



presents

The Alexander String Quartet

Zakarias Grafilo, violin • Yuna Lee, violin

David Samuel, viola • Sandy Wilson, cello

Saturday, June 7, 2025 at 7 PM

Congregational Church of South Hero, Vermont 

PROGRAM

String Quartet in G major, Op. 77, No. 1, Hob III:81 (1799) Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Allegro moderato

Adagio

Menuetto: Presto

Finale: Presto

Gradual (2016, rev. 2022)

Tarik O'Regan (b. 1978)

—INTERMISSION—

String Quartet No. 14 in D minor, D. 810 "Death and the Maiden" (1824) Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Allegro

Andante con moto

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Presto

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ABOUT ISLAND ARTS



Our Mission is to foster and provide creative, artistic opportunities in Vermont's Grand Isle County. We bring the arts and cultural diversity to residents and visitors in our rural county and surrounding areas. All events are free for ages 22 and under, and at least four concerts are free for all each summer.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Would you like to hear this concert again? At 4 PM tomorrow / June 8th, Hill & Hollow Music will present the Quartet at Saranac Methodist Church in Saranac [not Saranac Lake], NY. That program will feature Kian Ravaei "The Little Things" (2023) in place of tonight's Tarik O'Regan "Gradual." www.hillandhollowmusic.org/calendar/

Coming soon at the Island Arts Center in North Hero:

"Making Magic with Ken Burns" – A Jacqueline Schwab Piano-Lecture <i>Note: This event is in <u>South</u> Hero.</i>	Sunday June 15, 4 PM
Book Sale by Donation	Sat & Sun June 21-22, 11-3 PM
Silent Auction	Sat June 21, 11-3 PM
Mango Jam, Louisiana sounds: A free family barn dance	Sat June 28, 6 PM
Counterpoint Vocal Ensemble sings of "The Gilded Age"	Fri July 11, 7 PM
Ken Clark Organ Trio – Soul, Jazz, R&B	Sunday July 13, 7 PM
Skylark – A contemporary string ensemble	Friday July 25, 7 PM
Jorge Garcia Herranz, Solo Piano; Beethoven	Saturday, August 9, 7 PM
The Dixie Six – Louis Armstrong's jazz sounds	Sun Aug 10, 6 PM
Haiduck & Heckendorn Cabaret: The Great American Song Book	Sat Aug 16, 7 PM
Sohyun Ahn, Solo Piano; Chopin Nocturnes	Friday August 22, 7 PM

Youth events, more outside concerts, and many classes listed at islandarts.org.

THE ALEXANDER STRING QUARTET BIOGRAPHY

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 has 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.

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The Alexander String Quartet Biography, *continued from page 3*

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. [August 2024]

PROGRAM NOTES

String Quartet in G major, Op. 77, No. 1

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN. Born March 31, 1732, Rohrau, Died May 31, 1809, Vienna

Haydn turned the string quartet into a great form. Music for two violins, viola, and cello had been written for years – usually as background or entertainment music – but in his cycle of eighty-three quartets Haydn transformed the quartet into an ensemble of four equal partners, wrote music that demanded the greatest musicianship and commitment from all four performers, and made the quartet the medium for some of his most refined expression. His quartet-writing, however, came to an end in the late 1790s. Haydn had just returned from two quite successful visits to London, and now – in his mid-sixties – he was losing interest in purely instrumental music. He would write no more symphonies and would instead devote his final years to vocal music: from these last years came his oratorios *The Creation* and *The Seasons*, as well as the great masses.

Just as he was embarking on these new directions, Haydn completed the two string quartets of his Opus 77 (and actually began one more, destined to remain unfinished). Commissioned by Prince Lobkowitz, who would later be Beethoven’s patron, the two Opus 77 quartets of 1799 represent the culmination of a lifetime spent developing and refining the form: the *Quartet in G major* performed on this concert is widely considered one of Haydn’s finest, and that is saying a great deal. Audiences might best approach this quartet by listening for the many signs of a master’s touch: the liberation of all four voices, the rapid exchanges of melodic line between them, and the beautifully idiomatic writing for all four instruments – including the often-neglected viola. (*continued on page 5*)

5 PROGRAM NOTES, *continued from page 4*

[Haydn] The opening *Allegro moderato* is in the expected sonata form, though with some original thematic touches: the main subject is a genial march-like tune – the steady 4/4 pulse of this march strides along easily throughout the movement. The second subject is hardly a theme at all, just a flowing two-measure figure that moves between the two violins – it is a measure of Haydn’s mature mastery that he can find so much in such simple material. The *Adagio* is built on a single theme, which is then repeated, growing more elaborate with each recurrence. The brisk minuet (its marking is *Presto!*) sends the first violin soaring from the bottom of its range to the very top, while the trio makes a surprising leap from the minuet’s G major to the unexpected key of E-flat major, which in turn slides into C minor as it goes. The finale, also marked *Presto*, is a miniature sonata-form movement that blisters along at a pace that makes it feel almost like a perpetual-motion. Some suspect that Haydn derived its central theme from a Hungarian folksong, but – whatever its origin – this movement is a real showcase for the first violin, and Haydn demands sparkling, athletic playing from all four players throughout this movement. — Eric Bromberger

Gradual (2016, rev. 2022)

TARIK O'REGAN. Born January 1, 1978, London. Resides in San Francisco. Tarik and his wife are members of the Stanford University faculty and the parents of two young sons.

String Quartet. Duration: 11 minutes.

I visited Idaho for the first time in 2015. As I traveled around the southwest of the state, I was struck immediately by the feeling of gentle environmental variation. When I got back to New York City, where I was living at the time, I looked through the photographs I'd taken of my trip and I realized I had only a record of the visually dramatic and extremely varied highlights. What was missing was all that lay in-between: the extremely subtle gradations of landscape I'd witnessed. It's that sense of "the in-between" which stuck in my mind whilst composing the work.

Gradual was commissioned by the Boise Chamber Music Society and the Boise State University Department of Music for the Alexander String Quartet. The first performance took place on 7th October 2016 in the Morrison Center Recital Hall, Boise State University, Idaho, USA. —Tarik O'Regan

String Quartet No. 14 in D minor, D. 810 "Death and the Maiden"

FRANZ SCHUBERT. Born January 31, 1797, Vienna. Died November 19, 1828, Vienna

In the fall of 1822 Schubert became extremely ill, and every indication is that he had contracted syphilis. The effect on him — physically and emotionally — was devastating. He was quite ill throughout 1823, so seriously in May that he had to be hospitalized. His health had in fact been shattered permanently, and he would never be fully well again; the cause of his death five years later at 31, officially listed as typhoid, was probably at least partially a result of syphilis. Emotionally, the illness was so destructive that he never went back to complete the symphony he had been working on when he contracted the disease — it would come to be known as the "Unfinished." (*continued on page 6*)

PROGRAM NOTES, *continued from page 5*

[Schubert] By early 1824 Schubert had regained some measure of health and strength, and he turned to chamber music, composing two string quartets, the second of them in D minor. The nickname *Der Tod und Das Mädchen* (“Death and the Maiden”) comes from Schubert’s use of a theme from his 1817 song by that name as the basis for a set of variations in the quartet’s second movement. In the song, which sets a poem of Matthias Claudius, death beckons a young girl; she begs him to pass her over, but he insists, saying that his embrace is soothing, like sleep. It is easy to believe that, under the circumstances, the thought of soothing death may have held some attraction for the composer.

The quartet itself is extremely dramatic. The *Allegro* rips to life with a five-note figure spit out by all four instruments. This hardly feels like chamber music. One can easily imagine this figure stamped out furiously by a huge orchestra, and the dramatic nature of this movement marks it as nearly symphonic (in fact, Gustav Mahler arranged this quartet for string orchestra in 1894, and that version is still performed and recorded today). A gentle second subject brings a measure of relief, but the hammering triplet of the opening figure is never far away — it can be heard quietly in the accompaniment, as part of the main theme, and as part of the development. The *Allegro*, which lasts a full quarter of an hour, comes to a close with the triplet rhythm sounding faintly in the distance.

The *Andante con moto* is deceptively simple. From the song *Der Tod und Das Mädchen*, Schubert uses only death’s music, which is an almost static progression of chords; the melody moves quietly within the chords. But from that simple progression Schubert writes five variations that are themselves quite varied — by turns soaring, aching lyric, fierce, calm — and the wonder is that so simple a chordal progression can yield music of such expressiveness and variety.

After two overpowering movements, the *Scherzo: Allegro molto* might seem almost lightweight, for it is extremely short. But it returns to the slashing mood of the opening movement and takes up that same strength. The trio sings easily in the lower voices as the first violin flutters and decorates their melodic line; an unusual feature of the trio is that it has no repeat — Schubert instead writes an extension of the trio, almost a form of variation itself.

The final movement, appropriately marked *Presto*, races ahead on its 6/8 rhythm. Some listeners have felt that this movement is death-haunted, and they point out that its main theme is a tarantella, the old dance of death, and that Schubert also quotes quietly from his own song *Erlkönig*. Significantly, the phrase he quotes in that song sets death’s words “Mein liebes Kind, komm geh mit mir” (My dear child, come go with me), which is precisely the message of the song *Der Tod und das Mädchen*. What this movement is “about” must be left to each listener to decide, but it is hard to believe this music death-haunted. The principal impression it makes is of overwhelming power — propulsive rhythms, huge blocks of sound, sharp dynamic contrasts — and the very ending, a dazzling rush marked *Prestissimo* that suddenly leaps into D major, blazes with life.

— Eric Bromberger