

PRESENTS



The Alexander String Quartet
Zakarias Grafilo & Frederick Lifszitz, violins
Paul Yarbrough, viola • Sandy Wilson, cello

An Alexander String Quartet Series Event
Sunday, January 31, 2010 • 2 p.m. & 7 p.m.
Vanderhoef Studio Theatre, Mondavi Center, UC Davis

Lecturer: Robert Greenberg (2 p.m. concert only)

There will be an intermission in the 2 p.m. performance.

Post-performance Q&A following the 7 p.m. show.

FURTHER LISTENING 
see p. 40

The artists and your fellow audience members appreciate silence during the performance. Please be sure that you have switched off cellular phones, watch alarms, and pager signals. Videotaping, photographing, and audio recording are strictly forbidden. Violators are subject to removal.

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MAY 10–JULY 9, 2010

Capturing the new technology in textile application, Dr. Kinor Jiang from Hong Kong Polytechnic University explores metallic fiber transformation and metal plating of fabrics for innovative textile designs. Rich fabrics that meet contemporary esthetic demands from his studio will be presented in the spring of 2010 at the UC Davis Design Museum.

At the Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts, we are deeply interested in the visual arts and the ways in which painting, photography, and other forms may enhance the experience of the performing artists we present.

Located at the north end of the Rumsey Rancheria Grand Lobby just behind the Ticket Office, the art display case is a collaboration among the Mondavi Center, the Design Museum, the C. N. Gorman Museum, and the Richard L. Nelson Gallery & Fine Arts Collection.

ROBERT GREENBERG

by JEFF HUDSON

Lecturer Robert Greenberg—a partner alongside the Alexander String Quartet at the Mondavi Center since 2002—has just released a set of recorded lectures (through The Teaching Company, www.teach12.com) discussing the Beethoven string quartets, with musical examples from the Alexander String Quartet's new boxed set covering that music (released on the Foghorn label in summer 2009).

He's been working with the Alexander String Quartet since 1987, when they commissioned Greenberg to write his Second String Quartet. (They later commissioned a Third and Fourth Quartet as well). Greenberg started lecturing at ASQ concerts in the early 1990s, over a three-year cycle of Beethoven string quartet concerts in San Francisco.

"This is a project I started talking about with The Teaching Company in the late 1990s," Greenberg told me. "I wanted to be able to work with the Alexander String Quartet, and we just planned it."

Greenberg's Beethoven string quartet lectures come in three boxes, each containing eight CDs or DVDs (with a 45-minute lecture per disc). That contrasts with the 10 lectures you'll hear Greenberg deliver in the three-a-year series at Mondavi. "The Teaching Company course is a much expanded version of what I do live," Greenberg explained. "There's a level of detail that I cannot get into in a live lecture setting. And with the recordings, you can go back and listen as often as you need to."

The DVD version accounts for 70% of sales, with audio-only CDs making up the remainder. "There's all kinds of imagery that's added (on the DVDs) . . . if I mention a theater where the music was performed, there are images of the theater that come up. That's something that's not really possible in a live setting, but is possible in a media piece," he said.

As a speaker, Greenberg leaves little to chance. "When I'm speaking live, I'm working off a prepared text, somewhere between 4,800 and 5,200 words," Greenberg said. "Ninety-nine percent of what I say has been worked out beforehand. Before a lecture, I spend an hour of quiet time with my notes." But Greenberg knows the value of spontaneity and irreverent humor. "I have to take the (the Alexander String Quartet) by surprise," he shared. "If the audience sees the quartet laugh, the audience will laugh, too." And Greenberg doesn't want his presentations to feel dry.

In addition to lecturing at concerts, Greenberg has a longtime gig at the Wharton School (at the University of Pennsylvania), one of the classier places to earn an MBA. "We use music as a metaphor for leadership issues they may be facing at their firm," Greenberg explains.

He's also a collector—he owns more than 400 cocktail shakers, in every shape and color. He downplays that accomplishment, but concedes, "I can make a good martini."

And he's always preparing new lectures. Having covered the Beethoven symphonies, string quartets, and piano sonatas, as well as music by Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Liszt, Schumann, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Verdi, Stravinsky, Shostakovich and others, Greenberg's next project will be Wagner's operas. "I've been writing it for about a year, it should come out next fall. It will take me past the 550-lecture threshold," Greenberg said.

FURTHER LISTENING



Jeff Hudson contributes coverage of the performing arts to Capital Public Radio, the *Davis Enterprise*, and *Sacramento News and Review*.

The Alexander String Quartet

2 p.m. Concert: Robert Greenberg, Lecturer

String Quartet No. 8 in E Minor, Op. 59, No. 2 (1806)

Beethoven

Allegro

Molto adagio

Allegretto

Finale: Presto

Intermission (2 p.m. concert only)

String Quartet No. 9 in C Major, Op. 59, No. 3 (1806)

Beethoven

Introduzione: Andante con moto--Allegro vivace

Andante con moto quasi Allegretto

Menuetto: Grazioso

Allegro molto

The Alexander String Quartet is represented by
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PROGRAM NOTES

By Eric Bromberger

String Quartet No. 8 in E Minor, Op. 59, No. 2

Ludwig van Beethoven

(Born December 16, 1770, in Bonn; died March 26, 1827, in Vienna)

When Count Andreas Razumovsky, the Russian ambassador to Vienna and chamber music enthusiast, commissioned a set of three string quartets from Beethoven in 1805, he could not possibly have known what he would receive in return. Beethoven had at that time written one set of six quartets (published in 1801), cast very much in the high classical mold as set out by Haydn and Mozart. Doubtless Razumovsky expected something on this order, and he provided Beethoven with some Russian themes and asked that he include one in each of the three quartets.

The three quartets Beethoven wrote in 1806, however, were so completely original that in one stroke they redefined the whole conception of the string quartet. These are massive quartets, both in duration and dramatic scope, and it is no surprise that they alienated virtually everyone who heard them; only with time did Beethoven's astonishing achievement in this music become clear. Trying to take the measure of this new music, some early critics referred to the Razumovsky quartets as "symphony quartets," but this is misleading, for the quartets are true chamber music. But it is true that what the *Eroica* did for the symphony, these quartets did for the string quartet: they opened new vistas, entirely new conceptions of what the string quartet might be and of the power it might unleash.

The first Razumovsky quartet is broad and heroic and the third, extroverted and virtuosic, but the second has defied easy characterization. Part of the problem is that in this quartet Beethoven seems to be experimenting with new ideas about themes and harmony. The thematic material of the first movement in particular has baffled many, for it seems almost consciously non-thematic, and harmonically this quartet can seem elusive as well. All four movements are in some form of E, but Beethoven refuses to settle into any key for very long, and one key will melt into another (often unexpected) key in just a matter of measures.

Such a description would seem to make the quartet in E minor a nervous work, unsettled in its procedures and unsettling to audiences. But the wonder is that—despite these many original strokes—this music is so unified, so convincing, and at times so achingly beautiful. Simple verbal description cannot begin to provide a measure of this music, but a general description can at least aid a listener along his way to discovering this music for himself. The two chords that open the *Allegro* will recur throughout, at quite different dynamic levels and used in quite different ways. The "theme" that follows seems almost a fragment, and Beethoven develops small parts even of this theme, using them as rhythmic figures or developing intervals from this opening statement. This is a big movement, and Beethoven asks for repeats of both the exposition and development (not always observed in performance) before the movement closes on a massive restatement of the opening theme which suddenly fades into silence.

Beethoven's friend Carl Czerny said that the composer had been inspired to write the *Molto Adagio* "when contemplating the starry

sky and thinking of the music of the spheres.” Beethoven specifies in the score that “This piece must be played with great feeling,” and after the somewhat nervous first movement the *Adagio* brings a world of expressive intensity. This massive movement, in sonata form, opens with a prayer-like main theme, but all is not peace; along the way Beethoven punctuates the generally hushed mood with powerful massed chords.

The *Allegretto*, with its skittering main theme (the pulses are off the beat), feels somewhat playful. In its trio section, Beethoven introduces Razumovsky’s “Russian” theme and then proceeds to subject it to such strait-jacketed contrapuntal treatment that some critics have felt that Beethoven is trying to annihilate the theme; Joseph Kerman speaks of the trio as Beethoven’s “revenge” on Razumovsky. The finale begins in the wrong key (C major) and then wobbles uncertainly between C major and E minor throughout. Despite the air of high-spirited dancing in the main theme, this movement too brings stuttering phrases and the treatment of bits of theme, which are sometimes tossed rapidly between the four voices. A *Piu Presto* coda brings this most original quartet to a sudden close.

String Quartet No. 9 in C Major, Op. 59, No. 3 Ludwig van Beethoven

The *Quartet in C Major* opens in an aural fog: purposely obscuring both harmony and rhythm, Beethoven cuts the listener adrift and leaves him struggling for some sense of direction. Then the first violin leaps out brightly with the opening theme of the *Allegro vivace* and establishes the clear tonality of C major. Note carefully the violin’s first two notes: the rise of a half-step will unify the entire first movement. The first violin has so prominent a role that this movement has something of the feel of a violin concerto; that virtuoso part, often in a very high register, dominates this sonata-form movement, while the other three voices are frequently relegated to the role of accompanists. The music arrives at a moment of stasis before one of Beethoven’s shortest codas; the cello’s half-step rises launch a rapid chromatic *stringendo* to the final cadence.

The *Andante*, one of Beethoven’s most effective slow movements, opens with a *forte* pizzicato from the cello, and the first violin outlines the brooding A-minor theme that will dominate the movement. A surprising feature of the *Andante* is that the steady tread of six eighth-notes per measures continues almost throughout, but rather than becoming monotonous, this measured pace takes on a force of its own, particularly as it is reinforced by Beethoven’s imaginative and expressive use of cello pizzicato. A second theme—in C major—lightens the mood somewhat, but the tone of the *Andante* remains dark and restless. Once again, the first violin rises high above the other instruments, often in passages of almost aching beauty.

In contrast to the intense *Andante*, the *Menuetto* can seem lightweight. Vincent D’Indy sneered that it is “a return to the style of 1796,” and it is true that the movement lacks the originality of the two movements that surround it. But if the music can seem lightweight, it agreeably lessens the tension between the powerful movements on either side of it, and Beethoven makes piquant contrast between the flowing legato of the minuet and the sharply articulated staccato of the trio. Rather than conclude with a simple *da capo*, Beethoven writes out a coda that leads without pause to the final movement.

The finale explodes to life with a brilliant fugue introduced by the viola. This movement has been called a fugue, but that is inaccurate. Only the beginning is fugal—the remainder is in sonata form. The most impressive aspect of this movement is its relentless energy; the finale is virtually a perpetual motion for four virtuoso players. One of its most memorable sequences occurs in the development: each of the instruments is in turn given a brilliant eight-measure passage (based on the final measure of the fugue theme) that simply goes up and comes down the scale. But Beethoven specifies that each instrument must remain on one string, and the result is a brief but dazzling cadenza for each instrument as the others accompany. It is gloriously apt quartet writing, and the effect in performance is breathtaking. There are few finales in Beethoven—or anywhere else—full of such headlong energy, and the music finally hurtles to a cadence. But it is a false cadence, as if Beethoven is unwilling to quit too soon. The music tentatively resumes, then speeds ahead and—set off by a lovely counter-theme in the second violin—races to the end of one of Beethoven’s most exciting finales.

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. In 1984, Greenberg received a Ph.D. in music composition, with distinction, from the University of California, Berkeley.

Greenberg has composed more than 45 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 three Nicola de Lorenzo Composition Prizes and three Meet-The-Composer Grants. Recent commissions have been received from the Koussevitzky Foundation in the Library of Congress, the Alexander String Quartet, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, the Strata Ensemble, 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.

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, and a faculty member of the Advanced Management Program at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School of Business. He has served on the faculties of the University of California, 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 10 years he was host and lecturer for the Symphony’s nationally acclaimed “Discovery Series”), the Ravinia Festival, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the Van Cliburn Foundation, the Chautauqua Institute (where he was the Everett Scholar in Residence for the summer of 2006), the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, and Music@Menlo.

Greenberg has been profiled in *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Times* of London, *Los Angeles Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and *San Francisco Chronicle*. For many years Greenberg was the resident composer and music historian to National Public Radio's *Weekend All Things Considered*, and presently plays that role on *Weekend Edition, Sunday*.

In 1993, Greenberg recorded a 48-lecture course, *How to Listen to and Understand Great Music* for the Teaching Company/SuperStar Teachers Program, the preeminent producer of college level courses-on-media in the United States. Eleven further courses—*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*, and *The Concerto*—have been recorded since, totaling more than 500 lectures.

In 2003, the *Bangor (Maine) Daily News* referred to Greenberg as “the Elvis of music history and appreciation,” an appraisal that has given him more pleasure than any other. Dr. Greenberg is currently writing a book on opera and its impact on Western culture, to be published by Oxford University Press.

The Alexander String Quartet

Zakarias Grafilo, violin

Frederick Lifstiz, violin

Paul Yarbrough, viola

Sandy Wilson, cello

Having celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2006, the Alexander String Quartet has performed in the major music capitals of four continents, securing its standing among the world's premier ensembles. Widely admired for its interpretations of Beethoven, Mozart, and Shostakovich, the quartet has also established itself as an important advocate of new music through more than 25 commissions and numerous premiere performances. In 1999, BMG Classics released the Quartet's nine-CD set of the Beethoven cycle on its Arte Nova label to tremendous critical acclaim. The FoghornClassics label released a three-CD set (*Homage*) of the Mozart quartets dedicated to Haydn in 2004. Foghorn also released a six-CD set (*Fragments*) of the complete Shostakovich quartets, and a recording of the complete quartets of Pulitzer Prize-winning San Francisco composer Wayne Peterson was released in the spring of 2008. A new recording of the Beethoven cycle was released in June 2009.

The Alexander String Quartet's annual calendar of concerts includes engagements at major halls throughout North America and Europe. The quartet has appeared at Lincoln Center, the 92nd Street Y, and the Metropolitan Museum in New York City; Jordan Hall in Boston; the Library of Congress and Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D. C.; and chamber music societies and universities across North America. Recent overseas tours have included the U.K., the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, France, Greece, the Republic of Georgia, and the Philippines. The many distinguished artists to collaborate with the Alexander String Quartet include pianists Menahem Pressler, Gary Graffman, Roger Woodward, Jeremy Menuhin, and James Tocco; clarinetists Eli Eban, Charles Neidich, Joan Enric Lluna, and Richard Stoltzman; cellist Sadao Harada; soprano Elly Ameling; and saxophonists Branford Marsalis and David Sánchez.

The Alexander String Quartet's 25th anniversary was also the 20th anniversary of its association with New York City's Baruch College as Ensemble-in-Residence. This landmark was celebrated through a performance by the ensemble of the Shostakovich string quartet cycle at Engelman Recital Hall in the Baruch Performing Art Center. Of these performances, *The New York Times* wrote, “The intimacy of the music came through with enhanced power and poignancy in the Alexander quartet's vibrant, probing, assured and aptly volatile performances...Seldom have these anguished, playful, ironic and masterly works seemed so profoundly personal.” The Alexander String Quartet was also awarded Presidential Medals in honor of its longstanding commitment to the arts and education and in celebration of two decades of service to Baruch College.

Highlights of the quartet's 2009-10 season include a multiple concert series of music by Dvořák for San Francisco Performances, of Mendelssohn and Schumann at the Baruch Performing Arts Center in New York City, of Brahms at the Scottsdale Center for the Arts, and a continuing Beethoven cycle for the Mondavi Center. The quartet returns to the Library of Congress for a pair of performances, one an all-Beethoven program in collaboration with the lecturer Robert Greenberg and the other a program of 20th- and 21st-century repertory performed in collaboration with the Afiara String Quartet. The quartet will premiere a new work commissioned for them from Jeeyoung Kim for San Francisco Performances in April 2010. They also continue their annual residencies at Allegheny College and St. Lawrence University.

Among the quartet's recent premieres are *Rise Chanting* by Augusta Read Thomas, commissioned for the Alexander by the Krannert Center and premiered there and simulcast by WFMT radio in Chicago. The quartet has also premiered *String Quartets Nos. 2 and 3* by Pulitzer Prize winner Wayne Peterson and works by Ross Bauer (commissioned by Stanford University), Richard Festinger, David Sheinfeld, Hi Kyung Kim, and a Koussevitzky commission by Robert Greenberg.

At home in San Francisco, the members of the Alexander String Quartet are a major artistic presence, serving as directors of the Morrison Chamber Music Center at the School of Music and Dance in the College of Creative Arts at San Francisco State University and Ensemble in Residence of San Francisco Performances.

The Alexander String Quartet was formed in New York City in 1981, and the following year became the first string quartet to win the Concert Artists Guild Competition. In 1985, the quartet captured international attention as the first American quartet to win the London International String Quartet Competition, receiving both the jury's highest award and the Audience Prize. In 1995, Allegheny College awarded Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degrees to the members of the quartet in recognition of their unique contribution to the arts. Honorary degrees were conferred on the ensemble by St. Lawrence University in 2000.

The Alexander String Quartet performs on the Ellen M. Egger Quartet of instruments, built in 1987 by the American maker Francis Kuttner.

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