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For immediate release:

Acclaimed Alexander String Quartet to Play Brahms at Mondavi Center

September 6, 2007; Davis, California—The acclaimed **Alexander String Quartet** will play the music of **Johannes Brahms** as the 2007-08 **Classical Sundays Series** gets underway at the **Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts**. The event will include performances of Brahms' first two string quartets, along with introductory remarks about his life and music by renowned educator and composer **Robert Greenberg**.

There will be two performances, at 2 pm and 7 pm on Sunday, October 7, 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 two more concerts by the Alexander String Quartet with special guest musicians and three recitals by pianist **Lara Downes**.

Though he composed some of the world's best-loved orchestral masterpieces, Brahms was perhaps 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 most orchestras' programming that many listeners forget that Brahms first made his mark writing for smaller ensembles and that much of his greatest work lies in his solo piano music and his writing for small string ensembles.

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. In 1853, he gave a series of concerts as an accompanist for violinist **Eduard Reményi** in which some of Brahms' compositions were played, which 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 seemed less confident of his gift. A self-taught scholar, Brahms 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. “You have no idea how it feels to have the footsteps of a giant tramping behind you,” Brahms famously remarked, in reference to Beethoven, explaining why he struggled for more than 20 years to complete his first symphony.

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.

For its October 7 performances, the Alexander String Quartet will play Brahms' String Quartet no. 1 in C Minor, op. 51, no. 1, and the String Quartet no. 2 in A Minor, op. 51, no. 2. Completed in 1873 after some 13 years of labor, Quartet no. 1 features a forceful, agitated first movement of almost severe unity of form, followed by a gentler and sweetly expressive second movement, a playful and even sunny third, and a finale of harshly dramatic expressiveness worthy of Beethoven. If Quartet no. 1 can seem an almost confrontational encounter with Beethoven's legacy (written, as it is, in the key Beethoven reserved for his most dramatic works), the Quartet no. 2 is more individualistic, with a mellower tone, yet still distinguished by a strict formal unity, with the majority of its motivic material being variations of the opening theme.

The Alexander String Quartet (**Zakarias Grafilo,** violin; **Frederick Lifnitz,** 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 cycle 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.**

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.**

"Brahms' chamber works are among the greatest achievements of Western classical music, elegant, moving, and passionate," said **Don Roth,** the Mondavi Center's executive director. "We look forward to the Alexander String Quartet's focus on this great composer throughout this season."

What: Alexander String Quartet
With Robert Greenberg: Brahms

When: Sunday, October 7 • 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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