

The Westchester Chamber Music Society



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The Westchester Chamber Music Society (WCMS)
is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

Sunday, November 5, 2023
Congregation Emanu-El of Westchester
2125 Westchester Avenue, Rye, New York

The Westchester Chamber Music Society
presents

THE ALEXANDER STRING QUARTET

Zakarias Grafilo, *violin*

Yuna Lee, *violin*

David Samuel, *viola*

Sandy Wilson, *cello*



Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)
String Quartet in C Major, Op. 33, No. 3, "The Bird"
Allegro moderato
Scherzo: Allegretto
Adagio ma non troppo
Finale: Rondo—Presto

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)
String Quartet in F Major
Allegro moderato, très doux
Assez vif, très rythmé
Très lent
Agité

Intermission

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)
String Quartet No. 2 in A Major, Op. 68
Overture: Moderato con moto
Recitative and Romance: Adagio
Valse: Allegro
Theme and Variations: Adagio

*Following the concert, there will be a
Question & Answer session with the quartet.*

About the Performers

The Alexander String Quartet, founded in New York City in 1981, stands among the world's premier ensembles, having performed in the major music capitals of five continents. The Alexander has collaborated in performance and recording projects with numerous instrumentalists, singers, and composers, including 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. The quartet is a vital artistic presence in its home base of San Francisco, serving since 1989 as Ensemble in Residence of San Francisco Performances. Since its inception, the Alexander has maintained an unyielding and passionate commitment to education, training 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 2023-24 season marks the beginning of a new initiative in which the quartet is partnering with schools, arts organizations, and community institutions in the Bay Area and beyond to host innovative workshops, performances, and collaborations designed to support and bolster chamber music awareness and education for individuals from all walks of life. The Alexander performs on Michael Fischer and unlabeled circa 1800 Italian violins, a Hiroshi Iizuka viola, and a Francis M. Kuttner cello. They have also recorded and performed on a matched set of instruments known as the Ellen M. Egger Quartet, made in San Francisco by the late Francis M. Kuttner.

Zakarias Grafilo, *violin*, has been the first violinist of the Alexander String Quartet since 2002. Prior to that, he served as concertmaster of the Stockton Symphony and second violinist of the Pacific Symphony and Opera Pacific orchestras. He received his early musical training with the San Francisco Conservatory of Music Preparatory Division as well as through the Marin Music Conservatory, where he studied with Serban Rusu. Mr. Grafilo received his early orchestral training through the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra, where he served as concertmaster in 1992. He continued his studies at UCLA, studying with Alexander Treger. He earned an arts degree in Liberal Studies from San Francisco State University, where he is currently on faculty and co-director of the Instructional Program for the Morrison Chamber Music Center.

Yuna Lee, *violin*, joined the Alexander String Quartet in 2023, succeeding Frederick Lifszitz, who retired after over 35 years with the ensemble. Ms. Lee has played with the San Francisco and Saint Louis Symphonies and served as concertmaster of the New World Symphony in Miami Beach, also appearing with that orchestra as soloist. She co-founded the Phaedrus String Quartet in 1999 and has also performed as a member of The Knights in New York City. Ms. Lee received her early musical training at the New England Conservatory in Boston with Bo Hwang and served as concertmaster of both the Youth Philharmonic Orchestra and Tanglewood Young Artists Orchestra. She earned her B.M. and M.M. at Juilliard, where her principal teachers were Cho-Liang Lin and Naoko Tanaka. She also studied with members of the Guarneri, Emerson, Juilliard, and Tokyo String Quartets.

David Samuel, *viola*, joined the Alexander String Quartet in 2021, succeeding founding member Paul Yarbrough. Mr. Samuel was most recently the Associate Principal Viola of the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra and the Convenor of Classical Performance at the University of Auckland in New Zealand. He was previously the violist of Ensemble MidtVest in Denmark and was the founding violist of the Afiara Quartet. Mr. Samuel received his Bachelor and Master of Music, as well as an Artist Diploma, from The Juilliard School. His principal teachers were Paul Hersh, Henry Janzen, Michael Tree, and Karen Tuttle. Mr. Samuel has been a faculty member at the University of Stavanger and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music Preparatory Division and has held residencies at The Juilliard School, The Glenn Gould School, and the University of Alberta.

Sandy Wilson, *cello*, is a native of Northumberland, England. He completed his graduate studies at the Royal Danish Conservatory in Copenhagen as a recipient of two Danish Government scholarships and the Sophus Berendsen Award. While performing as a member of the Royal Chapel Orchestra, he studied composition with Niels Vigo Bentzon and cello with Erling Blöndal-Bengtsson. Mr. Wilson was principal cellist at the age of 21 in the Allgemeine Musikgesellschaft orchestra in Lucerne, Switzerland, at which time he also performed extensively in duo recital with the Swiss pianist Hedy Salquin. In 1979 Mr. Wilson moved to the United States, completing a degree at Yale University as a student of Aldo Parisot, Otto Werner Mueller, and the Tokyo Quartet. He co-founded the Alexander String Quartet in 1981 and has since lived in this country, devoting most of his energies to the development of the Quartet.

Program Notes

by Joshua Berrett, Ph.D.

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

String Quartet in C Major, Op. 33, No. 3, "The Bird"

The Vice-Kapellmeister will be bound to compose such music as his Serene Highness shall command, and not let such compositions be communicated to any other party, much less be copied, but they shall remain for his use only and his rightful ownership . . .

Until 1779, when it was removed, Haydn was bound by this clause in his Esterhazy contract. Now, for the first time, he was able to reach out to the larger world, earning money by distributing his manuscripts to publishers and patrons alike. These are the circumstances in which Haydn came to compose the six string quartets comprising his Op. 33, which were written over the summer and fall of 1781. In a series of letters dated Dec. 3, 1781 to prospective patrons, Haydn offers his music, composed in "a new and entirely special manner." As someone who responded, Grand Duke Paul of Russia became the dedicatee—hence the reason why these quartets are sometimes referred to as Haydn's "Russian Quartets." And a number of the Op. 33 quartets were premiered on Christmas Day, 1781, at the Viennese apartment of the Duke's wife, the Grand Duchess Maria Feodorovna.

The sonata-form first movement of *String Quartet, Op. 33, No. 3*, nicknamed "The Bird," is a vivid case of Haydn's new-found "manner. It is packed with musical mischief and our cheerful guide is the chirping grace note. It is a motif introduced by the first violin and deployed almost throughout the first movement. Mixed in are elements of comic opera, as in the case of the second theme. Listen as the chirp is fused with a chuckling descending five-note scale. Following the *pro forma* repetition of the exposition, the development section eventually brings us to a short passage of quasi-romantic, chromatic, chirp-infused yearning; then, seemingly "exhausted" by the sheer effort, we land on an exaggerated slow cadence, complete with chirps over a fermata. It sounds as though we are ready for the recapitulation, except that Haydn has somehow landed on the "wrong" dominant chord. Put another way, he has announced a "false reprise." In fact, there is considerable further working out of material before we return to a solid C major with the reprise of the chirp-chuckling second theme.

Defying convention, Haydn makes his second movement a *Scherzando Allegretto*. This is music combining grace and

playfulness, eschewing any of the rhythmic drive typical of a scherzo. The trio itself is a charming example of Haydn's "new and entirely special manner." It is a duet where the first violin delightfully chirps to the accompaniment of the second violin. What follows this movement is an *Adagio*, centered around F major and its parallel minor. Something of a hybrid, combining elements of embellished variation and sonata form, it is built around an expansive main theme and a brief developmental midsection.

The finale finds Haydn in his element. It is a romp in his cherished 2/4 meter for such movements. A mix of rondo and sonata form, the movement eventually ends with a final passage of hushed understatement—like a mischievous cat slinking away.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) *String Quartet in F Major*

Ravel's one and only string quartet dates from 1902-1903, and is dedicated to his beloved mentor, the composer and pedagogue Gabriel Fauré. Yet it is as much a homage to Claude Debussy and his sole string quartet of 1893. In fact, Ravel was very much under Debussy's spell at this point, what with the additional impact of the premiere of his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* in April 1902. At the same time, this gloriously luminous quartet is a tribute to Ravel's unique capacity to shape and color his works with a skill analogous to that of a Swiss watchmaker—to recall the characterization of him by Igor Stravinsky

The *Quartet in F Major* embodies a remarkable synthesis of multiple ingredients. Chief among them is the seamless fusion of tonal writing—the basic fact that is centered around a specific key—and the use of modes harking back to medieval practice and Gregorian Chant. It is well worth noting that in 1889 the Benedictine monks of Solesmes published a highly influential work on Gregorian Chant entitled *Paleographie Musicale*. No less significant was the founding earlier in the 19th century of École Niedermeyer, with its focus on writing church music typically evoking medieval sonorities. Then again, others have argued for traces of Andalusian chant in Ravel's music.

In the very opening measure of the first movement, the first violin announces a descending five-note theme that will serve as a crucial unifying element. It is also recalled in the third and fourth movements, thereby helping impart a cyclic quality to the work as a whole. But what impresses the listener throughout the work is the rich palette of colors that is deployed—among them multiple stops (chords), strings muted and unmated, octave sonorities, tremolos in abundance,

arpeggios, harmonics, and pizzicatos. Parenthetically, speaking of sonic flavors, it happens that Ravel craved spices and could consume astonishing amounts of pickles and mustard. Returning to the music itself, it is important to point out that the first movement follows a traditional sonata form, approximating a textbook model. The exposition, for example, is built around two clearly differentiated themes. The first of these is the one just referred to and is heard at the very start. The second appears slightly before the two-minute mark. It is a sensuous melody, marked *pp très expressif*, is in the Phrygian mode, and is sounded by first violin and viola playing two octaves apart. The Phrygian mode, incidentally, is essentially a scale that can be produced in its simplest form by playing only the white keys on the piano starting on E.

Ravel's vigorous second movement, his answer to the Austro-German scherzo, is a sonata rondo, that is, it fuses a refrain with contrasting material and developmental passagework. Heightening the energy is the music's initial twelve measures of the refrain—a polymetric pizzicato segment with 3/4 time layered atop a 6/8 meter. It is directly linked with a more lyrical waltz-like idea marked *bien chanté*. The movement's slow centerpiece offers the most dramatic contrast, what with markings of *Lento* and *très expressif*. There is lazy quasi-Moorish feeling here. And once again, modal color enters into the mix—in this case, the Aeolian mode, which can be produced by playing only the white keys starting on A.

The slow movement evokes a sense of nocturnal mystery, with muted strings, tremolos, and more. There is also a haunting reworking of the quartet's very opening idea with the marking *Très calme*. This mood is, however, briefly shattered by hints of the Beast making Beauty tremble in fear—all suggested by a disruptive cello prompting nervous tremolos in the upper strings. What follows is Ravel's vibrant and driven finale. It is striking in its juxtaposition of sections in quintuple and triple meter, while also reprising material from prior movements, particularly the first, and imparting a sense of cyclic unity to the whole work. And the final resonant F-major chord assures us that we are now safely back home from a wonderful musical ride.

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)
String Quartet No. 2 in A Major, Op. 68

It was in September 1944 that Shostakovich composed his Second String Quartet, in just nineteen days. He was able to work in a “house of rest and creativity”—a government retreat for writers and composers located in the town of Ivanovo north-east of Moscow. His creative juices were truly flowing

then because around the same time he also completed his *Piano Trio No. 2*. Both works were premiered in November of that year.

The opening sonata-form movement, identified as “Overture,” is boldly resonant, and assertive, and at times even strident. The exposition is presented twice, followed by an extensive development, but a foreshortened recapitulation and a rather abrupt ending. Opening the movement is a folk-like melody announced by the first violin and supported by the other strings sounding the perfect fifth of A and E. It provides much of the source material for what evolves in this movement. At the same time, it imparts an epic quality. Given the music’s historical context, there is in its sound palette an unmistakable affirmation of patriotic loyalty, in that on January 27, 1944, the horrendous Siege of Leningrad was finally lifted after 872 days. The Nazis had been defeated, but at terrible cost. That said, this movement stands apart from the three that follow—outer formal grand gestures contrasted with the drama of inner experience—at once more personal, intimate, and expressing the vulnerable. There are, however, elements in this first movement that are subsequently recycled. Embedded as well in this first movement are also traces of Jewish ethnic elements—hints of klezmer, oriental-sounding melodic intervals, syncopated rhythms, and “oom-pah” accompaniments.

Recitative and Romance brings a sharp change in mood with its soulful monologue for first violin. Austere, pensive, at times cantorial and passionate, the music carries us through an ambiguous mist of major and minor keys, eventually settling upon B-flat major. This, in turn, prepares us for the third movement—a danse macabre in E-flat minor. With the four instruments muted, there is a feeling of the mysterious and the ghostly. As this waltz finishes, we transition to the off-kilter beginning of the finale.

Shostakovich draws here upon a folk-like theme from the parallel movement of his contemporaneous *Piano Trio No. 2* to create a set of thirteen variations. A broad spectrum of moods is deployed, including klezmer-sounding episodes. And in a rather striking departure from tradition, Shostakovich ends the work in A minor. Instead of boldly affirming the major key, he leaves us with a sense of gray uncertainty.

Joshua Berrett, Ph.D. © 2023



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thanks the following for their generous support*

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Coming Up



December 3, 2023

Frisson Winds

Anna Urrey, *flute*

Tom Gallant, *oboe*

Bixby Kennedy, *clarinet*

Rémy Taghavi, *bassoon*

Wilden Dannenberg, *horn*

Frisson Winds plans to perform

Reicha: *Quintet in A Minor, Op. 100, No. 5*

Beethoven: *Variations in C Major on Mozart's*

"La ci darem la mano" WoO 28

Françaix: *Divertissement*

Debussy: *Syrinx*

Villa-Lobos: *Bachianas Brasileiras, No. 6*

D'Rivera: *Habanera*

Françaix: *Quartet No. 1*



March 10, 2024

The American Brass Quintet

Kevin Cobb, *trumpet*

Brandon Ridenour, *trumpet*

Eric Reed, *horn*

Hillary Simms, *trombone*

John D. Rojak, *bass trombone*

April 21, 2024

The Momenta Quartet

Emilie-Anne Gendron, *violin*

Alex Shiozaki, *violin*

Stephanie Griffin, *viola*

Michael Hass, *cello*