



MARINE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Sunday, March 24, 2024 at 2:00 P.M.
Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center
Northern Virginia Community College
Alexandria Campus

Lieutenant Colonel Ryan J. Nowlin, Director

Heinrich Biber (1644–1704)

Battalia

Sonata–Allegro
Die liederliche Gesellschaft von allerley Humor – Allegro
Presto I
Der Mars
Presto II
Aria – Andante
Die Schlacht
Lamento der Verwundten Musquetirer

Giovanni Bottesini (1821–89)
arranged by Norman Ludwin

Gran Duo Concertante

GySgt Karen Johnson, violin soloist
MSgt Eric Sabo, bass soloist

Thelonius Monk (1917–82)

“Blue Monk”

Béla Bartók (1881–1945)

Divertimento

Allegro non troppo
Molto adagio
Allegro assai

PROGRAM NOTES

Battalia

Heinrich Biber (1644–1704)

Heinrich Biber was one of the leading violin virtuosos of the Baroque era. Born in what is now the Czech Republic, he spent most of his life at the court of the archbishop of Salzburg, serving in various positions from valet to Kapellmeister. Although Biber composed for various ensembles, he is perhaps best known for his works for violin. His *Mystery Sonatas* (also known as *Rosary Sonatas*) for violin and continuo utilize a number of innovative ideas, including *scordatura* (unconventional tuning) and, in one of the sonatas, a restringing of the instrument such that the two middle strings are crossed over each other in the pegbox and behind the bridge, creating an image of the cross.

Battalia, composed in 1673, is a multi-movement work for string orchestra which also uses extended techniques, this time to depict the sounds and imagery of battle. These include *col legno* (tapping the strings with the wood of the bow) and snap pizzicato to simulate musket fire. In *Der Mars*, Biber instructs the bass player to place a sheet of paper between the strings and the fingerboard in order to imitate the sound of a snare drum. In another movement, *Die liederliche gesellschaft von allerley Humor* (“The dissolute society of all types of humor”), Biber captures the rowdy mood of a drunken gathering by combining several folk songs that are played simultaneously, a composition known as a *quodlibet*. Despite all the bravado of warfare, the piece ends with a moving lament for the wounded musketeers.

Gran Duo Concertante

Giovanni Bottesini (1821–89)

arranged by Norman Ludwin

The *Gran Duo Concertante* for violin and double bass was originally composed for two double basses by the Italian double bassist Giovanni Bottesini. While Bottesini is perhaps not a household name among musicians outside the double bass community, he was revered as an all-around musician in his time: a virtuoso performer on the bass; a composer of operas, chamber music, and works for the bass; and a conductor of international renown. His contemporary Gioachino Rossini declared, “Bottesini is the most well-rounded talent that we have in Europe today.”

Bottesini was born in Crema, Italy, into a musical family. His father, Pietro, a clarinetist and conductor, gave his son his early musical education, which led the young boy to sing in various choirs and play timpani in local orchestras. After studying violin with one of Crema’s leading players, Bottesini applied for admission at the Milan Conservatory in 1835. Only two scholarships were available, one for studying bassoon and the other for double bass. Bottesini played neither; however, he quickly learned to play the bass well enough to win the scholarship. A few years later, after studying with renowned bass teacher Luigi Rossi, Bottesini was being hailed as the “Paganini of the double bass,” amazing audiences not only with his virtuoso playing but with the sweet tones he drew from the instrument. One critic reported, “Under his bow, the double bass groaned, sighed, cooed, sang, quivered, roared—an orchestra in itself with irresistible force and the sweetest expression.

Bottesini travelled to Havana, Cuba, in 1846 with a cellist friend, Luigi Arditi (best known today as the composer of the popular song “*Il Baccio*,” often used by sopranos as an encore). There, in 1847, he led the première of his first opera, *Cristoforo Colombo*. In all, Bottesini wrote more than a dozen operas, some of which were well-received and performed throughout Europe.

Gunnery Sergeant Karen Johnson, violin

Concertmaster Gunnery Sergeant Karen Johnson of Gilbert, AZ, joined “The President’s Own” United States Marine Chamber Orchestra in March 2011. She was appointed Concertmaster in October 2015.

Gunnery Sgt. Johnson began her musical training at age four. Upon graduating in 1996 from Highland High School in Gilbert, she earned a bachelor’s degree in violin performance from The Juilliard School in New York. She earned a master’s degree in music from the University of Maryland, College Park in 2002. Her notable instructors include Dr. William Magers formerly of Arizona State University and Joel Smirnoff, formerly of the Juilliard String Quartet. Prior to joining “The President’s Own,” she was concertmaster of the Richmond Symphony Orchestra and guest concertmaster of the Seattle, Oregon, and Phoenix Symphonies.

She has been featured as a soloist with the Marine Chamber Orchestra on Erich Wolfgang Korngold’s Violin Concerto and Henryk Wieniawski’s Violin Concerto No. 2. She also has performed as a violin soloist with the Quantico Marine Band of Quantico, VA.

Master Sergeant Eric Sabo, bass

Double Bassist Master Sergeant Eric Sabo of Phoenix joined “The President’s Own” United States Marine Chamber Orchestra in April 2000.

Master Sgt. Sabo began his musical instruction at age twelve. After graduating from Trevor G. Browne High School in Phoenix in 1992, he attended Arizona State University in Tempe, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in music in 1996 and studied with Dan Swaim. He also pursued master’s-level studies at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, where he studied with Chris Brown of St. Paul, MN.

Prior to joining “The President’s Own,” he performed with the Arizona Opera Company in Phoenix, Evansville Philharmonic in Evansville, IN, Owensboro Symphony in Owensboro, KY, and was an affiliate bass professor at Murray State University in Kentucky.

Divertimento Béla Bartók (1881–1945)

Bartók was at the pinnacle of his compositional maturity by the late 1930s. At the same time, he began to simplify his style, turning away from the more modernist experiments of earlier works. Bartók was approached by Paul Sacher, conductor of the Basel Chamber Orchestra in Basel, Switzerland, in 1938, and asked to write a new work. Sacher had commissioned Bartók three years earlier, a collaboration that produced his masterpiece, *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*. This time, Sacher wanted “something simpler” and Bartók happily responded with his Divertimento for String Orchestra.

The Divertimento is wholly different from the modern and angular *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*. The work is more harmonically conventional and is completely cast in traditional forms: the first movement follows a classical sonata model, the second is in three-part form, and the final movement is a rondo. Even with Bartók’s signature chromaticism and frequent shifts in harmony from major to minor, each movement remains essentially rooted in tonality. In the opening movement, the composer alludes to the Baroque concerto grosso, often pitting a group of solo instruments against the rest of the ensemble. The slow movement carefully unfolds with a winding chromatic figure before suddenly becoming more insistent. The central section is highly suggestive of a funeral march, with a repeated bass and a climax complete with shrill and jolting trills in the upper

strings. The finale of the work decidedly alleviates the despair and uncertainty of the previous movement. Much of Bartók's music was deeply affected by the folk traditions of Hungary and Romania, and nowhere is this more apparent than here. Although the melodies are entirely original, the entire movement bubbles with a folk quality complete with a showcase of Roma-like fiddle music. The Divertimento has become a staple of the orchestral repertoire and stands as one of Bartók's most concise and accessible works.