



presents...

Shenson Chamber Series

CASTALIAN STRING QUARTET

Sini Simonen | Violin
Daniel Roberts | Violin

Ruth Gibson | Viola*
Steffan Morris | Cello

* Natalie Loughran has graciously agreed to perform with the Castalian String Quartet during Ruth Gibson's maternity leave.

STEPHEN HOUGH | Piano

Tuesday, March 5, 2024 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

HAYDN

String Quartet in F Minor, Opus 20, No. 5

Allegro moderato
Menuetto
Adagio
Finale: Fuga a due soggetti

HOUGH

String Quartet No. 1 (Les Six Rencontres)

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

INTERMISSION

BRAHMS

Piano Quintet in F Minor, Opus 34

Allegro non troppo

Andante, un poco adagio

Scherzo: Allegro

Finale: Poco sostenuto; Allegro non troppo

**The Shenson Chamber Series is made possible by Fred M. Levin,
The Shenson Foundation.**

**This program is made possible in part by the generous support of Robert and Ruth Dell & Bruce
and Carolyn Lowenthal.**

The **Castalian String Quartet** is represented by David Rowe Artists davidroweartists.com

Stephen Hough is represented by CM Artists
127 W 96th Street, #13B New York, NY 10025 cmartists.com

Yamaha CFX 9' Concert Grand Piano provided by Yamaha Artist Services, New York



ARTIST PROFILES

SF Performances presents the Castalian String Quartet for the second time. The ensemble first appeared in November 2021.

San Francisco Performances presents Stephen Hough for the seventh time. He made his first appearance in February 1991.

Since its formation in 2011, the London-based **Castalian String Quartet** has distinguished itself as one of the most dynamic, sophisticated young string quartets performing today. They are an Artist in Residence at the Wigmore Hall in London and are the inaugural Hans Keller String Quartet in Residence at the Oxford University Faculty of Music. They are also the recipient of the Royal Philharmonic Society's 2019 Young Artists Award.

The Castalian String Quartet will tour North America in the 2023–24 season with performances in Dallas, San Francisco, Louisville, Chicago, Houston, and many other cities. Another highlight will be their collaboration with pianist Stephen Hough, who will join them for concerts in Costa Mesa, Carmel and Napa, CA; New York, NY; Rockport, MA; and Washington, D.C.

The Quartet works with many living composers, including recent premieres of works by Mark-Anthony Turnage, Charlotte Bray, and Edmund Finnis. They have also established a strong presence abroad, with performances of the complete Haydn Op.76 Quartets at Wigmore Hall; at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Berlin Philharmonic, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, Paris Philharmonie, Vienna Konzerthaus, Montreal's Salle Bourgie, Carnegie Hall, the Spoleto USA Festival, and the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. They have played at the Heidelberger Frühling, East Neuk, Kuhmo, Edinburgh, Lockenhaus, and Banff International Festivals. Further afield,

they undertook tours of China and Colombia.

In spring 2022, the Castalian String Quartet released its first recording, *Between Two Worlds* (Delphian), featuring works by Thomas Adès, Beethoven, and first violinist Sini Simonen's own arrangements of early works by Orlando de Lassus and John Dowland.

The Castalian String Quartet studied with Oliver Wille (Kuss Quartet) at the Hannover University of Music, Drama and Media, graduating with a master's degree. In addition to the above, awards include Third Prize at the 2016 Banff Quartet Competition and First Prize at the 2015 Lyon Chamber Music Competition. The Quartet was selected by Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) in 2016. They have received coaching from Simon Rowland-Jones, David Waterman and Isabel Charisius.

Their name is derived from the Castalian Spring in the ancient city of Delphi. According to Greek mythology, the nymph Castalia transformed herself into a fountain to evade Apollo's pursuit, thus creating a source of poetic inspiration for all who drink from her waters.

Named by *The Economist* as one of **Twenty Living Polymaths**, **Sir Stephen Hough** combines a distinguished career as a pianist and a longstanding international career with those of composer and writer. He was the first classical performer to be given a MacArthur Fellowship. In 2022 as part of the Queen's Birthday Honours, Hough became the first British-born pianist since 1977 to be awarded a Knighthood for Services to Music.

In a career spanning 40 years, Hough has played solo recitals and concertos with leading orchestras at major concert halls and festivals across five continents. Celebrating Rachmaninov's 150th anniversary in 2023, Hough performed the composer's



five works for piano and orchestra, including his 30th appearance at the BBC Proms performing *Piano Concerto No. 1* with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra and a complete cycle in Brazil as the Artist in Residence of Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo. Additional recent and upcoming engagements include return appearances with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam, Orchestre National de France, London Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony, Finnish Radio and the Seoul Philharmonic as well as the National Symphony at the Kennedy Center, the New York Philharmonic and the Minnesota Orchestra, and the St. Louis, Cincinnati, Detroit, Dallas and Houston symphonies in the US.

2024 sees the premiere of Hough's own piano concerto, entitled *The World of Yesterday*, inspired by Stefan Zweig's novel *The World of Yesterday*. Jointly commissioned by four orchestras, the concerto receives its World Premiere in Salt Lake City in January 2024 with Hough as the soloist performing with the Utah Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Donald Runnicles. The European premiere takes place at Bridgewater Hall in Manchester in May 2024 with The Hallé under Sir Mark Elder.

As a solo recitalist, Hough opens Wigmore Hall's 2023–24 season in London, as well as in cities including Beijing, Mexico City, San Francisco, New York, Seoul and Shanghai. In March 2024, Hough and the Castalian String Quartet embark on a six-city US tour, including New York and Washington DC, performing the Brahms *Piano Quintet* and Hough's own *String Quartet No.1 Les Six Rencontres*.

Hough's extensive discography of around 70 CDs has garnered internation-

al awards including the Diapason d'Or de l'Année, several Grammy nominations, and eight Gramophone Awards including Record of the Year and the Gold Disc. Recent releases for Hyperion, now available to stream, include Beethoven's complete piano concertos (Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra/Hannu Lintu), *Brahms: The Final Piano Pieces*, *Chopin: Nocturnes [Complete]*, a Schumann recital, *Schubert Piano Sonatas*, and Mompou's *Música Callada*. For Warner Classics, Hough recorded Elgar's Violin Sonata with Renaud Capuçon and an album of his choral music was released in 2023 on Orchid Records.

As a composer, Hough has written extensively for the voice and the piano. His most recent song cycle, *Songs of Love and Loss*, co-commissioned by Wigmore Hall, the 92nd Street Y in New York and Tippet Rise in Montana, received its world premiere in January 2023. He wrote the commissioned work for the 2022 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, which was performed by all 30 competitors and Hough's *String Quartet No.1 Les Six Rencontres*, commissioned and premiered by the Takács Quartet, was released by Hyperion Records in January 2023. Hough has also been commissioned by Musée du Louvre, London's National Gallery, Westminster Abbey, Westminster Cathedral, the Genesis Foundation, Gilmore International Keyboard Festival, the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation, Orquesta Sinfónica de Euskadi and the Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet. His music is published by Josef Weinberger Ltd.

As an author, Hough's memoir *Enough: Scenes from Childhood*, was published by Faber & Faber in Spring 2023. It follows his collection of essays *Rough Ideas: Reflections on Music and More* (Faber & Faber, 2019)—a 2020 Royal Philharmonic Society Award winner and one of *Financial Times'* Book of the Year 2019—as well as his first novel, *The Final Retreat* (Sylph Editions, 2018). He has also been published by *The New York Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, *The Guardian*, and the *Evening Standard*. Hough is an Honorary Member of the Royal Philharmonic Society, a Visiting Professor at the Royal Academy of Music, holds the International Chair of Piano Studies at the Royal Northern College of Music, and is on the faculty of The Juilliard School in New York.

PROGRAM NOTES

String Quartet in F Minor, Opus 20, No. 5

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN
(1732–1809)

In 1772 Haydn completed the six quartets that he would publish as his Opus 20, but listeners should not be misled by that low opus number—these quartets are the work of an experienced composer. When he wrote them, Haydn was 40 years old, he had been kapellmeister to the Esterházy family for over a decade, and he had composed nearly 50 symphonies. Now he set out to transform the entire conception of the string quartet.

The string quartet had begun as an entertainment form, usually as a multi-movement work of light character intended as background music at social occasions. The original title of this form—*divertimento*—made clear that this music was intended as a diversion. Haydn in fact published the six quartets of his Opus 20 under the title *Divertimenti*, but already he had re-imagined the nature of the string quartet. No longer was it entertainment music content to remain in the background—Haydn made it a concise form, capable of an unusual range of expression. He reduced the number of movements to four, liberated all four voices (particularly the cello), and built the music around taut motivic development. The evolution of the form, though, was not simply a matter of newly-refined technique—it was also a matter of a new depth of expression. Haydn brought to his Opus 20 all his recent growth as a composer, and some have heard the influence of his symphonic thinking in this music. When the Opus 20 quartets were published in 1772, the publisher prefaced the set with a handsome illustration of the rising sun, and as a result they are sometimes known as the “Sun” Quartets. That is a fortuitous nickname, because these quartets do represent the beginning of a new era in quartet-writing.

The *Quartet in F Minor* is a particularly good example of Haydn's new conception of the form. Three of its four movements are in a minor key, and—throughout—this music is marked by a seriousness of expression and a tautness of construction. The opening of the *Allegro moderato* may flow smoothly, but it remains resolutely in F minor, and the concise second subject does little to alter the somber spirit of the opening. The lengthy development and

recapitulation are rounded off with a substantial coda that drives to a sudden (and surprisingly subdued) close.

In the classical period the minuet movement was usually an elegant dance-interlude, but the *Menuetto* of this quartet sustains the spirit of the opening movement—it remains in F minor and powers forward implacably. Its trio section, in F major, projects a flash of sunshine across an otherwise dark landscape.

The atmosphere changes perceptibly at the *Adagio*, which moves to F major and relaxes slightly. It is built on a dotted 6/8 meter, and its easy flow of melody swings gracefully along that old *siciliano* rhythm. The first violin part grows more ornate as the movement proceeds until it soars high above the other three instruments.

The *Finale* returns to the spirit (and key) of the opening two movements, but now Haydn intensifies the atmosphere by casting this movement as a fugue built on two subjects. The second violin announces the first fugue subject, which Haydn might seem to have borrowed from another composer: it echoes the chorus “And with his stripes” from Handel's *Messiah* (the problem with this theory, though, is that at this point Haydn had not heard the music of Handel). Even as this subject is being stated, the viola presents the second subject. Haydn's contrapuntal writing here is sharp-edged and closely argued: he combines his two subjects, presents them in canon and upside down, and at one point offers both subjects simultaneously.

String Quartet No. 1 (Les Six Rencontres)

STEPHEN HOUGH
(B. 1961)

This piece was conceived after an invitation from the Takács Quartet: to write a companion work for a recording of the quartets of Ravel and Dutilleux. It was a thrilling if daunting challenge and it gave me an immediate idea as I considered these two colossi who strode across the length of the 20th century—not so much what united their musical languages but what was absent from them, not to mention the missing decades between the Ravel Quartet of 1903 and Dutilleux's *Ainsi la Nuit* from the mid-1970s.

The term ‘*Les Six*’, referring to the group of six French composers most prominently active around the interwar years, evokes a flavor more than a style—and it's a flavor rarely found in the music of Ravel and Dutilleux. In

Les Six it's not so much a lack of seriousness, although seeing life through a burlesque lens is one recurring ingredient; rather it's an aesthetic re-view of the world after the catastrophe of the Great War. Composers like Poulenc and Milhaud were able to discover poignance in the rough and tumble of daily human life in a way which escaped the fastidiousness of those other two composers. Stravinsky, one of the godfathers of *Les Six*, supposedly referred to Ravel as "the most perfect, Swiss watchmaker." Poulenc and his party could never be accused of being clock-watchers; their social hours were dimly lit by sputtering candles as the parties continued through the night, with Jean Cocteau or Picasso (other godfathers) opening yet another bottle of Bordeaux.



The subtitle for my *Quartet No. 1* has in it a pun and a puzzle: the six movements as an echo of 'Les Six,' although there are no quotes or direct references from those composers; and 'encounters' which are unspecified, their phantom occurrence leaving only a trace in the memory of the places where the meetings might have taken place.

I) **Au boulevard.** Stravinskian spikes elbow across the four instruments, with jagged accents, darting arpeggios and bracing white-note harmonies. Indeed, no sharps or flats appear until bar 35 when the main theme is suddenly transformed into technicolor for the central section, blushed with sentiment, and exactly half-tempo.

II) **Au parc.** Under a pizzicato accompaniment a gentle, melancholy melody floats and is passed around the players in a haze of decorative variations, the central section warming the trope like vermouth around a bitter olive.

III) **A l'hôtel.** A bustling *fugato*, its short subject incorporating repeated notes, an arpeggio and a scale, patters in metronomic conversation until it suddenly finds itself swept off its feet on a decadent dance floor. It is soon exhausted and the opening material returns, now inverted and condensed, until a hectic coda hurries the theme through many keys with offbeat, snapping chords in pursuit.

IV) **Au théâtre.** A *spiccatissimo* skeleton of a motive dances in a recurring harmonic sequence, decorated with each repetition in more and more lurid colours, smeared with lipstick *glissandos*. Then comes a sudden change of mood with the viola's plangent 'amoroso' melody pushing the music forward to a splashing climax. The swirls of arpeggios segue to ferocious tremolos underneath the 1st violin's 'piangendo' state-

ment of the opening theme. As the music totters on the edge of despair there is a meltdown into a coda of consolation where the viola reimagines the opening skeleton theme in smooth, consoling D-flat major.

V) **A l'église.** We remain in D-flat major for this serene hymn which is sewn together into one four-part seam across the con sordino instruments—with a glance perhaps back to Ravel's teacher, Gabriel Fauré.

VI) **Au marché.** This whole movement energetically tosses material from one player to the other in a *moto perpetuo* of exuberance. Material from the rest of the piece reappears (most prominently the harmonic progression from the central section of the second movement) until the work ends as it began with the first movement's Stravinskian spikes, interrupted in the penultimate bar with a *feroce* quote of the opening of the third movement.

© Stephen Hough

Quintet for Piano and Strings in F Minor, Opus 34

JOHANNES BRAHMS
(1833-1897)

Brahms began work on the music that would eventually become his *Piano Quintet in F Minor* during the summer of 1862, when he was 29 years old and still living in Hamburg. As first conceived, however, this music was not a piano quintet. Brahms originally composed it as a string quintet—string quartet plus an extra cello—and almost surely he took as a model the great *String Quintet in C Major* of Schubert, a composer he very much admired. But when Joseph Joachim and colleagues played through the string quintet for the composer, all who heard it felt it unsatisfactory: an ensemble of strings alone could not satisfactorily project the power of this music. So Brahms set out to remedy this—he returned to the score during the winter of 1863-64 and recast it as a sonata for two pianos. Once again the work was judged not wholly successful—it had all the power the music called for, but this version lacked the sustained sonority possible with strings that much of this music seemed to demand. Among those confused by the two-piano version was Clara Schumann, who offered the young composer a completely different suggestion: "Its skillful combinations are interesting throughout, it is masterly from every point of view, but—it is not a sonata, but a work whose ideas you might—and must—scatter, as from a horn of plenty, over

an entire orchestra...Please, dear Johannes, for this once take my advice and recast it."

Recast it Brahms did, but not for orchestra. Instead, during the summer and fall of 1864 he arranged it for piano and string quartet, combining the dramatic impact of the two-piano version with the string sonority of the original quintet. In this form it has come down to us today, one of the masterpieces of Brahms' early years, and it remains a source of wonder that music that sounds so *right* in its final version could have been conceived for any other combination of instruments. Clara, who had so much admired her husband's piano quintet, found Brahms' example a worthy successor, describing it as "a very special joy to me" (Brahms published the two-piano version as his Opus 34b, and it is occasionally heard in this form, but he destroyed all the parts of the string quintet version).

The *Piano Quintet* shows the many virtues of the young Brahms—strength, lyricism, ingenuity, nobility—and presents them in music of unusual breadth and power. This is big music: if all the repeats are taken, the *Quintet* can stretch out to nearly three-quarters of an hour, and there are moments when the sheer sonic heft of a piano and string quartet together makes one understand why Clara thought this music might be most effectively presented by a symphony orchestra.

The *Quintet* is also remarkable for young Brahms' skillful evolution of his themes: several of the movements derive much of their material from the simplest of figures, which are then developed ingeniously. The very beginning of the *Allegro non troppo* is a perfect illustration. In octaves, first violin, cello, and piano present the opening theme, which ranges dramatically across four measures and then comes to a brief pause. Instantly the music seems to explode with vitality above an agitated piano figure. But the piano's rushing sixteenth notes are simply a restatement of the opening theme at a much faster tempo, and this compression of material marks the entire movement—that opening theme will reappear in many different forms. A second subject in E major, marked *dolce* and sung jointly by viola and cello, also spins off a wealth of secondary material, and the extended development leads to a quiet coda, marked *poco sostenuto*. The tempo quickens as the music powers its way to the resounding chordal close.

In sharp contrast, the *Andante, un poco Adagio* sings with a quiet charm. The piano's gently-rocking opening theme, lightly

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echoed by the strings, gives way to a more animated and flowing middle section before the opening material reappears, now subtly varied. Matters change sharply once again with the C-minor *Scherzo*, which returns to the dramatic mood of the first movement. The cello's ominous pizzicato C hammers insistently throughout, and once again Brahms wrings surprising wealth from the simplest of materials: a nervous, stuttering sixteenth note figure is transformed within seconds into a heroic chorale for massed strings, and later Brahms generates a brief fugal section

from this same theme. The trio section breaks free of the darkness of the scherzo and slips into C major for an all-too-brief moment of quiet nobility before the music returns to C minor and a da capo repeat.

The finale opens with strings alone, reaching upward in chromatic uncertainty before the *Allegro non troppo* main theme steps out firmly in the cello. The movement seems at first to be a rondo, but this is a rondo with unexpected features: it offers a second theme, sets the rondo theme in unexpected keys, and transforms the cello's healthy little opening tune in music of toughness and turbulence.

Clara Schumann, who had received the dedication of her husband's quintet, was

instrumental in the dedication of Brahms'. Princess Anna of Hesse had heard Brahms and Clara perform this music in its version for two pianos and was so taken with it that Brahms dedicated not only that version to the princess but the *Piano Quintet* as well. When the princess asked Clara what she might send Brahms as a measure of her gratitude, Clara had a ready suggestion. And so Princess Anna sent Brahms a treasure that would remain his prized possession for the rest of his life: Mozart's manuscript of the *Symphony No. 40 in G Minor*.

—Haydn and Brahms program notes
by Eric Bromberger