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For immediate release:

Acclaimed Alexander String Quartet to Play Brahms at the Mondavi Center

January 9; 2008; Davis, California—The acclaimed **Alexander String Quartet** will play the music of **Johannes Brahms** as part of the 2007-08 **Classical Sundays Series** at the **Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts**. The concert will include performances of Brahms' String Quartet No. 3 and the Quintet for Clarinet and Strings, featuring clarinetist **Eli Eban**. The event will include introductory remarks about the life and music of Brahms by renowned educator and composer **Robert Greenberg**.

There will be two performances, at 2 pm and 7 pm, on Sunday, February 3, in the Mondavi Center's Studio Theatre on the **UC Davis** campus. Tickets are available from the Mondavi Center Ticket Office at 530.754.ARTS (2787) or online at MondaviArts.org. The event is presented as part of the Mondavi **Center's Classical Sundays Series**, which includes one more concert by the Alexander String Quartet with special guest musicians and a recital by pianist **Lara Downes**.

Though perhaps best known as the composer of some of the world's greatest orchestral masterpieces, Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) often seemed most at home writing chamber music. His four symphonies, two piano concertos, violin concerto, and the monumental *German Requiem* for chorus, solo voices, and full orchestra are such a popular part of the orchestral repertoire that many listeners forget that Brahms first made his mark writing for piano and small ensembles and that much of his greatest work lies in his chamber music.

Born in Hamburg in 1833, Brahms studied piano and composition from an early age and made his first concert tour at the age of 19. As a 20-year-old, he was touring as an accompanist for the violinist **Eduard Reményi** when some of the fledgling composer's own works found their way into the program, and the positive response to them led to meetings with famed musicians including **Franz Liszt** and **Robert Schumann**. The encounter with Schumann proved particularly important, as the great composer and critic immediately realized Brahms' immense talent and heralded the arrival of a new genius in the pages of his influential journal *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*.

Brahms himself was less certain of his talents. A self-taught scholar, he had acquired a profound knowledge of musical history at a time when most baroque and medieval music was unknown even to professional musicians. With this knowledge came an enormous respect for the achievements of the past—particularly those of **Beethoven**—that almost prevented him from composing. Brahms struggled for more than 20 years to compose his first symphony, largely because of his awareness of the difficulty of matching Beethoven's

achievements in that genre. “You have no idea how it feels to have the footsteps of a giant tramping behind you,” Brahms remarked regarding his predicament.

This reverence for the past also seemed to frustrate his efforts to write for string quartet. Acutely aware of the supreme achievements in the string quartet compositions of **Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert**, Brahms is believed to have destroyed as many as 20 attempts to conquer the form before publishing his first string quartet at age 40. Yet this careful study of his predecessors also paid significant dividends, as all three of Brahms’ string quartets are considered masterpieces, displaying a compositional logic and sense of unity that few works in any genre can match.

The String Quartet in B-flat Major, op. 67, his third and final work in the genre, was completed in 1875. With its cheerful opening theme and lively second subject, the first movement is one of the sunniest sequences in Brahms’ quartet writing. The slow movement that follows features a sublimely extended melody and contrasting central section, while the third movement, led primarily by the viola, is unsettled and agitated. The work closes with its longest movement, a set of eight variations on a simple melody that demonstrates a remarkable unity.

The Quintet for Clarinet and Strings in B minor, op. 115, belongs to a unique set of compositions written for the clarinet at the very end of Brahms’ career. Inspired by the playing of clarinetist **Richard Mühlfeld**, whom the composer heard with the **Meiningen Orchestra** in March 1891, Brahms set about writing a trio, quintet, and two sonatas featuring Mühlfeld’s instrument—even though he had already announced to friends that was “retiring” from composition. These would be his final chamber works, and their valedictory nature gives them a unique place in the Brahms canon. The Clarinet Quintet, in particular, has been recognized as one of Brahms’ greatest masterpieces, using the clarinet’s unique range and timbre to achieve a mellow, autumnal mood that for many exemplifies the greatness of Brahms’ late music.

The Alexander String Quartet (**Zakarias Grafilo**, violin; **Frederick Lifszitz**, violin; **Paul Yarbrough**, viola; and **Sandy Wilson**, cello) 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 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**.

Clarinetist Eli Eban was born in New York and studied at the **Curtis Institute of Music** in Philadelphia. He has been a member of the **Israel Radio Symphony** and the **Israel Philharmonic Orchestra**, where he spent 13 seasons playing and recording under internationally renowned conductors such as **Claudio Abbado, Daniel Barenboim, Leonard Bernstein, Sir Simon Rattle, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt, Zubin Mehta**, and others. He has performed as soloist with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and the English Chamber Orchestra and tours extensively as a chamber musician, collaborating with world renowned artists and ensembles. He currently divides his time between teaching at **Indiana University**, performing with the **Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra**, and touring as a soloist and chamber musician.

The resident composer and music historian for National Public Radio’s *Weekend All Things Considered*, **Robert Greenberg** received a BA in music, *magna cum laude*, from **Princeton University**, and a PhD in music composition with distinction from the **University of California, Berkeley**. Greenberg has composed more than 45 works for a wide variety of instrumental and vocal ensembles, and has performed, taught, and lectured extensively across North America and Europe. He is a professor at the **San Francisco Conservatory of Music**.

“The String Quartet No. 3 and Clarinet Quintet represent some of the finest chamber music of Brahms’ career, and we look forward to outstanding performances from the Alexander String Quartet and Eli Eban,” said **Don Roth**, the Mondavi Center’s executive director.

What: Alexander String Quartet
with Robert Greenberg
Eli Eban, clarinet

When: Sunday, February 3, 2008 • 2 & 7 pm

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

Admission: \$39 Adults • \$19.50 Students & Children

Tickets/Info: 530.754.ARTS (2787)
866.754.ARTS (toll-free)
<http://www.MondaviArts.org>
530.754.5402 [TDD]

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