



Guest Artist Series

2012-2013 Season

Sara M. Snell Music Theater

Monday, September 24, 7:30 PM

Alexander String Quartet
Zakarias Grafilo, Violin
Frederick Lifnitz, Violin
Paul Yarbrough, Viola
Sandy Wilson, Cello

String Quartet No. 2, Op. 10 (1918)

Allegro

Andante quasi recitativo - Allegro giocoso

Zoltán Kodály

(1882-1967)

String Quartet No. 12 in E-Flat Major, Op. 127 (1825) Ludwig van Beethoven

Maestoso - Allegro

Adagio, ma non troppo e molto cantabile

Scherzando vivace

Finale

(1770-1827)

The Alexander String Quartet is represented by

BesenArts LLC

508 First Street, Suite 4W

Hoboken, NJ 07030-7823

www.BesenArts.com

The Alexander String Quartet records for FoghornClassics

www.asq4.com

The Alexander String Quartet Biography

Zakarias Grafilo, Violin

Frederick Lifszitz, Violin

Paul Yarbrough, Viola

Sandy Wilson, Cello

The Alexander String Quartet has performed in the major music capitals of five continents, securing its standing among the world's premier ensembles over nearly three decades. 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. 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 Arts and Humanities 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, Argentina, 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 Joyce Yang; clarinetists Eli Eban, Charles Neidich, Joan Enric Lluna, and Richard Stoltzman; cellists Lynn Harrell, Sadao Harada, and David Requiro; violist Toby Appel; and soprano Elly Ameling. Among the quartet's more unusual collaborations have been numerous performances of Eddie Sauter's seminal Third Stream work, *Focus*, in collaboration with Branford Marsalis, David Sánchez, and Andrew Speight.

A particular highlight of the season is a celebratory concert presented by San Francisco Performances in February 2012 marking the quartet's 30th anniversary. For the occasion, San Francisco Performances commissioned a new work by Jake Heggie, *Camille Claudel: Into the Fire*, a work for string quartet and mezzo-soprano; the Alexander will be joined in the world premiere by Joyce DiDonato.

Other highlights of the 2011-2012 season included two multiple concert series for San Francisco Performances, one presenting the complete quartets of Bartók and Kodály and the other music of Schubert; a Dvořák series for Mondavi Center; and a continuing annual series at Baruch College in New York City, this season featuring the Bartók cycle.

Other important series include Concerts International in Memphis, the Tuesday Evening Concert Series in Charlottesville, the Asheville Chamber Music Series, and the inaugural concert of a new chamber music series at the Capitol Theatre for Ruth Eckerd Hall in Clearwater, Florida. They also continue their annual residencies at Allegheny College and St. Lawrence University, this year in collaboration with the Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam.

The Alexander String Quartet's 25th anniversary as well as the 20th anniversary of its association with New York City's Baruch College as Ensemble in Residence was celebrated through a performance by the ensemble of the Shostakovich string quartet cycle. Of these performances at the Baruch Performing Art Center Engelman Recital Hall, *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.

The Alexander String Quartet added considerably to its distinguished and wide-ranging discography over the past decade. Recording exclusively for the FoghornClassics label, the Alexander's recent release (June 2009) of the complete Beethoven cycle was described by *Music Web International* as performances "uncompromising in power, intensity and spiritual depth," while *Strings Magazine* described the set as "a landmark journey through the greatest of all quartet cycles." The FoghornClassics 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. BMG Classics released the quartet's first recording of Beethoven cycle on its Arte Nova label to tremendous critical acclaim in 1999. The ASQ's three newest releases on FoghornClassics in the spring of 2012 include works by Brahms, Gershwin, Kern, Beethoven and new commissions from Paul Chihara, Veronika Krausas and Michael Gandolfi.

A forthcoming Bartók/Kodály cycle recorded on the renowned Ellen M. Egger matched quartet of instruments built by San Francisco luthier, Francis Kuttner will be released in the fall.

Recent Alexander premieres include *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 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.

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 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.

[January 2012]

PROGRAM NOTES

By Eric Bromberger

String Quartet No. 2, Op. 10

Zoltán Kodály

Born December 16, 1882, Kecskemet

Died March 6, 1967, Budapest

Zoltán Kodály wrote a comparatively small number of chamber works, completing them early in his career – all were composed during the second decade of the twentieth century. During these years, Kodály was teaching at the Academy of Music in Budapest, collecting folksongs with his friend Béla Bartók, and composing, and those two composers were fortunate to have as their champions the Waldbauer-Kerpely Quartet. Made up of four distinguished young musicians who had dedicated themselves to the cause of Hungarian music (and of new music in general), the quartet gave the premieres of the first string quartets of both Bartók and Kodály in 1910 (and that same year gave the Budapest premiere of the Debussy *String Quartet*, with the composer present)

The quartet continued its support of Bartók and Kodály during the difficult years of World War I, and in 1918 it gave the first performances of the second quartets of Kodály and Bartók. Bartók, who remained interested in chamber music throughout his life, would go on to write four more quartets, but Kodály changed course about 1920, turning first to orchestral music and later to choral works. He wrote no more quartets after his *Second Quartet*.

That is our loss, for Kodály's two string quartets are remarkable. Unlike Bartók, who played no string instrument, Kodály played violin, viola, and cello, and his quartet-writing is idiomatic and assured. Further, his quartets show that ideal idiom he and Bartók sought of a fusion of Hungarian folk music with classical form. Kodály does not quote Hungarian folk melodies in his *Second Quartet* – all the thematic material is his own – but the melodic shapes and inflections of the Hungarian folk music (and language) he loved so much give his quartet much of its distinctive flavor.

The structure of the *Second Quartet* is unusual. It opens with a concise sonata-form movement and then concludes with a long movement that performs the function of both slow movement and finale. The opening *Allegro* is built on three separate melodic ideas, all of which proceed along a gently-rocking 6/8 meter. The tone of this movement is subdued (though not somber), and it draws to a quiet close. The concluding section opens with a long *Andante* that Kodály specifies should be *Quasi recitativo*. It is built on a series of solos structured on *parlando* inflections: mirroring the sound of speech. The music proceeds without pause into the finale, aptly marked *Allegro giocoso* (“fast, happy”). This movement is a series of dances – it is built on six different thematic ideas – and it bursts to life with a vigorous dance over what sounds like the drone of bagpipes. Kodály moves from the swaying 6/8 of the opening movement to the fundamentally duple meter of Hungarian folk music here, leaping between dances and finally driving his *Second Quartet* to an exciting close on a great *accelerando*.

String Quartet No. 12 in E-flat major, Op. 127

Ludwig Van Beethoven

Born December 16, 1770, Bonn

Died March 26, 1827, Vienna

When Russian prince Nikolas Galitzin wrote to Beethoven in the fall of 1822 to commission three string quartets, his request fell on sympathetic ears: the composer had been thinking about writing string quartets for some time and promised to have the first done within a month or two.

Other projects intervened, however, and despite the Prince's frequent inquiries Beethoven had to complete the *Missa Solemnis*, *Diabelli Variations*, and *Ninth Symphony* before he could begin work on the first of the three quartets in the summer of 1824. This quartet — in E-flat major — was not complete until February 1825. Performed immediately by the string quartet of Ignaz Schuppanzigh, the music was a failure at its premiere on March 6, 1825. Furious, Beethoven quickly had it rehearsed and performed by another quartet. He attended their rehearsals and supervised their interpretation (though deaf, he could follow their performance by watching the movement of their bows). The second performance was a great success, and this quartet was performed publicly at least ten more times in 1825 — an extraordinary number of performances for a new work — and always to great acclaim.

That fact is important because it gives the lie to the popular notion that Beethoven's late quartets were far ahead of their time. Some of the late quartets may have defied quick comprehension, but this was not true of the *Quartet in E-flat major*. Many have noted that this is the most traditional of Beethoven's late quartets: at first glance, it has a relatively straightforward structure — a sonata-form first movement, a variation-form slow movement, a scherzo in ABA form, and a dance-finale. But to reduce this music to such simplicity is to miss the extraordinary originality beneath this music's appealing and gentle surface.

In the first movement, Beethoven seems to set out intentionally to blur traditional sonata form, which depends on the opposition of material. Contrast certainly seems to be implied at the beginning, which opens with a firm chordal *Maestoso*, but this *Maestoso* quickly melts into the flowing and simple main theme, marked *Allegro* (Beethoven further specifies that he wants this melody performed *teneramente* — “tenderly” — and *sempre piano e dolce*). The powerful *Maestoso* returns twice more, each time in a different key, and then drops out of the movement altogether; Beethoven builds the movement almost exclusively out of the opening melody and an equally-gentle second subject. Here is a sonata-form movement that does not drive to a powerful climax but instead remains understated throughout: the movement evaporates on a wisp of the opening *Allegro* theme.

Two softly-pulsing measures lead to the main theme of the *Adagio*, a gently-rocking and serene melody introduced by the first violin and repeated by the cello. There follow six melodic variations, each growing organically out of the previous one until the music achieves a kind of rhapsodic calm — and the original theme has been left far behind.

Four sharp pizzicato chords introduce the scherzo, and these four chords then vanish, never to re-appear. The fugal opening section, built on a dotted figure and its inversion, leads to a brief — and utterly different — trio section. In E-flat minor, this trio whips past in a blistering blur: Beethoven's phrase markings here stretch over twenty measures at a time. Beethoven brings back the opening section, and then offers a surprise at the ending by including a quick reminiscence of the trio just before the cadence.

The last movement has proven the most difficult for commentators, perhaps because of its apparent simplicity. Marked only *Finale*, it opens with a four-measure introduction that launches off in the wrong direction before the true main theme appears in the first violin. Of rustic simplicity, this melody has been compared to a country-dance, and the second theme — a jaunty march-tune decorated with grace notes — preserves that atmosphere. The tunes may be innocent, but Beethoven's treatment of them in this sonata-form movement is quite sophisticated, particularly in matters of modulation and harmony. Also striking is the very close, where instead of speeding ahead (the expected tempo at a close) Beethoven slows his main theme down, and the music comes to an understated conclusion.

In order to ensure a pleasant concert experience for both performers and audience, please refrain from:

- Entering or leaving during the performance.
- Bringing food or drink into the concert hall.
- Taking flash photographs.
- Using electronic devices (please completely turn off any devices that make sounds or have glowing screens).

Children who are able to sit quietly during the performance are welcome to our concerts.

Audio/video recording of performances is strictly prohibited without permission of the performers!

Thank you!

In Case of Fire Emergency

Leave the building immediately by walking to the nearest safe exit. Once outside, please move fifty feet away from the building and safely away from emergency traffic. Do not return to the building until authorities indicate that it is safe to do so.

Parking for Events in Snell Theater

Please bear with us during the construction phase of the new Performing Arts Building. Parking is limited in front of Snell Theater. Additional parking may be found in Lot 2 or Lot 1, near the front entrance of Raymond Hall.