

## Takács Quartet review – sheer aural pleasure

5/5 stars

### Wigmore Hall, London

A new second violin in no way diminishes the quartet's astounding unanimity and meticulous attention to detail – as this programme of Tchaikovsky and Brahms showed



Almost telepathic command ... Takács Quartet, with new second violin Harumi Rhodes, far right. Photograph: Glenn J Asakawa/University of Colorado

No ensembles have more delicately balanced constitutions, musical and psychological, than string quartets. Finding a new member for a long established group and integrating them successfully is a tricky process for everyone involved, and when that group is arguably the greatest string quartet in the world, it must seem more daunting still. But, at the end of last month, [Harumi Rhodes](#) took over as second violin of the [Takács Quartet](#), replacing [Károly Schranz](#), who had been a member of the group since it was founded in 1975. His departure means that only the cellist [András Fejér](#) remains from the original lineup.

The first work Rhodes played in her new role was Tchaikovsky's string sextet *Souvenirs de Florence*, and the same piece took up the first half of the Takács's latest Wigmore programme, paired with another sextet, Brahms's Op 36 in G. Two British-based players, violist Louise Williams and cellist Pál Banda, joined the group for the concert, to create that wonderfully rich sound unique to a string sextet, a luxuriance that Brahms's and Tchaikovsky's successors, such as Schoenberg (in *Verklärte Nacht*) and Richard Strauss (the introduction to his final opera *Capriccio*), exploited so wonderfully, too.

But as well as the sheer aural pleasure, it was fascinating to hear the supreme virtues of the Takács's music-making transferred so effortlessly to the larger ensemble; how in both works the six players combined the same meticulous attention to detail, instinctive ebb and flow of tension, and almost telepathic command, which regularly marks out the quartet's performances.

Even playing of this quality could not always disguise the unevenness of the Tchaikovsky, with its intensely driven opening movement (in which leader Edward Dusinberre's touches of portamento brought just the right amount of sentimentality to the second subject) and the unfettered melodic invention of the adagio, which is followed by two movements that really just go through the motions. The Brahms, though, has no such weaknesses, and everything in it flowed easily, right from the relaxed, whisper-quiet way with which the opening allegro was launched, to the helter-skelter of the finale's coda, which provided a last demonstration of astounding unanimity.

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Tue 22 May 2018 15.06 BST Last modified on Wed 23 May 2018 22.00 BST



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