

presents...

ALEXANDER STRING QUARTET | Ensemble-in-Residence

Zakarias Grafilo | Violin
Yuri Cho | Violin

David Samuel | Viola
Sandy Wilson | Cello

ROBERT GREENBERG | Music Historian-in-Residence

With Guest Artists

KEVIN KWAN LOUCKS | Piano

MARK BONNEY | Tenor

Saturday, March 11, 2023 | 10am

Herbst Theatre

Music as a Mirror of Our World: Chamber Music at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

United Kingdom

ELGAR

Piano Quintet in A Minor, Opus 84

Moderato
Adagio
Andante; Allegro

INTERMISSION

**VAUGHAN
WILLIAMS**

On Wenlock Edge

On Wenlock Edge
From Far, from Eve and Morning
Is My Team Ploughing
Oh, When I Was in Love with You
Bredon Hill
Clun

**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 in association with San Francisco State University and the May T. Morrison Chamber Music Center.

The **Alexander String Quartet** is represented by Besen Arts
7 Delaney Place, Tenafly, NJ 07670-1607 besenarts.com

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

For Tickets and More: sfperformances.org | 415.392.2545

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, the result of a unique partnership between SF Performances and The Morrison Chamber Music Center at San Francisco State University. 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 has performed in the major music capitals of five continents, securing its standing among the world's premier ensembles, and a major artistic presence in its home base of San Francisco, serving since 1989 as Ensemble-in-Residence of San Francisco Performances and Directors of The Morrison Chamber Music Center Instructional Program at San Francisco State University. Widely admired for its interpretations of Beethoven, Mozart, and Shostakovich, the quartet's recordings have won international critical acclaim. They have established themselves as important advocates of new music commissioning dozens of new works from composers including Jake Heggie, Cindy Cox, Augusta Read Thomas, Robert Greenberg, Cesar Cano, Tarik O'Regan, Paul Siskind, and Pulitzer Prize-winner Wayne Peterson. Samuel Carl Adams' *Quintet with Pillars* was premiered in 2018 and has been widely performed across the U.S. by the Alexander with pianist Joyce Yang.

The Alexander String Quartet's annual calendar includes engagements at major halls throughout North America and Europe. They have appeared at Lincoln Center, the 92nd Street Y, the Metropolitan Museum, Jordan Hall, the Library of Congress, and chamber music societies and universities across the North American continent including Yale, Princeton, Stanford, Lewis and Clark, Pomona, UCLA, the Krannert Center, Purdue and many more. Recent 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*.

Distinguished musicians with whom the Alexander String Quartet has collaborated include pianists Joyce Yang, Roger Woodward, Menachem Pressler, Marc-André Hamelin, and Jeremy Menuhin; clarinetists Joan Enric Lluna, Richard Stoltzman, and Eli Eban; soprano Elly Ameling; mezzo-sopranos Joyce DiDonato and Kindra Scharich; violinist Midori; violist Toby Appel; cellists Lynn Harrell, Sadao Harada, and David Requiro; and jazz greats Branford Marsalis, David Sanchez, and Andrew Speight. The quartet has worked with many composers including Aaron Copland, George Crumb, and Elliott Carter, and enjoys a close relationship with composer-lecturer Robert Greenberg, performing numerous lecture-concerts with him annually.

Recording for the FoghornClassics label, their 2021 recording of the complete string quartet of Brahms has been praised by *MusicWeb International*: "The joy of this quartet's playing is immediately apparent in the ferocious opening movement of the C minor quartet: they play with all the verve, drive and passion you could wish for but never at the expense of homogeneity or intonation—and the sustained warmth and depth of their string tone are a constant delight." *Fanfare* lauded their 2020 release of the Mozart and Brahms clarinet quintets (with Eli Eban) as "clearly one of the Alexander Quartet's finest releases." Their release in 2019 of Dvořák's "American" quartet and piano quintet (with Joyce Yang) was selected by *MusicWeb International* as a featured recording of the year, praising it for interpretations performed "with the bright-eyed brilliance of first acquaintance." Also released in 2019 was a recording of the Late Quartets of Mozart, receiving critical acclaim ("Exceptionally beautiful performances of some extraordinarily beautiful music." –*Fanfare*), as did their 2018 release of Mozart's Piano Quartets with Joyce Yang. ("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 releases have included the combined string quartet cycles of Bartók and Kodály ("If ever an album had 'Grammy nominee' written

on its front cover, this is it." –*Audiophile Audition*); the string quintets and sextets of Brahms with violist Toby Appel and cellist David Requiro ("a uniquely detailed, transparent warmth" –*Strings Magazine*); the Schumann and Brahms piano quintets with Joyce Yang ("passionate, soulful readings of two pinnacles of the chamber repertoire" –*The New York Times*); and the Beethoven cycle ("A landmark journey through the greatest of all quartet cycles" –*Strings Magazine*). Their catalog also includes the Shostakovich cycle, Mozart's Ten Famous Quartets, and the Mahler Song Cycles in new transcriptions by Zakarias Grafilo.

The Alexander String Quartet formed in New York City in 1981, capturing international attention as the first American quartet to win the London (now Wigmore) International String Quartet Competition in 1985. The quartet has received honorary degrees from Allegheny College and Saint Lawrence University, and Presidential medals from Baruch College (CUNY). The Alexander plays on a matched set of instruments made in San Francisco by Francis Kuttner, known as the Ellen M. Egger quartet.



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).

Pianist **Kevin Kwan Loucks** enjoys a multifaceted career as international concert artist, educator, and arts entrepreneur. He has been described as "impeccable" (*La Presse*, Montreal), "a shining talent" (*Völser Zeitung*, Italy), and "a pianist of exhilarating polish, unity and engagement" (*The Orange County Register*, California). He has earned ovations from Weill Recital Hall and Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall to Prösels Castle in Italy, Walt Disney Concert Hall, the Kennedy Center, Kumho Art Hall and Seoul Arts Center in South Korea, Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall, and Prague's Lichtenstein Palace. He has been featured on National Public Radio, CBC Radio 2, Classical KUSC, the Public Broadcasting Service, KABC-TV Los Angeles, and the Korean Broadcasting System, and was a top prize winner at the Schlern International Competition in Italy, the International Chamber Music Ensemble Competition in Boston, the Beverly Hills International Auditions in Los Angeles, and the American Prize in Performance.

Mark Bonney is based in London and performs internationally. Recent appearances include the Evangelist in Bach's *St. John Passion* (Amsterdam), Tamino in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (Berlin Opera Academy), Parpignol in Puccini's *La bohème* (Grange Park Opera), Count Barigoule in Pauline Viardot's *Cendrillon* (Wexford Opera Festival), Jonathan in Handel's *Saul* with Laurence Cummings (Dartington International Festival), the title role in Handel's *Jephtha* (Iford Arts & Bath Choral Society), and Paolino in Cimarosa's *Il Matrimonio Segreto* (Pop-up Opera).

In addition to his work as an opera and concert soloist, Mark has performed in the chorus at Grange Park Opera, Opera Holland Park, Wexford Festival Opera, Bury Court Opera, Iford Arts, with the Monteverdi Choir, and with Barbara Hannigan at the Aldeburgh Festival. He is often invited to perform with leading ensembles including the Gabrieli Consort, Britten Sinfonia, and Le Concert d'Astrée.

Before embarking on his career as a classical singer, Mark worked in socio-economic development in Egypt, before, during and after the Arab Spring. He holds a Master's in Opera from the Royal Conservatoire in Scotland, a Master's in Music from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, and a bachelor's degree in Political Science from Stanford University. He also studied at the Berlin Opera Academy, the Franz Schubert Institute and the American Institute of Musical Studies.

In his spare time, Mark enjoys the outdoors, tennis and reading.

PROGRAM NOTES

Piano Quintet in A Minor, Opus 84

SIR EDWARD ELGAR
(1857-1934)

Elgar wrote little chamber music. He appears to have been more comfortable with the resources of the symphony orchestra and the human voice, and he wrote most often for orchestra and for chorus. In fact, after writing some brief pieces for violin and piano early in his career, Elgar turned away from chamber music almost permanently.

But during the summer of 1918, at the very end of his creative career, the 61-year-old composer suddenly produced three substantial pieces of chamber music. There was no readily apparent reason for him to turn to a type of music he had neglected for so long. But during that summer England was nearing the end of a horrifying war, Elgar was facing the deteriorating health of his wife, and he may well have been confronting his own waning powers as a composer (he wrote only one more major work, the *Cello Concerto* of 1919). Perhaps all these had an influence on his decision to turn to so personal a form as chamber music. Perhaps none of them did—we can only guess. But in quick succession (he worked on all three simultaneously) he produced a violin sonata, a string quartet, and a piano quintet.

The *Piano Quintet* is remarkable for the range and sharp contrast of its moods, and nowhere is this more evident than in its opening *Moderato*. This movement is based on a wealth of ideas, all presented in the first few moments. The very beginning is particularly impressive: the piano quietly announces the movement's main theme, while in the background the strings sound the three-note figure that will echo like faint drum-taps throughout the movement. A few moments later the upper strings in exotic harmony (English commentators invariably refer to this as "the Spanish theme") give way to a yearning cello figure, to be quickly followed by an *Allegro* that sounds as if it should be scored for full orchestra. The movement pitches between these extremes: at moments it can sound confident and full, almost like salon music in its smoothness. And at others, it sounds spare and hard and haunting. The bleak ending, where fragments of the beginning break down and collapse, is especially effective.

The *Adagio* is one of Elgar's most successful slow movements. Its glowing beginning, with a ravishing theme for viola, sounds very much like the kind of music Brahms was writing 30 years earlier. Elgar's development is extended, and an animated middle section leads to a quiet close. The final movement returns to the mood and manner of the first—Elgar even uses some of the same themes, as the slow introduction gives way to a confident *Allegro* (Elgar marks this *con dignita, cantabile*). This movement is very much in the grand manner: its gestures are dramatic, its themes full of sweep, its sonorities at times almost orchestral. The ending, marked *Grandioso*, is opulent in its rich sound and confidence. But just before the coda comes an extraordinary moment: the music grows quiet, and Elgar brings back the haunting and quiet music of the first movement, even with the ghostly drum-taps in the background. This note of stinging, quiet beauty in the midst of such splendor and energy is typical of the *Quintet's* sharply-ranging moods.

For all the surface confidence, for all its grand gestures, the *Quintet* is tense music in the best meaning of that term. Throughout, one feels that this is many-faceted music, that those facets are often at odds emotionally with each other, and that from their collision comes some very moving music.

On Wenlock Edge

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
(1872–1958)

In 1896 A.E. Housman, a government clerk and translator of classical languages, published a slim volume of 63 poems called *A Shropshire Lad*. Set in a somewhat-mythical Shropshire, these poems—with their themes of youthful hope and disappointment, transience, irony, humor, and melancholy—charmed a generation of young readers at the turn of the century (and countless others since then). They also attracted a generation of English composers that was in the process of discovering the heritage of English folk-music. In 1908–9, barely a decade after its publication, Vaughan Williams set six poems from *A Shropshire Lad*, giving his set the title of the first song, *On Wenlock Edge*. He scored these songs for an unusual ensemble—tenor, piano, and string quartet—and *On Wenlock Edge* was first performed in London on November 15, 1909. (In the early 1920s, Vaughan Williams arranged these songs for tenor and orchestra, and they are sometimes heard today in this later version.)

On Wenlock Edge should be understood not as a cycle—a title that implies a unity and a direction—but as a collection of six

settings of individual poems by the same poet. These poems can be quite different in manner and theme, and Vaughan Williams' treatment varies accordingly. The songs can range from the dramatic (*On Wenlock Edge*, with its rush of wintry winds) to the jaunty and very brief *Oh, When I Was in Love* to the atmospheric detachment of the concluding *Clun*. Sometimes Vaughan Williams will create miniature dramas, as with his use of two different kinds of music for the two voices in *Is My Team Ploughing*, or in the lengthy *Bredon Hill*, in which the rapt, shimmering music of the beginning gradually evolves to a numbed close. In some of these songs, Vaughan Williams rounds matters off with a piano postlude that underlines the atmosphere and meaning of the poem.

Vaughan Williams had studied briefly with Ravel in Paris in 1908, just before beginning to compose *On Wenlock Edge*. Several years later—in 1912, as he was overseeing the premiere of his *Daphnis and Chloe*—Ravel helped arrange a performance of *On Wenlock Edge* in Paris, and he later wrote to the English composer to convey the "pleasure of congratulating you and telling you of my delight at your great success. In everyone's opinion your lyrical settings were a revelation."

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger



EMERSON STRING QUARTET

APRIL 14

PURCELL (arr. BRITTEN): Chacony in G Minor
HAYDN: String Quartet in G Major, Op. 33, No. 5, Hob. III: 41
MOZART: String Quartet in D Minor, K. 421
BEETHOVEN: String Quartet in E Minor, Op. 59, No. 2

415.392.2545

sfperformances.org