



SAN FRANCISCO
PERFORMANCES

presents...

Alexander String Quartet

Zakarias Grafilo | Violin
Paul Yarbrough | Viola

Frederick Lifszitz | Violin
Sandy Wilson | Cello

Eli Eban | Clarinet

Recorded at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church,
Belvedere, CA, June 10-14, 2019

MOZART

Menuetto—Trio I—Trio II from
Quintet in A Major for Clarinet and Strings, KV 581

Track from the upcoming Foghorn Classics release: *Brahms & Mozart Clarinet Quintets*

Produced, engineered and mastered by Matt Carr

Instruments:

Clarinet: Handmade by Luis Rossi, Chile

Quartet: Ellen M. Quartet, all by Francis Kuttner, 1987

Bows by Arcus

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Having celebrated its 35th Anniversary in 2016, the **Alexander String Quartet** has performed in the major music capitals of five continents, securing its standing among the world's premier ensembles. Widely admired for its interpretations of Beethoven, Mozart, Shostakovich, and Brahms, the quartet's recordings of the Beethoven cycle (twice), Bartók and Shostakovich cycles have won international critical acclaim. The quartet has also established itself as an important advocate of new music through more than 30 commissions from such composers as Jake Heggie, Cindy Cox, Augusta Read Thomas, Robert Greenberg, Martin Bresnick, Cesar Cano, and Pulitzer Prize-winner Wayne Peterson. The ASQ's new release with mezzo-soprano Kindra Scharich—*Mahler Song Cycles*, transcribed for string quartet by Zakarias Grafilo—has received rapturous critical notices. Samuel Carl Adams' new *Quintet with Pillars* was premiered and widely performed by ASQ with pianist Joyce Yang across the U.S. during the spring of 2019 and will be introduced to European audiences in the forthcoming 2020–21 season.

The Alexander String Quartet is a major artistic presence in its home base of San Francisco, serving since 1989 as Ensemble in Residence of San Francisco Performances. The ASQ is in residence at San Francisco State University

where they are members of the string faculty in the School of Music and instructional faculty at the Morrison Chamber Music Center.

Among the fine musicians with whom ASQ has collaborated are pianists Roger Woodward, Anne-Marie McDermott, Menachem Pressler, Marc-André Hamelin, and Jeremy Menuhin; clarinetists Eli Eban, Joan Enric Lluna, David Shifrin, and Richard Stoltzman; soprano Elly Ameling; mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato; violinist Midori; cellists Lynn Harrell, Sadao Harada, and David Requiro; violist Toby Appel; and jazz greats Branford Marsalis, David Sanchez, and Andrew Speight. The quartet has worked with many composers, including Aaron Copland, George Crumb, and Elliott Carter, and performs numerous lecture-concerts annually with composer-lecturer Robert Greenberg.

The Alexander String Quartet was formed in New York City in 1981 and captured international attention as the first American quartet to win the London [now Wigmore] International String Quartet Competition in 1985. Recipients of honorary degrees from Allegheny College and Saint Lawrence University, and Presidential medals from Baruch College (CUNY), ASQ is the subject of an award-winning documentary, *Con Moto: The Alexander String Quartet* (2017).



Eli Eban was appointed principal clarinetist of the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra under Lukas Foss immediately after graduating from the Curtis Institute of Music. Shortly thereafter he joined the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra at the invitation of Zubin Mehta. During thirteen seasons with the Israel Philharmonic, he performed and recorded all the major orchestral repertoire with the world's leading conductors, including Claudio Abbado, Leonard Bernstein, Christoph von Dohnanyi, Charles Dutoit, Christoph Eschenbach, James Levine, Kurt Masur, Simon Rattle, Georg Solti, Krzysztof Penderecki, and Lorin Maazel.

Eban was the featured soloist with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra on many occasions, and he has also performed concertos with the English Chamber Orchestra, the Salzburg Camerata Academica, the City of London Sinfonia, the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, Louisville Orchestra, and the Israel Camerata/Jerusalem, among others. He tours extensively as a chamber musician, collaborating with renowned artists and ensembles. He has been guest artist with the Alexander, Audubon, Orion, St. Petersburg, Tel Aviv and Ying quartets and was a frequent participant of the famed Marlboro Music Festival. While at Marlboro, Eban was selected by legendary violinist Sandor Vegh to be the first wind player to perform at the prestigious IMS Prussia Cove festival in England, drawing acclaim from the *London Guardian* for his "high-powered, electrifying performances." His subsequent recordings for Meridian Records, London, were cited by critics as being "full of life and highly sensitive." He has also recorded for the Saphir, Crystal and Naxos labels. He was a member of "Myriad" (a chamber ensemble formed by members of the Cleveland Orchestra) and has often traveled to Eastern Europe to perform and teach at the invitation of the European Mozart Foundation.

Eli Eban was a visiting professor at the Eastman School of Music for two years before joining the faculty of the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University, where he holds a distinguished rank Rudy professorship. His former students are pursuing active solo careers and have won orchestral positions in Israel, Denmark, Korea, Poland, Singapore, and South Africa. In the USA they can be heard in the symphony orchestras of Indianapolis, New Mexico, Toledo, the New World Symphony, and in the premier service bands in Washington, D.C. He divides his time between teaching at the Jacobs School of Music, touring as a soloist and chamber musician, and serving as the principal clarinetist of the Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra. His summers are spent performing and teaching at the Sarasota Music Festival and playing principal clarinet in the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra.

The Ellen M. Egger Quartet of Instruments

The idea of creating a quartet of stringed instruments, the **Ellen M. Egger Quartet**, was born from a conversation with Fritz Maytag and is a working memorial to Fritz's sister Ellen Egger, one of four siblings and an accomplished musician and teacher. The four instruments are loaned individually to promising students in far-flung places for an indefinite period, and then are reassembled once a year for a concert in San Francisco. Memorable performances have taken place at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor with such distinguished quartets as the Angeles Quartet, the Pro Arte Quartet, the Lafayette Quartet, the Pacifica Quartet and the Turtle Island Quartet. In recent years, the Alexander String Quartet has reunited the two violins, viola and cello in performances and in their second recording in 2009 of the complete Beethoven Quartet Cycle.

Francis Kuttner studied violinmaking at the Scuola Internazionale di Liuteria in Cremona, Italy, and worked privately with accomplished violinmaker/woodcarver Francesco Bissolotti, a proponent of traditional Cremonese violinmaking. Working from original Stradivari models and forms provided a comprehensive and insightful method of construction. Kuttner has been awarded numerous Gold and Silver Medals in Paris, New York, Manchester and Cremona. Designated "Hors Concours" by the Violin Society of America, he serves on many international juries. He divides his time between his workshops in Cremona and San Francisco.

The two violins were made on a 1705 Stradivari "P" form.

The viola is made on a personal model.

The violoncello was constructed on a modified "B" form of Antonio Stradivari 1709. The labels are dated 1987.

PROGRAM NOTES

Composers have been drawn to the combination of clarinet and string quartet ever since the clarinet began to take shape in the eighteenth century. The mellow sound and agility of the clarinet make it an ideal complement to the resonant warmth and harmonic richness of the string quartet, and the range of composers who have written for this pairing is extraordinarily diverse, including Weber, Meyerbeer, Reger, Busoni, Hindemith, and—more recently—Carter and Widmann. Yet all these compositions, varied as they are, exist within the shadow of the two towering masterpieces composed for clarinet and string quartet, the quintets of Mozart and Brahms.

And it is quite right that they should be. They are two of the finest chamber works by two of the greatest composers, and there are many parallels between them: both were written late in their creators' lives, both were inspired by contact with a particular clarinetist, and both beautifully integrate the quite different sonorities of clarinet and string quartet. Neither work is in any way valedictory, yet—coming near the end of each composer's life—they represent some of the most refined and expressive music of Mozart and Brahms.

MOZART Quintet in A Major for Clarinet and Strings, K.581

Mozart first heard an early version of the clarinet at age 8 while on a visit to London, and he first composed for it when he wrote the *Divertimento in D Major, K.113* at age fifteen. Seven years later, after hearing the excellent orchestra in Mannheim, which included clarinets, he wrote home to his father lamenting that they did not have clarinets in the Salzburg orchestra. His fascination with the clarinet's mellow sonority and wide range stayed with him throughout his life (what Mozart heard in Mannheim was probably the basset horn, an early form of the clarinet as it was developing late in the eighteenth century). Mozart was one of the first composers to use the clarinet in a symphony, and as he moved into his thirties, he began to compose more often for that instrument.

Much of Mozart's growing interest in the clarinet came from his friendship with the Austrian clarinet virtuoso Anton Stadler (1753–1812). Mozart apparently met Stadler soon after arriving in Vienna in 1781. Stadler was part of the ensemble that gave the first performance of Mozart's great *Serenade in D Major, K.361*, in 1784, and the two soon became friends and colleagues—they were both Freemasons in the same lodge in Vienna, and Mozart is known to have lent Stadler money during these years.

Not surprisingly, Mozart began to write for Stadler and for the clarinet. In the summer of 1786, shortly after the premiere of *Le Nozze de Figaro*, Mozart wrote his Trio for Clarinet, Viola, and Piano, presumably for Stadler, and the instrument figures prominently in his *Symphony No. 39*, composed two years later. It is a measure of the composer's respect for Stadler's artistry that in the final year of his life Mozart would compose the obligato clarinet parts in *La clemenza di Tito* and the *Clarinet Concerto* specifically for

Stadler, and he revised his *Symphony No. 40* to include clarinet parts, almost certainly for Stadler. Two years earlier, during the summer of 1789, Mozart composed his *Clarinet Quintet*, completing it on September 29. The premiere had to wait until December 22, when it was performed at a concert of the Tonkünstler Societät in Vienna. On that occasion Stadler was the clarinetist, and Mozart played the viola. Mozart made clear the connection between this music and the artist for whom it was written the following year when he referred to it as “Stadler's quintet.”

Stadler played the basset clarinet, an instrument of his own invention, which could play four semitones lower than the standard clarinet of that era. This unfortunately resulted in a number of corrupt editions of Mozart's works for Stadler, as editors rewrote them to suit the range of the contemporary clarinet. Subsequent modifications have given the A clarinet those four low pitches, and today we hear these works in the keys for which Mozart originally wrote them.

Simple verbal description cannot begin to suggest the glories of Mozart's *Clarinet Quintet*—this is truly sovereign music, full of the complete technical mastery of Mozart's final years and replete with the emotional depth that marks his music from that period.

The strings present the chorale-like first theme of the sonata-form opening *Allegro*, and the clarinet quickly enters to embellish this noble opening statement. The expressive second subject, sung by the first violin, flows with a long-breathed smoothness that itself seems shaped for the fluid sound of the clarinet.

The *Larghetto*, in D major, belongs very much to the clarinet, which weaves a long cantilena above the accompanying strings; new material arrives in the first violin, and the development section is Mozart at his finest. Particularly impressive here is Mozart's careful attention to sonority, with the silky sound of muted strings set against the warm murmur of the clarinet. After the subdued conclusion of the second movement, the *Menuetto* bursts to life with a perky freshness—off come the strings' mutes, and Mozart moves back to the home key of A major. This minuet is unusual in that it has two trio sections: the first—in A minor—is entirely for strings, while in the second the clarinet has a ländler-like freshness.

In place of the expected rondo-finale, Mozart offers a variation movement based on the opening theme, sung as a duet for the violins. The five variations are sharply differentiated: the first introduces an entirely new theme, full of wide skips, played by the clarinet as the quartet repeats the opening theme, several feature virtuosic parts for the clarinet and first violin, and the third opens with a plaintive episode for viola over rich accompaniment from the other voices. And now Mozart springs a surprise: the stirring conclusion of the fourth variation gives way to an expressive *Adagio* that is really a fifth variation. This long and moving variation complete, the music jumps back to its opening tempo, and the *Clarinet Quintet* concludes with a jaunty coda derived from the first half of the original theme.

—Program notes by Eric