



presents...

TAKÁCS QUARTET

Edward Dusinberre | Violin
Harumi Rhodes | Violin

Richard O'Neill | Viola
András Fejér | Cello

JULIEN LABRO | Accordion and Bandoneón

Thursday, March 17, 2022 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

BRYCE DESSNER **Circles** (*commissioned by MusicAccord*)

JULIEN LABRO **Meditation #1**

*Julien Labro, bandoneón
Takács Quartet*

DINO SALUZZI **Minguito**

J.S. BACH **Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme, BWV 645**

JULIEN LABRO **Astoración**

Julien Labro, bandoneón & accordina

MAURICE RAVEL **String Quartet in F Major**
Allegro moderato - très doux
Assez vif—très rythmé
Très lent
Vif et agité

Takács Quartet

CLARICE ASSAD **Clash** (*commissioned by MusicAccord*)

*Julien Labro, bandoneón
Takács Quartet*

The **Takács Quartet** appears by arrangement with Seldy Cramer Artists, and records for Hyperion and Decca/London Records.

The **Takács Quartet** is Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Colorado in Boulder and are Associate Artists at Wigmore Hall, London. takacsquartet.com

Julien Labro plays a custom made bandoneón by Bandonion Fabrik, and an accordina by Marcel Dreux. julienlabro.com



ARTIST PROFILES

San Francisco Performances presents the **Takács Quartet** for the sixth time. They first appeared in October 2010.

Julien Labro made his *SF Performances*' debut in October 2017 with guitarist Jason Vieaux.

Recent winners of the Gramophone Classical Music Awards 2021, Chamber category, the world-renowned **Takács Quartet**, is now entering its forty-seventh season. Edward Dusinberre, Harumi Rhodes (violins), Richard O'Neill (viola) and András Fejér (cello) are excited to bring to fruition several innovative projects for the 2021–22 season. With bandoneón/accordion virtuoso Julien Labro, the group will perform throughout the U.S. new works composed for them by Clarice Assad and Bryce Dessner. This season also marks the world premiere of a new quartet written for the Takács by Stephen Hough, *Les Six Rencontres*. The Takács will record this extraordinary work for Hyperion Records, in combination with quartets by Ravel and Dutilleux.

During the last year, the Takács marked the arrival of Grammy®-award-winning violist, Richard O'Neill by making two new recordings for Hyperion. Quartets by Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel and Felix Mendelssohn were released in the Fall of 2021, followed in 2022 by a disc of Haydn's opp. 42, 77 and 103.

The Takács Quartet continues its role in 2021–22 as Associate Artists at London's Wigmore Hall, performing four concerts

there this season. In addition to many concerts in the U.K., the ensemble will play at prestigious European venues including the Paris Philharmonie, Berlin Konzerthaus, and Teatro Della Pergola, Florence. The Takács will perform throughout North America, including concerts in New York, Boston, Washington DC, Princeton, Ann Arbor, Berkeley, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Vancouver, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Cleveland, and Portland.

Based in Boulder at the University of Colorado, the members of the Takács Quartet are Christoffersen Faculty Fellows. During the summer the members of the Takács are on the faculty at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, where they run an intensive summer string quartet seminar.



Heralded as “the next accordion star,” **Julien Labro** has established himself as the foremost accordion and bandoneón

player in both the classical and jazz genres. Deemed to be “a triple threat: brilliant technician, poetic melodist and cunning arranger,” his artistry, virtuosity, and creativity as a musician, composer and arranger have earned him international acclaim and continue to astonish audiences worldwide.

Labro's musical journey has taken him all across North and South America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. His long list of classical collaborations includes A Far Cry, Spektral Quartet, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of St Luke's, New World Symphony, the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra, and the New York City Ballet to name a few. A frequent guest soloist of symphonies, Labro has also written for numerous chamber ensembles, from quartets to full orchestra.

Labro has worked and premiered works by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Du Yun, Bryce Dessner, Angélica Negrón, Clarice Assad, Ethan Iverson, and Avner Dor-man. He has collaborated and shared the stage with the likes of Cassandra Wilson, Maria Schneider, Anat Cohen, João Donato, Marcel Khalife, Paquito D'Rivera, Pablo Ziegler, Uri Caine, Miguel Zenón, James Carter, John Clayton, guitarists Jason Vieaux, Larry Coryell, Tommy Emmanuel, and John and Bucky Pizzarelli.

PROGRAM NOTES

Happy Little Collisions

“I'll play it first, and tell you what it is later.”

—Miles Davis

What ferried you through the disenchantments of lockdown? For me it was, at age 42, playing make-believe with other grown men. Well, that and *The Great British Baking Show*, if I'm being honest. Our weekly Dungeons & Dragons-esque game quickly led to an obsession with the accompanying artwork, which led me to begging one such artist to perform the ultimate heresy by painting a wizardly scene on the back of my newly commissioned 5-string violin.

Boy, this program note went sideways quickly.

The point I am circling by over-sharing my pandemic proclivities is this: without risk, art will atrophy. The program that you are about to experience, featuring the superlative Takács Quartet and the dauntless bandoneón virtuoso Julien Labro...

the thing is...no one actually knew what it would sound like until the tickets were already purchased, and the programs printed. This is quite profound when you really consider it. We perhaps tend to think of western classical music concerts at this level as thoroughly vetted, polished objects during which the greatest uncertainty is, say, whether or not an untended cell phone gets frisky.

What if a concert is not a culmination, but an experiment? What if it could give you the same nervy thrill as watching literally any gymnast eschew rationality by mounting a balance beam? Would knowing that the performers could be just as surprised at the outcome as you make this feel more like a shared experience than a one-way transmission? I'm not suggesting that most or even many concerts are safe, pre-determined events. After all, inherent to all live performance is the possibility for an encounter with the unexpected. For instance, an encounter between a Wendy and a wall during a production of *Peter Pan*...

So, how did this particular constellation of pieces before you—this fetching confluence of sonic flavors—first come into orbit? Borrowing from the immortal sagacity of Bob Ross, some of it can be chalked up to “happy little accidents.” Allow me to illustrate with an excerpt from a recent conversation I had with your bandoneón soloist this evening, recounting his being approached by Music Accord to commission new works for his instrument and string quartet:

“Julien: *So the consortium came back and asked me if I had a particular string quartet in mind, and I told them, ‘Not really. Let’s just go with whoever is first on your list.’*”

“Doyle: *And you end up paired with one of the greatest string quartets in the known universe?*”

Julien: *Yeah. It was pretty sick.”*

Pretty, pretty sick, indeed. With a veritable dream team assembled and determined that the project propel this combination of instruments beyond the realm of concert hall tango (as popularized by Astor Piazzolla and the Kronos Quartet some 30 years ago), Julien turned to names already inhabiting his phone's contact list. Enamored of the wondrous music of composer/performer Clarice Assad—in fact, already in process on another commission with her on the West Coast—he followed her affirmative response with a call to compos-

er/performer Bryce Dessner. The two had initially met when Bryce invited Julien to guest on his soundtrack to the 2019 film, *The Two Popes*, and a mutual admiration society was formed.

All previous skylarking on my part notwithstanding, here is the crux of the matter, friends. The flirtations with, and solicitations of, The Unexpected referenced above is, in the context of this show, not about wardrobe malfunctions or fickle pyrotechnics. It's about a deliberate choice to palm a handful of multi-hued Mentos (for our purposes: Assad, Dessner, Bach, Saluzzi, Ravel, and Labro) and funnel them into a 2-liter bottle of Coke (this concert), knowing full well that the result will be meteoric and magnificent. *The crux of the crux* is that in the case of both of Music Accord's commissions, Julien insisted the composers write the pieces *they* wanted to write, rather than confining them to a theme or prompt. You're about to witness what's been consuming and inspiring these artists at this particular moment in time.

Is the same part of your brain that lights up for Arvo Pärt starting to flicker as you wind through the hypnotic revolutions of *Circles*? After the show, ask Bryce if he's a fan and throw me under the bus without mercy if his answer is anything short of, “Fratres for life.”

Regarding *Clash*, Clarice shared with me that 2020–21—or as she put it, “A turbulent period brought on by a world health crisis, social distancing, the collapse of the economy, riots, and political turmoil”—provided the combustibles that fueled her writing. Do moments in this score resemble human speech to your ears...specifically not of the friendly variety? In what proximity are your shoulders to your ears at the conclusion of this one?

Julien was also fascinated with human interaction for his *Astoración* in which he conjures up a dialogue between his instrument and a historic interview with bandoneón grandmaster Astor Piazzolla. Allow yourself to go on a scavenger hunt, seeking out the inventive ways in which Julien interacts with the cadence and melodic contours of Piazzolla's voice. You might also take the opportunity of *Meditation No. 1* to ponder the sublime or, if you're in a mood, contemplate the saintly journey of the bandoneón from budget church organ to brothel superstar.

The two pieces that I expect may surprise you most memorably, though, are the two most familiar to classical concert halls. How will J.S. Bach's near-ubiquitous *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* transform

when emboldened by the sometimes defiant, at times ambrosial, timbres of the bandoneón in this work? Even more provocatively, doesn't the Ravel sound as though it just enjoyed a particularly successful Queer Eye makeover? Not an improvement, to be clear, but an alluring re-contextualization, say, on the order of a dapper beard trim or the addition of some truly daring accent pillows. Takács has something to say to you, something profound, with their stirring interpretation of this iconic work. What I'd like to suggest is that you also listen intently for what these pieces are saying to *one another*.

I'm quite jealous of you, about to supervise all these compositional first dates. I can almost hear the din of anticipatory butterflies from here. What a brilliant collision of creativity and world-class playing you've treated yourself to today. I leave you with a salient provocation from composer John Cage, a collision himself between brilliance and, well, sometimes being just kind of a tool, but in this case exclusively the former:

“The act of listening is in fact an act of composing.”

I can't wait to hear what you come up with.

—Program note by Doyle Armbrust

A Word From The Composers

Circles (2021)

BRYCE DESSNER
(B. 1976)

I was fortunate to meet the wonderful bandoneón/accordion player Julien Labro a few years ago while I was composing the music for the Fernando Mereilles film, *The Two Popes*. I wrote a lot of music for Julien to play and was completely blown away in the studio by his exceptional musicianship and virtuosity. He seems to literally be able to do anything. So, when the chance to compose for him and the equally wonderful Takács Quartet came, I was very happy to write a new piece.

Circles is my composition for their quintet and is a simple idea that I wrote during the many months of lockdown in France due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. This piece was an expression of the creative process slowly starting to turn again, each individual voice searching for a line and searching for one another and eventually falling into a pattern or dance together, which weaves

in and out of this collective rhythm and individualist polyphony. This theme of the individual versus the collective voice is something I have been exploring a lot in my work, especially when writing for a soloist. What does it mean to write for the individual, is it not more important what we have to say as a group—the voice of many as opposed to the voice of one? And in this case, I have left quite a lot of information out of the score, to encourage the players of the quartet and Julien to find their own expressions and dynamics, to bring their own voice to these skeletal notes.

Meditation #1 (2021)

JULIEN LABRO
(B. 1980)

Meditation #1 is the first of a series of forthcoming pieces for bandoneón and string quartet that was composed as a way to create a space that allows for escape from the chaos that often envelopes us. In dealing with the tumultuous events over the past year, I started a habit of waking up early in the morning and preserving small windows of time for myself before allowing the craziness of the world to descend upon me. This series captures and reflects these precious moments in time, without disruptions from news outlets, social me-

dia, phones, etc. where I was able to escape into an oasis that opened a new window for peace and creativity.

Astoración (2021)

Astoración is an imagined duet and conversation with Nuevo Tango master Astor Piazzolla. I discovered his music at age 12 and it changed my life. It enlightened me that music was not only about written notes on a page but a mean of expression. His passionate music moved me like none other and he became one of my biggest inspirations. I always dreamt that perhaps one day I could thank him in person, but fate decided otherwise as Piazzolla passed away in July of 1992, the same month and year I discovered his music.

Clash (2021)

CLARICE ASSAD
(B. 1978)

I modeled the composition on imaginary friction between two human beings, basing much of the musical material and phrasing in human speech and predictability on human behavior, such as behavioral matching and contrast. Emotions influence language, and as listeners, we react to the speaker's emotional state, later

adapting our behavior depending on what emotions the speaker transmits. On one side we have a person who argues, throws violent insults, interrupts, and yells—and on the other side, another who either retaliates or retreats, appeals to guilt, pleads, and indulges in over-sentimentalism. These are constant themes in this work.

Episodic in nature, *Clash* gravitates towards tension more than understanding, though such moments happen periodically, as, for every conflict, there must be a resolution. Moments of peace and agreement in this work are musical passages of a quasi-diplomatic character; they act either as neutral or pleading intercessors between escalating clashes of willfulness and stubbornness.

I wrote *Clash* between 2020 and 2021, a turbulent period for many, brought by a world health crisis, social distancing, the collapse of the economy, riots, and political turmoil—stressful occurrences with one central theme at its core: Conflict. This piece explores states of discord such as struggle, disagreement, dispute, and division.

The music travels through obvious fiery passages of dissonance vs. consonance and tackles indirect moments of discordance: The idea of not being heard while speaking; bursts of anger forcefully making the other party either retaliate or retreat.