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TAKÁCS QUARTET

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2025

7:30 PM

MAHANEY ARTS CENTER, ROBISON HALL



Takács Quartet

Edward Dusingberre, violin

Harumi Rhodes, violin Richard O'Neill, viola

András Fejér, cello

Program

String Quartet in G Minor, Op.74, No. 3, Hob. III:74, “Rider” (1793)

Joseph Haydn

I. Allegro (1732–1809)

II. Largo assai

III. Menuetto: Allegretto

IV. Finale. Allegro con brio

NEXUS (2025)

Clarice Assad

MOVEMENT ONE: (Dis)Connection (b. 1978)

Opening Sequence – Individual Emergence – Emotional

Breakthrough – Connection

Forms – Disconnection – Ritual – Orbital Hypnosis

MOVEMENT TWO: Connection

Controlled Unity – Intensification – Dissolution

MOVEMENT THREE: Synchronization

Handoff Ritual – Mechanical Control – Virtuosic – Liberation –
Resolution

Vermont premiere.

Middlebury is a co-commissioner of NEXUS.

∞ *Intermission* ∞

String Quartet in G Minor, Op. 10 (1893)

Claude Debussy

I. Animé et très décidé

(1862–1918)

II. Assez vif et bien rythmé

III. Andantino, doucement expressif

IV. Très modéré



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Program Notes

HAYDN String Quartet, Op. 74, No. 3, “Rider”

Program note courtesy of the L.A. Philharmonic

The string quartet according to Haydn was a place for experimentation, discovery, and ultimately, artistic splendor. Like the piano sonata in Beethoven's career, the quartet for Haydn became a laboratory where new ideas and methods could be tested and the glorious tools of his trade be honed. Again, like Beethoven's sonatas, Haydn's quartets became the proving ground for his symphonies and the other large forms which were to receive the benefits of his ever-growing mastery.

Haydn began writing string quartets as early as the 1750s, when he was in his twenties. Not surprisingly, since the stylistic compass available at the time was an unreliable instrument that sent composers off in different directions, these works demonstrate that the young composer was caught with one ear galvanized by grandiose Baroque swirls, the other enticed by the deliberate plainness and the passionate stirrings of the music of C.P.E. Bach. Was Haydn confused by the apparent conflict? Yes, somewhat. But, like the talented, young Austrian musician that he was, he experimented with what he had, and since what he had was both the old and the emerging new, his early compositions in all forms can be seen to combine, at times hesitantly, features of both.

He proceeded with due care, and by the late 1760s his string quartets reflected a decisive definition as to form, expressive content, and compositional dexterity. Through the some 30 years that he was Kapellmeister to the titled Esterházy, he composed voluminously in all forms and was referred to as “our national favorite” by his countrymen. When in 1790 Prince Anton dismissed most of his court musicians, he retained Haydn on the payroll but gave him freedom to move about as he pleased. Haydn was more than ready to accept offers in London and to effectively conquer that bustling musical city which had for so long been dominated by, and still worshipped at the shrine of, the German-turned-Britisher, Handel.

Large fame, the adulation of a large public, an honorary doctorate from Oxford University, and the experience of the rich musical scene in London invigorated the 60-year-old Haydn and stimulated his creative juices.

Among the works he produced upon returning to Vienna were the six hugely successful quartets, Opp. 71 and 74. These might have been the culmination of his quartet writing, but Haydn was not yet written out: In 1797, at the age of 65, he composed the six superb quartets, Op. 76; two years later he added what were to be the two final works to his quartet catalog, Op. 77. At his death in 1809, he left an unfinished quartet, which is listed as Op. 103.

The present quartet, with its kind-of-silly nickname, “Rider,” christened (not by Haydn) because of the final movement’s somewhat galloping licks,

must be considered one of the composer's crowning achievements. (Remember, Haydn's crown is filled with countless gems.) Whereas in his first quartets, Haydn was loath to give much, if any, important material to any but the first violin, he later wrote fully for four instruments. As a prime example, the present G minor quartet is an equal opportunity employer. In fact, all the players are pressed into quite demanding, heavy-duty activity, right from the striking, attention-getting opening. Most of the movement, except for the waltzy second theme, is designed in large strokes with dynamic rhythmic energy pressing ever forward.

Haydn loosens the pressure completely for a slow movement that has the deepest kind of sensibility. The music revolves around an awed, hymn-like theme that is both grand and solemn, its lofty expressiveness traced at an extremely slow tempo. The essential seriousness of the movement, however, does not restrain Haydn from some dramatic outbursts, but these are very much in character and help to define the grandeur of the whole musical statement.

The Minuet is not exactly grand, but it's not trivial, either, which is one of those musical tricks not all composers can pull off. Haydn, of course, is one of history's great tricksters, so this Minuet gains substance and momentum by way of its G minor trio.

Galloping or not, the last movement is in turn both fiery and charming. It also boasts some brilliant exhibitionism from the first violin; Haydn knew how to ingratiate himself to his players and his public.

ASSAD NEXUS (2025)

Program note by composer Clarice Assad

NEXUS was inspired by watching the Takács Quartet's visceral, whole-body approach to musical expression. *NEXUS* amplifies the natural physicality of chamber music performance into choreographed symbolism.

NEXUS explores the magnetic forces that draw us together and apart in our modern physical and virtual worlds—the invisible threads of influence, the seductive pull of belonging, and the courage required to maintain an authentic and diverse voice within a collective. It achieves this by theatrically incorporating metaphorical scenes of systems that demand uniformity, mining the essence of those who want to exist authentically. It concludes with a message about being fully oneself while contributing to collective harmony, requiring both individual courage and collective wisdom.

The journey of *NEXUS* begins with Movement I, “(Dis)connection,” where four musicians enter a sonic landscape where individual voices seem to find each other organically. Slowly, people begin to recognize each other

and form groups, until a grounded, gravitational force, portrayed by the cello, emerges, drawing everyone into its hypnotic orbit. In Movement II, “Connection,” the controlling force orchestrates traditional togetherness, uniting in quartet formation, creating music through subtle nods and careful invitations. It is structured and feels familiar, but the harmony is soon dispersed by an individual’s need for control and rigidity. In the final movement, “Synchronization,” the exchange gradually transforms into rigid conformity and trend-following; individual gestures become collective commands, portrayed by choreographed head movements and bodies that mirror each other and fall into lockstep. As synchronization intensifies, it becomes mechanical and routine. For a while, there seems to be a flow in this new setting, and all players seem to go along. But at some point, towards the end, in a somewhat unusual move, some choose withdrawal, stopping the pattern and fading into the background. Others choose transformation, remaining to reclaim the space for authentic expression. Both are acts of liberation with costs and gifts. A final gesture from the shadows offers support across the divide between those who leave and those who stay.

NEXUS lead commissioner: Elizabeth and Justus Schlichting, for Segerstrom Center for the Arts.

NEXUS co-commissioners: Middlebury College, Carnegie Hall, Cal Performances, The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland, University Musical Society (Ann Arbor, MI), Chamber Music Napa Valley, BroadStage, and the Portland Friends of Chamber Music.

DEBUSSY String Quartet in G Minor, Op. 10

Program note courtesy of the L.A. Philharmonic

The 1890s rank among the most productive years of Debussy's life. From this decade date the *Suite Bergamasque* for piano (home of the ever-popular *Clair de Lune*), the seductive orchestral Nocturnes, most of his work on the opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and the only string quartet he ever wrote. Debussy was 31 when the Quartet in G Minor appeared in 1893, a truly personal and original statement. His distinctive musical language would appear fully formed the following year with his quietly revolutionary *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*.

It was perhaps the premiere of César Franck's String Quartet in 1890 that encouraged Debussy to venture into the realm of chamber music. With an uncanny ear for attractive melodies and harmonies, he created an audaciously ultra-modern quartet with startlingly beautiful effects in lieu of sheer shock tactics. His fresh slant on musical architecture utilized the "cyclical" method advocated by Franz Liszt, and carried on by Franck and his disciples, a method characterized by the recurrence of certain themes or motifs throughout a work. Debussy combined this cyclical idea with a light-handed variation technique that carried his motto theme through subtle ongoing transformations—an approach that replaced the traditional contrast and development techniques, which had formed the crux of the Austro-Germanic thinking that had dominated European music since Haydn's time.

The vigorous motto theme from which Debussy fashions the entire quartet appears at the outset, cast in Phrygian mode (a musical scale with a dark, exotic, tense sound created by lowering the second note in the scale by a half step). The lyrical second theme turns out to be a close relative to the principal theme itself. Then, a mosaic of miniature variations, based primarily on the second subject, replaces a true development section, while the recapitulation delivers further variations cloaked in a rich texture of shifting harmonies.

Repetitious phrases lend a flavor of precocious minimalism to the beginning of the sonically stunning second movement. A dusky viola solo intones the motto theme, recast now in rhythm, mode, and tempo. The backdrop for this rhythmic whirlwind runs the gamut from pin-prickly pizzicatos to shimmering trills. In a brief central episode, the first violin offers a more lyrical view of the theme.

The motto theme appears most drastically altered in the contemplative Andantino, which features muted soliloquies by viola and cello, an exotically distant key signature of D-flat major, and a decadently sensuous climax with hints of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, on which Debussy was concurrently working.

Then, a pensive preamble reflects on various metamorphoses of the germinal theme before plunging into the mainstream of the finale. During

the movement, Debussy makes concessions to tradition as the motto theme appears in inversion, imitation, and the slightest hint of fugato. The work concludes with a potent sample of the powerful, colorful string writing that sparked contemporary complaints that this vital quartet was “too orchestral.”

The piece made its debut on December 29, 1893, at the Salle Pleyel in Paris with the prestigious Ysaÿe Quartet, to whom the work is dedicated.





Biographies

Takács Quartet

Edward Dusinberre, Violin

Harumi Rhodes, Violin

Richard O'Neill, Viola

András Fejér, Cello

In recognition of its 50th anniversary, the world-renowned **Takács Quartet** was recently the subject of an in-depth profile by the *New York Times* and featured on the cover of *Strad* magazine. The Takács released two anniversary season albums in 2025 for Hyperion Records to glowing reviews. *Flow* by Ngwenyama, composed for the ensemble, was followed by an album of piano quintets by Dvořák and Price with Marc André Hamelin. In August 2025, for Musica Viva in Australia, the ensemble played a new work, *Sonnet of an Emigrant*, for quartet and narrator by Cathy Milliken with texts by Bertolt Brecht.

Edward Dusinberre, Harumi Rhodes (violins), Richard O'Neill (viola) and András Fejér (cello) are excited about upcoming projects including performances throughout the US of Mozart viola quintets with Jordan Bak and the new string quartet, NEXUS, written for them by Clarice Assad, co-commissioned by leading concert organizations throughout North America. The group's North American engagements include concerts in New York's Carnegie Hall, Vancouver, Philadelphia, Boston, Princeton,

Ann Arbor, Washington DC, Duke University, Los Angeles, Berkeley, Cleveland, Phoenix, Portland, and Middlebury.

The Takács enjoys a busy international touring schedule. As Associate Artists at London's Wigmore Hall, the group will present four concerts featuring works by Haydn, Assad, Debussy, Beethoven, and two Mozart viola quintets with Timothy Ridout that will also be recorded for Hyperion. Other European appearances include the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, Konzerthaus Berlin, Florence, Bologna, and Rome.

The members of the Takács Quartet are Christoffersen Fellows and have been Artists in Residence at the University of Colorado, Boulder since 1986. During the summer months the Takács join the faculty at the Music Academy of the West, running an intensive quartet seminar. This season the ensemble begins a new relationship as Visiting Artists at the University of Maryland.

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 Recording 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 Muzsikás.

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. They are grateful to be Thomastik-Infeld Artists.

The Takács Quartet appears by arrangement with Seldy Cramer Artists,
and records for Hyperion and Decca/London Records.

The Takács Quartet is Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Colorado
in Boulder
and are Associate Artists at Wigmore Hall, London.

www.takacsquartet.com



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We remember their connection to this region and the hardships they continue to endure.

We give thanks for the opportunity to share in the bounty of this place and to protect it.