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For immediate release:

## **Alexander String Quartet to Play Beethoven in Mondavi Center Studio Theatre**

*September 5, 2008; Davis, California*—The acclaimed **Alexander String Quartet** will play the first installment of a survey of the string quartets of **Ludwig van Beethoven** as the 2008-09 **Alexander String Quartet: Beethoven** series gets underway at the **Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts, UC Davis**. The event will include performances of two of Beethoven's early Opus 18 quartets, the Quartet for Strings no. 1 in F major and Quartet for Strings no. 3 in D major.

There will be two performances, at 2 pm and 7 pm on Sunday, October 5, in the Mondavi Center's Studio Theatre on the **UC Davis** campus. The afternoon concert will include introductory remarks about his life and music by renowned educator and composer **Robert Greenberg**; the evening event will include a post-performance question-and-answer session with the quartet members. A limited number of tickets are available from the Mondavi Center Ticket Office at 530.754.ARTS (2787) or online at [MondaviArts.org](http://MondaviArts.org).

The Alexander String Quartet (**Zakarias Grafilo**, violin; **Frederick Lifszitz**, violin; **Paul Yarbrough**, viola; and **Sandy Wilson**, cello) has been a Mondavi Center audience favorite since the venue opened in 2002 and has been featured each season in series focusing on the quartets and chamber music of **Dmitri Shostakovich**, **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**, and **Johannes Brahms**. The ensemble captured international attention in 1985 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 the years since, the ASQ has performed on four continents and released numerous recordings, including an acclaimed nine-CD set of the 16 Beethoven quartets on the Arte Nova label. At home in San Francisco, the Alexander String Quartet is a major artistic presence, through a residency with San Francisco Performances and as directors of the Morrison Chamber Music Center at **San Francisco State University**.

ASQ performances have drawn rave reviews. *The New York Times* called the ensemble "an unusually fine group—musically, technically, in just about any way one wants to view it." The

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## Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts, UC Davis

ensemble's Beethoven concerts have been particularly well-received by critics. "The musicians' controlled exuberance was unflagging and consequently produced superlative accounts of Beethoven," *The Washington Post* wrote of one concert. "Every phrase and line, every textural and colorific effect, every structural element, every *sforzando*, every *legato*, every hairpin dynamic shading, every articulation—in short, every musical detail—was performed so precisely, in so shapely a fashion, and in such perfect balance with every other detail that I felt my mind irresistibly and uninterruptedly held deep inside the world of Beethoven's imagination," raved the *San Diego Reader*.

The string quartets of Beethoven (1770-1827) are widely considered one of the pinnacles of the chamber music repertoire. Though the great composer wrote masterpieces in virtually every genre he attempted, the string quartets are often considered among his most personal, inventive, and profound compositions. Many observers have suggested that the intimate nature of the string quartet—a genre which, unlike opera, symphonies, or concertos was almost invariably performed for very small audiences in Beethoven's time—encouraged him to be especially inventive and to give voice to his most private musical thoughts. The 16 quartets are often thought of as almost a "musical diary" of Beethoven's inner life, with relatively clear delineations between the three periods commonly used to describe the composer's output: and "early" period that included the first six quartets and reflected the strongest influence of **Mozart** and **Haydn** and classical ideals; a "middle" exemplified by quartets seven through 11 and marked by a heroic sense of struggle; and a "late" period including the final quartets that stressed formal innovation and highly personal expression.

The works to be offered by the Alexander String Quartet this season belong to the set of six Opus 18 quartets written between 1798 and 1800. As with most of Beethoven's earlier compositions, these were strongly influenced by Haydn and Mozart, yet contain strong hints of his own emerging musical personality. The quartet numbered third was actually the first to be composed, and this delightful composition in D major will open the ASQ's Mondavi Center performances. The work is notable for its opening theme, which makes use of the relatively unusual interval of a seventh, and for its finale, which sets a D major theme against a contrasting section in D minor—both of which would have been audacious musical ideas for a young composer to offer in the final years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The quartet numbered first came shortly after, and this F major composition is noted for its lively opening movement, a minor-key slow movement that is believed to have been a depiction of the "burial vault" scene from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and a contrapuntal finale that surely must have pleased Haydn, who was one of Beethoven's teachers during this period.

The Alexander String Quartet's subsequent 2008-09 performances will include the remaining Opus 18 quartets, with the Quartet for Strings no. 2 in G major and the Quartet for Strings no. 5 in A major to be performed on January 18, 2009; and the Quartet for Strings no. 4 in C minor and Quartet for Strings no. 6 in B flat major to be given June 7, 2009.

"Beethoven's string quartets surely rank among the greatest achievements of Western classical music, and hearing them played by the outstanding Alexander String Quartet in our Studio Theatre promises to be an outstanding experience," said **Don Roth**, the Mondavi Center's executive director.

Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts, UC Davis

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**What:** Alexander String Quartet  
With Robert Greenberg: Beethoven

**When:** Sunday, October 5 • 2 pm

**What:** Alexander String Quartet: Beethoven

**When:** Sunday, October 5 • 7 pm

**Where:** Studio Theatre  
Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts  
University of California, Davis

**Admission:** \$40 Adults • \$20 Students & Children

**Tickets/Info:** 530.754.ARTS (2787)  
866.754.ARTS (toll-free)  
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