

PHILADELPHIA CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

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PREVIEW
NOTES

Takács Quartet

Thursday, March 16 – 7:30 PM

Perelman Theater, Kimmel Center

PROGRAM

Quartet in F Major, Op. 77, No. 2

Franz Joseph Haydn

Born: March 31, 1732, Rohrau, Austria

Died: May 31, 1809, Vienna, Austria

Composed: 1799

Duration: 25 minutes

This is Haydn's final full string quartet. He initially intended to compose the usual six quartets, but the two years he labored on *The Creation* left him no time to complete this commission from Prince Lobkowitz. The later, so-called Opus 103 quartet is merely a two-movement torso. Haydn begins with a disarmingly simple, graceful tune carried by the first violin with minimal accompaniment. This is the first subject and second subject; Haydn keeps elaborating on it. The quartet's inner movements reverse their usual order. Here the *Minuet* comes second. It begins with four bars of rough, irregular peasant dancing, providing all the material for the movement's outer sections. In the middle is a lyrical trio, reminiscent of a lullaby. The brief coda of the *Finale* takes its leave without much ado. Haydn had no idea this would be his last finished quartet, and had no reason to provide a valedictory ending.

Quartet in F Major, Op. 135

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born: December 16, 1770, Bonn, Germany

Died: March 26, 1827, Vienna, Austria

Composed: 1826

Duration: 25 minutes

Beethoven wrote the bulk of his final quartet in a two-month burst of activity after his nephew Karl attempted to commit suicide. But there's not a hint of anguish in this compact, good-natured work. For Beethoven's valedictory composition, this quartet is surprisingly small-scaled, finding inspiration in the quartets of Beethoven's teacher Haydn. The first movement takes standard sonata form, with the principal theme hinting at a march; this, the light textures, and Beethoven's reliance

on very short phrases give the movement a playful nature that is emphasized by Beethoven's abrupt melodic and harmonic shifts and frequent interruptions in mid-phrase. The finale initially seems to be a great, tragic utterance. At the head of the score Beethoven has written, in German, "The difficult decision," and next to the tempo indication are the words "Must It Be?" The cello and viola seem to be asking that question in the introduction, but soon the music breaks into an *Allegro*; here, Beethoven has written "It Must Be!" Those three syllables form the rhythmic basis of the main theme.

Quartet in F Major

Maurice Ravel

Born: March 7, 1875, Ciboure, France

Died: December 28, 1937, Paris, France

Composed: 1902-1903

Duration: 29 minutes

The similarities between Maurice Ravel's only work for string quartet and Claude Debussy's only work for string quartet can hardly be ignored. However, Ravel seems more certain to have relied on Debussy's quartet; as emotionally, psychologically, and even structurally different as the two works are, one could never accuse them of having a language barrier. But, whereas Debussy's quartet is the work of a headstrong progressive still on his way to developing a mature, personal style, Ravel's is the work of an already mature artist more concerned with craftsmanship and traditional structure than with innovation. Not surprisingly, given their relative places in their careers when the two composers wrote their string quartets, Ravel's is the more sound piece of music and Debussy's is the more groundbreaking. In the second movement, which serves as the Quartet's scherzo, Ravel moves into the pizzicato world already explored by Debussy in the scherzo movement of his String Quartet. Bits of music from earlier in the Quartet can be heard, wearing new clothes, in the slow movement; likewise in the finale, which lightens up in the middle, and then ends in a blaze of zeal.