



presents...

ALEXANDER STRING QUARTET | Ensemble-in-Residence

Zakarias Grafilo | Violin
Yuna Lee | Violin

David Samuel | Viola
Sandy Wilson | Cello

ROBERT GREENBERG | Music Historian-in-Residence

Saturday, March 2, 2024 | 10am

Saturday, March 23, 2024 | 10am

Herbst Theatre

Music as a Mirror of Our World: The String Quartet from 1905 to 1946

March 2

Program 4: United States

PISTON

String Quartet No. 1

Allegro

Adagio

Allegro vivace

INTERMISSION

BARBER

String Quartet in B Minor, Opus 11

Molto allegro e appassionato

Molto adagio

Molto allegro (come prima)

March 23
Program 5: Austria

ZEMLINSKY

String Quartet No. 4, Opus 25

Präludium: Poco Adagio

Burleske: Vivace

Adagietto

Intermezzo: Allegretto

Thema mit Variationen: Barcarolle

Finale-Doppelfuge: Allegro molto, energico

INTERMISSION

KORNGOLD

String Quartet No. 3 in D Major, Opus 34

Allegro moderato

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Sostenuto: Like a Folk Tune

Finale: Allegro; Allegro con fuoco

**The Saturday Morning Series is sponsored in part by the
Mark D. Kaplanoff Lecture Fund of San Francisco Performances' Endowment.**

The **Alexander String Quartet** is Ensemble-in-Residence with San Francisco Performances.

The **Alexander String Quartet** is represented by Christina Daysog Concert Artists
PO Box 529, Alameda, CA 94501 daysogconcertartists.com

The Quartet frequently performs and records on a matched set of instruments by the San Francisco-based maker Francis Kuttner, circa 1987.



ARTIST PROFILES

The Alexander String Quartet celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2021. The Quartet has been Ensemble-in-Residence since 1989 with San Francisco Performances. Starting in 1994, the Quartet joined with SF Performances' Music Historian-in-Residence, Robert Greenberg, to present the Saturday Morning Series exploring string quartet literature.

The Quartet has appeared on SF Performances mainstage Chamber Series many times, collaborating with such artists as soprano Elly Ameling and mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato; clarinetists Richard Stoltzman, Joan Enric Lluna and Eli Eban; pianists James Tocco, Menahem Pressler, Jeremy Menuhin, and Joyce Yang; and composer Jake Heggie.

Robert Greenberg, in addition to his programs with the Alexander String Quartet, lectures frequently for SF Performances.

The **Alexander String Quartet** stands among the world's premier ensembles, having performed in the major music capitals of five continents. The quartet is a vital artistic presence in its home base of San Francisco, serving since 1989 as Ensemble-in-Residence of San Francisco Performances. Widely admired for its interpretations of Beethoven, Mozart, and Shostakovich, the quartet's recordings have won international critical acclaim. Founded in New York City in 1981, the ensemble quickly captured attention, initially winning the Concert Artists Guild Competition in 1982, and then becoming the first American quartet to win

the London (now Wigmore) International String Quartet Competition in 1985. The members of the Alexander String Quartet are recipients of honorary degrees from Allegheny College and St. Lawrence University, and Presidential medals from Baruch College (CUNY).

Since its inception, the Alexander String Quartet has maintained an unyielding and passionate commitment to education. For decades, the ensemble 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 2023–24 season marks the beginning of a new initiative that brings together the quartet's expertise in education and devotion to its community. Partnering with schools, arts organizations, and community institutions in the Bay Area and beyond, the Alexander String Quartet will be hosting a series of innovative workshops, performances and collaborations that are designed to support and bolster chamber music awareness and education for individuals from all walks of life.

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," brings 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 continues to enjoy a long-standing collaboration with the richly entertaining composer-lecturer, Robert Greenberg, with whom it presents series of concerts every season with San Francisco Performances and at the Mondavi Center at the University of California in Davis. These concerts provide 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.



Dr. Robert Greenberg was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1954 and has lived in the San Francisco Bay Area since 1978. He received a B.A. in Music, magna cum laude, from Princeton University in 1976 and a Ph.D. in music composition, *With Distinction*, from the University of California, Berkeley in 1984.

Greenberg has composed more than 50 works for a variety of instrumental and vocal ensembles. Performances of his works have taken place across the United States and Europe.

Dr. Greenberg has received numerous honors, including commissions from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation in the Library of Congress, the Alexander String Quartet, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, San Francisco Performances, and the XTET ensemble. His music is published by Fallen Leaf Press and CPP/Belwin and is recorded on the Innova label.

Greenberg is a Steinway Artist.

Dr. Greenberg is currently the 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, Berkeley; California State University, East Bay; the Advanced Management Program at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business; and the San

Francisco Conservatory of Music, where he chaired the Department of Music History and Literature from 1989 to 2001.

Dr. Greenberg has lectured for some of the most prestigious musical and arts organizations in the United States, including the San Francisco Symphony (where for 10 years he was host and lecturer for the symphony's nationally acclaimed Discovery Series), the Chautauqua Institution (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 Dallas Symphony Orchestra, the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, Villa Montalvo, the Phoenix Orchestra, the University of British Columbia (where he was the Dal Grauer Lecturer in September 2006), and Philadelphia's College of Physicians (where he has been the Behrend Lecturer since 2017).

In addition, Dr. Greenberg is a sought-after lecturer for businesses and business schools and has spoken for such diverse organizations as S. C. Johnson, Deutsche Bank, the University of California/Haas School of Business Executive Seminar and the Goldman School of Public Policy, the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, Harvard Business School Publishing, Kaiser Permanente, the Young Presidents' Organization, the World Presidents' Organization, and the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco. Dr. Greenberg has been profiled in *The Wall Street Journal, Inc. Magazine*, the *Times* of London, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*, among other publications.

For 15 years, Dr. Greenberg was the resident composer and music historian for NPR's *Weekend All Things Considered* and *Weekend Edition, Sunday* with Liane Hansen. His show *Scandalous Overtures* can be seen on www.ora.tv/shows.

In May 1993, Greenberg recorded a 48-lecture course entitled "How to Listen to and Understand Great Music" for The Great Courses/The Teaching Company. (This course was named in the January 1996 edition of *Inc. Magazine* as one of "The Nine Leadership Classics You've Never Read.") Dr. Greenberg has since recorded 30 additional courses. The most recent, "The Great Music of the 20th Century," was released in January 2018.

In February 2003, Maine's *Bangor Daily News* referred to Dr. Greenberg as the Elvis of music history and appreciation, an appraisal that has given him more pleasure than any other.

Dr. Greenberg is currently "blogging, vlogging, performing, Zooming, reviewing, opining, and bloviating 4-6 times a week" on his subscription site at [Patreon.com/RobertGreenbergMusic](https://www.patreon.com/RobertGreenbergMusic).

PROGRAM NOTES MARCH 2

String Quartet No. 1

WALTER PISTON
(1894-1976)

Walter Piston learned to play the violin as a boy, but he trained to be an architect and draftsman. The lure of music would eventually too strong, but some of Piston's early ambitions stayed with him: throughout his career, his manuscripts were so clear and precise that his publisher simply had them engraved rather than re-setting them. Piston played saxophone in a navy band during World War I, graduated from Harvard in 1924, and then spent two years in Paris, where he studied with Nadia Boulanger, Paul Dukas, and Georges Enescu. He returned to the United States and taught composition at Harvard from 1926 until 1960; he wrote textbooks on harmony, counterpoint, and orchestration that are still in use. Among Piston's works are eight symphonies and five string quartets.

Piston composed his *String Quartet No. 1* in 1933 for the First Yaddo Festival, which had been arranged by Aaron Copland as part of his efforts to advance American music. This was also a moment of change for the nation at large: the Chardon Quartet gave the premiere of the *First String Quartet* on March 7, 1933, just three days after Franklin Roosevelt was inaugurated for his first term as president. Piston's quartet proved an immediate success. In a memorable review, Copland offered strong praise: "A work like the *First String Quartet*, with its acidulous opening movement, the poetic mood painting of the second, and its breezy finale, sets a superb standard of taste and of expert string writing." Over the years, it has been recorded by the Juilliard, Dorian, Chester, Harlem, and Portland quartets.

The quartet is in three concise movements. The energetic opening *Allegro* seems always to be pressing forward. The sharply-chiseled opening rhythm will underpin much of this movement, and against that sharp pulse Piston sets sever-

al long-lined, flowing themes. Harmonies can be strident here—this is what Copland meant when he called the movement “acidulous”—before the movement drives to its surprisingly fierce conclusion.

The ternary-form *Adagio* brings sharp contrast. Piston mutes the strings and gives a prominent role to the cello, which has the long opening solo. Textures grow more complex, the music drives to a climax, and then falls away; in the central episode, the viola introduces the sharply-dotted subject of a brief fugue. The opening material, with its sustained cello solo, returns to bring the movement to its close.

The concluding *Allegro vivace* is in rondo form. The most striking feature here is Piston’s rapid leaping between 2/4 and 5/8 meters, which gives all of this energetic writing an unexpectedly off-kilter (and pleasing) vitality. The movement rushes to a conclusion just as powerful as the ending of the first movement.

String Quartet in B Minor, Opus 11

SAMUEL BARBER
(1910–1981)

Samuel Barber’s only string quartet is fated to remain a sort of “phantom” piece—it will always be remembered as the work from which Barber’s most famous music, the *Adagio for Strings*, was drawn. The 26-year-old Barber composed his *String Quartet in B Minor* during the summer of 1936, which he spent in the Tyrol, and the quartet was premiered in Rome on December 14, 1936, by the Pro Arte Quartet. Barber arranged the quartet’s slow movement for string orchestra, and when Arturo Toscanini and the NBC Symphony gave the *Adagio for Strings* its first performance on November 5, 1938, the string quartet dropped into the shadows. The *Adagio for Strings* has become probably the most famous piece of American orchestral music ever composed, but today it is rarely heard in its original form.

Barber’s *String Quartet* has a unique form: the *Adagio*, the middle movement, is framed by two fast outer movements. Both of these have the same marking—*Molto allegro e appassionato*—and both use the same thematic material. The quartet opens with a great unison outburst, and this opening contains the three-note kernel that underlies the outer movements; Barber stretches this figure many ways through the quartet, both as rhythm and

theme-shape. Barber’s harmonies in this movement depend on the intervals of the fourth, fifth, and sixth—so typical of American music from this period—and along the way come attractive subordinate themes. But in the background one always hears the opening three-note kernel dancing along or driving the music to a climax, and at the end of the movement the music vanishes on this rhythm.

The second movement is the familiar *Adagio* (here marked *Molto adagio*). Even before the quartet was played, Barber knew this movement would be a success; that summer he wrote to a friend: “I have just finished the slow movement of my quartet today—it is a knockout!” The solemn—and endlessly beautiful—melody passes from instrument to instrument until the music builds to a powerful climax and then fades away on a quiet final chord. Out of this chord, Barber immediately launches the finale, which springs to life on the three-note kernel from the opening movement. The last movement is quite short (barely two minutes), and Barber recapitulates his earlier material by telescoping it—several of the themes from the first movement now appear simultaneously. A very brief *Presto* coda drives the movement to a close on the three-note figure that has dominated the outer movements.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger

PROGRAM NOTES MARCH 23

String Quartet No. 4, Opus 25

ALEXANDER ZEMLINSKY
(1871–1942)

Alexander Zemlinsky’s career spanned several musical worlds. Born and trained in the Vienna of Brahms (who as an old man admired his works), he died—almost forgotten—in a suburb of New York City during World War II. Early in his life, Zemlinsky became close friends with Schoenberg (who married his sister) and with him formed a new-music society in Vienna; Mahler conducted the premiere of his opera *Es war einmal* at the Staatsoper. Zemlinsky made his own career largely as a conductor, first in Prague (where he led the premiere of Schoenberg’s *Erwartung*) and later at the Kroll Opera in Berlin, where he was an as-

sistant to Otto Klemperer. When the Nazis came to power in 1933, Zemlinsky fled first to Vienna and then to the US in 1938.

Like many composers at the turn of the century, Zemlinsky found himself trapped between the heritage of Viennese classicism and the new directions Schoenberg and his followers were taking in the first decades of this century. Zemlinsky struggled with this conflict: he could be attracted by the new ideas in music, but his own music remained firmly anchored in tonality. His output is small (only 27 opus numbers), and of these, four are string quartets.

Zemlinsky’s final quartet was written in response to a devastating event: Alban Berg, aged only 50, died on Christmas Day 1935 from overwhelming sepsis, the result of a bee sting. Zemlinsky began to plan a memorial work, and in the fall of 1936 he composed a work for string quartet. But what he wrote is not a quartet in the traditional sense. Rather, the *Fourth String Quartet* is a suite-like work in six movements, and these are subdivided into three pairs of two movements each; all three of these pairs are in a slow-fast sequence. The late 1930s was a turbulent moment in Austrian history, and Zemlinsky could not find a publisher for his new quartet, nor he could find a string quartet interested in playing it. He never heard a note of his *Fourth Quartet*: he fled to America at the Anschluss in 1938 and died four years later. The *Fourth Quartet* was not premiered until April 21, 1967, more than 30 years after it was composed.

Its structure may be described briefly. The opening of the *Präludium* is dark and somber, but gradually the music unfolds and the mood is somewhat lightened by playful violin lines. In sharp contrast, the *Burleske* is full of energy—spiky pizzicatos and strong unisons drive the music forward; the central episode is lyric and grieving, and the movement closes with an emphatic pizzicato chord. The second pair opens with an *Adagietto* somewhat in the manner of the opening *Präludium*, and this gives way to a dancing *Intermezzo*. This music flows gracefully at first, but soon blazes out, driven along powerful triplet rhythms. The final pair begins with an unusual variation movement, opening with a long cello solo in the manner of a gently-rocking barcarole, and then Zemlinsky creates a series of variations on this melody over shimmering, murmuring accompaniment. The *Finale* is a double fugue: its first subject is spiky and hard-edged, the second more sinuous. This movement is quite brief—Zemlinsky works these fugues out

concisely—and the *Fourth Quartet* drives to a sonorous, full-throated conclusion.

String Quartet No. 3 in D Major, Opus 34

ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD
(1897–1957)

Few child composers have been as precocious as young Korngold: at age 10, his cantata *Gold* amazed Mahler, and those impressed by his talent included Richard Strauss and Puccini, who said: “That boy’s talent is so great, he could easily give us half and still have enough left for himself!” His opera *Die tote Stadt*, composed when he was 20, received simultaneous premieres in Hamburg and Cologne, and in the 1920s Korngold was one of the most admired young composers in Europe.

And then his career took an unexpected turn. Invited to Hollywood to help score a film, Korngold found his romantic idiom ideally suited to film music, and when Hitler came to power Korngold moved his family to Hollywood, where he achieved his greatest success with swashbuckling music for Errol Flynn movies like *Captain Blood*, *Robin Hood*, and *The Sea Hawk*. As

soon as the war was over, Korngold put films behind him to return to “serious” music but could never escape his Hollywood reputation, particularly since he used themes from many of his film scores in his classical works; the most successful of these is the 1945 *Violin Concerto*, championed by Heifetz.

Korngold’s *Third String Quartet* dates from that same year. One of the most striking features of this music is its stylistic range: from an elegant lyricism to the chromatic bite of its themes, from the slashing brilliance of some of the writing (more suited to concertos than chamber music) to the gentleness of its quiet moments, this is extremely varied music. It is also quite difficult, requiring players of the greatest skill.

While the *Allegro moderato* opens in D major, the chromatic freedom of its ideas almost suggests Schoenberg. From this gentle beginning, the music presses ahead, sometimes changing meter every measure, to an agitated middle section before falling away to end quietly on its opening theme, now gracefully elongated. The viola introduces the lively rhythmic kernel of the *Scherzo*, a figure that will recur in many shapes throughout the movement. It

is a mark of Korngold’s classical roots that the form of this movement is so traditional: the opening section leads to a flowing trio and a da capo repeat.

Korngold mutes all four instruments in the lyric third movement, which he specifies should sound “Like a Folk Tune.” The opening gives way gradually to an animated center section: Korngold has the players remove their mutes in turn as the tension rises to a climactic *Appassionato*, then has them put the mutes back on as the movement winds to its quiet close. A six-measure introduction kicks off the finale, which Korngold aptly marks “with fire.” This is almost a *moto perpetuo* in its non-stop energy; along the way, Korngold alternates pizzicato and bowed passages, refers in passing to some of his film scores, and even subjects his main theme to brief fugal treatment. At the end, he offers fleeting reminiscences of earlier movements before the blistering rush to the concluding unison D.

Korngold dedicated his *Third Quartet* “in admiration and friendship” to the conductor Bruno Walter, who had led the premiere of his opera *Violanta* in 1916.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger