



# Alexander String Quartet with Robert Greenberg

DECEMBER 1, 2024 | 2:00PM  
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We should take a moment to acknowledge the land on which we are gathered. For thousands of years, this land has been the home of Patwin people.

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The Patwin people have remained committed to the stewardship of this land over many centuries. It has been cherished and protected, as elders have instructed the young through generations. We are honored and grateful to be here today on their traditional lands.

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## ***A Season of Firsts***

Welcome to the 24-25 Season at the Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts, UC Davis.

Whether you're a returning patron or joining us for the first time, we're grateful for your support of live performance. I'm so happy you've decided to come see a show.

This is my first full season as the Mondavi Center's new Executive Director. This year, we've chosen *Designed for Discovery* as our theme and our guiding principle. I believe it's critical that we not only bring you the familiar names you know and love, but also introduce artists that are new to you, and support the rising generation of exceptional talent.

Our classical offerings therefore begin with a Mondavi Center debut by 28-year-old violinist Randall Goosby, as part of the London Philharmonic Orchestra's first appearance. As the *L.A. Times* so aptly put it, "Goosby plays like an angel."

As well, our programming this fall features 15 Mondavi Center debuts. Like Goosby, several of these artists are early in their careers, offering you a brilliant glimpse of the future of the performing arts.

Our fall first-timers cohort is comprised of an eclectic and deeply talented bunch. Jazz artists Sean Mason and Youn Sun Nah join us for three shows each, in the intimate Vanderhoef Studio Theatre. 25-year-old vocalist Ekep Nkwelle makes her Mondavi Center debut with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. We have new modern dance from the Asian diaspora, with work from Claudine Naganuma, SanSan Kwan, and Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan. And we offer you some hilarious and poignant evenings of spoken word with WNBA Star Brittney Griner, futurist Baratunde Thurston, comic W. Kamau Bell, and the one and only Astria Suparak.

In another Mondavi Center first, thanks to the Manetti Shrem Opera Program at Festival Napa Valley, our fall programming includes a fully staged opera with orchestra. Whether or not you think you're an opera fan, I encourage you to join us for Donizetti's wonderful comedy, *Don Pasquale*. This fresh take on a classic is proof that opera remains relevant, and powerful, and can be a lot of fun.

As always, we're glad you're here!

Thank you,

**Jeremy Ganter**

*Executive Director*

# Alexander String Quartet with Robert Greenberg

Zakarias Grafilo and Yuna Lee, Violins

Davis Samuel, Viola

Sandy Wilson, Cello

Robert Greenberg, Lecturer

## PROGRAM

String Quartet No. 10 in E-flat Major, Op. 74 "Harp"

*Poco adagio - Allegro*

*Adagio ma non troppo*

*Presto*

*Allegretto con Variazioni*

Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770-1827)

## INTERMISSION

String Quartet No. 14 in D Minor, D. 810 "Death and the Maiden"

*Allegro*

*Andante con moto*

*Scherzo: Allegro molto*

*Presto*

Franz Schubert

(1797-1828)

\*PROGRAM SUBJECT TO CHANGE\*



# Program Notes

## String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 74 "Harp" (1809)

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born in Bonn, German, December 16, 1770

Died in Vienna, Austria, March 26, 1827

Beethoven's middle-period quartets proved difficult for audiences from the very beginning. The exception is the lovely *Quartet in E-flat major, Opus 74*, long nicknamed the "Harp." In contrast to the other middle quartets, this one is full of graceful music executed with consummate technical skill. No battles are fought and won here – instead one savors the calm pleasures of what is perhaps Beethoven's most relaxed string quartet.

Yet this music was composed during a difficult time for Beethoven, the year 1809. That year, French armies under Napoleon bombarded and occupied Vienna, forcing most of the city's nobility and many of Beethoven's friends to flee (the composer himself hid in his brother's basement during the bombardment with a pillow held tightly around his head). And it was during the French occupation that Beethoven's old teacher Haydn died. Anguished, Beethoven wrote to his publishers: "We are enjoying a little peace after violent destruction, after suffering every hardship that one could conceivably endure. I worked for a few weeks in success, but it seemed to me more for death than for immortality." Beethoven's music from 1809, however, shows little trace of his anxieties: from early in that year came the noble "*Emperor*" *Concerto*, and after completing the quartet (probably in September 1809) Beethoven set to work on the incidental music to Goethe's *Egmont*.

The first movement of the quartet opens with a slow introduction whose chromaticism creates an uncertain tonality; from this tonal blur, the main theme of the *Allegro* establishes the unequivocal key of E-flat major. Very quickly come the pizzicatos that have earned this quartet the (not particularly appropriate) nickname "Harp." The development is quite active, and the recapitulation features a near-virtuoso first violin part that goes swirling across all four strings before the movement's vigorous close. The *Adagio ma non troppo* can be described simply – this is lovely music. It is built on one of Beethoven's most attractive lyric ideas, which develops across three repetitions, each elaborated differently. Throughout, Beethoven constantly reminds all four performers: *cantabile* and *espressivo*.

By contrast, the *Presto* bristles with energy. It bears a strong resemblance to the scherzo movement of the *Fifth Symphony*, composed two years earlier: both are in C

minor, both are built on the same characteristic rhythm, and both feature fugal writing in the trio section. Yet where the third movement of the symphony builds through a huge crescendo to a triumphant finale, Beethoven winds this movement in the quartet down very carefully, and the finale that follows seems intentionally anti-climactic. It is a variation movement consisting of an almost innocent theme, six variations, and a coda; the odd-numbered variations tend to be vigorous and fast, the even-numbered lyric and gentle. The sixth variation gives way to a coda that extends the theme and leads to a wonderful – and very appropriate – conclusion: a great rush of sixteenth-notes powers the coda *fortissimo* to the very close where instead of hammering out a cadence, Beethoven concludes with two tiny and gentle chords. It is a conclusion brilliant in its understatement.

## String Quartet No. 14 in D Minor, D. 810 "Death and the Maiden" (1824)

FRANZ SCHUBERT

Born in Vienna, Austria, January 31, 1797; died in Vienna, Austria, November 19, 1828

In the fall of 1822 Schubert became extremely ill, and every indication is that he had contracted syphilis. The effect on him — physically and emotionally — was devastating. He was quite ill throughout 1823, so seriously in May that he had to be hospitalized. His health had in fact been shattered permanently, and he would never be fully well again; the cause of his death five years later at 31, officially listed as typhoid, was probably at least partially a result of syphilis. Emotionally, the illness was so destructive that he never went back to complete the symphony he had been working on when he contracted the disease — it would come to be known as the "Unfinished."

By early 1824 Schubert had regained some measure of health and strength, and he turned to chamber music, composing two string quartets, the second of them in D minor. The nickname *Der Tod und Das Mädchen* ("Death and the Maiden") comes from Schubert's use of a theme from his 1817 song by that name as the basis for a set of variations in the quartet's second movement. In the song, which sets a poem of Matthias Claudius, death beckons a young girl; she begs him to pass her over, but he insists, saying that his embrace is soothing, like sleep. It is easy to believe that, under the circumstances, the thought of soothing death may have held some attraction for the composer.

The quartet itself is extremely dramatic. The *Allegro* rips to life with a five note figure spit out by all four instruments. This hardly feels like chamber music. One can easily imagine this figure stamped out furiously by a huge

orchestra, and the dramatic nature of this movement marks it as nearly symphonic (in fact, Gustav Mahler arranged this quartet for string orchestra in 1894, and that version is still performed and recorded today). A gentle second subject brings a measure of relief, but the hammering triplet of the opening figure is never far away — it can be heard quietly in the accompaniment, as part of the main theme and as part of the development. The *Allegro*, which lasts a full quarter of an hour, comes to a quiet close with the triplet rhythm sounding faintly in the distance.

The *Andante con moto* is deceptively simple. From the song *Der Tod und Das Mädchen*, Schubert uses only death's music, which is an almost static progression of chords; the melody moves quietly within the chords. But from that simple progression Schubert writes five variations that are themselves quite varied — by turns soaring, achingly lyric, fierce, calm — and the wonder is that so simple a chordal progression can yield music of such expressiveness and variety.

After two overpowering movements, the *Scherzo: Allegro molto* might seem almost lightweight, for it is extremely short. But it returns to the slashing mood of the opening movement and takes up that same strength. The trio sings easily in the lower voices as the first violin flutters and decorates their melodic line; an unusual feature of the trio is that it has no repeat — Schubert instead writes an extension of the trio, almost a form of variation itself.

The final movement, appropriately marked *Presto*, races ahead on its 6/8 rhythm. Some listeners have felt that this movement is deathhaunted, and they point out that its main theme is a tarantella, the old dance of death, and that Schubert also quotes quietly from his own song *Erkönig*. Significantly, the phrase he quotes in that song sets death's words "Mein liebes Kind, komm geh mit mir" (My dear child, come go with me), which is precisely the message of the song *Der Tod und das Mädchen*. What this movement is "about" must be left to each listener to decide, but it is hard to believe this music deathhaunted. The principal impression it makes is of overwhelming power — propulsive rhythms, huge blocks of sound, sharp dynamic contrasts — and the very ending, a dazzling rush marked *Prestissimo* that suddenly leaps into D major, blazes with life.

Program notes by Eric Bromberger

# The Alexander String Quartet

ZAKARIAS GRAFILO, VIOLIN

YUNA LEE, VIOLIN

DAVIS SAMUEL, VIOLA

SANDY WILSON, CELLO

Having performed in the major music capitals of five continents over more than four decades, the Alexander String Quartet remains among the world's premier ensembles. Making its home base in San Francisco since 1989, the Quartet has been a vital artistic presence in the Bay Area community and beyond, both as Directors of the May T. Morrison Center's Chamber Music Instructional Program at SFSU, and as Ensemble in Residence of San Francisco Performances. Their sustained activities, at work in advancing the cause of small ensemble study in public and private schools and in continuing educational and senior environments, locally and abroad has been exemplary. Admired widely for its interpretations of Beethoven, Mozart, Bartók and Shostakovich, the quartet's recordings have won international critical acclaim.

Founded in New York City in 1981, the ensemble quickly captured attention, initially by winning the Concert Artists Guild Competition in 1982 leading to their critically acclaimed Carnegie Hall Debut that spring. They subsequently became the first American quartet to win the London (now Wigmore) International String Quartet Competition in 1985. The Alexander String Quartet are recipients of honorary degrees from Allegheny College and St. Lawrence University, as well as Presidential medals from Baruch College (CUNY) where they taught for more than 30 years.

Since its inception, the Alexander String Quartet has trained generations of gifted performers, emerging string quartets, and talented young musicians destined to pass on their knowledge and love of music as teachers in schools across the globe. The 2024-25 calendar marks their 44th and final celebratory season incorporating concert and teaching activities in the Northwest and Northeast US as well as in Europe.

The Alexander String Quartet has performed at Lincoln Center, the 92nd Street Y, the Metropolitan Museum, Jordan Hall, the Library of Congress, and appeared as guests at universities including Yale, Princeton, Stanford, Lewis & Clark, UCLA, and many more. Numerous overseas tours include the U.K., the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, France, Greece, the Republic of Georgia, Argentina, Panamá and the Philippines. Their visit to Poland's Beethoven Easter Festival is beautifully captured in the 2017 award-winning documentary, *Con Moto: The Alexander String Quartet*.

Joyce Yang, Marc-André Hamelin, Richard Stoltzman, Joyce DiDonato, Midori, Lynn Harrell, Branford Marsalis, David Sánchez, Jake Heggie, Augusta Read Thomas, Tarik O'Regan, Wayne Peterson and Samuel Carl Adams are only a few of the



many distinguished instrumentalists, singers and composers with whom the Alexander String Quartet has collaborated in performance and recording projects crossing genres from classical to jazz, rock and folk in its more than four decades of music making. Their most recent collaborative project, "British Invasion," brought the Quartet together with guitarist William Kanengiser to explore the music of Sting, Led Zeppelin, John Dowland and the Beatles by way of contemporary composers Ian Krouse, Dušan Bogdanović and Leo Brouwer. The Quartet enjoys a long-standing collaboration with the richly entertaining composer-lecturer, Robert Greenberg, with whom it has presented a series of concerts every season with San Francisco Performances and at the Mondavi Center at the University of California in Davis. These concerts have provided a deep dive into the history and essence of the works being presented in addition to a full performance of each piece.

Recording for the Foghorn Classics label, the Alexander String Quartet's extensive recording catalogue includes complete string quartet cycles by Bartók, Beethoven, Brahms, Kodály, and Shostakovich. Their most recent release is the third installment of a Mozart chamber music project, "Apotheosis Volume 3," featuring the string quintets of Mozart with violist Paul Yarbrough. Apotheosis Volumes 1 & 2, released in 2018 and 2019, featured the late string quartets and piano quartets (with Joyce Yang) of Mozart. Both recordings received critical acclaim ("These are by far, hands down and feet up, the most amazing performances of Mozart's two piano quartets that have ever graced these ears." - *Fanfare*). Other major recordings include the 2020 release of the Mozart and Brahms clarinet quintets (with Eli Eban) and the 2019 release, "Locale," featuring Dvořák's "American" quartet and piano quintet (with Joyce Yang). Their recording catalogue also includes the Mahler Song Cycles in transcriptions for mezzo-soprano (with Kindra Scharich) and string quartet by the Quartet's first violinist, Zakarias Grafilo.

The Alexander String Quartet performs on Michael Fischer and unlabeled circa 1800 Italian violins, a Hiroshi Iizuka viola and a Francis M. Kuttner cello. They have also had the distinct honor on numerous occasions to record and perform on a matched set of instruments known as the Ellen M. Egger Quartet, made in San Francisco by the late Francis M. Kuttner.

The Alexander String Quartet is represented by  
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## Robert Greenberg

Robert Greenberg was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1954, and has lived in the San Francisco Bay Area since 1978. Greenberg received a B.A. in music, magna cum laude, from Princeton University in 1976. His principal teachers at Princeton were Edward Cone, Daniel Werts and Carlton Gamer in composition, Claudio Spies and Paul Lansky in analysis, and Jerry Kuderna in piano. In

1984, Greenberg received a Ph.D. in music composition, with Distinction, from the University of California, Berkeley, where his principal teachers were Andrew Imbrie and Olly Wilson in composition and Richard Felciano in analysis.

Greenberg has composed over fifty works for a wide variety of instrumental and vocal ensembles. Recent performances of his works have taken place in New York, San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, England, Ireland, Greece, Italy, and The Netherlands, where his *Child's Play* for String Quartet was performed at the Concertgebouw of Amsterdam.

Greenberg has received numerous honors, including being designated an official Steinway Artist, three Nicola de Lorenzo Composition Prizes and three Meet-The-Composer Grants. Notable commissions have been received from the Koussevitzky Foundation in the Library of Congress, the Alexander String Quartet, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, San Francisco Performances and the XTET ensemble. Greenberg is a board member and an artistic director of COMPOSERS, INC., a composers' collective/production organization based in San Francisco. His music has been published by Fallen Leaf Press and CPP/Belwin, and recorded on the Innova label.

Greenberg has performed, taught and lectured extensively across North America and Europe. He is currently music historian-in-residence with San Francisco Performances, where he has lectured and performed since 1994. He has served on the faculties of the University of California at Berkeley, California State University East Bay, and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where he chaired the Department of Music History and Literature from 1989-2001 and served as the Director of the Adult Extension Division from 1991-1996. Greenberg has lectured for some of the most prestigious musical and arts organizations in the United States, including the San Francisco Symphony (where for ten years he was host and lecturer for the Symphony's nationally acclaimed "Discovery Series"), the Chautauqua Institute (where he was the Everett Scholar-in-Residence during the 2006 season), the Ravinia Festival, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the Van Cliburn Foundation, the Nasher Sculpture Center, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, Villa Montalvo, Music @ Menlo and the University of British Columbia (where he was the Dal

Grauer Lecturer in September of 2006). In addition, Greenberg is a sought-after lecturer for businesses and business schools. For many years a member of the faculty at the University of Pennsylvania/Wharton School's Advanced Management Program, he has spoken for such diverse organizations as S.C. Johnson, Canadian Pacific, Deutsches Bank, the University of California/Haas School of Business Executive Seminar, the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, Harvard Business School Publishing, Kaiser-Permanente, the Strategos Institute, Quintiles Transnational, the Young Presidents' Organization, the World Presidents' Organization and the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco. Greenberg has been profiled in the *Wall Street Journal*, *INC. Magazine*, the *Times of London*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *San Jose Mercury News*, the *University of California Alumni Magazine*, *Princeton Alumni Weekly* and *Diablo Magazine*. For fifteen years Greenberg was the resident composer and music historian to National Public Radio's "Weekend All Things Considered" and "Weekend Edition, Sunday" with Liane Hansen.

In February 2003, *The Bangor Daily News* (Maine) referred to Greenberg as the "Elvis of music history and appreciation," an appraisal that has given more pleasure than any other.

In May 1993, Greenberg recorded a forty-eight lecture course entitled "How to Listen to and Understand Great Music" for the Teaching Company/Great Courses Program of Chantilly, Virginia. (This course was named in the January, 1996 edition of *Inc. Magazine* as one of "The Nine Leadership Classics You've Never Read.") The Great Courses is the preeminent producer of college level courses-on-media in the United States. Twenty-Five further courses, including "Concert Masterworks," "Bach and the High Baroque," "The Symphonies of Beethoven," "How to Listen to and Understand Opera," "Great Masters," "The Operas of Mozart," "The Life and Operas of Verdi," "The Symphony," "The Chamber Music of Mozart," "The Piano Sonatas of Beethoven," "The Concerto," "The Fundamentals of Music," "The String Quartets of Beethoven," "The Music of Richard Wagner" and "The Thirty Greatest Orchestral Works" have been recorded since, totaling over 550 lectures. The courses are available on both CD and DVD formats and in book form.

Dr. Greenberg's book, *How to Listen to Great Music*, was published by Plume, a division of Penguin Books, in April, 2011.

Greenberg lives with his children Lillian and Daniel, wife Nanci, and a very cool Maine coon (cat) named Teddy in the hills of Oakland, California.



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Barbara K. Jackson Rising Stars of Opera  
 UC Davis Symphony Orchestra and  
 singers from the San Francisco Opera Center  
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