



MARINE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA  
Saturday, August 17, 2024 at 7:30 P.M.  
Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center  
Northern Virginia Community College  
Alexandria Campus

Lieutenant Colonel Ryan Nowlin, Director

---

Jessie Montgomery (b. 1981)

“Starburst” (2012)

Philip Glass (b. 1937)

String Quartet No. 2, *Company* (1983)

♩ = 96

♩ = 160

♩ = 90

♩ = 160

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)  
arranged for string orchestra by Gustav Mahler

String Quartet No. 14 in D minor, D. 810, *Death and the Maiden*

Allegro

Andante con moto

Scherzo: Allegro molto; Trio

Presto; Prestissimo

[www.marineband.marines.mil](http://www.marineband.marines.mil) | (202) 433-5809 | [www.facebook.com/marineband](https://www.facebook.com/marineband) | [www.twitter.com/marineband](https://www.twitter.com/marineband) | [www.instagram.com/usmarineband](https://www.instagram.com/usmarineband)

PLEASE NOTE: The use of recording devices and flash photography is prohibited during the concert. In addition to works of the U.S. Government (as defined by 17 U.S.C. § 101 et seq.), this performance may also contain individuals' names and likenesses, trademarks, or other intellectual property, matter, or materials that are either covered by privacy, publicity, copyright, or other intellectual property rights licensed to the U.S. Government and owned by third parties, or are assigned to or otherwise owned by the U.S. Government. You should not assume that anything in this performance is necessarily in the Public Domain.

# ***PROGRAM NOTES***

## **“Starburst” (2012)**

**Jessie Montgomery** (b. 1981)

New York City native Jessie Montgomery embodies the role of today’s multidimensional musician, combining roles as a composer, violinist, educator, and advocate. Named *Musical America’s* 2023 Composer of the Year, Montgomery began her violin studies at age four and was composing by age eleven. She went on to earn a violin performance degree from The Juilliard School and a master’s degree from New York University in film scoring and multimedia. She was a violinist with the acclaimed Catalyst Quartet from 2012 to 2021, touring regularly in the United States and abroad. She is a recipient of the Sphinx Medal of Excellence and has served in a variety of roles with the Sphinx Organization, which supports the professional development of young Black and Latinx classical musicians. She began a three-year appointment as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra’s Mead Composer-in-Residence in July 2021. Recent commissions include works written for the National Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, violinist Joshua Bell, and cellist Alisa Weilerstein.

“Starburst” for string orchestra is a brief but vibrant one-movement work full of rapidly changing musical colors. The composer describes her juxtaposition of “exploding gestures” with “gentle fleeting melodies,” which together create a “multidimensional soundscape.” She continues, “A common definition of a starburst: ‘the rapid formation of large numbers of new stars in a galaxy at a rate high enough to alter the structure of the galaxy significantly:’ lends itself almost literally to the nature of the performing ensemble who premiered the work, The Sphinx Virtuosi. I wrote the piece with their dynamic in mind.”

## **String Quartet No. 2, *Company* (1983)**

**Philip Glass** (b. 1937)

Philip Glass’s *Company* shares the title of the Samuel Beckett work it was composed to accompany as incidental music. Beckett’s *Company* depicts an old man held captive in an unnamed dark space who begins to hear a ghostly, persistent, and unidentifiable voice in the room with him. Sometimes the voice regales the prisoner with stories of the old man’s past, while at other times the voice observes, in painful detail, the old man’s current confinement. It eventually becomes clear that the voice is the old man’s, created in an effort to provide himself with some “company” in his seclusion. Through this vehicle Beckett examines the inescapable self-evaluation we all face in old age. We all become captives of our own past, constricted by the events and actions (or inactions) of our lives.

Philip Glass was approached about providing incidental music for a dramatization of Beckett’s poem staged by Mabou Mines, a theater company with whom Glass had already collaborated. Glass chose a string quartet as the ideal medium for this presentation (the work was later revised for chamber orchestra). By 1983, Glass was well established as a minimalist composer. He found the instrumentation of the string quartet, with its uniform sound and capability for subtle shading, to be a perfect vehicle for his techniques. The repetition and

gradual changes in his minimalist score perfectly match the similar pattern of Beckett's narrative, and both the play and the music received much acclaim upon their première. Glass later arranged this music for the debut album of the Kronos Quartet, and it was later adapted for string orchestra.

**String Quartet No. 14 in D minor, D. 810, *Death and the Maiden***

**Franz Schubert** (1797–1828)

arranged for string orchestra by **Gustav Mahler**

Franz Schubert's Quartet in D minor, D. 810 has been known by its informal title, *Death and the Maiden*, almost since its creation. The appellation arises from the theme used in the quartet's second movement; a melody first used by the composer several years earlier in a song of the same title. The text of the original song describes an encounter in which the Maiden begs Death to pass her by. Death is reassuring, if unrelenting, and promises the Maiden that he is her friend and that she will sleep peacefully in his arms. Although the use of this melody is the only connection between the Quartet in D minor and the concept of mortality, it has been seemingly impossible for musicians and musicologists alike to resist the urge to imagine deathly allusions throughout this quartet. In addition to the provocative title, the fact that Schubert began work on this quartet not long before his death, led many to wonder if it was a musical contemplation of his fate. As noted by biographer Maurice Brown, "...the temptation was irresistible, and unresisted, to weave fanciful interpretations and philosophies round the quartet by associating the music of the whole work with the subject of the poem which Schubert had set as a song in 1817.... The nineteenth century's incurable tendency to read meanings and fantasies and stories into all music prompted the theory that Schubert was, in the other three movements, also expounding some other aspect of death." Although these theories may have been conceived in the nineteenth century, they continue to influence interpretation and analysis of this work to this day.

Although he often spoke of Schubert's limitations as a composer, Gustav Mahler felt that the Quartet in D minor was an exceptional composition. He was so enamored of the work that he obtained a copy of the quartet score in which he made extensive annotations that indicated his desire to perform the work with string orchestra. This kind of adaptation of chamber music for orchestra was a fairly common practice during Mahler's time, as he himself demonstrated through transcriptions of the works of Ludwig van Beethoven and Johan Sebastian Bach. (Coincidentally, Bach's *Orchestral Suite No. 2* is another one of the works Mahler rescored to accommodate "modern" tastes.) Even so, the idea of a string orchestra performing a string quartet, especially one by beloved composers like Beethoven or Schubert, still generated considerable controversy. For example, before the first rehearsal of his setting of Beethoven's *String Quartet in F minor, Serioso*, Mahler had to gird his loins, telling a friend, "Well, I'm ready for battle today! For, you'll see—all the Philistines, to a man, will rise up against this treatment of the quartets, instead of having enough natural curiosity to sit back and enjoy a different kind of performance for once."

Although the performance of the Beethoven was generally considered a success, Mahler may have been scared off by the "Philistines" since he never presented his string orchestra version of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* quartet. Several decades after his death, Mahler's daughter Anna discovered the annotated Schubert quartet score and passed it along to scholars

David Matthews and Donald Mitchell. American businessman Gilbert Kaplan, an amateur conductor and Mahler-phile, commissioned Matthews and Mitchell to prepare an edition based upon Mahler's annotated score and conducted the world première of the work with the American Symphony Orchestra in Carnegie Hall in 1984. Mahler's string orchestra version has been performed and recorded dozens of times since the première, confirming the composer's instinct that there is an audience for both the original quartet version and string orchestra setting of this masterpiece.