

# THE ALEXANDER STRING QUARTET

Biography

Zakarias Grafilo, violin • Frederick Lifszitz, violin • Paul Yarbrough, viola • Sandy Wilson, cello

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Having celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> 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 over 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 Foghorn Classics label released a three-CD set (*Homage*) of the Mozart quartets dedicated to Haydn in 2004. Foghorn released the a six-CD album (*Fragments*) of the complete Shostakovich quartets in 2006 and 2007, 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 will follow in 2009. The Alexander String Quartet is a major artistic presence in its home base of San Francisco, serving there 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'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; and chamber music societies and universities across the North American continent. Recent overseas tours have brought them to 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, and Jeremy Menuhin; clarinetists Eli Eban, Charles Neidich, Joan Enric Lluna, and Richard Stoltzman; cellists Lynn Harrell and 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 in April 2006. 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 was also awarded Presidential Medals in honor of their longstanding commitment to the Arts and Education and in celebration of their two decades of service to Baruch College.

Highlights of the 2008-2009 include the conclusion of a Beethoven cycle and a series of five concerts of music by Mendelssohn and his circle for San Francisco Performances, a series of four Brahms programs presented by the Baruch Performing Arts Center in New York City, the first installments of a Beethoven cycle for Mondavi Center, and a performance of Eddie Sauter's work *Focus* with Branford Marsalis at the Lied Center at the University Kansas. The quartet will also make its first tour of Argentina and give performances for Chamber Music Albuquerque and the University of Vermont Lane Series. They also continue their annual residencies at Lewis & Clark College (Portland, Ore.), 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. Upcoming premieres include a new work being commissioned by San Francisco Performances from Jeeyoung Kim.

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 and only American Quartet to win the London International String Quartet Competition, receiving both the jury's highest award and the Audience Prize. In May of 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 May 2000.

The Alexander String Quartet performs on a matched set of instruments by the American maker Francis Kuttner built in the late 1980s.

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Robert Besen, Director | 508 First Street, Suite 4W | Hoboken NJ 07030-7823  
T 201-386-8565 | F 201-386-8564 | Robert@BesenArts.com | www.BesenArts.com