

The Takács Quartet

with Richard Stoltzman, clarinet

Sunday, October 5, 2003, 3 pm
Zellerbach Hall

The Takács Quartet
Edward Dusinger, violin
Károly Schranz, violin
Roger Tapping, viola
András Fejér, cello

Béla Bartók String Quartet No. 3
Prima parte: Moderato
Seconda parte: Allegro
Ricapitolazione della prima parte: Moderato
Coda: Allegro molto

Felix Mendelssohn String Quartet No. 2 in A Minor, Op. 13,
"Ist Es Wahr?"
Adagio – Allegro vivace
Adagio non lento – Poco più animato – Tempo I
Intermezzo: Allegretto con moto –
Allegro di molto – Tempo I
Presto – Adagio non lento – Adagio

INTERMISSION

Johannes Brahms Quintet for Clarinet and String Quartet
in B Minor, Op. 115
Allegro
Adagio
Andantino – Presto non assai, ma con sentimento
Con moto
Richard Stoltzman, clarinet

The Takács Quartet appears by arrangement with Cramer/Marder Artists
and records exclusively for Decca/London Records.

The Takács Quartet is Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Colorado in Boulder
and Fellow of The Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London.

www.takacsquartet.com

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String Quartet No. 3

Béla Bartók (1881–1945)

After the fiendish winds of the First World War had finally blown themselves out in 1918, there came into music a new invigoration and an eagerness by composers to stretch the forms and language of the ancient art. Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Webern, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Copland, and other important modern masters challenged listeners and colleagues throughout the 1920s with their

daring visions and their brilliant iconoclasm. It was one of the most exciting decades in the entire history of music. Béla Bartók, whose folksong researches were severely limited geographically by the loss of Hungarian territories through the treaties following the War, was not immune to the spirit of experimentation, and he shifted his professional concentration at that time from ethnomusicology to composition and his career as a pianist. He was particularly interested in the music of Stravinsky, notably the mosaic structures and advanced harmonies of the Diaghilev ballets, and in the recent Viennese developments in atonality and motivic generation posited by Arnold Schoenberg and his friend—disciple Alban Berg. A decided modernism entered Bartók's music with his searing 1919 ballet, *The Miraculous Mandarin*, and his works of the years immediately following—the two violin sonatas, the piano suite *Out of Doors*, the *Piano Concerto No. 1* and the *String Quartet No. 3*—are the most daring that he ever wrote. He was reluctant to program them for any but the most sophisticated audiences.

Bartók wrote the *String Quartet No. 3* quickly in Budapest at the end of the summer of 1927, immediately following a concert tour of Germany during which he performed his new *Piano Concerto No. 1* with Furtwängler in Frankfurt and his *Piano Sonata* in Baden-Baden. The composition of the quartet was well advanced by September 10th, and the score was completed before the end of the month. In December 1927, Bartók began his first visit to the United States, concertizing from coast to coast for three months after making his American debut with the New York Philharmonic and Willem Mengelberg in Carnegie Hall on December 22nd in his own *Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra*. (It was one of the ironies of Bartók's life that both his last home and the hospital in which he died in 1945 were literally across the street from the famed auditorium that hosted his introduction to this country.) Before returning to Hungary in February 1928, Bartók learned of a lucrative competition for new chamber works sponsored by the Musical Fund of Philadelphia, and submitted his *Quartet No. 3* for consideration after he arrived home. He heard nothing for some time, however, and so sent a copy of the work to Universal Edition in Vienna, inquiring if that firm would be willing to publish the score and help promote its first performance. Then on October 2nd, news arrived that Bartók's piece and a string quartet by the Italian composer Alfredo Casella had been chosen by a panel (which included Mengelberg, Fritz Reiner, and Frederick Stock) from over 600 entries to share the considerable first prize of \$6,000. In view of the international recognition accorded the work, Universal agreed to issue the score immediately; the piece was premiered at London's Wigmore Hall by the Waldbauer Quartet on February 19, 1929.

Bartók's *Quartet No. 3* is among the great masterworks of 20th-century music—brilliant, challenging, cathartic, one of the most difficult yet rewarding pieces in the entire chamber literature. Though the music is Bartók's furthest adventure into modernity, it is founded solidly on the confluence of two traditional but seemingly opposed musical streams—the folk music of Eastern Europe, a subject on which Bartók was a scholar of the highest accomplishment, and the elaborate contrapuntal constructions of Sebastian Bach and other Baroque composers. By 1927, the time of the *Quartet No. 3*, Bartók had so thoroughly absorbed the quirky intervals, tightly circling motivic phrases, snapping rhythms, and ornate decorations of indigenous Hungarian music into his original work that his themes constitute a virtual apotheosis of native folksong. "The melodic world of my string quartets does not essentially differ from that of folksong," he said, "only the framework is stricter." For the working-out of his folk-derived thematic materials (Bartók never quoted existing melodies unless specifically noting that they were arrangements), he turned to the highly organized models of canon and fugue postulated by Bach and his 18th-century contemporaries. The *Quartet No. 3* therefore represents a marvelous synthesis of West and East—the structural integrity and emotional range of Bach wedded to the melodic and rhythmic exoticisms of Slavic folksong. One of Bartók's most tightly constructed works, the *Quartet No. 3* is disposed as a large single span divided into four sections. Part I opens with a mysterious harmonic curtain that serves as an introduction to the work's germinal theme—a tiny fragment comprising a rising fourth and a falling minor third initiated by the violin in measure six, at the point where the lower strings remove their mutes. The first section is largely based on the extensive permutations of this pregnant thematic kernel through imitation, inversion, augmentation, diminution, and other processes that Bartók learned from Bach. Part II, which follows without pause, is a free, continuously unfolding variation of an arch-shaped folk-dance melody presented in pizzicato multiple stops by the cello. A passage of

dizzying slides and almost brutal dissonance bridges to Part III, which is a thoroughly reworked version of Part I (Bartók marked this section “Ricapitolazione della prima parte,” but also noted, “I do not like to repeat a musical idea without change”), a distillation of the essence of the work’s earlier material. The concluding Coda starts as a vague, bow-tip buzzing, but soon develops into a furious altered restatement of the folk dance of Part II. The Quartet No. 3 culminates in a powerful, viscerally compelling cadence. Wrote Mosco Carner of Bartók’s incomparable series of string quartets, “For profundity of thought, imaginative power, logic of structure, diversity of formal details and enlargement of the technical scope, they stand unrivaled in the field of modern chamber music.”

String Quartet No. 2 in A Minor, Op. 13, “Ist Es Wahr?”

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

Felix Mendelssohn, in 1827, must have been the most musically sophisticated 18-year-old in Europe. Upon the foundation of his fine general education had been placed disciplined training in theory and composition with Carl Friedrich Zelter (a distinguished pedagogue who was then the director of the Berlin Singakademie), tutelage in violin with Carl Wilhelm Henning (a respected member of the Berlin Opera orchestra) and Eduard Rietz (a close friend who succeeded Mendelssohn as director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus concerts upon the composer’s death in 1847), and in piano with his mother (a student of the noted German theorist Johann Philipp Kirnberger, himself a pupil of Johann Sebastian Bach) and Marie Bigot (an esteemed Alsatian virtuoso and friend of Haydn and Beethoven). Mendelssohn’s first dated composition, a cantata, was completed on January 3, 1820, three weeks before his eleventh birthday, though this piece was almost certainly preceded by others whose exact dates are not recorded. Two years later began the twice-monthly Sunday family concerts at the Mendelssohns’ Berlin mansion, for which Felix selected the programs, led the rehearsals, appeared as piano and violin soloist and chamber musician, and even conducted, though as a young teenager he was still too short to be seen by the players in the back rows unless he stood on a stool. By 1825, he had written over 80 works for these concerts, including operas and operettas, string quartets and other chamber pieces, concertos, motets, and a series of 13 symphonies for strings.

Mendelssohn possessed a boundless curiosity and enthusiasm about all music, old and new. By age 18, he was, of course, intimately familiar with the Classical forms and idioms of Mozart and Haydn, and he erected upon them the creative precocities of his youth (including the magical Octet of 1825, the greatest piece of music ever composed by one so young), but he was also one of the leading Bach scholars of the time. Zelter had guided him fruitfully through *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (whose contrapuntal intricacies he delighted in mimicking in his teenage works), and placed into his hands the astounding treasure of the manuscript of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* (which Zelter had rescued from a cheese monger who intended to use it as wrapping paper!). Before the end of 1827, Mendelssohn had enlisted the town’s best vocalists to rehearse the *Passion* and determined to perform it in public—the renewal of interest in Bach’s music, and, indeed, the entire Baroque revival, date from that concert, on March 11, 1829, at the Singakademie. Complementing Mendelssohn’s antiquarian strain was his interest in the most daring, avant garde music of the day—the last works of Beethoven. In the years before his death, in March 1827, Beethoven explored uncharted continents of style and expression in his sonatas, quartets, *Missa Solemnis* and the *Symphony No. 9*, and Mendelssohn eagerly studied these amazing and challenging creations. The *String Quartet in A Minor* that Mendelssohn completed on October 26, 1827, was the product of this entire congeries of influences—Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, plus, of course, his own genius—which were further enflamed by a *petite affaire de le coeur*. The previous spring, shortly before matriculating at Berlin University, Mendelssohn had indulged in a short holiday at Sakrow, the Magnus family estate near Potsdam, and there he fell in love, at least a little. The circumstances, even the maiden’s name, are unknown, but he was sufficiently moved by the experience to set to music a poem of his friend Johann Gustav Droyson that began, “Is it true [Ist es wahr?] that you are always waiting for me in the arbored walk?” The piece, published two years later under the title *Frage* (“Question”) as the first number of his Op. 9 set of songs, was woven as thematic material into the new *Quartet in A Minor*. The score was published in 1829 as Mendelssohn’s Op. 13. (The *Quartet in E-flat Major*, though written two years later, was issued just before this work, as Op. 12.)

“In this work, the mature composer stands revealed,” wrote Homer Ulrich of Mendelssohn’s Quartet in A Minor in his comprehensive survey of the chamber repertory. “All the melodic charm, all the perfection of detail, all the deftness of touch we associate with the later works are present in this Quartet from

his eighteenth year.” This piece is also the most Beethovenian of Mendelssohn’s works, embracing bold contrasts, adventurous harmonies, complex counterpoint, cyclical procedures, multi-compartmented movements, and a pervasive impassioned expression that lend this music an urgency that Mendelssohn seldom recaptured. At a performance of the work at a Paris salon, a music-loving priest nudged Mendelssohn during the finale, and whispered, “He does that in one of his symphonies.” “Who?” asked the composer. “Why, Beethoven, the author of this quartet,” came the reply. “This was bittersweet,” Mendelssohn allowed.

The Quartet opens with a slow introduction whose A-Major tonality serves as an emotional foil for the tempestuous main body of the movement. Two arching phrases—the second soaring high in the first violin’s compass—preface the quotation of the searching motto phrase from “Ist Es Wahr?,” recognizable by its long–short–long rhythm. The music’s tempo and energy are quickened by scurrying filigree before the viola initiates the principal theme, based on the motto rhythm. The cello posits a lyrical melody as the complementary subject. The scurrying phrases return to mark the onset of the development section, which is remarkable for the intensity of its counterpoint and its nearly febrile mood. The recapitulation serves both to return and to enhance the earlier themes before the movement closes with an explosive coda that stops without resolving the music’s strong tensions. The deeply felt Adagio offers another paraphrase of the motto theme at beginning and end as the frame for the somber, densely packed fugal episode that occupies the middle of the movement. The third movement, titled Intermezzo, uses a charmingly folkish tune, daintily scored, in its outer sections to surround an ethereal passage of musical feather-stitching at the center. Both ideas are deftly combined in the coda. A dramatic cadenza-recitative for the violin over tremolo harmonies, reminiscent of the fourth movement of Beethoven’s Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132, launches the finale. A clutch of highly charged motives is presented and worked out with great intensity as the music unfolds. The work closes not with a wail of tragedy or with a sunburst of redemption, but with a recall of the Quartet’s most introspective moments—first the theme of the Adagio, and then the introduction from the opening movement, bringing with it a final reflection upon the music and thought, “Ist Es Wahr?”.

Quintet for Clarinet and String Quartet in B Minor, Op. 115

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

As an unrepentant, life-long bachelor (he once vowed that he would “never undertake either a marriage or an opera”), Johannes Brahms depended heavily on his circle of friends for support, encouragement, and advice. By word and example, Robert Schumann set him on the path of serious composition as a young man; Schumann’s wife, Clara, was Brahms’ chief critic and confidante throughout his life. The violinist Joseph Joachim was an indefatigable champion of Brahms’ chamber music, and provided him expert technical information during the composition of the Violin Concerto. Hans von Bülow, a musician of gargantuan talent celebrated as both pianist and conductor, played Brahms’ music widely, and made it a mainstay in the repertory of the superb court orchestra at Meiningen during his tenure there as music director from 1880 to 1885. Soon after arriving, Bülow invited Brahms to Meiningen to be received by the music-loving Duke Georg and his consort, Baroness von Heldburg, and Brahms was provided with a fine apartment and encouraged to visit the court whenever he wished. (The only obligation upon the comfort-loving composer was to don the much-despised full dress for dinner.) Brahms returned frequently and happily to Meiningen to hear his works played by the orchestra and to take part in chamber ensembles. At a concert in March 1891, he heard a performance of Weber’s Clarinet Concerto in F Minor by the orchestra’s principal player of that instrument, Richard Mühlfeld, and was overwhelmed. “It is impossible to play the clarinet better than Herr Mühlfeld does here,” he wrote to Clara. “He is absolutely the best I know.” So fluid and sweet was Mühlfeld’s playing that Brahms dubbed him “Fräulein Nightingale,” and flatly proclaimed him to be the best wind instrument player

that he had ever heard. Indeed, so strong was the impact of the experience that Brahms was shaken out of a year-long creative lethargy—the Trio for Clarinet, Cello, and Piano (Op. 114) and the Quintet for Clarinet and Strings (Op. 115) were composed for Mühlfeld without difficulty between May and July 1891 at the Austrian resort town of Bad Ischl, near Salzburg. Three years later, Brahms was inspired again to write for Mühlfeld, and produced the two Sonatas for Clarinet and Piano (Op. 120). Both the trio and the quintet were first heard at a private recital at Meiningen on November 24, 1891, presented by Brahms (as pianist), Mühlfeld, and the members of the Joachim Quartet. The same artists gave the public premieres of both works in Berlin on December 12th. The Clarinet Quintet's mood is expressive and autumnal, with many a hint of bittersweet nostalgia, a quality to which the darkly limpid sonority of the clarinet is perfectly suited. The opening movement follows the traditional sonata plan, with the closely woven thematic development characteristic of all Brahms' large instrumental works. The main theme, given by the violins in mellow thirds, contains the motivic seeds from which the entire movement grows. Even the swaying second theme, initiated by the clarinet, derives from this opening melody. The Adagio is built in three large paragraphs. The first is based on a tender melody of touching simplicity uttered by the clarinet. The central section is an impetuous strain in sweeping figurations seemingly derived from the fiery improvisations of an inspired Gypsy clarinetist. The Adagio melody returns to round out the movement. Brahms performed an interesting formal experiment in the third movement. Beginning with a sedate *Andantino*, the music soon changes mood and meter to become an ingenious combination of scherzo and rondo that is closed by a fleeting reminiscence of the movement's first melody. The finale is a theme with five variations, the last of which recalls the opening melody of the first movement to draw together the principal thematic strands of this masterful quintet.

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The Takács Quartet is recognized as one of the world's greatest string quartets. Since its formation in 1975, the ensemble has appeared regularly in every major music capital and prestigious festival. The Quartet is based in Boulder, Colorado, where it has held a residency at the University of Colorado since 1983. The Takács is a resident quartet at the Aspen Festival and its members are also visiting fellows at The Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London.

The first volume of the Takács Quartet's Beethoven Cycle (middle quartets) was released in May 2002, and received the Grammy Award for Best Chamber Music Album, the Gramophone Chamber Music Recording of the Year award, a Grammy nomination for Best Classical Album, the Chamber Music America/WQXR Record Award, and the Japan Record Academy Award for Chamber Music. Its recording of the Bartók cycle received the Gramophone award for 1998, and a Grammy nomination in 1999. The ensemble's subsequent recording release for Decca/London, with which it signed an exclusive recording contract in 1988, includes the Schubert Trout Quintet with Andreas Haefliger, piano (Grammy nominee, 2000), and Dvořák's Quartet Op. 51 and Piano Quintet Op. 81, also with Haefliger. Volume two (early quartets) of the Beethoven cycle will be released this fall, and the final volume of the late quartets is to appear in early 2005. The ensemble's discography also includes Schubert's Quartet in

G Major and Notturmo; quartets by Smetana and Borodin; Haydn's Op. 76, 77, and 103 quartets; the three Brahms quartets and the Piano Quintet in F Minor with Andras Schiff; Chausson's Concerto for Violin, Piano, and String Quartet with Joshua Bell and Jean-Yves Thibaudet; Mozart's String Quintets, K. 515 and 516 with Gyorgy Pauk; and Schubert's Quartettsatz, Rosamunde, and Death and the Maiden.

During the 2003–2004 season, the Takács Quartet performs over 40 concerts in the United States, and tours extensively in Europe and Asia. Special projects include Beethoven cycles presented by the Cleveland Orchestra and UCLA, and a tour with the famed Hungarian gypsy ensemble Muzsikás, culminating in a Carnegie Hall concert. In addition to an annual residency at the Aspen Festival, worldwide 2003–2004 tour cities include Washington, New York, Cleveland, Los Angeles, San Diego, Boston, Dallas, Phoenix, Berkeley, Ann Arbor, Lawrence, Seattle, New Haven, London, Paris, Bordeaux, Edinburgh, Bristol, Leon, Taipei, and Tokyo.

Recent Takács seasons have included Bartók cycles in Cleveland, Berkeley, New York, London, Madrid, and Seville; Schubert cycles in London, Lisbon, Utrecht, and Spain; and a Brahms cycle in

London. The ensemble has performed Beethoven cycles in Paris, London, Zurich, Sydney, and New York, and numerous concerts surrounding the Mozart anniversary year in 1991. During the summer of 1993, the Takács gave a cycle of three concerts at the Salzburg Festival featuring the quartets of Bartók and Brahms. The Quartet made its Lincoln Center debut on the Great Performers Series in 1989, and performed a six-concert Haydn Festival in 1991 with pianist András Schiff at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (repeated in London's Wigmore Hall). The Quartet made its Carnegie Hall debut in 1992.

The Takács Quartet was formed by Gabor Takács-Nagy, Karoly Schranz, Gabor Ormai, and András Fejér in 1975, while all four were students at Budapest's Liszt Academy. It first received international attention in 1977, winning First Prize and the Critics' Prize at the International String Quartet Competition in Evian, France. Thereafter, the Takács won the Gold Medal at the 1978 Portsmouth and Bordeaux competitions and first prizes at the Budapest International String Quartet Competition (1978) and the Bratislava Competition (1981). The ensemble made its North American debut tour in 1982.

Richard Stoltzman's (clarinet) virtuosity, musicianship, and sheer personal magnetism have made him one of today's most sought-after concert artists. As soloist with more than a hundred orchestras, as a captivating recitalist and chamber music performer, as an innovative jazz artist, and as a prolific recording artist, the two-time Grammy Award winner has defied categorization, dazzling critics and audiences alike throughout many musical genres.

Stoltzman graduated from Ohio State University with a double major in music and mathematics. He earned his master of music degree at Yale University while studying with Keith Wilson, and later worked toward a doctoral degree with Kalmen Opperman at Columbia University. As a 10-year participant in the Marlboro Music Festival, Stoltzman gained extensive chamber music experience, and subsequently became a founding member of the noted ensemble TASHI, which made its debut in 1973.

Since then, Stoltzman's unique way with the clarinet has earned him an international reputation as he has opened up possibilities for the instrument that no one could have predicted. He gave the first clarinet recitals in the histories of both the Hollywood Bowl and Carnegie Hall, and in 1986, he became the first wind player to be awarded the Avery Fisher Prize. Stoltzman's talents as a jazz performer as well as a classical artist have been heard far beyond his annual tours. He has performed or recorded with such jazz and pop greats as Gary Burton, the Canadian Brass, Chick Corea, Judy Collins, Eddie Gomez, Keith Jarrett, the King's Singers, George Shearing, Wayne Shorter, Mel Tormé, and Spyro Gyra founder Jeremy Wall. His commitment to new music has resulted in the commissioning and premiere of numerous new works for the clarinet, including *Landscape with Blues* by Stephen Hartke (2001), and a new concerto by Einojuhani Rautavaara that premiered in October 2002 with conductor Leonard Slatkin and the National Symphony at the Kennedy Center and Carnegie Hall.

Richard Stoltzman has a discography numbering over 50 releases on BMG/RCA, Sony Classical, MMC, BIS, Albany, and other labels, including a Grammy-winning recording of Brahms sonatas with Richard Goode. Stoltzman's recent releases include *Amber Waves*, a CD of American works, and the trios of Beethoven, Brahms, and Mozart with Emanuel Ax and Yo-Yo Ma, which won Stoltzman his second Grammy Award. Three recent releases include Nielsen, Prokofiev, and Lutoslawski with the Warsaw Philharmonic, conducted by Lawrence Leighton Smith (BMG/RCA); the Skrowaczewski Concerto with the Saarbrücken Radio Orchestra, conducted by the composer (Albany); and three new clarinet concertos with the Seattle Symphony and Gerard Schwarz (MMC). Premiere recordings of Hartke's *Landscape with Blues* and Rautavaara's *Clarinet Concerto* are forthcoming on Naxos and Ondine, respectively, during the 2003–04 season.

The current season begins with Stoltzman performing Mozart with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at Ravinia and at New York's Mostly Mozart Festival, marking his 25th appearance at the Lincoln Center festival. Special 2003–04 celebrations of Einojuhani Rautavaara's 75th birthday will include numerous performances by Stoltzman of the composer's new clarinet concerto throughout the United States, Germany, and Italy, and a celebration of William Thomas McKinley's 65th birthday will bring Stoltzman back to Lincoln Center for a performance of the composer's *Nine*

Shades of Lament, both written for Stoltzman. Additional orchestral appearances span the United States, Canada, Denmark, and Germany. Brahms celebrations with the renowned clarinetist include performances with the Takács, American, and Borromeo string quartets in Berkeley, New York, and Boston, respectively. The Stoltzman family, recently called “New England’s First Family of Classical Music” by WGBH radio in Boston, will appear at the Kennedy Center this season in a program of jazz and classics.

In addition to the Rautavaara concerto premiere performances in Washington (DC), New York, Toronto, London, and Helsinki, Stoltzman’s orchestral concerts in 2002–03 took him around the world with repertoire that ranged from Mozart and Weber to Copland, Bernstein, Takemitsu, Hartke, and McKinley. Other highlights included a joint recital tour with longtime friend, pianist Emanuel Ax; a 12-city tour with the American String Quartet; a return to San Francisco Performances with Lukas Foss, celebrating the pianist/composer’s 80th year; a Benny Goodman tribute with George Mason University’s Metropolitan Jazz Orchestra; and an extended winter holiday tour of Japan.

Stoltzman also continues his commitment as an active board member of Young Audiences, which helps bring music to children of all ages.

Richard Stoltzman, also a Cordon Bleu-trained pastry chef, is the father of two children, Margaret Anne and Peter John, with whom he shares a passion for the Boston Red Sox baseball team. Stoltzman and his wife, Lucy, reside in Massachusetts.

REPRESENTATION

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