



presents...

# ALEXANDER STRING QUARTET

Zakarias Grafilo | Violin  
Yuna Lee | Violin

David Samuel | Viola  
Sandy Wilson | Cello

## ROBERT GREENBERG | Music Historian

Saturday, January 11, 2025 | 10am  
Saturday, January 25, 2025 | 10am

Herbst Theatre

### The String Quartets of Papa Joe and Wolfgang

Program 3  
January 11

**HAYDN**

**String Quartet in E-flat Major, Opus 33, No. 2 "Joke"**

*Allegro moderato*

*Scherzo: Allegro*

*Largo sostenuto*

*Finale: Presto; Adagio; Presto*

INTERMISSION

**MOZART**

**String Quartet in G Major, K.387**

*Allegro vivace assai*

*Menuetto: Allegro*

*Andante cantabile*

*Molto allegro*

*Program 4*  
**January 25**

**MOZART**

**String Quartet in B-flat Major, K.589**

*Allegro*  
*Larghetto*  
*Menuetto: Moderato*  
*Allegro assai*

**INTERMISSION**

**HAYDN**

**String Quartet in D Major, Opus 64, No. 5 “Lark”**

*Allegro moderato*  
*Adagio cantabile*  
*Menuetto: Allegretto*  
*Finale: Vivace*

**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](http://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.*

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 have 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 cata-

logue 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](http://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 JANUARY 11

### String Quartet in E-flat Major, Opus 33, No. 2 "Joke"

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN  
(1732-1809)

The six string quartets of Haydn's Opus 33 date from 1781, when the composer was 49 years old. In December of that year Haydn gave music lessons in Vienna to Maria Fyodorovna, wife of Grand Duke Paul, who later became Emperor Paul II of Russia. Haydn dedicated this set of quartets to the Grand Duke and as a result they sometimes go under the nickname "Russian Quartets," though there is nothing Russian about them beyond that name.

Before their publication, Haydn planned to offer handwritten copies of these quartets for sale to wealthy patrons and advertised them as having been written "in a quite new, special manner." Exactly what he meant by this has been the source of some debate, and cynical commentators have felt that Haydn's public enthusiasm for the novelty of these quartets was merely a sales pitch. The Opus 33 quartets were Haydn's first in nine years, and while they represent no radical departure from previous technique, they do show a new clarity of texture, greater use of all four voices (the bass line in particular has been liberated), and a more complete development of material. Perhaps this is what the composer had in mind when he proclaimed these quartets "quite new." One of those who *did* recognize something new in these quartets was Mozart, as we shall see in the next work on this program.

The *Allegro moderato* opening movement of the *Quartet in E-flat Major* is characterized by the lucidity of Haydn's writing for all four instruments. The first violin's amiable opening theme, marked *cantabile*, rises gracefully above the other three voices, which quickly become partners with the first violin once the development begins.

Haydn smoothly knits the movement together through the repetition of the two sixteenth-note pickup that introduces the first theme: that figure can be heard in almost every measure of the opening movement.

Haydn called the second movement a scherzo, but exactly what he meant by this is uncertain. This is clearly not the kind of dramatic scherzo that Beethoven later wrote, and it is formally indistinguishable from standard minuet-and-trio form. The only thing that makes this movement scherzo-like is that it is to be taken at a speed faster than the usual minuet: Haydn specifies *Allegro*. The *Largo sostenuto* is noteworthy for its use of the often-neglected viola to introduce the main theme, and the development makes effective contrast between piano and sforzando attacks.

The last movement, marked *Presto*, is a brief rondo-finale, and the “joke” that has earned this quartet its nickname comes at the very end. The rondo sails buoyantly along until Haydn brings it to a stop with a cadential *Adagio*. Phrases from the original rondo theme emerge bit by bit before Haydn slyly concludes in a way guaranteed, as he said, to catch “the ladies [who] will always begin talking before the music is finished.”

## String Quartet in G Major, K.387

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART  
(1756–1791)

Soon after his arrival in Vienna in 1781, Mozart fell under the spell of Haydn’s quartets, and in the six quartets of Haydn’s Opus 33, the younger composer saw new expressive possibilities in the form. He set about writing a cycle of six quartets of his own, and these new works—his first quartets in nine years—would be far different from his divertimento-like early essays in that form. We normally think of Mozart as a fast worker, but he worked for three years on these quartets, revising and refining until he had them just the way he wanted. In his rather flowery dedication of them to Haydn, Mozart conceded that they were indeed “the fruit of long and laborious toil.”

Yet this music hardly sounds labored. It flows with consummate ease, and these six quartets are among Mozart’s finest works. He completed the first of the set, in G major, on December 31, 1782. There is nothing remarkable formally about the first three movements—a sonata-form opening movement, a minuet-and-trio, and a slow movement—but what distin-

guishes this music is the glorious writing for string quartet and the organic growth of simple thematic motifs. The *Allegro* is built around a lyric opening idea (note how Mozart dovetails fragments of that theme into the line even as the theme is still being announced) and a bouncy second subject presented by the second violin and which is itself derived from the opening theme. The graceful development of these ideas is often canonic in structure with the melodic line flowing easily between the four voices.

The minuet is massive, both in duration (surprisingly, this minuet is the longest movement in the quartet) and in scope. It features off-the-beat accents and themes built on long chromatic lines; its powerful trio, in G minor, leaps across unexpected intervals. The elegant *Andante cantabile* does indeed sing. Mozart was usually sparing in his use of the marking *cantabile*—he believed that *all* music should sing—but this movement seems to demand that marking. Its main idea, already ornate on its opening statement, grows more intense as the movement proceeds.

Most remarkable by far is the finale, which—while not strictly a fugue—is built on fugal material. It opens with the four-note tag that would later form the fugal opening of the finale of the “Jupiter” Symphony. Almost before this contrapuntal complexity is underway, Mozart introduces a second fugue subject, and then—just as a dazzling display of compositional virtuosity—he combines the two fugue themes. The movement is actually in sonata-form, using fugal ideas as the contrasted material, and Mozart works out the movement with breathtaking ease. The very end may well be the most striking moment of all: the music races to what sounds like a cadence, but it is a false ending, and now Mozart produces the true conclusion, a simple restatement of the opening fugue subject, presented very quietly and—at the end—harmonized.

Mozart may have been impressed by Haydn’s string quartets, but now it was the older composer’s turn to repay the compliment, and he did that with the utmost sincerity. After hearing three of the quartets that Mozart dedicated to him performed at a garden party in Vienna in 1785, Haydn turned to Mozart’s father and exclaimed: “Before God and as an honest man, I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by name. He has taste and, what is more, the most profound knowledge of composition.”

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger

## String Quartet in B-flat Major, K.589

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART  
(1756–1791)

In the spring of 1789, Prince Karl Lichnowsky, a generous patron of music, invited Mozart to visit Berlin with him. Legend has it that the cello-playing King Friedrich Wilhelm II was anxious to receive Mozart, who played before the king and queen and was rewarded with a golden snuffbox full of a hundred louis d’or and a commission to compose six string quartets for the king and six easy keyboard sonatas for his daughter, Princess Friederike. Mozart returned to Vienna but was able to complete only three of these quartets and then had to sell them for quick cash during the poverty of his final years.

But the problem is that this tale appears to have been a complete fabrication on Mozart’s part. While Mozart did visit Berlin in May 1789, all the evidence suggests that the king did not receive him—instead he sent Mozart off to Jean-Pierre Duport, his director of chamber music. The king did not meet Mozart, gave him no gift, and commissioned nothing. Faced with having to return to Vienna in defeat, Mozart borrowed money to pass off as from the king and created the story of the commission. Certainly he did not seem to take the commission—if it ever existed—very seriously: he wrote one quartet immediately, two a year later, and then forgot about the whole thing, and when these quartets were published there was no hint of a royal dedication. The notion that these quartets had been written on commission from a king had been abandoned. Yet the nickname “King of Prussia” will be forever a part of how we think of these quartets. It is an irony that Mozart would have felt keenly.

Uncomfortable as this episode may be, it should not cause us to undervalue these quartets, which are composed with all the mastery of Mozart’s final years. Taking an obvious cue, he made sure that all three feature an important role for the cellist, but such prominence created special problems for Mozart, who was essentially a “top-line” composer: he preferred to have the melody in the highest register, the accompaniment beneath it. As soon as the bottom voice is given prominence, the

other three voices must have their roles re-defined. As a result, all four instruments have very active roles, giving these quartets an unusually rich sonority.

The *Quartet in B-flat Major*, completed in May 1790, is relaxed and agreeable music. There is a sense of smoothness throughout the first movement. Its opening theme flows easily in the first violin, and there are two secondary subjects, both assigned to the cello. The brief but energetic development concentrates on the opening idea, and the two themes that had been announced by the cello do not reappear until the closing moments. The cello has the main theme of the *Larghetto*; textures grow complex here, with ornate rhythms and unusual pairings of instruments: the first violin and cello, though some distance apart in range, share the material at times.

The cello fades from prominence over the final two movements. The *Menuetto* is in many ways the most striking movement of this quartet. The opening section sends the first violin quite high in its register, perhaps as an effort to balance the deep sonority of the cello. The trio section is huge: over a busy, chirping accompaniment, the first violin assumes a role of concerto-like prominence, and Mozart stays with this until the third movement becomes, surprisingly, almost the longest in the quartet. The finale, much more conventional, unfolds smoothly on its 6/8 meter; its main theme bears a close relationship to the finale of Haydn's "Joke" Quartet (perhaps an act of homage). The movement drives to an almost operatic climax with the first violin soaring high above the other instruments before the music subsides to its nicely understated close.

## String Quartet in D Major, Opus 64, No. 5 "Lark"

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN  
(1732–1809)

Haydn's 30 years as kapellmeister to the Esterhazy family at their palaces to the east of Vienna was one of the most distinguished relationships in the history of music. Prince Nikolaus was a passionate amateur musician who maintained an opera house, a marionette theater, and an orchestra. Haydn directed all these activities, and in the process he turned the Esterhazy establishment into one of the musical centers of Europe—it was for Prince Nikolaus' court that he wrote the vast majority of his symphonies, quartets, and liturgical music.

By the late 1780s, however, there were

signs that this situation would not last forever, and in fact it came to a sudden end when Nikolaus died on September 28, 1790. His successor, his son Prince Anton, was uninterested in music: Anton disbanded the orchestra and virtually the entire musical establishment and put Haydn on a handsome pension. The Esterhazy musicians were alert enough to see this coming, and several of them had already made alternate plans. The principal second violinist of Haydn's orchestra during the 1780s was Johann Tost, but in 1788 Tost resigned from the orchestra, married a wealthy woman, and went into business as a cloth merchant in Vienna. But Tost maintained his interest in music (and in commercial possibilities), and he commissioned 12 string quartets from his former music director. It was for Tost that Haydn composed the six quartets of his Opus 64, completing the last two in the fall of 1790 just after Nikolaus' death, and the set of six quartets was published in Vienna. In 1791, Haydn took the quartets with him to London, where they were published by John Bland.

The *Quartet in D Major*—the fifth in the set—has become one of Haydn's most famous. It takes its nickname from the first violin's extended melody at the very beginning of the first movement. Listeners should be wary of that nickname. It makes a convenient handle by which to identify this quartet, but that violin melody bears no relationship to the song of the lark. The nickname did not originate with Haydn, who would have been as surprised to learn that he had written a "Lark" quartet as Mozart would have been to learn that he had written a "Jupiter" symphony. But—nickname aside—that opening passage is a good introduction to the entire work, for the first violin is the star of this quartet, in-

roducing themes, dominating their development, and generally soaring high above the other three instruments. If one of the clichés about Haydn is that he liberated all four voices in the string quartet, making it a democracy of equals, this quartet seem a reversion to an aristocratic hierarchy. But the first violin's unusual prominence is easy to forgive when dealing with music as fresh as this.

The opening *Allegro moderato* is built largely on the soaring "lark" theme, although Haydn offers two other ideas, and all three are treated in the development. The *Adagio cantabile* is, as its name suggests, an essentially lyric movement. Again the first violin soars and sings as the other instruments accompany. In the central episode, however, Haydn moves from the shining A major of the opening into a more subdued A minor, and when the opening material returns, he decorates the first violin line with ornate embellishments. The third movement is the expected minuet-and-trio, built on a main theme full of grace notes. The trio section, though, brings a surprise: Haydn modulates into D minor, and the individual entrances descend gracefully through chromatic modulations.

Haydn concludes with a finale marked *Vivace*. This movement is virtually a perpetual-motion display piece for the first violin, which races along a steady rush of sixteenth notes. The center section features a series of fugal entrances and some energetic syncopations as the two violins ascend ever higher as the perpetual-motion rush continues below them. Even with its repeat, this sparkling movement races home in a blistering two minutes.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger



**SIR STEPHEN  
HOUGH** | Piano

**FEB 4**

**CHAMINADE:** *Automne; Autre Fois; Les Sylvains*

**LISZT:** Sonata in B Minor

**HOUGH:** *Sonatina Nostalgica*

**CHOPIN:** Sonata in B Minor

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