

# WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 15 October 2023  
7.30pm

## Takács Quartet

Edward Dusinberre violin  
Harumi Rhodes violin  
Richard O'Neill viola  
András Fejér cello

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

String Quartet in D Op. 71 No. 2 (1793)

*I. Adagio - Allegro • II. Adagio cantabile •  
III. Menuetto. Allegro • IV. Finale. Allegretto*

Sir Stephen Hough (b.1961)

Les Six Rencontres (2021)

*Au boulevard • Au parc • A l'hôtel •  
Au théâtre • A l'église • Au marché*

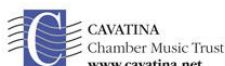
*Interval*

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

String Quartet No. 8 in E minor Op. 59 No. 2 'Razumovsky' (1806)

*I. Allegro • II. Molto adagio •  
III. Allegretto - Maggiore, Thème russe •  
IV. Finale. Presto*

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**Haydn** left his full-time position as Kapellmeister to the Esterházy family in 1790. The following year he was invited by the impresario-violinist Joseph Salomon to tour England and lead concerts of his own music. This was the first occasion on which Haydn experienced his music played for a paying public, rather than in the intimate salons of the nobility. Upon returning to Hungary, Haydn agreed to write six string quartets for Count Anton Apponyi, a relative of the Esterházy. Written in the summer of 1793, the quartets are grouped as two sets of three, Opp. 71 and 74. As a whole they mark a significant change in Haydn's style, since they were written with public performances in mind. They were first performed on return visit to London in 1794 at the Hanover Square Public Rooms with Salomon as first violinist. The move away from the rarified world of the cognoscenti is signalled by several factors: the fast movements are faster and the slow movements are slower than in earlier quartets; the individual parts are written with greater virtuoso panache; and the intricate inner workings that Haydn once delighted in scoring are replaced by grander, more obvious gestures. The String Quartet in D Op. 71 No. 2 opens with an ear-catching motif and the development section is somewhat truncated. Perhaps with Salomon's gifts as violinist in mind, it is the first violin that introduces the second movement, which utilises an A-B-A tripartite structure to explore adventurous harmonies to telling effect. The third movement may be indicated as *Menuetto*, but is actually a scherzo in all but name. The work closes with a dashing *Finale* that once again draws upon the first violinist's virtuosity to a great extent.

**Sir Stephen Hough** is best known as one of today's foremost international concert pianists. For several years he has been active as a composer and has written commissioned works for numerous ensembles and orchestras. *Les Six Rencontres*, Hough's first string quartet, was written for the Takács Quartet in 2021 as a companion piece to Ravel's String Quartet in F and Dutilleul's *Ainsi la nuit*. In reviewing the Takács Quartet recording of the work on the Hyperion label, *BBC Music Magazine* found Hough to be 'an unmistakably individual and convincing voice'. Within the brief movements Hough presents imaginary encounters in various settings with each of the members of *Les Six* who were active in Paris in the 1920s (the members were Poulenc, Honegger, Milhaud, Auric, Durey and Tailleferre). Hough's aim, whilst not directly quoting each composer, is 'to evoke a flavour more than a style' from the lingering aftermath of each encounter, thereby exploring 'not so much what united their musical languages but what was absent from them'.

Hough has commented on each of the movements as follows. *Au boulevard* contains 'Stravinskian spikes [that] elbow across the four instruments, with jagged accents, darting arpeggios and bracing white-note harmonies ... the main theme is suddenly transformed

into technicolor for the central section, blushed with sentiment and exactly half-tempo.' *Au parc* features 'a gentle, melancholy melody [which] floats under a pizzicato accompaniment and is passed around the players in a haze of decorative variations'. *A l'hôtel* opens with 'a bustling fugato, its short subject incorporating repeated notes, an arpeggio and a scale' and ends with 'offbeat, snapping chords in pursuit'. *Au théâtre's* skeletal motif 'dances in a recurring harmonic sequence, decorated with each repetition in more and more lurid colours, smeared with lipstick glissandos', then the viola changes the mood, 'pushing the music forward to a splashing climax', followed by a despairing reprise and a conciliatory close. *A l'église* is a 'serene hymn' played on muted strings, whilst *Au marché* recalls earlier musical material; in so doing it provides both a sense of unity and closure to the work.

**Beethoven's** String Quartet No. 8 in E minor Op. 59 No. 2 'Razumovsky' is the second of three quartets he wrote for Prince Razumovsky, who was then Russian ambassador to Vienna. Anton Schindler, Beethoven's biographer, characterised Razumovsky as 'a practicing musician and an upholder of the Haydn tradition'. He would often play second violin at musical gatherings within his palace, which were the most exclusive assemblies of the day. Razumovsky established a permanent quartet of professional musicians in 1807, the year after the three Op. 59 quartets were commissioned. Joseph Kerman has opined that the 'Op. 59 [set] doomed the amateur string quartet' due to their technical demands. Written after the Symphony No. 3 in E flat Op. 55 'Eroica', the first quartet in the set shared the symphony's expansive quality, but the E minor Op. 59 No. 2 work is altogether different. Almost uniquely amongst Beethoven's works, all four movements explore the same key note.

The first movement is brusquely announced with two loud chords, a feature reminiscent of Haydn's later quartets. Thereafter, pianissimo phrases drift into silence more than once and a palpable sense of nervous tension pervades the movement, as if Beethoven is uncertain of how the music should proceed, before the first violin finally provides the impetus for a sense of purposeful direction. The second movement, acknowledged as one of Beethoven's finest in the genre, is serenity itself. The third movement includes a concession to Razumovsky's Russian background, as the trio section includes a Russian tune, 'Glory to the Sun', that Beethoven found in a collection of folksong arrangements. Musorgsky and Rachmaninov would later employ the same tune. The fourth movement eventually lands in the key of E minor after beginning in C major. An accelerating tempo lends the quartet humorous positivity and a sense of unity.

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