



presents...

ROBERT GREENBERG | Music Historian-in-Residence

ESMÉ QUARTET

Wonhee Bae | Violin
Yuna Ha | Violin

Dimitri Murrath | Viola
Yeeun Heo | Cello

Saturday, November 15, 2025 | 10am

Saturday, December 13, 2025 | 10am

Herbst Theatre

November 15

SCHUBERT

String Quartet in G Major, D.887

Allegro molto moderato
Andante un poco moto
Scherzo. Allegro vivace
Allegro assai

December 13 *with Paul Wiancko, cello*

SCHUBERT

String Quartet in C Major, D. 956 "Cello Quintet"

Allegro ma non troppo
Adagio
Scherzo: Presto
Allegretto

**The Saturday Morning Series is sponsored in part by the
Mark D. Kaplanoff Lecture Fund of San Francisco Performances' Endowment.**

Robert Greenberg robertgreenbergmusic.com

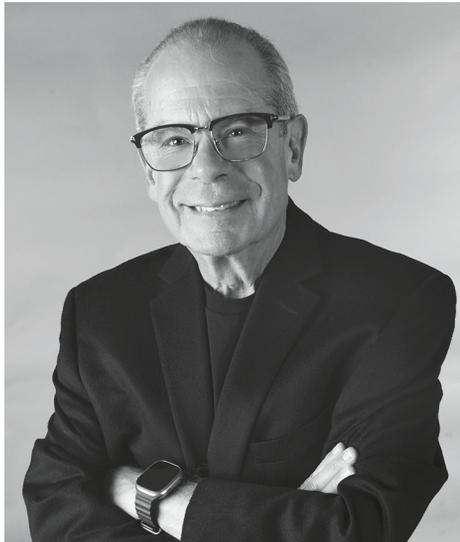
Esmé Quartet is represented by Christina Daysog Concert Artists
PO Box 529, Alameda, CA 94501 daysogconcertartists.com

For Tickets and More: sfperformances.org | 415.392.2545

ARTIST PROFILES

Robert Greenberg became San Francisco Performances' Music Historian-in-Residence in 1994 and for 30 years offered a Saturday morning lecture series with the Alexander String Quartet.

Esmé Quartet made their San Francisco Performances debut in October 2024.



Dr. Robert Greenberg was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1954 and has lived in the San Francisco Bay Area since 1978. He received a B.A. in Music, magna cum laude, from Princeton University in 1976 and a Ph.D. in music composition, With Distinction, from the University of California, Berkeley in 1984.

Greenberg has composed more than 50 works for a variety of instrumental and vocal ensembles. Performances of his works have taken place across the United States and Europe.

Dr. Greenberg has received numerous honors, including commissions from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation in the Library of Congress, the Alexander String Quartet, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, San Francisco Performances, and the XTET ensemble. His music is published by Fallen Leaf Press and CPP/Belwin and is recorded on the Innova label. Greenberg is a Steinway Artist.

Dr. Greenberg is currently the Music Historian-in-Residence with San Francisco Performances, where he has lectured and performed since 1994. He has served on the faculties of the University of California, Berkeley; California State University, East Bay; the Advanced Management Program at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business; and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where he

chaired the Department of Music History and Literature from 1989 to 2001.

Dr. Greenberg has lectured for some of the most prestigious musical and arts organizations in the United States, including the San Francisco Symphony (where for 10 years he was host and lecturer for the symphony's nationally acclaimed Discovery Series), the Chautauqua Institution (where he was the Everett Scholar-in-Residence during the 2006 season), the Ravinia Festival, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the Van Cliburn Foundation, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, Villa Montalvo, the Phoenix Orchestra, the University of British Columbia (where he was the Dal Grauer Lecturer in September 2006), and Philadelphia's College of Physicians (where he has been the Behrend Lecturer since 2017).

In addition, Dr. Greenberg is a sought-after lecturer for businesses and business schools and has spoken for such diverse organizations as S. C. Johnson, Deutsche Bank, the University of California/Haas School of Business Executive Seminar and the Goldman School of Public Policy, the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, Harvard Business School Publishing, Kaiser Permanente, the Young Presidents' Organization, the World Presidents' Organization, and the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco. Dr. Greenberg has been profiled in *The Wall Street Journal, Inc. Magazine, the Times of London, the Los Angeles Times, The Christian Science Monitor,* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*, among other publications.

For 15 years, Dr. Greenberg was the resident composer and music historian for NPR's *Weekend All Things Considered* and *Weekend Edition, Sunday* with Liane Hansen. His show *Scandalous Overtures* can be seen on www.ora.tv/shows.

In May 1993, Greenberg recorded a 48-lecture course entitled "How to Listen to and Understand Great Music" for The Great Courses/The Teaching Company. (This course was named in the January 1996 edition of *Inc. Magazine* as one of "The Nine Leadership Classics You've Never Read.") Dr. Greenberg has since recorded 30 additional courses. The most recent, "The Great Music of the 20th Century," was released in January 2018.

In February 2003, Maine's *Bangor Daily News* referred to Dr. Greenberg as the Elvis of music history and appreciation, an appraisal that has given him more pleasure than any other.

Dr. Greenberg is currently "blogging,

vlogging, performing, Zooming, reviewing, opining, and bloviating 4-6 times a week" on his subscription site at [Patreon.com/RobertGreenbergMusic](https://www.patreon.com/RobertGreenbergMusic).



Praised for their warm sound and commanding stage presence, the **Esmé Quartet** has quickly established itself as one of the most captivating chamber ensembles of its generation. Formed in 2016 in Cologne, Germany, by four Korean musicians and lifelong friends, the quartet is driven by a deep artistic connection and a shared passion for music and the arts.

The ensemble garnered international acclaim after winning First Prize and four special awards at the 2018 Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition in London. That same year, they were named HSBC Laureates of the Académie du Festival d'Aix. Additional honors include top prizes at the Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition, the Possehl Musikpreis Lübeck, and the inaugural Hans Gál Prize by the Academy of Sciences and Literature Mainz and Villa Musica Germany.

The Esmé Quartet has performed at major venues and festivals across Europe, North America, and Asia, including the Lucerne Festival, Wigmore Hall, Opéra de Lille, L'Auditori Barcelona, Hong Kong Arts Festival, and the Aix-en-Provence Festival. They were the first Artists-in-Residence at Lotte Concert Hall in Seoul for the 2020–2021 season and have appeared in residencies at the McGill International String Quartet Academy, Classic Esterházy, and the Heidelberg String Quartet Festival.

In recent seasons, the quartet made acclaimed debut tours of North America, Japan, and Australia. Highlights include performances of John Adams' *Absolute Jest* with the Hong Kong Philharmonic, Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra (with John Adams conducting), and Gyeonggi Philharmonic. Their collaborations also include a multimedia project, *The book of water* by Michel van der Aa with British actor Samuel West at the Hong Kong Arts Festival and a North American tour with Van Cliburn Gold Medalist Yekwon Sunwoo.

The quartet's discography on Alpha Classics includes *To Be Loved* (2020), named one of the best classical albums of the year by WQXR as well as five stars review by Diapason, *Yessori: Sound from the Past* (2023), and a 2024 Apple Music Classical Sessions EP of Mendelssohn's Op. 13. A third album celebrating their 10th anniversary will be released in 2026.

Belgian-American violist Dimitri Murath joined the ensemble in 2023, succeeding founding member Jiwon Kim.

From the 2025–26 season, the Esmé Quartet will be based in San Francisco as ensemble-in-residence with San Francisco Performances, where they will present a Schubert quartet cycle in collaboration with noted musicologist and host Robert Greenberg. Concurrently, the quartet members will serve as visiting artists and faculty at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. The season also features the quartet's highly anticipated New York debut at The Frick Collection, continued tours across North America and Europe, and will culminate in a special 10th anniversary celebration concert at the Seoul Arts Center in June 2026.

The quartet has worked closely with esteemed mentors including Günter Pichler, Oliver Wille, Eberhard Feltz, Christoph Poppen, Jonathan Brown, and Heime Müller.

Their name, Esmé, derives from the Old French word for "beloved."

Paul Wiancko is an acclaimed composer and cellist. *The Washington Post* describes Wiancko as "a restless and multifaceted

talent who plays well with others"—a reference to his substantial collaborations with artists like Max Richter, Chick Corea, Norah Jones, Arcade Fire, and The National. "Even with this chronically collaborative spirit," the *Post* continues, "Wiancko maintains a singular voice as a composer." In 2023, Paul was named Director of Chamber Music at Spoleto Festival USA.

As cellist of the internationally-celebrated Kronos Quartet, Wiancko regularly appears on the world's foremost stages—including Carnegie Hall, the Barbican, and the Sydney Opera House. Wiancko first collaborated with the Kronos Quartet in 2018 when he was invited to compose a piece for *50 For The Future: The Kronos Learning Repertoire*, and soon after toured with the quartet as guest cellist. Upon officially joining the group in 2023, violinist and Kronos artistic director David Harrington stated, "We look forward to soaring into the future with the catalytic, super-charged vitality of Paul's playing. It will be so much fun to explore the vast world of music together with Paul."

A serial chamber musician, Wiancko is a founding member of the viola and cello duo Ayane & Paul, as well as Owls, a quartet-collective dubbed a "dream group" by *The New York Times*. He has shared the stage with many of today's most prominent artists, including Richard Goode, Mitsuko Uchida, Yo-Yo Ma, Terry Riley, Caroline Shaw, and members of the Emerson, Guarneri, St. Lawrence, and JACK quartets. From 2009 to 2011, he was cellist of the Harlem Quartet, with whom he performed and taught extensively throughout the US, Europe, South America, and Africa.

Wiancko's own music has been described as everything from "dazzling" and "compelling" (*Star Tribune*) to "joyous, riotous" and "delicate" (*NY Times*). NPR writes, "If Haydn were alive to write a string quartet today, it may sound something like Paul Wiancko's *LIFT*"—a work that "teems with understanding of and affection for the string-quartet tradition" (*NY Times*) and is featured on the Aizuri Quartet's Grammy®-nominated album, *Blueprinting*. Wiancko is a recipient of the S&R Foundation's Washington Award for composition and was named one of *The Washington Post*'s "22 for '22: Composers and Performers to Watch." He has served as composer-in-residence at Spoleto Festival USA, Music from Angel Fire, Portland Chamber Music Festival, Caramoor, and the Banff Centre, and has composed works for the St. Lawrence, Kronos, Aizuri, Parker, Calder, and Attacca

Quartets, yMusic, Alisa Weilerstein, Alexi Kenney, Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, and many others.

In addition to a full performance and composition schedule, Wiancko is a dedicated teacher, mentor, and advocate for music education at all levels. He has taught at the St. Lawrence Chamber Music Seminar, Festival del Lago, and the Banff Centre, and is regularly invited to give masterclasses at institutions including Stanford, Peabody, and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Wiancko's commitment to supporting future generations of performers and composers has led him to assist in the development of forward-thinking programs like Evolution Classical at the Banff Centre and the Green Lake Chamber Music Institute.

PROGRAM NOTES NOVEMBER 15

String Quartet in G Major, D. 887

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797–1828)

Schubert wrote his fifteenth and final string quartet in the unbelievably short span of eleven days (June 20–30, 1826)—Mozart himself would have been hard-pressed to get a work of this breadth done in so brief a time. The *Quartet in G Major* is in every way a striking piece of music: in length (it stretches out to 45 minutes even when some of the most important repeats are omitted); in scope (its huge sonorities, often underpinned by violent tremolos, frequently suggest orchestral writing); and key relationships. Schubert was a master of the ingenious modulation, and this quartet's quicksilver shifts of tonality mirror the flickering moods within the music itself. This is mercurial music—elusive, haunting, and finally very moving.

From a near-silent beginning, the *Allegro molto moderato* suddenly bursts to life on great chords, sharply-dotted rhythms, and jagged thematic edges. Within its first instants, the music pitches uneasily between G Major and G Minor, and over orchestra-like tremolos the opening idea (derived from the jagged edges of the introduction) is announced pianissimo by first violin and cello. The gracefully-syncopated second subject arrives as a chordal melody, and—curiously—the rest of the exposition consists of a set of variations on this theme. The

development at first concentrates on the opening idea, then resumes the variations on the second subject. The movement drives to a close that returns to the powerful (and harmonically unstable) manner of the very beginning. The *Andante un poco molto* opens conventionally—the cello tune in the opening measures is pure Schubert—but suddenly come great rips of sound, discordant cries from the first violin over harmonically ambiguous tremolos in the lower voices. Agitated, dark, and almost shrill, these passages break in throughout the movement, which finally resolves peacefully.

The *Scherzo*, in B minor, is reminiscent of the scherzo of the “Great” *C-Major Symphony*—it bristles with energy as individual voices leap out of the general bustle. In complete contrast, the trio section is a laendler, and the languorous lilt of its main idea—introduced by the cello—brings an interlude of calm; the sudden jump back to the needle-sharp entrances of the scherzo is dramatic. The finale—*Allegro assai*—has been described as a perpetual-motion movement. Actually, it is a tarantella-like rondo that rides exuberantly along its 6/8 meter. Schubert supplies contrasting episodes along the way (smoothly making the 6/8 meter sound like 3/4 in the process), but it is the dancing opening music that finally takes the quartet to its energetic close.

Schubert apparently never heard this quartet. There is speculation that its opening movement might have been performed at the famous Schubertiad in March 1828, but even the best evidence is conjectural, and there is no convincing suggestion of a performance during his lifetime. The *Quartet in G Major* appears to have been consigned to the silence of dusty shelves, where it remained until it was premiered by the Hellmesberger Quartet in Vienna on December 8, 1850, 22 years after its composer’s death.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger

PROGRAM NOTES DECEMBER 13

String Quartet in C Major, D. 956 “Cello Quintet”

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797–1828)

Universally acknowledged as one of the finest creations in all chamber music,

Schubert’s *String Quintet in C Major* dates from the miraculous final year of that composer’s brief life, 1828. That year saw the revision of the “Great” *Symphony in C Major* and the composition of the three final piano sonatas, the songs of the *Schwanengesang* collection, this quintet, and the song “Der Hirt auf Dem Felsen,” completed in the weeks just prior to Schubert’s death on November 19. The date of the *Quintet* is difficult to pin down, but it was probably composed at the end of the summer: on October 2 Schubert wrote to one of his publishers that he had “finally turned out a *Quintet* for 2 violins, 1 viola, and 2 violoncellos.”

Some have been quick to hear premonitions of death in this quintet, as if this music—Schubert’s last instrumental work—must represent a summing-up of his life. But it is dangerous to read intimations of mortality into music written shortly before any composer’s death, and there is little basis for such a conclusion here—although he was ill during the summer, Schubert did not know that he was fatally ill. Rather than being death-haunted, the *Quintet in C Major* is music of great richness, music that suffuses a golden glow. Some of this is due to its unusual sonority: the additional cello brings weight to the instrumental texture and allows one cello to become a full partner in the thematic material; a freedom Schubert fully exploits. Of unusual length (over 50 minutes long), the *Quintet* also shows the incredible harmonic freedom of Schubert’s final years—someone once commented that this music seems to change keys every two bars.

The opening *Allegro ma non troppo* is built on three theme groups: the quiet violin theme heard at the very beginning, an extended duet for the two cellos, and a little march figure for all five instruments. The cello duet is unbelievably beautiful, so beautiful that many musicians (certainly many cellists!) have said that they would like nothing on their tombstone except the music for this passage. But it is the march tune that dominates the development section; the recapitulation is a fairly literal repeat of the opening section, and a brief coda brings the movement to its close.

Longest of the four movements, the *Adagio* is in ABA form. The opening is remarkable. The three middle voices—second violin, viola, and first cello—sing a gentle melody that stretches easily over 28 bars; the second cello accompanies them with pizzicato notes, while high above the first violin decorates the melody with quiet interjections of its own. The middle section,

in F minor, feels agitated and dark. A trill leads back to the opening material, but now the two outer voices accompany the melody with runs and swirls that have suddenly grown complex.

The third movement is a scherzo-and-trio, marked *Presto*. The bounding scherzo, with its hunting horn calls, is fairly straightforward, but the trio is quite unusual, in some surprising ways the emotional center of the entire *Quintet*. One normally expects a trio section to be gentle in mood, sometimes even a thematic extension of the scherzo. But this trio, marked *Andante sostenuto* and in the unexpected key of D-flat major, is spare, grave, haunting. Schubert sets it in 4/4 instead of the expected 3/4, and its lean lines and harmonic surprises give it a grieving quality quite different from the scherzo—and from the rest of the *Quintet*. The lament concludes, and the music plunges back into sunlight as the scherzo resumes.

Many have heard Hungarian folk music in the opening of the *Allegretto*, with its evocation of wild gypsy fiddling. The second theme is one of those graceful little tunes that only Schubert could write; both themes figure throughout the movement, until finally another cello duet leads to a fiery coda ingeniously employing both main themes.

The *Quintet in C Major* is one of the glories of the chamber music repertory and one of Schubert’s finest works. Yet he never heard a performance of it. The *Quintet* may have been rehearsed at a gathering of Schubert’s friends in October—the evidence is unclear—and Schubert died a few weeks later. The music then slipped from memory: it lay in manuscript for years and was not officially premiered until 1850, 22 years after Schubert’s death.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger