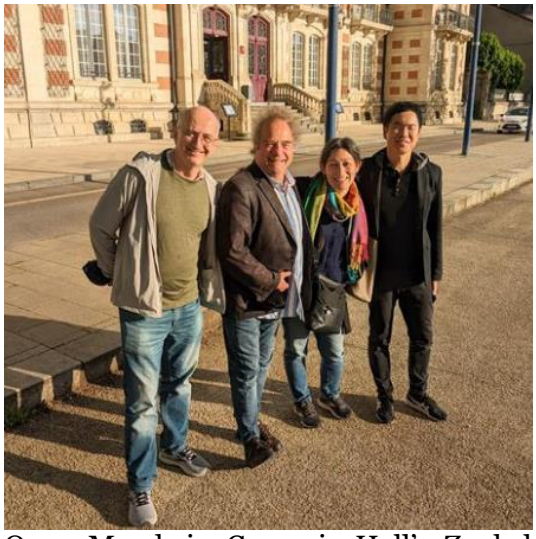
Emery Kerekes is a journalist, arts administrator, and singer based in New York City. He has written for Chamber Music *and The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Perspectives series, and is the founder of All Ears.*

Photo: Phil Channing, courtesy of Music Academy of the West

the Strad

March 2, 2026

‘Let’s Clarice it up!’: The Takács on Assad’s new commission



On 4 March in Carnegie Hall’s Zankel Hall, the Grammy Award-winning **Takács Quartet** brings a **programme** that juxtaposes treasured repertoire with a striking contemporary voice. Between Haydn and Debussy, the quartet – violinists Edward Dusinberre and Harumi Rhodes, violist Richard O’Neill and cellist András Fejér – presents the New York premiere of *NEXUS*, written for the ensemble by Brazilian-American composer, pianist and vocalist **Clarice Assad**, whose earlier collaboration with the group yielded ***Clash*** (2021).

The performance also marks the quartet’s final New York appearance with Fejér, the last remaining founding member, who retires at the end of the season.

Rather than unveiling *NEXUS* in a single high-profile premiere, the Takács has carried the work throughout its 51st season, allowing it to evolve through repeated performance before arriving on one of the world’s most iconic stages.

Assad conceived *NEXUS* after observing what she describes as the quartet’s ’visceral, whole-body approach to musical expression’. The work, she writes, ‘amplifies the natural physicality of chamber music performance into choreographed symbolism’, with the players themselves incorporating structured movement into the musical argument.

In her programme note, Assad describes the work as unfolding across three movements. In the opening movement, ‘(Dis)connection’, four individual voices gradually coalesce, drawn together by a gravitational cello pulse. The middle movement, ‘Connection’, presents a more ordered unity, soon unsettled by rigidity and control. In the final movement, ‘Synchronization’, mirrored gestures and physical alignment become increasingly mechanical before giving way to moments of resistance and renewal.

For an ensemble long praised for the way its players remain in constant dialogue with one another and the listener, *NEXUS* offers both a challenge and a natural extension of its identity, inviting listeners to consider connection, individuality and collective energy in equal measure. Takács violinist Harumi Rhodes shared her thoughts with US

correspondent Thomas May about living with the piece on tour and embracing its physical and psychological demands.

The Takács Quartet has travelled with Clarice Assad's *NEXUS* throughout the season rather than introducing it as a one-off premiere. How has the piece changed through repeated performance? What only became clear once you started living with it on tour?

Harumi Rhodes: One of the many things I love about *NEXUS* is how it morphs and adapts to every physical space. We start the piece in four separate worlds, entering the stage at different times and completely ignoring each other. We form a duo, then a trio, then finally a quartet. Having the luxury of living with the piece on tour, we've memorised chunks of music and incorporated more choreographed movements to fit the physical space. In some ways, *NEXUS* has evolved greatly over time. In other ways, it feels like a new premiere every night.

Clarice Assad has spoken about being inspired by the quartet's 'visceral, whole-body approach' to music-making. Did working on *NEXUS* heighten your awareness of physicality in performance? Did it articulate something you already recognised in your playing? How did that element challenge – or perhaps liberate – your usual sense of what string quartet performance entails?

Harumi Rhodes: Because Clarice asks us to move around on stage, we decided to film our rehearsals. It was a fun, awkward and painful process – we aren't in the habit of watching ourselves in this way. We needed help, a trusted outside eye – we called our former student and friend, Michi Theurer. She gave us small tasks to focus on: take each footstep with intention, articulate each head nod, calculate your body placement in relation to each other and to the audience.

Much of this advice is what we strive for in our musical performance: clarity, conviction and character. But the process of using more physical space on stage opened our eyes to how much magnetism we can create between the four of us. Yes, it has been liberating, and also very humbling.

***NEXUS* traces shifting states of connection, from fragmentation to synchronisation. From inside the ensemble, does that progression feel narrative, psychological, or primarily musical?**

Harumi Rhodes: The four characters in *NEXUS* struggle with the concept of freedom. Are we most liberated when we set out on our own? Do we feel utmost freedom when we achieve connection? Does synchronisation cause us to want to disperse? *NEXUS* articulates something about our need for connection and also disconnection – and perhaps casts an optimistic light on how this cyclical process is a beautiful part of being human.

You previously collaborated with Clarice Assad on *Clash* in 2021. What has deepened or changed in the quartet's musical dialogue since then? What does she bring out in the Takács that other composers perhaps do not?

Harumi Rhodes: I love Clarice's infatuation with spontaneity and the unknown. Her music demands precision but also asks us to be unhinged. Clarice brings out the more mischievous side of our quartet playing – more capricious, more provocative… more dangerous, in a good way.

At Carnegie Hall, *NEXUS* is framed by Haydn's 'Rider' Quartet and Debussy's String Quartet. Do you hear Assad's work speaking to that tradition in any way? What does *NEXUS* reveal about where the quartet form can still go?

Harumi Rhodes: The psychology of *NEXUS* has infiltrated everything we do. That includes the Haydn and Debussy that bookend the programme, and much more. When we have spicy offbeats in Haydn that beg for more interplay, I now find myself saying to the others, 'Let's Clarice it up!' When we have swirling passing material in the

Debussy, one of us will seamlessly segue into a swirling passage in *NEXUS* and burst out laughing.

Our interactions in *NEXUS* range from disconnected to connected, synchronised to robotic, mischievous to mechanical, imprisoned to liberated, and more. We often talk about a string quartet being its own little village, its own ecosystem. Clarice asks the string quartet to design a whole new psychological universe, creating a strong gravitational pull linking together ideas of individual expression, collective wisdom, artificial intelligence and human connection.

the Strad

April 8, 2025

From Attic to album: Takács Quartet and Marc-André Hamelin shine light on Florence Price's Piano Quintet



Takács Quartet with Marc-André Hamelin

This year, the Takács Quartet celebrates its 50th anniversary with global tours, new commissions, and another opportunity to savour their artistry on disc. Their latest album — made in collaboration with a favourite partner, keyboard phenomenon Marc-André Hamelin — continues the ensemble's commitment to expanding the chamber music repertoire by championing female composers.

Florence Price takes the spotlight in a pairing of her Piano Quintet in A minor (1936) with Antonín Dvořák's ever-popular A major Piano Quintet. Price's score was among a trove of manuscripts discovered in an Illinois attic in 2009, more than 50 years after her death. The quintet reveals her singular voice: lyrical, structurally inventive and deeply rooted in African American musical traditions.

Early in his American residency as director of New York's National Conservatory — founded by the visionary philanthropist Jeannette Thurber — Dvořák championed the idea that Black spirituals and Indigenous

music held the key to an authentically American musical identity. Price's quintet now finds powerful new life alongside Dvořák's chamber masterwork — two pieces linked by a shared faith in the richness of American musical voices. Takács violist Richard O'Neill shared some thoughts on the album.

What are some of the unique challenges and rewards for a string quartet in playing Florence Price's Piano Quintet?

Richard O'Neill: The Price Quintet is a new discovery for us. We enjoyed very much the process of learning the work. From a string perspective, Price is often very tuneful which is always a positive. Transitional material and how things develop throughout each of the movements were perhaps the biggest challenge, making shape and sense of the first movement, and also getting the last movement to feel like the culmination of the piece even though it is the shortest movement in length. The inner movements have fun things for all the string parts.

How do the textures and colours of Price's writing compare to Dvořák's? Did anything about her string writing surprise you?

Richard O'Neill: As the violist of the quartet, I appreciate very much how Price gives quite a lot of the juicy material to the viola. The first violin writing is virtuosic and that is a delight. If it were a direct comparison to the Dvořák, Price does not take advantage of the cello as much as Dvořák – but it is hard to think of a piano quintet that gives such prominence to the cello as the Dvořák.

You've played Dvořák's Piano Quintet many, many times. Did revisiting it in the context of Price's work give you a fresh perspective on this familiar friend?

Richard O'Neill: Most definitely. There are interesting parallels – the Price and Dvořák both sharing slow and soulful slow movements (second), jubilant dance movements (third) and rambunctious finales (fourth). Price was a virtuoso pianist, and the piano writing was thrilling to hear (from a string player's perspective).

This is your fifth recording with Marc-André Hamelin. What makes this collaboration so special? How has your dynamic evolved over the years?

Richard O'Neill: Marc-André is a friend and we have enjoyed very much working with him over the years. Not only is he one of the most gifted pianists that we know, he is also a formidable composer, and this perspective – compositional – was extremely helpful with the recording process for this project. It has been a lot of fun to work with Marc-André on such diverse repertoire as Shostakovich, Franck, Schumann and Dohnányi!

Any interesting observations about the rehearsal process for this album? Were there any interpretative decisions that required extra discussion?

I must say that Marc-André's perspective as a composer was really meaningful during this process because he understood things that were incredibly helpful when we were learning the piece. His expert and facile playing also made easy work of many of the challenging piano licks.

What do you hope this recording brings to audiences – especially when it comes to shining a light on Florence Price's chamber music?

Richard O'Neill: During the performances that preceded this recording, there were so many friends and audience members who came up to us and said how much they enjoyed the Price Quintet. It is a work that deserves to be heard and it was a privilege to get to record it for Hyperion and Marc-André. Especially in the context of what Dvořák believed about the future of music in America, I feel that the pairing of the two works on this disc helps highlight and differentiate each piece's unique character.

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April 9, 2025

Video of the Day: Takács Quartet and Marc-André Hamelin perform Florence Price's 'Piano Quintet in A minor: III. Juba: Allegro'

By Holly Baker



Today's Video of the Day is a performance of Florence Price's 'Piano Quintet in A minor: III. Juba: Allegro' by the Takács Quartet and Marc-André Hamelin. As in her symphonies, the slow movement of Price's Piano Quintet is followed by a jazzy 'juba': a dance movement whose syncopated rhythms were accompanied, in the absence of any percussion instruments, by stomping and slapping. The recording can be found on the quartet and Hamelin's fifth Hyperion album together which couples Antonín Dvořák and Florence Price.

Boulder
MOUNTAIN LIVING IN COLORADO
Magazine

March 31, 2025

Four of a Kind

By Matt Maenpaa



What Grammy-winning musical group, residing at the University of Colorado at Boulder, is celebrating its 50th anniversary?

The answer may surprise you, especially if you are unfamiliar with the state of contemporary classical music in America. When not making award-winning recordings or touring the planet, the Takács Quartet, one of the most honored string quartets in the world, calls Boulder home.

"We always loved Boulder for its combination of many things. We adored that there was a huge, highly sophisticated audience base, the university has been supporting us from the very beginning and that support has only grown in these past decades," says Takács co-founder and cellist András Fejér. "And finally, this is just the place to return to in between tours all over the world. It's ideal, really."

Richard O'Neill, the group's violist and newest member, concurs. "I'll have to say, with the pandemic, the access to nature and all the trails saved my psyche. And it's such an amazing, beautiful place to live."

The Quartet was formed by four students at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest, Hungary in 1975. The group's founders were Gábor Takács-Nagy, first violin; Károly Schranz, second violin; Gábor Ormai on viola, and Fejér on cello. In 1983, the group became the quartet-in-residence at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Today, Fejér is joined by Edward Dusinberre, first violin; Harumi Rhodes, second violin; and O'Neill on viola. Each player has achieved much individually

as well, bringing a diverse set of musical skills to their work together.

Dusinberre, originally from England, joined the Quartet in 1993. He is a published author who explored the challenge of playing Beethoven in "Beethoven for a Later Age: The Journey of a String Quartet." Rhodes, who joined the group in 2018, is originally from New Jersey, and notched an extensive solo career before joining Takács.

Fejér came from a musical family, playing cello by age seven—as his cellist and conductor father couldn't stand the idea of the noise of violin practice. And O'Neill hails from a small town near Seattle. He recalls listening to Takács as a child, dreaming of playing at that level, a dream that came true in in 2020, when he joined the group.

The group won a Grammy for its 2003 recording of Beethoven's string quartets and has garnered a slew of additional trophies for its work. Together, the players have explored the full spectrum of the string quartet repertoire, including the iconic compositions of Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert and Mozart. They are fully conversant with the modern quartet literature, recording an award-winning set of Bartok's quartets in 1998.

In addition, the Quartet commissions new pieces from contemporary composers. They recently debuted Clarice Assad's "Clash" for string quartet and bandoneon (an instrument akin to a button accordion), and they continue to premiere new work.

"I definitely think—at least in our programming—we have explored a lot of composers over time, especially in the last few seasons," O'Neill says. "We had some really exciting commissions from Gabriela Lena Frank, from Nokuthula Endo Ngwenyama, from Stephen Hough, and now this piece with Clarice Assad. We have been exploring a lot of pieces of our time, from people who are still living."

Clearly, not idle, they perform 90 concerts a year. In 2025 alone, the group travels to South Korea, Japan, Australia (premiering a new piece by Cathy Milliken for narrator and quartet), London, Barcelona, Budapest, Milan and the alliterative Basel, Bath and Bern. Back home, they travel North America from New York to Vancouver with stops in Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., La Jolla, Berkeley, Ann Arbor, Chicago, Tucson, Portland and Princeton.

Throughout its existence, the Quartet's history is marked by a steady cycle of performers. How has the group maintained its identity through the personnel changes?

"One of the most compelling features when I was outside the group listening as a sort of a nerdy teenager, is that the quartet has such a liveliness and commitment to making music that's very human," O'Neill says. "What I really loved about all the Takács recordings was this commitment and almost risk-taking to the music-making—that the goal wasn't perfection, the goal was to be completely committed to make the music as vivid and alive as possible."

CLASSICAL MUSIC
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March 3, 2025

Death and the Maiden: Schubert's harrowing string quartet and most emotive recordings

By Erik Levi



Takács Quartet

Few quartets have enjoyed such a long and distinguished recording history as *Death and the Maiden*. Indeed, one of the earliest recorded versions, given by the Busch Quartet in the late 1930s (Warner Classics), still very much holds its own, particularly for the wonderfully moving way in which the players unfold the sequence of variations in the second movement, and for the sustained energy and tension of the Finale which is capped by a daring almost unhinged accelerando near the end.

Later performances from 1970s and '80s by the Amadeus (DG), the Alban Berg (Warner Classics) and Quartetto Italiano (Universal) also command enormous respect for the warmth and fluidity of their performances although they don't take as many risks as the Busch Quartet.

Since then, almost every major quartet worth its salt has committed its interpretation of *Death and the Maiden* to disc, making the field not only extremely crowded but highly competitive. Of course, absolute technical mastery of Schubert's ferociously difficult writing, especially in the fast and furious unison passages of the finale, has to be taken for granted, and almost all the currently available versions fulfil this requirement more than admirably.

So the choice of the finest recording rests far more on the ways in which the players get to grips with sustaining the emotional anguish of Schubert's message without being over-bearing too much of the time. Equally vital is the extent to which interpreters resist the temptation to contrive sudden artificial shifts in gear to enable there to be sufficient contrasts in mood in such a long and expansive work.

To my mind, the Takács Quartet's 2006 recording trumps all rivals in delivering a performance that maintains an almost demonic forward momentum throughout the first, third and fourth movements. They have all the necessary power and variety of **timbre** to encapsulate every aspect of the music, from wildness and anger to tenderness, poignancy and even numbness of expression. But this is achieved without resorting to sentimentality or exaggerated mannerisms.

As a result of their incredibly subtle mastery of Schubert's textures, they perfectly convey the emotional ambiguity that lies behind the music's more lyrical episodes, a good example being the gentler second idea in the first movement where the menacing viola **ostinato** pattern casts a distinctly uneasy light on the sweet-toned melody in thirds in the violins.

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TAKÁCS QUARTET

THE EVER-EVOLVING ENSEMBLE CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF EXCEPTIONAL MUSIC MAKING

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THE FIFTH ELEMENT

As the Takács Quartet celebrates its 50th birthday, its members talk to **Pauline Harding** about the ensemble's legacy, the intangible 'fifth spirit' that has shaped its character even as its players have changed over the decades, and the importance of teaching and other projects and challenges



The Takács Quartet (*l-r*): Edward Dusinberre, Harumi Rhodes, András Fejér and Richard O'Neill

Four very different characters walk on to London's Wigmore Hall stage. They are the members of the Takács Quartet, and as they dive into Haydn's String Quartet in D minor op.42, Dvořák's String Quartet in E flat major op.51 and an encore of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's 'Humoresque' from *Fantasiestücke* op.5, their individual personas shine through in every phrase. First violinist Edward Dusinberre is a tall, upright Brit in his mid-fifties, with a warm smile and adventurously twinkling eyes. He plays with shimmering, effortless clarity. Petite by comparison is second violinist Harumi Rhodes, an American in her mid-forties, with Japanese, Russian and Romanian family heritage. Her empathetic demeanour glows through in the mellow timbre of her playing. Then there is Hungarian cellist András Fejér, who turns 70 next year and sits squat, square and content, with feet planted firmly on the ground, beneath an eccentric crown of frizzy hair that reverberates with the gorgeous sonority of his cello. Finally, 45-year-old Korean–American violist Richard O'Neill, on the quartet's outer edge, throws tantrums of notes and sweeping ethereal phrases towards the ensemble and the audience, along with petulant glares and daydreamy smiles. The four are like a chatting, bickering family, sometimes in sympathy with one another, sometimes in disagreement, but never straying from their cohesive musical unit. They make a captivating theatre of Wigmore's concert stage.

The Takács Quartet looks obviously at home at Wigmore, where its players have been associate artists since 2012. The hall is significant in the Takács's history: it was at the 1979 inaugural Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition – then in Portsmouth, without Wigmore Hall in its title – that the ensemble won an early first prize. That was four years after violinists Gábor Takács-Nagy and Károly Schranz, violist Gábor Ormai and cellist Fejér had established the group at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest. In the late 1980s, meanwhile, a Takács performance in Limerick started an Irish schoolboy's love affair with string quartets. That schoolboy was John Gilhooly, who became Wigmore Hall's executive director and artistic director in 2000 and 2005 respectively – something for which Fejér (jokes the cellist) takes responsibility. For its artistic contributions to the hall, ▷



IAN MALKIN



(*l–r*) András Fejér, Harumi Rhodes, Richard O'Neill and Edward Dusinberre

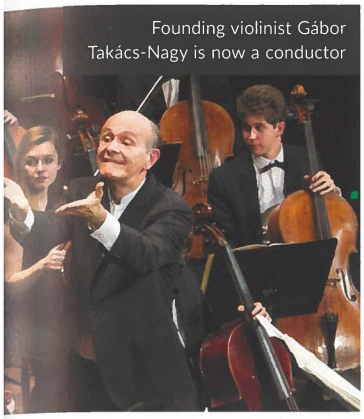
AMANDA TIPTON

the ensemble was the first string quartet to receive a Wigmore Hall Medal (in 2014).

Of course, the Takács's 50-year history extends far beyond Wigmore. Other early successes include first prizes at competitions in Evian (1977), Bordeaux (1979) and Bratislava (1981). Later came two Royal Philharmonic Society awards in 1992 and 2011, five *Gramophone* Awards between 1998 and 2021, a Grammy (2002), three awards from the Japanese Record Academy (2002, 2004, 2006), a *BBC Music Magazine* Disc of the Year in 2006 and a Presto Music Recording of the Year Award in 2021. The Takács was also the first string quartet to enter the *Gramophone* Hall of Fame in 2012. The ensemble's tens of recordings span the diverse string quartet, string quintet and piano quintet repertoire of the 18th to 21st centuries, from Haydn to Hough.

This concert season the ensemble celebrates its 50th anniversary. But with Fejér as the group's only remaining founder member, I ask, is the Takács Quartet *really* still the Takács Quartet? Dusinberre replaced Takács-Nagy as first violin in 1993. Rhodes replaced Schranz in 2018. The viola chair, meanwhile, saw Roger Tapping take over from Ormai in 1994; Geraldine Walther replace Tapping in 2005; and O'Neill assume the role in 2020. They answer my question with a resounding 'Yes!': they are the Takács Quartet through and through, bound by a decades-old legacy and a 'fifth element', the Takács spirit, that has persisted even as its players have changed. O'Neill first noticed that 'magical balance' as a student, when listening to the ensemble's 1998 Bartók cycle. 'Those recordings came out when I was at college, and they were mind-blowing,' he says. 'The technique wasn't for showing off – everything had musical meaning, and it was just so captivating. I've heard all the Takács Quartet recordings now, and it's amazing to me that whoever the voices are, somehow that magic fifth personality of the Takács Quartet is always there.' ▹

> 'I'VE HEARD ALL THE TAKÁCS QUARTET RECORDINGS, AND IT'S AMAZING THAT SOMEHOW THAT MAGIC FIFTH PERSONALITY IS ALWAYS THERE' – *RICHARD O'NEILL, VIOLA*


Founding violinist Gábor Takács-Nagy is now a conductor

That fifth element stems, it seems, from the ensemble's cultivation of individual ideas and voices. 'When I joined the quartet I was young and inexperienced,' says Dusinberre. 'But if I had an idea, the others always let me try it out. They never said, "We are much older than you, so trust us. You're wrong." I felt incredibly well supported.' O'Neill had a similar experience when he joined years later. Even before he was offered a bed in the quartet's home town of Boulder, Colorado, Fejér left him with 'crates and crates of viola parts from the previous members of the quartet, with all their hard-earned markings'. As the group's newest member and fourth violist, he found it fascinating to look back over those parts to see how the quartet's ideas had evolved over the years without sacrificing individual personalities. 'For me that was a major life change,' says O'Neill. 'It wasn't that I was kept from being myself before that; but for a quartet it is difficult, because you don't want four drastically different personalities that don't coalesce.'

The ability to have four distinct personalities that *do* coalesce, however, has been a hallmark of the Takács's success. 'I come into rehearsal knowing that everything's fair game, and that there's no such thing as a sacred bowing,' says O'Neill. Sometimes, he confesses, he hesitates before rubbing out earlier players' markings, which he feels represent the quartet's spirit and the years of hard work that preceded him. Yet the players also sometimes find it liberating to erase aspects of that past, rather than being chained to them. 'My predecessor, Gábor Takács-Nagy, is a conductor now, and he is a phenomenal musician,' says Dusinberre. 'The idea of trying to fill his shoes was daunting, and so I had to work out that, well, "I'm *not* going to fill his shoes. I'm going to have to do something different and be myself." For me, the past members are very much still in the room, in terms of the contributions they made: they gave their hearts and souls to the group, and that's why we're here today. But when there's a change of member in a quartet, you have to move forward.'
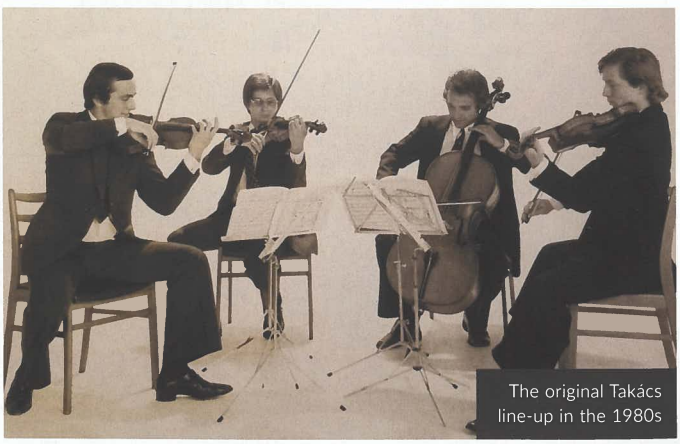
That sense of progress is also necessary, says Fejér, because the group's players and style have changed. 'We were not as free when we started as we are today,' he says. 'Back then the bowing might have been more careful, more thought out. Now the quartet is a vibrant living organism. We work, we keep working, we dig, we argue, we work more, and we hope that in the process we all improve.'

> 'THE QUARTET IS A VIBRANT LIVING ORGANISM. WE WORK, WE DIG, WE ARGUE, WE WORK MORE, AND WE HOPE THAT IN THE PROCESS WE ALL IMPROVE' – *ANDRÁS FEJÉR, CELLO*

Inevitably, some changes have been more affecting than others. When Dusinberre joined the group, it was more than some Takács fans could bear. 'People thought, "Who's this stiff, uptight Brit who's joined this Hungarian group?"' says Dusinberre. 'All of Hungary was in despair!' Fejér exclaims. 'They said, "My dear sons, what has happened to your Hungarian identity?" And we said, "What Hungarian identity?" We tried to be expressive, we tried to be in tune. It had nothing to do with being Hungarian.' The three older members were quick to protect Dusinberre from outside hostility. 'I was a bit insecure after reading the reviews,' says Dusinberre. 'And András said, "All that matters is that everything is fine between the four of us."' Fejér nods: 'That gives you resistance against what other people think,' he says. 'Your immune system grows because of this togetherness you have against everything else in the world. It's wonderful to be in our own cocoon and support system.' Nowadays, the players' mixed nationalities and ages only enrich the quartet's musical output and allow the ensemble to connect with more diverse audiences.

The Takács 'cocoon' is nowhere stronger than at the University of Colorado, Boulder, where its players have been full-time Christoffersen Fellows and Artists-in-Residence since 1986. There they spend a little over half the year rehearsing, performing and teaching. The residency gives ▹


The founding members of the quartet (*l–r*) András Fejér, Gábor Ormai, Károly Schranz and Gábor Takács-Nagy


The original Takács line-up in the 1980s

TAKÁCS-NAGY PHOTO ANDREA FELVEGI. QUARTET PHOTOS COURTESY OF ANDRÁS FEJÉR

them time, support and space to recharge, practise and explore music together. 'On the road, we're constantly changing, depending on the hall or the situation,' says Rhodes. 'In Colorado, we can work and cultivate a sound, without being pushed and pulled all the time. It's a musical home for us.' The residency has also allowed the quartet to structure its practice, says Fejér, so that 'at some point joy creeps in, and then it stays'. That joy, Rhodes says proudly, always stood out to her when she listened to the ensemble's recordings as a student, more than in any other quartet she'd ever heard. It is something she cherishes, in a career that was previously dominated by 'a lot of pressure to be perfect, or fierce, or intellectual, or wise'. For the whole ensemble, joy remains a priority, and one made all the easier by a revitalising Colorado fan base, some of which has been attending the Takács's university concert series for more than 30 years. 'It's a home crowd,' says Dusinberre. 'Sometimes they're so happy to see each other that I used to joke we could go home without performing and no one would even notice.' That joke, he says, died quickly during the pandemic, when the crowd's party-like chatter was replaced by the haunting silence of an empty concert hall. Only this year does he feel that the audience has finally regained its vigour.

Teaching – through the Colorado residency and, in the summer, at California's Music Academy of the West – is important to the Takács players because it keeps them well grounded and connected. 'It means that we don't become out of touch with music as it lives in the world,' says Rhodes. 'We get to know what the younger generation care about, what music they are listening to, how they hear it and what they really need.' This, agrees Dusinberre, helps to 'keep us real' – as when a student of his recently played a 'very surprising bowing' for Bartók's String Quartet no.3 in a masterclass, simply because he had seen Dusinberre play it another way in a concert the previous week. 'It was brilliant,' says Dusinberre. 'It shows that we're not brainwashing our students: they listen to us, they get ideas and sometimes they want to do something different. That's what I call education.'

The quartet has also reached out to the wider community, supporting disadvantaged children via Boulder Suzuki Strings and the Greater Boulder Youth Orchestras, and in 2023–4 in collaboration with El Sistema Colorado, in Denver. The hope is to nurture new audiences and performers, and to make excellent recordings available especially to those who struggle to access concert halls. 'It's about planting seeds,' says O'Neill. 'You never know how they're going to germinate.' Dusinberre particularly

> 'IN COLORADO, WE CAN WORK AND CULTIVATE A SOUND, WITHOUT BEING PUSHED AND PULLED ALL THE TIME. IT'S A MUSICAL HOME FOR US'
> *– HARUMI RHODES, VIOLIN*

THOMAS HULL

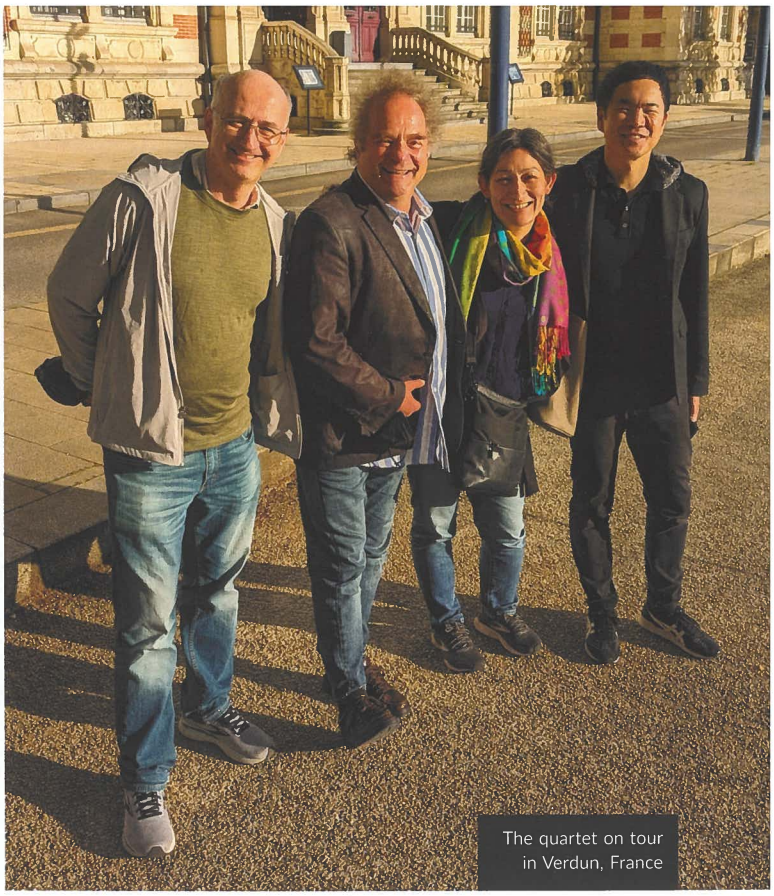


Rehearsing with pianist Marc-André Hamelin at the Chipping Campden Festival, May 2024

enjoys answering these children's candid questions after concerts because, he says, 'It shows that they are engaging with the human aspects of playing. We've been asked, "Why did the first violinist have trouble with his page turn? Hasn't he played the piece before?"; "Why does the cellist shake his head?"; and "Why does the first violinist stamp his foot?" It's delightfully unfiltered.' Sometimes the children's words can be emotional too, Rhodes found during the El Sistema project. 'We were playing inside the group, side by side, so I asked my stand partner, "Are you looking forward to the concert coming up?" And she's a very shy person, but she said, "Yeah, it's nice to be actually proud of something." And I thought, "I need a tissue!" I'm not going to forget that.'

Going forward, the Takács players intend to maintain this balance of concert-giving and educational work, while scouting for interesting new projects and challenges. Past adventures have included performances with Muzsikás, a Hungarian folk group specialising in the folk tunes that inspired Bartók; and performances with narrations by Robert Pinsky (US Poet Laureate, 1997–2000). In 2007, 2014 and 2015 the quartet worked first with actor Philip Seymour Hoffman and later with actress Meryl Streep, playing music interspersed by readings from Philip Roth's 2006 novel *Everyman*. In 2021 they began a collaboration with bandoneonist Julien Labro, with a mixed programme of old and contemporary works. This continues as part of the 50th-anniversary celebrations. New commissions for the 2024–5 season include a work for string quartet and narrator by Cathy Milliken, about displacement and migration. This the ensemble plans to juxtapose with Beethoven's once similarly radical op.59 no.1 'Rasumovsky' Quartet, which Dusinberre is excited to explore for the first time with Rhodes and O'Neill.

Rhodes speaks enthusiastically about long-standing friendships with composers including Gabriela Lena Frank, Nokuthula Ngwenyama and Clarice Assad that have resulted in more recent commissions, too – works that the whole group is eager to play, partly because of the composers' shared love and understanding for string chamber music. Ngwenyama, for example, is an accomplished violist whose compositions, says Rhodes, are idiomatic and enriched by a highly intellectual interest in theology and science. In *Flow* (2023), a quartet co-commissioned by the Takács and premiered in the US in November 2023, she evokes 'sounds of the atmosphere, of atoms moving, of starling bird formations – all kinds of imaginative stuff', says Rhodes. 'And there are *pranayama* yogic breathing sounds, with written-out passages that sound like inhaling and exhaling. Parts of the piece are very lush and big, with stacked, open intervals to give this cosmic, larger-than-life sound.' All in all, *Flow* tackles what O'Neill calls some 'pretty heavy stuff, way above my science understanding'. It is, however, also a 'true string quartet': accessible, idiomatic, thought-provoking and overflowing with radiance and positive energy. The Takács Quartet recorded *Flow* in May, for digital release in November, in response to requests from audience members. They will also give its London premiere at Wigmore Hall on 14 November, following the European premiere in Edinburgh in August. It all serves as a reminder that this is an ensemble buoyed by its 50-year history, not weighed down by it. As put by Dusinberre, 'A good group, if it's going to be around a long time, can't be too nostalgic for the past. You can be very happy with things that you've done, but you need to keep evolving.' ●



The quartet on tour in Verdun, France

'OUR STUDENTS LISTEN TO US, THEY GET IDEAS AND SOMETIMES THEY WANT TO DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT. THAT'S WHAT I CALL EDUCATION' – *EDWARD DUSINBERRE, VIOLIN*



The Takács musicians at their home base in Colorado

TOP PHOTO IAN MALKIN, BOTTOM PHOTO AMANDA TIPTON

University of Colorado Boulder

College of Music

September 9, 2024

CU Boulder's Grammy Award-winning Takács Quartet celebrates 50 years

By Marc Shulgold + Sabine Kortals Stein



Harumi Rhodes has mixed feelings about observing The Milestone. As second violinist of the world-renowned, Grammy Award-winning Takács Quartet, she understands the significance of the group's founding a half-century ago.

"It's a monumental moment and we're approaching it with a sense of awe," she admits. "I feel humbled. Yet, in another sense, for us it's business as usual." Much of that business takes place right here in Boulder.

Joining Rhodes in conversation is first violinist Ed Dusinberre, who's also her husband. The English-born musician reflects on the group's remarkable musical journey filled with loss, personnel changes and—most of all—brilliant music making.

"I find myself thinking about all our former quartet members—we wouldn't be celebrating this milestone today except for them," says Dusinberre, recalling that the original quartet was formed by students at the Music Academy in Budapest, Hungary, in 1975.

"They were so young, living behind the Iron Curtain, wondering how they could fulfill their musical aspirations worldwide," he adds.

Hard work and winning prestigious awards in several European competitions led to an American tour in 1982 and—following several U.S.-based short-term residencies—the decision to permanently relocate their families to the United States in 1985-86. Soon after, the players accepted an invitation to become the resident quartet at the University of Colorado Boulder—and they've resided here ever since, though not without challenges. Gábor Takács-Nagy stepped down in 1993 and now enjoys a successful career as a conductor and teacher worldwide. The following year, violist Gábor Ormai was diagnosed with cancer and retired, passing away in 1995. The late Roger Tapping succeeded him, leaving to spend time with his family in 2005; in turn, he was succeeded by Geraldine Walther. Upon the retirement of founding second violinist Károly Schranz, Harumi Rhodes joined the quartet in 2018.

As the first new member in 1993, Dusinberre recalls the challenge of being a non-Hungarian. "It was a big adjustment for me, but I appreciated the welcoming, adventurous spirit of the

players and the warmth of their collective sound," he says. "The process was similar when Harumi and then Richard joined"—referring to current violist Richard O'Neill who succeeded Walther in 2020. Grammy-Award winner for Best Classical Instrumental Solo Performance in 2021, O'Neill is only the second person to receive an award for a viola performance in the history of this category.

Today, cellist András Fejér remains the sole original member of the Takács Quartet.

For Rhodes, becoming a member of the Takács was thrilling. "The College of Music is a musical home for us. We feel grateful to be embedded in this university and the community."

Although the Takács maintain an international touring schedule that takes up about half of their time, the foursome prioritizes time with their students, working in partnership with Meta Weiss, the College of Music's chamber music coordinator.

It may surprise some audience members who've been regulars at sold-out Takács Quartet concerts to learn that the group's campus connection extends beyond Grusin Music Hall. As Dusinberre notes, their decades-long residency is centered around daily hands-on work with College of Music students.

"Our relationship with the college is the glue that keeps us together," he stresses. "Our graduate string quartet program inspires us to think about future generations." This two-year program consists of intense work with a promising ensemble, preparing and guiding the young artists into the demanding world of quartet playing.

"The newest quartet we're working with is the Michigan-based Koa Quartet," adds Rhodes. "We'll listen to their interests and help them to develop a unique musical voice."

The College of Music's chamber music program has a long track record of success. The Brisbane, Australia-based Orava Quartet is a good example: Via email, first violinist Daniel Kowalik shared that his group met the Takács at a music festival in Sydney in 2011—at that time, the Orava had been together for five years. They soon came to CU Boulder to study with the Takács.

"We always worked with one member at a time," wrote Kowalik. "They rotated, so we had time with each member. I asked lots of questions, from general well-being to dealing with the pressures of performing."

Today, the Orava Quartet enjoys an active schedule and has been signed by Deutsche Grammophon. Their Boulder experience "really helped launch us into having a career," Kowalik noted. "Our coachings were invaluable and absolutely essential to learning the craft. Being mentored by the Takács forever changed how I think about and approach music making."

For many students at the College of Music, a career as a performer isn't their only goal—and the Takács Quartet is sensitive to that, too. "It's only partly about making music," Rhodes emphasizes. "Much of what we focus on when we're talking with students has to do with how to make a life in music."

Dusinberre treasures those conversations. "I ask students to identify individual favorite moments in a piece and we explore different ways to heighten those moments. Hopefully they learn about each others' musical tastes and how to use their individual ideas to shape a unified interpretation."

When touring and recording sessions wind down, these beloved artists find a special joy in coming home to Boulder, visiting with faculty colleagues, and sharing their knowledge and experience with students. As Rhodes says, "The gritty and beautiful work of a string quartet happens offstage in the rehearsal room. We feel so grateful that—after many decades—this process continues in our home at CU Boulder."

Reviews

GRAMOPHONE

November 2026

MOZART String Quintets K515 & 516



The string quintets harbour some of Mozart's most cherished treasures, and yet they're hardly over-exposed in the catalogues, so it's a particular pleasure when a leading quartet teams up with a leading young viola player in this repertoire. In fact, the Takács have been here before, albeit in an earlier incarnation as an all-Hungarian ensemble: with Dénes Koromzay (Hungaroton, 10/85) and György Pauk (Decca, 5/92). Only cellist András Fejer survives from those days, and this is among his last recordings with the group before his recent retirement.

The corporate sound here is built from the cello upwards, leader Edward Dusinberre's violin silvering the ensemble tone, with warmth provided from within by violinist Harumi Rhodes and viola player Richard O'Neill, and Timothy Ridout a rising star name who blends in seamlessly, without pulling focus towards himself, as if he'd been a member of the group for ever. Contrast this with the same coupling from the Quatuor Ébène with Antoine Tamestit: a violin-focused sound in a more analytical studio set-up, and readings that are Romantically flexible and hyper-reactive to nuance. Richard Wigmore admitted he was won over by this almost provocative approach, and so were our Editor and critics' panel, making the Ébène coupling Recording of the Month in April 2023 and an Award-winner later that year.

If the Takács and Ridout don't attract the same sort of attention, that's not for want of quality or colour. But where the Ébène go for maximum impact and intensity, the Takács present honest, affectionate readings with customarily high-class playing, whose authority is based on long acquaintance with these works. The expressiveness that emerges from slower music – especially the G minor's *Adagio ma non troppo*, leading into another *Adagio* as an introduction to the finale – is testament to their command of some of Mozart's most expansive, lyrical music, and the playfulness with which they dispatch that finale is tinged with the melancholy that so permeates the work. It may be that the Ébène's brew is too heady for some, in which case the Takács offer a welcome counterbalance. More than that, though: these are finely, subtly judged readings suffused with abundant craft and finesse.

OREGON ARTSWATCH
ARTS & CULTURE NEWS

November 2, 2026

Delighted and exhausted in quick succession: Takács Quartet with Jeremy Denk

By Alice Hardesty



In what has become an annual tradition, Friends of Chamber Music presented the Takács Quartet in Lincoln Hall at Portland State University, Monday and Tuesday evenings, October 12 and 13, 2026. This time the Quartet was joined by pianist Jeremy Denk. *Oregon ArtsWatch* was fortunate to have a ticket for a truly amazing performance on October 13.

Changes

This is the first visit to Portland by the Takács Quartet without a Hungarian. After 51 years as a founding member of the Quartet, cellist András Fejér retired at the end of last season, following his three compatriots. Taking his place is the Romanian-born cellist Mihai Marica, whose presence seems to have come with a burst of new energy. The Takács has always been a top-tier quartet — *The New York Times* refers to them as "the essential quartet of our time," with which this reviewer would concur, but there seems to have been a moderating influence over the past few seasons. However, the Tuesday night program (Oct. 13) exploded with pent-up energy.

Mendelssohn's final quartet

On hearing about the death of his beloved sister Fanny, Felix Mendelssohn is said to have collapsed. He was even too weak to attend her funeral, after which he became seriously ill. During that summer he composed his last major work, the String Quartet in F minor, Op. 80, and at the age of only 38 he died. The quartet was published posthumously. Throughout, the composer reveals raw emotions, so uncharacteristic of most of his other works. Instead of the buoyancy of his earlier quartets, the genius playfulness of the Octet and the sunlit clarity of his symphonies, here he allows himself to express anger and grief to an extent not revealed before.

First violinist and undisputed leader Edward Dusinberre led the quartet in the expression of barely restrained passion throughout. The "Allegro" opens with a *sforzando* strike by the cello, followed immediately by the viola, after which the violins embark on rapid runs that set the pace for the whole movement. Melodic passages appear, only to be replaced by the urgency from

before, first and second violinists bending forward and back as if straining together to convey the composer's agony, only barely contained. The movement ends with a crescendo to fortissimo.

At this point the audience did something this reviewer (in all her years attending chamber music concerts) had never experienced before. They exhaled a huge sigh, murmured among themselves, and started to applaud. *After the first movement!* It certainly wasn't a lack of sophistication. Not the Takács audience! It was as if this degree of passion, so masterfully paired with restraint, was nearly overwhelming. It could also be that the quartet was now sufficiently independent of the Old World to express itself to the fullest.

There wasn't much relief in the "Allegro assai," which took the place of a scherzo in earlier quartets. Frenetic movement in the outer sections, with the strident repetition of heavy chords, surrounded a soft trio with a sad melody, closing with a gentle pizzicato.

A slower tempo and sunnier mode were features of the elegiac "Adagio," as if the composer had made peace with the unavoidability of death. In the finale's "Allegro molto," renewed passion returned with driving energy in iambic rhythms, and swirled to a fortissimo conclusion, after which the audience levitated — rare (but not unheard of) in that it occurred before the second piece and before the intermission. There was no doubt about the ability of the new Takács to communicate at the highest level.

Gabriela Lena Frank

The program notes, provided by the composer herself, describe the next piece, *Quijotadas*, in some detail. But the program itself was surprisingly silent about the composer. American composer Gabriela Lena Frank is a Grammy-nominated pianist and Pulitzer Prize-winning composer, whose father of Lithuanian Jewish heritage met his wife (Gabriela's mother), when he was a Peace Corps volunteer in Peru. About her compositions, Frank has said, "I think the music can be seen as a byproduct of my always trying to figure out how Latina I am and how *gringa* I am." ("Gabriela Lena Frank: Composite Identity.") She has been composer-in-residence with several symphony orchestras and a member of Yo Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble. Her compositions include several orchestral works as well as pieces for soloists, chamber ensembles, and two operas.

Not surprisingly, Frank has founded a school for emerging composers, has composed works to be played entirely on Indigenous instruments, and has been the subject of a PBS documentary, "Compadre Huashayo." Perhaps it is surprising that she is quite open about the fact of her hearing impairment, which could explain her special connection with percussion instruments, and that she wears hearing aids. In 2020, Frank received the 25th Annual Heinz Award in the Arts and Humanities for her work "weaving Latin American influences into classical constructs and breaking gender, disability and cultural barriers in classical music composition." (Read Oregon ArtsWatch's recent interview with the composer here.)

Quijotadas

Takács second violinist Harumi Rhodes addressed the audience to explain the quartet's five movements. Inspired by Cervantes' *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, the string quartet evokes scenes and dances from the Don's crazy adventures. The opening "Alborada" is a virtuoso performance by the two violinists alone, which is followed by the whole quartet in the "Seguidilla," evoking the happy dance rhythms of La Mancha. The third section, "Moto perpetuo," lives up to its title — frenetic motion interspersed with vigorous pizzicato hinting at the coming insanity. In the fourth section, "Asturianada: La Cueva" — referring to the episode of the Cave of Montesinos — the cello opens with vigorous strokes, and the movement ends with tenuous statements that could represent glimpses of self-realization. The finale, "La Danza de los Arrieros," evolves into a wonky waltz and ends in the Don's plaintive acceptance of reality.

Enter Jeremy Denk

About the multiple prize-winning American pianist Jeremy Denk, *The New York Times* says he is "a pianist you want to hear no matter what he performs." He is not a stranger to Portland, having been featured by Portland Piano International and Chamber Music Northwest, and in 2021 he performed a virtual piano recital on demand during Covid for Friends of Chamber Music. He is also a writer about music and the life of a musician, having published in *The New Yorker, The Guardian*, and *The New York Times*, among others, and he is the author of a popular memoir, *Every Good Boy Does Fine*. This season the Takács has embarked with him on a tour presenting César Franck's piano quintet.

Amorous complications

Composer Franck — not to be confused with composer Frank — began as a keyboard prodigy in Liége, Belgium, and after escaping his father's domination, ended up as a church organist and professor of composition at the Paris Conservatory, where he was in the company of colleagues like Bizet, Debussy, Liszt, and Camille Saint-Saëns, to whom Franck dedicated his piano quintet.

The story of this über-passionate quintet is fraught with romantic detail. It seems that Saint-Saëns was in competition with Franck for the affections of Franck's beautiful Irish-French student Augusta Holmès, as were several other composers and artists at the time. In fact, Saint-Saëns had proposed marriage to her but had been rebuffed. At the quintet's opening performance, it appears that Saint-Saëns sight-read the score (!) and became increasingly agitated about aspects of the music. The source may have included the unsettling effect of constant modulations, but more likely it was because he began to see it as an open love-letter to the golden-haired Ms. Holmès. At the end of the performance he stormed off the stage, leaving the score and its dedication on the piano. Franck's wife, the actress Félicité Saillot Desmousseaux, was similarly displeased. Franck, however, published the quintet with the dedication intact, although he deleted the "to my friend" part before Saint-Saëns' name.

Franck's quintet

At the time of this quintet's composition, there was a new appreciation for classical forms and styles in France, and its effect is seen in the composer's use of sonata form. Franck also organized his material using cyclic form, where themes are shared across movements. Despite these organizing principles, the quintet is vastly expansive and the listener can feel both delighted and exhausted in quick succession.

The quintet begins with a bold dive into Romanticism, where the piano and strings take turns diving, then all dive together. Sometimes in the quieter moments the piano is a soloist, and at others there are duets between the piano and strings. Sweeping changes in dynamics, as well as relentless modulation, occur throughout the piece. The "Lento" opens with a lovely duet between the piano and first violin before they are joined by the other strings, and the movement ends with a question mark. The final "Allegro" is indeed "con fuoco," where the strings provide the sparks, the piano joins the conflagration, and they all crescendo to the finale.

Throughout the quintet the piano seems like a natural part of the family, never overshadowing the strings, as is often the case with this group of instruments. Communication between Denk and the Takács felt as though they had been playing together for years.

After a prolonged standing ovation, first violinist Dusinberre offered an encore, which he announced would be "something intense for a change of mood," to a mixture of laughter and groans. It was the "Scherzo" from Dvořák's Piano Quintet No. 2. The audience was treated to the lively, dancing scherzo with its trio of sweetness before they left for home.

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October 18, 2026

The Takács Quartet: new cellist, same passion and precision

By Edward Sava-Segal



After more than half a century at the forefront of chamber music, the Takács Quartet has a new cellist. Mihai Marica has succeeded András Fejér, the last remaining founding member of the ensemble formed in 1975 at Budapest's Franz Liszt Academy of Music. Judging by the performance at Zankel Hall, Marica has integrated seamlessly into the ensemble.

The cellist's warm, singing tone was evident in the *Adagio* of Mendelssohn's String Quartet, Op.80, while his rhythmic precision contributed to the driving energy of the *Scherzo* and finale. Written in the aftermath of the death of the composer's sister Fanny, the quartet inhabits a darker emotional world than the Mozartian elegance associated with some of his earlier music. Its troubled harmonies, restless rhythms and abrupt shifts between tenderness and anguish recall the spirit of late Schubert. The Takács gave the *Allegro vivace assai* a fierce urgency, almost as if refusing to accept the finality of loss.

The *Scherzo* had a menacing edge and incisive rhythmic articulation, evoking the dim, mysterious forests of the German Romantic imagination. The *Adagio* remained steeped in grief, its gentler contours offering little respite from the surrounding turbulence. The players' restrained phrasing gave the music a more intimate quality without diminishing its expressive weight. In the finale, the players sustained the music's intensity without unnecessary effusion. The four musicians displayed a shared musical vision while allowing individual expression to emerge, notably in Edward Dusinberre's violin playing.

Introducing Carlos Simon's three-movement *Warmth from Other Suns* (2020), violinist Harumi Rhodes spoke briefly about Isabel Wilkerson's book of the same title which chronicles the Great Migration of Black Americans. The Takács brought out an undercurrent of unease in Simon's atmospheric writing, with its echoes of jazz and spirituals. In 'Rays of Light', the ethereal violin harmonics were unsettled by the cello's agitated motif while the incisive rhythms of 'Flight' propelled the music forward. The concluding 'Settle' suggested arrival but not quite resolution. The Takács gave the three movements a coherent emotional trajectory, rather than treating them as separate illustrations of Wilkerson's narrative.

With Franck's Piano Quintet, the program returned to F minor, the key of Mendelssohn's quartet. The anguish so palpable in Mendelssohn and more subtly expressed in Simon resurfaced here on a more expansive scale. Jeremy Denk demonstrated once again his exceptional abilities as a chamber

musician, listening attentively to his partners and maintaining a finely judged balance between piano and strings. As in Mendelssohn's *Scherzo*, a sense of mystery permeated the first movement, deepening its passionate, almost obsessive character. Motifs passed repeatedly from one string instrument to the next before being taken up and expanded by the piano. The interplay among the five musicians was remarkably fluid. The tension lingered in the *Lento*, where the dialogue between first violin and cello seemed to foreshadow Debussy's harmonic language. The phrases changed color as they passed between the instruments, while the movement's apparent calm never entirely dispelled its inner restlessness. The finale unfolded with mounting dramatic force, while the performers maintained a firm sense of proportion without lapsing into Romantic grandiloquence.

After an evening of sustained tension, Edward Dusinberre announced that the musicians would offer something lighter for their encore. They did so with the *Scherzo* (*Furiant*) from Dvořák's Piano Quintet No.2, bringing out both its effervescence and its spirited Bohemian folk-dance character.

ConcertoNet.com

October 18, 2026

Fire and Desolation from the Takács Quartet

By Harry Rolnick

One marriage in musical heaven is rare. Two are rarefied. Last night the Takács Quartet gave us a pair of miracles. And they almost re-defined the word marriage.

The first was their union with Jeremy Denk. As a soloist, Mr. Denk is one of the most illuminating on the concert stage. As a partner, especially a partner with Takács, his is not so much a chemical as a *quantum* blending.

(Incidentally, should the Iran's *Sharia* or our own ICE monsters decide to ban pianos, Denk and Stephen Hough would shrug their shoulders. Their writing keys are as illuminating as their piano fingers.)

The second marriage is the "new" Takács, with the Romanian-born cellist Mihai Marica replacing András Fejér, the last of the "original" quartet. I don't have the experience to tell the difference. But I can say that the Takács is still one of the most exciting, blistering and sensitive chamber groups on the stage today.

And that was obvious last night with the first *measures* of Felix Mendelssohn's penultimate *Sixth Quartet*. The piece is an obsequy for the death of his sister– but could have been an ode for himself, since the composer died a few months after this work.

It is a work of despondency, yes. Yet this is not Tchaikovsky's masturbatory gloom. The way the Takács played, this was pure agitation, it was the whirl of vibrato perplexity at the start, the major-minor cataclysm at the end.

The opening agitated movements had such a concordance of the four instruments that one felt the tempest was internal, a mystical substance that virtually transcended the notes.

And if one needed a typical happy Mendelssohn "fairy-dust" Scherzo, the Takács belied that, showing an emotional depth of jabs and cuts, syncopations and brutality. For the trio, it was time for their new cellist to play darkly, while the upper strings played a ghostly tune.

The Adagio was undisguised mourning, with a sighing by first violin Edward Dusinberre, leading to a finale with words rarely used to describe the young composer: anger and mystery. The Takács went through their paces with rumbling undertones, with demonic triplets (Mr. Dusinberre again) and raw last notes.

One shouldn't hypothesize about inspiration. But one wonders whether Mendelssohn, had he lived longer than his 36 productive years, would have deepened, turned the feelings of this *Quartet* into honestly tragic music.

The 40-year-old Carlo Simon is already in his prime. With *Warmth from Other Suns*, he had the challenge of transforming Isabel Wilkerson's novel, about the Great Migration of Black southerners to the north into music.

Nothing is gimmicky about Mr. Simon's quartet here. Like Mendelssohn's work, this is about pure emotion. Again, the ending is not a dominant-tonic happiness as music verging on happiness with tremolos of fear.

Mr. Simon's music–played by the Takács, who had premiered the work– was illustrative, yes. But it was equally a well crafted intriguing three movements standing on their own.

For one who is tired of César Franck's *Symphony* and endless *Violin Sonata*, the *Piano Quintet* was an emotional revelation. Not simply Jeremy Denk's energetic playing, but the fierce playing of Takács itself.

Nothing here has the sentiment of those foregoing Franck pieces. Between the ferocious playing of the opening, with a winning excess of vibrato to a slow movement which averts Franck's sentimental mien, we have a gripping work. The final movement usually balances between *allegro non troppo* and *fuoco*–fire. Takács didn't balance it at all. They swung through the movement undeterred about propriety, and allowed their incandescence continue through the breathless last notes.

Santa Barbara Independent

July 2, 2026

Swan Song, on a Beethovenian Note

Takács Quartet's Lobero Theatre Concert Had the Bonus Distinction as the Official Final Performance of Cellist András Fejér, After 51 Years of Service

By Josef Woodard



When we think of the interface of the Lobero Theatre and the Takács Quartet — two historic institutions in their own right — a third strong and historic association is the Music Academy of the West (MAW), which has hosted the Hungarian-founded, Colorado-based quartet, now in residence at the University of Colorado Boulder, each summer for more than two decades. We also take comfort in seeing the long-standing and last remaining founding member, cellist András Fejér. He has been a stalwart point of continuity and keeper of the flame, where the quartet was founded at Budapest's Franz Liszt Academy in 1975.

That illustrious pact ended at the Lobero on Saturday, with the final official performance with Fejér, retiring after 51 years in the ranks. The musical subject was Beethoven's quartet repertoire, spanning the early, middle, and late periods (the majestic Opus 131), and the group delivered the goods with bounteous musical prowess.

In her introduction to the Quartet's virtually annual early summertime recital at the Lobero Theatre, Music Academy of the West head Shuana Quill gave thanks to enabling patrons and also to former Music Academy director NancyBell Coe, who first invited the famed quartet to the MAW family. Other Takács chairs have changed players

through the years, most recently with the addition of violist Richard O'Neill, who Santa Barbarans knew from his work with Camerata Pacifica. But Fejér was a link to the origin story and the Hungarian connection.

First violinist Edward Dusinberre opened by noting that "he's never wanted the story to be around himself, but to the group and about the music." He hinted that he might say a few words later in the evening.

The program offered a welcome and wondrously realized triple dose of Beethoven, lending us a modest tour through the dramatic evolution of the great composer's string-quartet thinking. Each piece brings with it a set of expressive parameters and approaches that the quartet gave its proper musical wardrobe. Opus 10, No. 2, written in 1800, is plainly in the style of his hero, Haydn, steeped in classical and courtly manners, in contrast to the early-romantic gestures of the "Harp" quartet, Opus 74, from 1809, after Beethoven had begun to pursue a more adventurous new path.

After intermission came the monumental late-period Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp Minor, Op. 131, completed in 1826 and among the last quartets Beethoven composed. It was reportedly his favorite quartet. Schubert, hounded by an inferiority complex regarding Beethoven, commented: "After this, what is left for us to write?"

The Takács rose handily to the occasion of the 40-minute, seven-movement score and its innate challenges. A sense of all-for-one cohesion and resolve was readily apparent, from the muted and moodier opening Adagio to the witty turns and exciting volleys of phrases passed around the stage.

In its time near the upper reaches of the string quartet realm, globally, the Takács has been crowned for its sensitive way with Beethoven (as well as native icon Bartók). At the Lobero, at a historic juncture in the ensemble's sweeping arc of a lifespan, they — or, more aptly, *it* — offered the inspired justification for that respect. And they did so by both showing a deep, lived-in understanding of this music and by giving it another critical factor — a sense of fresh wonder.

Fejér went out on a series of high notes.

And yes, the cellist did offer a few words, half-reluctantly, at the concert's end. "This is the moment I've been waiting for since 7:30," he said with a wry grin, "the moment of public speaking with me as the … whatever. Thank you for 20-plus years of support, hugs, and appreciation. Please keep it up for the next 40 years. The new cellist, Mihai Marica, is wonderful, a much nicer guy than I am." The audience appropriately laughed.

Then he happily introduced the exit strategy of an encore, the slow, sweetly melodic movements from Haydn's own late, late piece, the unfinished "Lost Quartet," a gentle nightcap of a closing statement for the night.

the Strad

May 22, 2026

Concert reviews: Takács Quartet

By Leah Hollingsworth and Bruce Hodges



Once again, an ensemble in two similar programmes offered an opportunity for virtually side-by-side comparison. In appearances by the Takács Quartet in Philadelphia and New York, the common threads were Haydn's 'Rider' Quartet op.74 no.3 and a new work by Brazilian–American composer Clarice Assad.

In the first evening, presented by the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, many in the audience were caught off guard by the false ending of the 'Rider', which the ensemble managed with supreme comic timing. Hundreds of people erupted in premature applause, which took a few seconds to subside. Later, the group – grinning at its small triumph – finished to even more vigorous clapping and laughter.

That humour continued with Assad's NEXUS, a work that explores the subject of what it means to perform in a string quartet. Significantly, the opening featured cellist András Fejér alone on stage, a moving preface to his departure after this season. Soon first violinist Edward Dusinberre entered from the left, violist Richard O'Neill from the right, followed by violinist Harumi Rhodes to complete the ensemble. Assad gave the group plenty of theatrics, acknowledging their physicality, but also a sheaf of virtuoso cadenzas. Throughout, she mined the ideas of togetherness and separation.

In the clean acoustic of Philadelphia's Perelman Theater, Beethoven's op.131 ended the afternoon, which seemed a natural pairing with the Assad – not to mention a bit of sobriety in contrast to

the playful first half. The foursome poured equal warmth and high contrasts into the score, with detail after detail emerging in a carefully considered manner – both a marvellous 'farewell' to Fejér and a nod to the ensemble's future.

Three days later at Zankel Hall, the ensemble opened with the same artful Haydn, also done with real imagination (especially from Dusinberre in the Largo assai), elegant phrasing and utterly infectious playing in the Menuetto and Finale.

In a reprise of the Assad (co-commissioned by Carnegie Hall), the drama and staging were every bit as memorable as the music itself. The composer was inspired to add the theatrical elements after watching the Takács perform, and wanted to capitalise on its natural stage presence and 'whole-body approach to musical expression'. That she did, with musicians walking around the stage, exaggerating facial expressions, stomping, sighing, and more, in a way that enhanced rather than detracted from the music. Virtuosity came through in solos and cadenzas – all executed with passion, precision and skill.

Transparent elegance and articulate textures characterised the Takács's approach to Debussy's String Quartet. The musicians achieved a magical ensemble sound throughout, and the finale combined subtlety and passion. As an encore, the group chose the Allegro molto of Beethoven's op.59 no.3, exuberantly played at a spirited tempo.

Despite recent news of Fejér's impending retirement, the ensemble has reinvented itself, adapted to new members, and manifested that change with the savvy Assad commission. These two outings only reconfirmed its longstanding tradition of imagination and artistry.

New York CLASSICAL REVIEW

March 5, 2026

Takács players dissect and reassemble the string quartet with new Assad piece

By David Wright



The interpersonal dynamics of a professional string quartet have intrigued listeners ever since Joseph Haydn pioneered the genre two and a half centuries ago. How do four top-drawer musicians, with years of expensive education and, often, egos to match, manage to put it all aside and "play as one"?

Memoirs by members of famous ensembles, offering a peek inside the mystery, have sold well. Now there is a work for string quartet that tackles the same question, but with music and choreography instead of words.

Clarice Assad's *NEXUS*, which received its New York premiere in the Takács Quartet's concert Wednesday night in Carnegie's Zankel Hall, had the players literally in motion, circling each other onstage like planets trying to form a solar system. But what the Brazilian-born composer called this group's "visceral, whole-body approach to musical expression" was in evidence even when they were conventionally seated for quartets by Haydn and Debussy.

The galloping physicality in Haydn's Quartet in G minor, Op. 74, no. 3, earned the piece its traditional nickname, "The Rider." The Takács players kept it light in the first movement, gracefully shaping the fleet, airy phrases and not really digging in until the knotty development section. The visionary, long-breathed Largo assai unfolded in spacious realms of chromatic harmonies.

While giving the Menuetto its traditional courtly poise, the players responded animatedly to the movement's contrasts of legato and staccato. The ensemble, founded 51 years ago in Budapest (though now based in Colorado), brought a full measure of Hungarian fire to the agitated finale, with first violinist Edward Dusinberre charging repeatedly to his instrument's top range; by the exuberant G-major coda, however, the sheer pleasure of quartet playing was in the saddle. Only a few clappers in the audience were fooled by Haydn's deceptive double ending.

The word "nexus" has acquired various meanings in English lately, but in the original Latin it signifies "the tie that binds." Composed last year specifically for the Takács Quartet, Assad's *NEXUS* evoked that tie both aurally and visually. Dusinberre introduced the piece with a few words to the audience, then departed, leaving cellist András Fejér alone onstage. Fejér—the only remaining original member of the quartet, who has

announced his retirement at the end of this season—waited half a minute or so, then wafted a questing solo into the air to begin the first movement, titled "(Dis)Connect."

One by one, the other musicians walked onstage, playing themes that asserted their individuality: first Dusinberre, then violist Richard O'Neill, and finally second violinist Harumi Rhodes with a very un-second-fiddlish, soaring cadenza. The players encountered each other and formed alliances, until the sun at the center—Fejér—summoned them to play together. The players celebrated their new-found unity with a startling foot stamp that brought a laugh from the audience.

The second movement, "Connect," was a virtual catalogue of ensemble virtuosity, the sort of things one seeks out a Grammy-winning quartet to hear: sweeping violin lines in finely-tuned octaves, syncopated start-stop phrases smartly executed, pizzicato passages rocketing around the group.

By the final movement, "Synchronization," however, centrifugal forces were pulling on the members of the ensemble. Rigor was slipping into routine; in motion again around the stage, some players stayed connected, while others drifted to the back of the stage and silence, leaving only violinist Rhodes to pronounce her benediction on the whole enterprise.

Happily, the real-life Takács Quartet has not reached that final stage, and rewarded the audience after intermission with a lively rendition of Debussy's one and only work in their genre, the Quartet in G minor. That title was the giveaway: this famously innovative composer and Wagner antagonist had a not-so-secret love of the 18th-century classics, both French and German, and citing the key in the title was a nod in their direction.

The work's four movements, and the overall character of each, were straight out of Haydn as well. However, the details and harmonic adventures were Debussy all the way. The first movement's ever-changing textures ranged from bold blocks of sound to filaments intertwining, all of it vividly rendered by the Takács players. The airy scherzo rippled with well-synchronized pizzicato and staccato.

In the Andantino—a non-French tempo marking, another rare departure for Debussy—muted strings spoke in short, breathless phrases, then emerged and receded in intimate dialogue. The finale began in understatement, but grew steadily to a bold, assertive finish. With Assad's piece echoing in the mind, one could appreciate both the individuality and the coordination of the Takács's superb players.

As an encore, just for fun, the quartet played a scintillating piece of ensemble virtuosity, the Allegro molto from Beethoven's "Razumovsky" Quartet in C major, Op. 59, no. 3.

December 6, 2025

Takács Quartet Celebrates 50 Years Of Sublime Chamber Music Mastery At Tiny Desk



Mapping out a massive 50th-anniversary tour that included dozens of stops in global cities like Seoul, London, Milan, and Vancouver, the esteemed Takács Quartet honored the Tiny Desk with a special Washington D.C. visit. Cellist András Fejér, the quartet's sole original member, commands a goldmine of institutional memory, having co-founded the group in communist Hungary and guiding it through a defection to Boulder, Colorado, where the members still teach. This Tiny Desk set served as a brilliant microcosm of the band's broad-minded programming creed, beginning in the 18th century with pioneer Joseph Haydn, whose false cadences brought humor as the themes were passed around like delicious canapés. They transitioned into a quirky waltz from 'Flow: III. Quark Scherzo,' a new piece written specifically for them by Nokuthula Ngwenyama, and finally performed a plucky, shimmering, and magical movement from Maurice Ravel's 1903 String Quartet in F. As violinist Edward Dusinberre told the audience, "Somehow the medium inspires composers to express themselves in their most daring, imaginative and humorous ways," and for five decades, the Takács Quartet has been the eloquent voice for those composers.

CLASSICAL VOICE
Concerts · Artists · Critical Reviews

October 14, 2025

Takács Quartet Meets Marc-André Hamelin

By Ken Iisaka

Piano quintets have a unique place in the chamber music repertoire. As there are only a handful of full-time piano quintet ensembles, the repertoire typically sets an established string quartet against a solo pianist, although, far less often, a piano trio may add a violinist and a violist.

The string-quartet-plus-solo-pianist formula becomes particularly interesting when a well-established string quartet is pitted against another well-known solo pianist. Not long ago, we heard **pianist Joyce Yang with the Alexander Quartet,** and this last warm Sunday afternoon at Berkeley's Hertz Hall, the venerable Takács Quartet returned with the superb Marc-André Hamelin.

In the program's second half, the five presented one of the most thrilling piano quintets ever written: the Franck Piano Quintet in F Minor, composed in 1879. The work began with the Takács Quartet giving a desperate, passionate reading of the introduction, followed by a pensive, soulful reflection by Hamelin. As they continued, they held a tightly unified voice through the turmoil. Yet, at times, Hamelin provided an orchestral accompaniment to the Quartet, and vice versa at other times.

The soundscape of the ensemble was broad, with Hamelin's warm and embracing tone placing the Quartet at the forefront. In addition, Hamelin never let the piano overpower the Quartet, with his deliberate modesty and stoicism. Even in the fervent coda, the reins were closely held, and the brutal character was still kept deliberate and never sounded out of control.

The textural tremolo rendered the work more atmospheric than a landscape, and the Quartet effectively brought out the tension created by opposing melodic lines in the score.

It was easy to forget that it was even a quintet, performed by five distinct souls. Golden beads of notes laid out by Hamelin in the second movement cast a warm glow onto the silken veil of the Quartet. The music breathed, heaving in anguish, sorrow, and even optimism at times. The long crescendo in the coda of the last movement, somewhat reminiscent of Franck's *Variations Symphonique,* came as a unified triumph after the nervous struggles depicted by the strings in tremolo.

The Quartet presented two contrasting works in the first half of the program: one by Haydn, who brought the string quartet form into prominence, and an innovative work by Debussy.

Haydn's joyous String Quartet, Op. 64, No. 3 in B-flat Major was delivered with transparent, clear tones. Uncontaminated by overzealous vibrato, the purity carried the lines, adding sparkle to the air. The trilled laughing

passages were executed with hilarity, and the players passing arpeggios from one to another were a delight to witness.

In particular, violist Geraldine Walther, former principal violist of the San Francisco Symphony, maintained her position as a fulcrum throughout the work. Her role was critical in balancing the ensemble, sometimes joining cellist András Fejér to counter the violinists, or stepping aside to let the battle ensue between the violins and the cello.

The Quartet then presented Debussy's Quartet in G Minor, Op. 10. Though one of the composer's earliest works, it is an ambitious piece full of innovative writing. The textural tremolo rendered the work more atmospheric than a landscape, and the Quartet effectively brought out the tension created by opposing melodic lines in the score.

The saffron-infused second movement, full of piquant rhythmic tension, was evocative of castanets and leveche. At the opening of the movement, with violist Walther pitted against the rest of the Quartet, it was not hard to imagine Carmen confronting a small crowd. The suave third movement was a slowly shifting warm colorscape, rich yet muted at the same time. The pacing was luxurious and it contrasted well with the evocative and playfully presented fourth movement.

LIMELIGHT
Music, Arts & Culture

August 18, 2025

Takács Quartet with Angie Milliken (Musica Viva Australia)

By Michael Wilson



The 50th anniversary of the Takács Quartet coincides with the 80th anniversary of Musica Viva Australia.

With Takács' own relocation from Cold War Hungary to the United States in the 1980s, what better tribute to this long partnership than a new commission by Berlin-based Australian composer Cathy Milliken addressing the experience of emigration and cultural dislocation?

Drawn from eight poems by twice-exiled playwright and poet Bertolt Brecht, Milliken's *Sonnet of an Emigrant* was prepared for the Takács Quartet and narrator, Australian actress (and Cathy's sister) Angie Milliken.

Performed as the second work of the program, the music forms around the narrator reciting Brecht's text in English and German against a largely free-form soundscape, where the players respond to the subjects and emotions in the poetry.

Brecht fled the Nazis for the USA during World War II but then felt forced to leave under the shadow of McCarthyism in 1948, settling back in what was by



then East Berlin. Perhaps coincidentally, Cathy Milliken's Berlin apartment overlooks the theatre Brecht founded.

Tracking emotions of loss, unsettledness, displacement, difference and suspicion experienced in adopted lands, the piece starts very quietly, with the first violin (Edward Dusinberre) on the E string at the top of the fingerboard, before the cello (András Fejér) takes the dynamic to mezzo-forte for the first time.

Plenty of discordance and the use of percussive and brushing techniques on the instruments respond to the words, enunciated in an unhurried and weighty metre by Angie Milliken.

From journeys between places ("writing, travelling, singing") to establishing a new life in a foreign land ("Is there a shop I can find where I can sell the products of my mind?"), words and music reinforce moods.

Free-form playing and calls for improvisation mean that narrator and instrumentalists have to simultaneously follow the score and take visual cues from each other to stay synchronised. Apart from two moments when the strings drown out some of the words, this is executed flawlessly.

Bracketing the Milliken commission are Haydn's String Quartet in G minor, *Rider,* which opens the concert, and Beethoven's String Quartet in C major – his third *Razumovsky* – which comprises the second half.

In the Haydn, a lovely animated interplay between the cello and viola (Richard O'Neill) signals what is clearly an intricately planned approach to how each instrument responds to each leading phrase. This allows the ensemble to wring maximum colour and contrast from the notes on the page. Yet this is not done in a stern or severe way, leaving plenty of scope for play and humour between all four players, especially in the contrapuntal and syncopated passages of the last *Menuetto* movement.

In the Beethoven, O'Neill is so animated, he often leaps out of his chair, making piercing eye contact both with his colleagues and – occasionally disconcertingly – the audience.

The *Andante*'s relative lack of structure gives way to more tactile and familiar forms, with second violin Harumi Rhodes setting the mood and providing anchorage.

A brilliant encore – the second movement of Ravel's String Quartet – rounds out a concert that has ample energy and engagement. Perfect coherence and technical accomplishment set this performance at the pinnacle of the string quartet form.

The New York Times

May 12, 2025

The Frick's Gift to New York: A Superb New Concert Hall

There's a crackling aliveness to music in the 220-seat, subterranean yet airy auditorium, which was put through its paces in a burst of six concerts.

By Zachary Woolfe



Most everything at the Frick Collection, which reopened last month after a nearly five-year renovation, is the same as it was, but better.

Hand-loomed velvet wall coverings have been replaced, making Vermeers and Rembrandts pop with fresh vibrancy. Chandeliers and skylights have been cleaned. It's the museum we knew, with the grime wiped away.

What a relief. For almost a century, the jewel-box Frick has held a special place in the city's heart. Why mess with perfection?

But sometimes messing around is worthwhile. The public can now enter the Frick family's upstairs living quarters, turned into intimate galleries. And the museum has returned bearing another gift: a superb space for music, which has swiftly become one of the best places to hear chamber performances in New York City.

The Frick's well-loved concert series has moved from an ovoid room off the garden court, where performances took place since the 1930s, to a new, roughly 220-seat, curved-amphitheater

auditorium two stories underground. In a debut burst of six concerts over two weeks, the theater was put through its paces.

Youthful Baroque ensembles blazed through early music. A long, spare piano solo by Tyshawn Sorey had its New York premiere. The Takacs Quartet and Jeremy Denk played memorably volatile Brahms. There were pieces from Tudor England as well as a just-written song for the countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo.

If you went to all six performances, you heard two Steinway pianos — one from the late 19th century, one recent — as well as a fortepiano, a harpsichord, a synthesizer, a violin fitted with old-style gut strings and another with modern metal ones.

Through the very different programs, instruments and textures, the sound was clear, vividly present and resonant. There's a crackling aliveness to music in the hall.

Every slowly decaying tone in Sorey's "For Julius Eastman" registered. The acoustics encourage both transparency and blending — each of the Takacs players had a defined voice, but those voices also melded — which is difficult to achieve in a relatively small room like this one.

It's also tough to make a subterranean space feel airy and bright. But the new Stephen A. Schwarzman Auditorium — designed by Selldorf Architects, which led the Frick renovation, with acoustical consulting by Arup — avoids claustrophobia.

With pale walls, stylish brown leather seating and a gently wavy proscenium framing the performers, the hall is spacious yet cozy, with frisky touches. (Those zigzag banisters!)

Even in a cultural center like New York, ideal homes for chamber music — gatherings of just a few players, historically in domestic salons — are rarer than you might think. Alice Tully Hall, where the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center resides, sounds good, but with nearly 1,100 seats, lacks the immediacy this repertory lives on. Weill Recital Hall, a staid shoe box at Carnegie Hall, holds fewer than 300, but if seated at the back, you can feel far from the action.

The Morgan Library's Gilder Lehrman Hall benefits from partnerships with Young Concert Artists and the Boston Early Music Festival, but the space is precipitously raked and feels stifling, with flinty acoustics. The Board of Officers Room at the Park Avenue Armory is an ornate delight, but its limited season concentrates on vocal recitals. In this company, the Frick's auditorium stands out.

Concerts at the museum began in 1938, just a few years after the former home of the industrialist Henry Clay Frick opened to the public. The artists presented in that early period were a who's-who of legends like Claudio Arrau, Andrés Segovia and Gregor Piatigorsky. Seating 175, the damask-lined, amber-glowing music room encapsulated the Frick's gentility; until 2005, by which time the focus had shifted from stars to rising artists, tickets were free and had to be requested by mail.

Some devotees were furious when it was announced that the room would be given over to exhibition space in the renovation. "Destroying the Frick's music room — a chamber concert venue beloved for generations — is an erasure of New York City's cultural and civic memory," one resident testified at a Landmarks Preservation Commission hearing in 2018.

But while the music room had old-school charm, its acoustics were inert compared to the zestiness of the new auditorium. In the opening concert, on April 26, Lea Desandre's mezzo-soprano floated atop the sparkling Jupiter Ensemble in Handel arias. The next weekend, Alexi Kenney, whose violin sported those gut strings, joined Amy Yang on fortepiano in scorching Schumann sonatas. The dazzling flutist Emi Ferguson combined with the vivacious group Ruckus for a playfully conceived but seriously virtuosic program interweaving miniatures by Telemann and Ligeti.

Even if the space no longer resembles a 19th-century salon, it is, if anything, more intimate. At the Takacs concert, a tall young man in the front row leaned forward at one point, listening intently, and his face was just a couple of feet from the first violinist.

While the fortepiano was characterful in the Schumann, and Denk's 1880s piano blended well with the Takacs in the Brahms, one acoustical issue concerns the modern concert grand. The Steinway used during Sarah Rothenberg's Sorey premiere and Mishka Rushdie Momen's juxtaposition of Tudor works and contemporary pieces tended to sound stony and blaring in the new hall, even in softer passages.

After spending the first few performances in the center near the front, I sat in a back corner for Rushdie Momen's recital, and the piano sound bounced off the wall so strongly that it almost made my ear ring. Some kind of dampening panels or other intervention might help with the trouble.

But it's hardly unusual for new halls to need acoustical tweaks. Jeremy Ney, appointed the Frick's head of music and performance a year ago — a blink of an eye in the long-planned world of classical music — has hit the ground running with this richly varied, brilliantly played festival. Hopefully he is given the resources to continue to organize robust seasons, not a mere scattering.

And hopefully, in a landscape of museum performance programs increasingly dominated by wan site-specific productions and strained exhibition tie-ins, the series will retain the commitment of these opening weeks: great music, passionately performed. It's as simple as that.

VULTURE

May 2, 2025

The Frick's New Hall Makes Small Ensembles Sound Huge

By Justin Davison



My new favorite mini concert hall is a chamber-music cellar, slipped two floors beneath the Frick. When the architect Annabelle Selldorf renovated and expanded the museum upstairs, honoring its Beaux-Arts sensibility, she reserved this clubby underground room as an expression of her own. (It's the Stephen A. Schwarzman Auditorium, according to the words projected on the wall; perhaps if someone else comes up with a bigger donation, they can simply swap out the slide.) An audience of 218 semi-encircles the stage on tiers fitted out with comfortable leather armchairs; the musicians perform against a convex wall that tosses sound across the same wide arc. The hall is a rarity, an egglike vault gracefully designed to make a concert feel special, and a chamber intimate enough to make listeners feel like they've been drawn deep inside the music rather than receiving it from the stage.

The Takács Quartet, with the pianist Jeremy Denk, helped inaugurate this little space, instantly filling it with spirit. It's not only that we were just about all close enough to the musicians to notice the sparkles on violist Richard O'Neill's

shoes or the way violinist Harumi Rhodes dances in her seat (and sometimes right up out of it); it's that the notes landed on the ear with all their subtlety and force intact. Ampler rooms, even good ones, tend to smooth out detail. Here, thanks to the acoustic engineers at Arup, you could make out the slight thump of a finger on a violin neck, the hiss of the bow, the quiver of a tremolo, the way a note leaves a soft trail as it leaps to the next. And because all that graininess is fundamental to unamplified music, the way a brushstroke is to painting, a trio of dead composers sounded very much alive.

Beethoven kicked open the door to the 19th century with his first string quartet, which opens with one of his characteristic *hey, you!* motives. The Takács used those two simple measures to serve notice, too: Warning, high voltage. For the next two hours, I kept looking for sparks every time a bow hit a string. When chamber musicians of this caliber are at their best, you can sense the thoughts whip around the ensemble, an extra bit of weight on an accent in the first violin prompting an answering push from the cello. Familiarity breeds excitement, and an old score feels suddenly spontaneous.

In Janáček's Quartet No. 1, the Takács ratcheted up the genre's conversational quality into high drama, widening the expressive gulf between the opening lamentation and the skittering response. The piece has a literary cast — Janáček based it on Tolstoy's novella *The Kreutzer Sonata* — and the players kept the characters sharp, veering between tender romance and gnashing outbursts in the third movement, or indulging in the full-throated melancholy of the fourth.

Denk joined the quartet for the second half, a rip-roaring performance of Brahms's F-minor Piano Quintet. Adding that one keyboard instrument made the hall seem almost too small to contain so much boiling music. That's a virtue. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, venues kept getting bigger to keep pace with composers who kept pushing their physical limits, and they wound up making the music sound smaller. Brahms, especially, can grow sedate if it sits too comfortably in a hall. Here, you could feel the score's gallop and growl, and sensed the danger in its muscular lines. Great musicians can produce that crackle at will, but not always. A hall like this helps it happen with an atmosphere so electric and intimate it borders on the indecent.

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May 4, 2025

The Takács Quartet at the reopened Frick: lines of continuity

By Edward Sava-Segal



The reopening of the Frick Collection this spring marks both a physical transformation and a reaffirmation of its founding vision. Housed in the former Fifth Avenue mansion of industrialist Henry Clay Frick, the museum has long offered a rare fusion of intimacy and grandeur: Old Master paintings, Renaissance bronzes and eighteenth-century decorative arts displayed not in sterile galleries but in richly appointed domestic settings. Designed in 1914 by Carrère and Hastings – the Beaux-Arts architects also responsible for the New York Public Library – the mansion was later expanded in 1935 by John Russell Pope to accommodate its new role as a public museum.

The three-year renovation and expansion, led by Selldorf Architects, preserved the essential character of the mansion while discreetly modernizing its infrastructure and repurposing its internal layout. The upstairs private quarters where the Frick family once lived have been transformed into additional galleries, and the conservation studios have been relocated. Among the most significant additions is a new, state-of-the-art auditorium – built below ground and named for donor Stephen A. Schwarzman – intended for concerts, lectures and other public programs. Its debut signals a renewed commitment to the Frick's tradition of chamber music and intellectual exchange, reimagined for the twenty-first century.

Since its inaugural concert in 1938, the museum has cultivated a distinguished chamber music tradition. From Artur Schnabel to Mitsuko Uchida, from the Budapest Quartet to the Guarneri, many luminaries have contributed to the Frick's reputation as one of New York's premier venues for chamber music. Now, to mark the reopening of the museum and the debut of its new auditorium, the Frick has launched a Spring Music Festival that reflects both historical depth and stylistic range, with offerings spanning Baroque to contemporary. Among the featured programs are a Handel recital with Lea Desandre and Anthony Roth Costanzo alongside the Jupiter Ensemble; the New York premieres of works by Tyshawn Sorey and Vijay Iyer performed by Sarah Rothenberg; and an evening of Robert Schumann violin sonatas with Alexi Kenney and Amy Yang.

The Takács Quartet first performed at the Frick in 1984, early in their international career and just a decade after the ensemble's founding in Budapest. Of the original lineup, only cellist András Fejér remains, yet the group has consistently renewed itself

without compromising its artistic identity. Celebrating its fiftieth anniversary this year, the quartet continues to exemplify clarity, precision and expressive depth. For their return to the Frick as part of the reopening celebrations, they were joined by pianist Jeremy Denk in a program that moved between restraint, turbulence and grandeur – an ideal vehicle for exploring the acoustic character of the Frick's elegant and discreet new auditorium.

From the first attack of Beethoven's String Quartet No.1 in F major, the ensemble's coordination was striking – each entrance crisp, each phrase paced with quiet authority. There was no need for rhetorical underlining: articulation and balance did the work. The first movement unfolded with a kind of structural patience, revealing not just thematic logic but the give-and-take of four players deeply attuned to one another. The *Adagio* was marked by restraint – affective, not sentimental – with silences that felt like held breaths. The *Scherzo* had bite without overstatement, and the final movement's rhythmic edge emerged more from tension than volume. The room's acoustic clarity undoubtedly supported the group's ensemble precision, but the absence of wood paneling gave the sound a certain neutrality – at times a coolness – that seemed to drain some warmth from the inner voices. The Takács's reading recalled Haydn, not only in its elegance and motivic economy but in its quiet refusal of grandiosity. Their Beethoven was neither nostalgic nor monumental. Instead, it was alive to detail and shaped by long-line thinking, the kind of performance where motivic connections – rather than tonal peaks – provide the contour.

One of the most distinctive string quartets of the early twentieth century, Janáček's 'Kreutzer Sonata' remains surprisingly underperformed. Written in 1923 and inspired by Tolstoy's novella of the same name, the work was also shaped by Janáček's obsessive, unreciprocated attachment to Kamila Stösslová, the young married woman who served as muse to many of his late compositions. Emotionally volatile and structurally unorthodox, the quartet bypasses conventional development in favor of obsessive fragments, abrupt contrasts and compressed lyricism.

The Takács players did not try to unify the music's torn edges but leaned into its jagged lyricism – its abrupt emotional pivots, fierce whispers and wounded outbursts. Where Beethoven hinted at Haydn's motivic logic, here Janáček's repetitions and fragmentary gestures seemed to circle memory and rupture. The ensemble's control remained firm, but the emotional energy was far less contained: sudden swells broke through whispered pianissimos, phrases ended in silence or dissolution, and the players allowed dissonance to hang in the air unresolved. Dusinberre's first violin lines pushed toward the operatic, almost vocal in their anguish; Fejér, with his grainy, dark-hued tone, reinforced the work's psychological weight from below; and O'Neill, with a mellow but resonant tone, gave shape to the quartet's turbulent interior, maintaining expressive tension within even the most fragmented material. His phrasing created connective tissue between violent outbursts and moments of stasis, lending coherence to a score that can easily feel episodic. In this more exposed and unstable musical terrain, the auditorium's clarity served the music's intensity, though again without lending it much warmth. If anything, the space heightened the sense of emotional rawness – a kind of clean brutality, sharpened by contrast with the understated intimacy of the Beethoven that preceded it.

The second half was devoted to Brahms's Piano Quintet in F minor, a work whose stormy grandeur and structural density presented yet another expressive challenge. Jeremy Denk joined the quartet, not as soloist but as equal partner – alert to texture and especially sensitive to the interplay between piano and strings. The Frick lent an 1883 Steinway & Sons concert grand named Palisandra for the occasion – an instrument built during

Brahms's lifetime, whose resonance and tonal palette evoked the very soundworld in which the quintet was conceived. Yet in this intimate space, the piano's projection occasionally tipped the balance and overwhelmed the ensemble's carefully blended dynamic. To their credit, Denk and the Takács responded with sensitivity – adjusting touch and articulation where possible, though the instrument's power was always just at the edge of containment.

Edward Dusinberre shaped the first violin's surging lines with lyrical urgency; Harumi Rhodes, in the second violin seat, responded with clarity and poise. Under the attentive and proud gaze of her father, the great violist Samuel Rhodes – a longtime member of the Juilliard String Quartet – she played as she had throughout the evening: with quiet authority and a finely judged sense of ensemble. The *Andante* unfolded with a kind of searching lyricism, gently unsettled by harmonic shifts. The *Scherzo* moved with dark energy, but never rushed; and in the *Finale*, Denk and the quartet held a tight focus on pacing and cohesion, resisting the temptation to let the closing material sprawl. There was grandeur, certainly – but always shaped from within, not imposed from outside.

What lingered most after the final chord was not just the refinement of the playing, but the sheer vitality the Takács Quartet continues to bring to the stage. They play not like a group looking back, but like musicians still in love with the act of discovery. That sense of urgency, of collective listening and risk-taking, was present in every phrase. Nothing in their performance felt settled or habitual. If anything, it offered a sense of renewal – of chamber music as a living art, and of the quartet's evolving bond with it.

musical america
WORLDWIDE

March 18, 2025

The Takács Quartet's Fresh Approach to Masters Old & New

By Fred Cohn

On paper, the program for the Takács Quartet's recent 92nd Street Y appearance was unremarkable: standard works by Haydn and Beethoven sandwiching a piece of new music. But the March 13 concert carried no trace of routine, reinforcing the quartet's reputation for exemplary music-making. With cellist András Fejér the only original member, the current cohort––which also includes violinists Edward Dusinberre and Harumi Rhodes and violist Richard O'Neill––demonstrated that, a near half-century after its 1975 founding, the Takács thrives.

The program was labeled "The Natural World," with all three of its selections shaped in some fashion by nature. It began, bracingly, with Haydn's *Sunrise* Quartet. The work's opening measures depict the daybreak of its title as a first-violin figure rises from the mist of sustained chords. Marked Allego con spirito, the second movement proceeded at a fast clip, as if expelled in a single breath, taut but never tense. The ensuing Adagio unfolded like a *bel canto* melody; its "singer" being the four musicians, playing and breathing as an integral organism. Haydn sets the two violins playing in thirds through significant stretches of the finale; as executed by Dusinberre and Rhodes, the sound seemed to emerge from a single instrument.



The general unanimity of ensemble by no means inhibited interpretive freedom. The *Sunrise* was marked by an extraordinary command of rubato, the players offering finely controlled tempo modifications throughout while keeping the basic pulse steady and viscerally present. The inflections served to heighten the drama of Haydn's writing; my companion remarked that the players gave the piece "the Beethoven treatment." But it never felt like the Takács was imposing the conventions of a later tradition on Haydn; instead, the sense of interpretive freedom only accentuated the work's classical underpinnings.

The new work was a Takács commission receiving its New York premiere: *Flow*, by Nokuthula Ngwenyama, an American composer of Zimbabwean-Japanese parentage. This, too, begins with a "natural" component; as Rhodes explained in a short introduction, the work's opening depicts "the beginning of the universe." Rhodes went on to tell us that *Flow* reflects the composer's interest in the intersections of "physics, chemistry, biology, and spirituality." At first hearing, it was hard to discern such a purpose in the piece. But the opening measures, characterized by spectral violin harmonics, clearly depict primordial miasma; the rest of the four-movement work seems to represent the emergence of order from chaos.

A happy synergy

Coming on the heels of the "Sunrise," the *Flow*'s ordered elements called to mind Haydn's classicism. But the work also has a strong element of Neo-romanticism, as when the third-movement Scherzo coheres into an exuberant, R. Strauss-ian waltz. Throughout, Ngwenyama offers opportunities for solo display, perhaps a characteristic derived from Romantic concertos. She is herself a violist, which may explain why she gave the juiciest of these to O'Neill, who played with impeccable beauty and panache. Matching of composer and ensemble seemed like the happiest kind of synergy: *Flow* succeeded both as a showpiece for its commissioners and as an engaging 22 minutes of music in its own right.



The program cocluded with the second of Beethoven's Op. 59 Razumovsky quartets. The "natural" tie-in here was not immediately perceptible, but a press release pointed to testimony from Beethoven's pupil Carl Czerny that the composer conceived its slow second movement while looking at the stars and imagining "the music of the spheres." Considering the quality of the performance, the Czerny anecdote was hardly necessary to divine the work's celestial essence.

Once again, Takács' ensemble skills were very much in evidence, with uniform dynamic and rhythmic emphases that were clearly the result of painstaking preparation. The reading exuded no less spontaneity, however, sounding as if the ink was still wet on the page and making the two centuries since its writing seem to vanish.

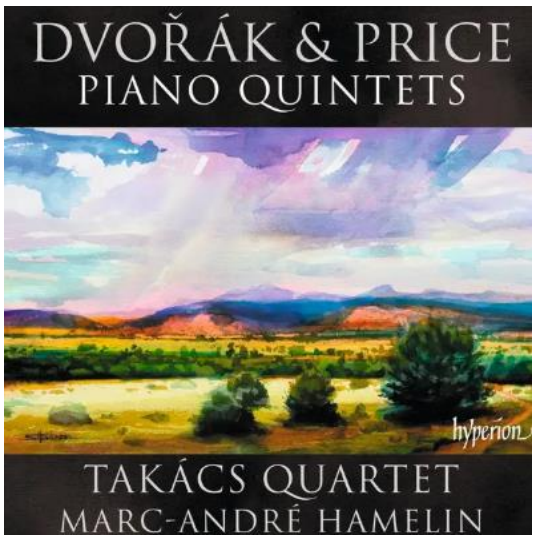
Looking at the sea of white hair in the audience, one might well have wondered about the future of chamber music performance. But the freshness, energy, and sheer mastery of the Takács's playing demonstrated that the great tradition is very much alive.

BBC music MAGAZINE

April 17, 2025

Dvořák & Price – Piano Quintets

By Professor Jan Smaczny



Florence Price's music is coming increasingly to the fore and all credit to the Takács Quartet and Marc-André Hamelin for recording her eminently rewarding piano quintet. Composed in the 1930s, the quintet – apparently discovered by accident in an attic – inhabits a late-Romantic world, more than a little tinged by **Dvořák**'s 'American' style, though skilfully put together and melodically attractive.

But for all its undoubted qualities, the work is out of kilter with a large-scale opening movement outbalancing the remaining three, a pity since the brief finale is in many ways the most imaginative part of the work. Hamelin and the Takács are committed advocates shaping the first movement with finesse and clearly relishing the syncopations and occasionally Blues-influenced melody in the catchy 'juba' third movement.

Their performance of Dvořák's magical second piano quintet is magnificent. The verve and sheer beauty of the string playing is immediately apparent in the glorious **cello** solo at the opening, but such exquisite moments never get in the way of a strong feeling for overall structure which pays huge dividends in the outer movements.

Care over shaping is also apparent in the *Dumka* slow movement in which the *Vivace* central section is exhilarating and perfectly judged without turning, as it often does, into an undignified scramble.

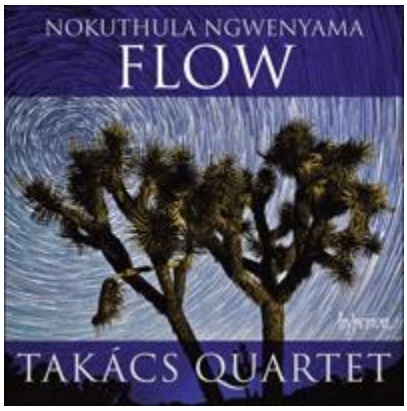
A well-balanced recorded sound allows each of the strings to shine where necessary, most notably the viola in the radiant central section of the ***scherzo***, but the lasting impression is of Marc-André Hamelin's beautifully-shaped accompaniment.

GRAMOPHONE
THE WORLD'S BEST CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEWS

January 1, 2025

NGWENYAMA Flow

By Pwyll ap Siôn



Born in Los Angeles in 1976 of Zimbabwean and Japanese descent, Nokuthula Ngwenyama first came to prominence as a talented viola player, but her career has branched out more recently into composition. Unsurprisingly, a large portion of Ngwenyama's output has been for string instruments, and it therefore seems fitting that her most significant work to date – the 21-minute *Flow* – is written for string quartet.

Critics have often drawn attention to the direct and immediate qualities belonging to Ngwenyama's music, evidence of which can be found in the finale of *Flow* (subtitled 'Enjoy and go with the flow'), which ends jubilantly on a striking D major chord. Nevertheless, up to that moment the musical direction of the piece is anything but clear. Drawing inspiration from a range of spiritual and scientific concepts and ideas, *Flow* begins atmospherically with trembling tremolandos and glassy glissandos alongside a halo of harmonic overtones. This sense of uncertainty and unease is also captured in the second part of the Prelude, with its spiralling whole-tone lines, and later during the middle section of the *Lento* second movement, which features an eerie-sounding 'wrong-note' melody. Such moments of dramatic tension are offset by assertive tonal and lyrical passages, which during the third-movement Scherzo give rise to a pastiche 19th-century Viennese waltz. A brief return to the unsettling mood of the opening movement finally gives way to a powerful and radiant ending.

The range of references is much wider than in other pieces I've heard by Ngwenyama – testament to her ability to harness these multiple stylistic strands to convincing creative ends. The Takács Quartet, for whom *Flow* was written, offer an energetic and engaging account of the work, aided by solo cameo roles for viola player Richard O'Neill and cellist András Fejér, and assisted in no small measure by Ngwenyama's own personal understanding of the medium itself. Worth exploring.

The Guardian

November 13, 2024

Takács Quartet review – a superlative performance in which the music never sits still

By Erica Jeal



Right from the start of this concert it was clear that we were in for more of the kind of superlative music-making we have come almost to take for granted from the Takács Quartet. They began with Haydn's Quartet in C, Op. 54 No.2, and there was something in the way that all four players seized tenaciously upon the opening chord, then again on the next one, and the next – but each time subtly different. Other groups might have given us short sentences; the Takács gave us a whole paragraph, and the start of a story. None of the music on the programme ever sat still.

Two unconventional, forward-looking classical quartets framed Britten's No. 2, written in 1945 – which in its final movement nods the other way, back to the baroque era and even earlier. The first movement of the Haydn was ebullient, but it was in the second that the spell-weaving really began, the music quickly reaching a high level of intensity as first violinist Edward Dusinberre traced skittish, rhapsodic lines over the others. The fourth movement continued this rapt atmosphere, now with cellist András Fejér tracing slow arpeggios upwards with almost impossible sweetness.

The players found a new sound for the start of the Britten, drier and almost gauzy, but this filled out to red-blooded warmth by the time the first movement hit its peak point, the two violins and viola soaring above the motor of the cello. In the second movement Britten makes a feature of pairs of instruments playing in unison, handled here with rewarding precision. And in the third, it was the impossibly quiet, grainy trills that grabbed the ear – one of several points when time seemed to be stretched.

That feeling returned in the slow movement Beethoven's F major Quartet, Op. 135, before a powerful forward momentum returned in the finale, in which the players revelled in the recurring chords – Beethoven's strange, sonorous klaxons. The Takács play late Beethoven as if they have simultaneously known it all their lives and are coming to it for the first time – which is as it should be, but no less remarkable for that.

THE TIMES

November 13, 2024

Takacs Quartet review — sweat, comedy and blazing brilliance

By Daniel Lewis



Founded in Budapest in 1975 and on the cusp of its 50th anniversary, the Takacs Quartet has very little to prove. But these players are clearly not content to rest on their (many) laurels. This was a demanding programme of three quartets written to impress, and each was an exacting, engaging, rewarding labour.

The first violinist Edward Dusinberre worked particularly hard in the first item, Haydn's String Quartet in C Op 54 No 2, originally written for a (fittingly) Hungarian virtuoso. Dusinberre is not the most forthright — after 31 years in the group, he's a thorough team player — but he did play to the crowd, occasionally raising an eyebrow or two to make sure we were all in on Haydn's gentle jokes. After the proto-Chopin-esque abandon of the slow movement, he urged despair in the middle of the minuet before shedding sweetness and light in the final movement. Although there, the cellist András Fejer, the quartet's last remaining original member, ran a close beauty contest with Dusinberre with some tenderly placed accompanying arpeggios.

It was very much a team effort in Britten's String Quartet No 2, written in part to work his way back into British hearts after having fled to America at the start of the Second World War. Though inspired by Purcell, and premiered at the Wigmore on the baroque composer's 250th anniversary, it is not a polite petition for re-entry into Blighty but more of a volatile demand. The group let loose. The second violinist Harumi Rhodes and the violist Richard O'Neill, both brilliantly full-blooded, lurched at each other like fighting fowl. The other two mopped their brows after the second movement's technical frenzy. But their real triumph was in the stretches of serenity that relieve the nearly 20-minute final movement, a set of 21 variations on a spiky theme. The movement is a test of concentration for audience and performer alike but the

Takacs players held it throughout so that the final blaze of C major felt entirely earned.

It was a test of co-ordination after the interval in Beethoven's final string quartet, No 16 Op 135, which lays many Haydn-like tripwires. But the Takacs is a tight unit. Once, when a particularly sinuous melody was passed around it was hard to tell the instruments apart. They returned to well-organised rowdiness in the riotous second movement. The only letdown of the evening was the following glacial movement, where tuning issues surprisingly crept in. But they immediately, miraculously picked up the slack in the final which was pure chiaroscuro. You could almost see Beethoven looking out on the vineyard where he wrote the work, frowning at the sun.

the Strad

October 11, 2024

Festival round-up: Edinburgh International Festival 2024

By David Kettle



The Takács Quartet offered a far soberer, almost aristocratic approach to Haydn and Schubert in its morning recital at the Queen's Hall. Its account of the former's 'Sunrise' Quartet (op.76 no.4) was impeccably crafted, deeply considered and exquisitely delivered, with abundant glances and cues between players adding to a sense of warm, assured ensemble. And the Schubert G major Quartet D887, assumed a noble, stiff-upper-lip perspective on the composer's final work for the medium, one that revelled in the piece's expansiveness while never seeming ponderous, but also conveying the composer's more desperate outbursts with a sense of grace and acceptance.

In between, however, *Flow* by US violinist–composer Nokuthula Ngwenyama brought out the Takács's colourful, groovy side, with the players conjuring 1970s-style pop and glittering sound worlds, all with complete conviction and no lack of persuasiveness. It's no surprise that Ngwenyama wrote it specifically for the group: the musicians clearly adore the piece, and know its intricate corners and its esoteric textures intimately. If there was a sense that Flow was more a catalogue of ideas (even something of a live concept album) than a fully formed, rigorously structured unity, that was swept aside by the joy of this performance.

the Strad

August 30, 2024

Takács Quartet: Schubert

By David Threasher



Consummate musicianship is a given in any new recording by the Takács Quartet, and it approaches Schubert's final string quartet of 1826 – one of the peaks of the early Romantic repertoire – with its customary seriousness of intent. It responds as if instinctively to the myriad colours of this large-scale, endlessly challenging work, which lurches from near-violence to sweet consolation as abruptly as it does from major to minor and back.

In the Andante the players pay heed to Schubert's un poco moto instruction, and its discontinuities and non sequiturs needle as they should. The Scherzo has an uncommon Mendelssohnian lightness, contrasting vividly with the Trio's lilting Ländler. Only in the finale's dance of death does the forward thrust feel a little unvarying, certainly when compared to the more nuanced Brandis Quartet (Nimbus).

Of course, it's all too easy to read biography into a composer's music. A decade or so earlier, the teenage Schubert was clearly in a happier place, composing prolifically and turning out a procession of more or less experimental quartets for performance by his schoolfriends or his family quartet. His Eighth Quartet (of 1814) boasts Mozartian melodiousness and Haydnesque rusticity, although Schubert's mature voice is already evident. Top marks to the Takács for offering this comparative rarity, and – especially – for playing the long exposition repeat in D887's opening movement. The recording was made, like the Brandis's, with stunning clarity at the Nimbus Concert Hall in Monmouth.