“Peerless” and “constantly invigorating”: Takács Quartet returns September 25

Photo (L-R): Edward Dusinberre, András Fejér, Geraldine Walther, Károly Schranz, photo by Ellen Appel.

HANOVER, NH—“Arguably the greatest string quartet before the public today” (Sunday Times, London), the Grammy-winning Takács Quartet comes to the Hop’s Spaulding Auditorium on Friday, September 25, at 8 pm, with a hearty program of Dvořák, Haydn and Schubert works.

Praised as “peerless” and “consistently invigorating” (The New York Times), and “at the peak of its profession” (The Boston Globe), this group’s unique blend of drama, virtuosity, warmth and humor have netted it an impressive array of honors and worldwide performances and an extensive recorded legacy. In 2012, Takács became the only string quartet to be inducted into Gramophone’s first Hall of Fame, along with such legends as Jascha Heifetz, Leonard Bernstein, and Dame Janet Baker.

Formed in Budapest in 1975 and named after one of its original members, the ensemble has been quartet-in-residence at the University of Colorado Boulder for over 30 years. Now newly named associate artists at London’s Wigmore Hall, members Edward Dusinberre, Károly Schranz, Geraldine Walther and András Fejér form an extraordinary whole: “The Takács Quartet are matchless, their supreme artistry manifest at every level. In any quartet, players’ individual traits are always apparent, yet, with the Takács, every facet of their musicianship serves the music in such a way that the character and personality of the composer emerges with extraordinary intensity. The most familiar music takes on a new purity and significance,” wrote The Guardian, London.

Wrote The New York Times of a performance earlier this year: “The Takács Quartet always shows that there is, and must be, room for insightful, intense performances of major works. That was its achievement...revealing the familiar as unfamiliar, making the most traditional of works feel radical once more.”

At the Hop, they will play Dvořák’s String Quartet No. 14 in A Flat, Op. 105, which the quartet will record later this year; and two works of which Takács has made acclaimed recordings, Haydn’s String Quartet in C major, Op 74 No 1 and Schubert’s Quartet No. 14 “Death and the Maiden” D.810.

Opus 105 was Dvořák’s final string quartet, a genre to which he made contributions comparable to Beethoven’s and Bartók’s. It was written in 1895, around the time the great Czech composer moved back to
Prague after three years in America as the head of the National Conservatory of America, in New York City. Despite his fascination with America and its music (especially the music of African Americans and Native Americans), the hearty reception that he received from the music establishment and the public, and his writing success while in the US (which included his two most popular orchestral works), he never stopped feeling homesick for his beloved Bohemia. Finally, in April of 1895, he and his family sailed back to Europe, never to return to America.

During his final weeks in New York City, he began to sketch out two string quartets, one in G major and the other in A flat major. These were completed upon his return to Prague and reflected his joy on returning to his homeland. Before December was through, he had completed the Quartet in A flat major, considered a work of supreme mastery, a life-affirming tour de force that leaves behind the inspirations of the New World and returns to Dvořák’s beloved Czech folk idioms, yet subtly transforming them.

Haydn’s String Quartet in C major is one of two generally known as the Apponyi Quartets after the Hungarian nobleman who commissioned, Count Antal Apponyi (later to become a patron of the young Beethoven). Apponyi purchased both the privilege of having Haydn’s newest quartets dedicated to him, and exclusive rights for the period of one year for the still unpublished works. It is quite possible that he also fancied they were written for him, for he was an accomplished amateur violinist. Musicologists have hailed these quartets as the window looking out from the 18th century into the romanticism of the early 19th.

Schubert’s String Quartet No. 14 in D minor is one of the pillars of the chamber music repertoire, rich in melodic invention. Composed in March 1824, it wasn’t published until 1831—three years after Schubert’s death. The title Death and the Maiden stems from material taken from Schubert’s early song setting Der Tod und das Mädchen (Death and the Maiden). Historians believe Schubert’s grave health problems at the time it was written led to the theme of death—yet, while the music is somber at times, it isn’t being morbid. Passages of fire and intensity, buoyant sunniness and ethereal peace alternate with the darker, more foreboding intervals.

About the Artists

Recognized as one of the world’s great ensembles, the Takács Quartet was formed in 1975 four students at Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest—Gábor Takács-Nagy, Károly Schranz, Gábor Ormai and András Fejér—and came to international attention in 1977 when it won First Prize and the Critics’ Prize at the International String Quartet Competition in Evian, France. Other European prizes followed, as did its North American debut tour, in 1982. Violinist Edward Dusinberre joined the Quartet in 1993 and violist Roger Tapping in 1995. Violist Geraldine Walther replaced Tapping in 2005.

The Quartet’s award-winning recordings include, on Decca, six Bartók String Quartets, which received the 1998 Gramophone Award for chamber music and a Grammy nomination; the complete Beethoven Cycle, which has netted a Grammy, two Gramophone Awards, and 2005 Disc of the Year and Chamber Award from BBC Music Magazine; and with Hyperion Records, Brahms’ Piano Quintet with pianist Stephen Hough (Grammy nomination).

In 2001 the Takács Quartet was awarded the Order of Merit of the Knight's Cross of the Republic of Hungary, and in March of 2011 each member of the Quartet was awarded the Order of Merit Commander’s Cross by the President of the Republic of Hungary. The Takács became the first string quartet to win the Wigmore Hall Medal in May, 2014. The Medal, inaugurated in 2007, recognizes major international artists who have a strong association with the Hall. In 2012, Gramophone announced that the Takács was the only string quartet to be inducted into its first Hall of Fame, along with such legendary artists as Jascha Heifetz, Leonard Bernstein and
Dame Janet Baker. The ensemble also won the 2011 Award for Chamber Music and Song presented by the Royal Philharmonic Society in London.

Engagements this season include two Carnegie Hall programs, one featuring a new work commissioned by Carnegie Hall; performances in Chile and Brazil; the group’s annual Wigmore Hall series in London, where the quartet are Associate Artists, plus concerts in Oslo, Amsterdam, Budapest, Hamburg, Hannover, Brussels, Bilbao and Hohenems, Austria; and a performance of Philip Roth’s “Everyman” program with Meryl Streep at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto in October 2015, a program that they previously played with Streep at Princeton in 2014. The program was conceived in close collaboration with Philip Roth and first performed at Carnegie Hall with Philip Seymour Hoffman in 2007.

The Quartet is known for such innovative programming. They have toured 14 cities with the poet Robert Pinsky, collaborate regularly with the Hungarian Folk group Muzsikas, and in 2010 they collaborated with the Colorado Shakespeare Festival and David Lawrence Morse on a drama project that explored the composition of Beethoven’s last quartets.

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CALENDAR LISTING:
Takács Quartet

One of the world’s eminent string ensembles, the Grammy-winning Takács Quartet is praised as “peerless” and “consistently invigorating” (The New York Times), and “at the peak of its profession” (The Boston Globe). Formed 40 years ago in Budapest and long based in the US, this Hop favorite has amassed an impressive array of honors and worldwide performances and an extensive recorded legacy. The quartet brings its warmth, intensity and insight to a meaty program including Schubert’s melodically inventive 14th quartet. Post-performance discussion with the artists.

Friday, September 25, 8 pm
Spaulding Auditorium, Hopkins Center for the Arts, Hanover NH
$25/40/50, Dartmouth students $10, 18 and under $17/19
Information: hop.dartmouth.edu or 603.646.2422

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Founded in 1962, the Hopkins Center for the Arts is a multi-disciplinary academic, visual and performing arts center dedicated to uncovering insights, igniting passions, and nurturing talents to help Dartmouth and the surrounding Upper Valley community engage imaginatively and contribute creatively to our world. Each year the Hop presents more than 300 live events and films by visiting artists as well as Dartmouth students and the Dartmouth community, and reaches more than 22,000 Upper Valley residents and students with outreach and arts education programs. After a celebratory 50th-anniversary season in 2012-13, the Hop enters its second half-century with renewed passion for mentoring young artists, supporting the development of new work, and providing a laboratory for participation and experimentation in the arts.