



Lieutenant Colonel Ryan Nowlin, Director

MARINE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Saturday, August 23, 2025 at 7:30 P.M.
Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center
Northern Virginia Community College
Alexandria Campus
MSgt Karen Johnson, coordinator

Felix Mendelssohn (1801–47)

String Symphony No. 10 in B minor, MWV N 10

William Grant Still (1895–1978)

Ennanga for Harp, String Orchestra, and Piano (1956)

Moderately fast

Moderately slow

Majestically; moderately fast

SSgt Taylor Fleshman, soloist

Benjamin Britten (1913–76)

Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge, Opus 10

Introduction and Theme: Lento maestoso; Allegretto poco lento

Adagio

March: Presto alla marcia

Romance: Allegretto grazioso

Aria Italiana: Allegro brillante

Bourrée Classique: Allegro e pesante

Viennese Waltz: Lento; Vivace

Moto Perpetuo: Allegro molto

Funeral March: Andante ritmico

Chant: Lento

Fugue and Finale: Allegro molto vivace; Lento e solenne

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PROGRAM NOTES

String Symphony No. 10 in B minor, MWV N 10

Felix Mendelssohn (1801–47)

Felix Mendelssohn is one of Western music's bona fide prodigies. His earliest datable composition, a song for his father's birthday titled "Lied zum Geburtstag meines guten Vaters" or "Song for My Good Father's Birthday," is from 1819 when he was age eleven. By age fourteen, Mendelssohn had composed works in nearly every standard musical genre of the time from opera, instrumental sonatas, chamber music, concertos, and the thirteen string symphonies.

Every Sunday, concerts were held in the Mendelssohns' home featuring performances by the young prodigies Felix and his sister Fanny. Felix's compositions were played by small chamber ensembles or orchestras. His twelve multi-movement string symphonies and the thirteenth symphony composed in a single movement, were often programmed at these home concerts. Considered youthful composition exercises, they were never published during Mendelssohn's lifetime.

The string symphonies reveal Mendelssohn's astonishing talent as a young composer. The works are strongly influenced by Bach, Handel, and the Viennese classicists, however they also hint at his mature style. Although the description of these works as "symphonies" was the composer's own, this can cause some confusion. He followed these works with five symphonies bearing opus numbers for full symphony orchestra.

***Ennanga* for Harp, String Orchestra, and Piano (1956)**

William Grant Still (1895–1978)

Ennanga is one of William Grant Still's intimate and reflective works. The title refers to a traditional Ugandan harp: an instrument with deep roots in East African culture. Still is known as the "Dean of Afro-American Composers," and was deeply committed to bringing elements of African and African American identity into Western art music traditions. His approach was not limited to a work's title or theme, but through the blending of classical form with the harmonies and rhythm of Black music.

Ennanga was originally scored for harp and full orchestra, and later arranged for a smaller ensemble of harp, piano, and strings. The work unfolds in three short movements. The outer movements are lively and rhythmic: dance-like in their energy. The middle movement is tender and lyrical. The harp, which takes center stage, interacts closely with the piano and strings throughout. The result is a rich, conversational texture that feels both elegantly structured and rooted in folk tradition. Though the music does not follow a strict program, it evokes the deep and rich musical traditions of East Africa.

In *Ennanga*, one can hear echoes of spirituals, blues, and folk music woven into a framework that feels distinctly personal and refined. This piece is a beautiful example of Still's

lifelong effort to honor his cultural heritage by expanding the boundaries of American classical music. It's at once quiet and powerful, simple and sophisticated: a musical meditation that feels timeless.

Staff Sergeant Taylor Fleshman, harp

Harpist Staff Sergeant Taylor Fleshman of Kernersville, North Carolina, joined "The President's Own" United States Marine Band in July 2023. Staff Sgt. Fleshman began her musical training on harp at age seven. After graduating in 2014 from University of North Carolina School of the Arts, she attended the University of Cincinnati, where she studied under Dr. Gillian Benet Sella and earned a bachelor's of music performance in 2018. She then continued her studies with Florence Sitruk at Indiana University where she earned a master's of music in 2020. Prior to joining "The President's Own," Staff Sgt. Fleshman was principal harp with The Orchestra Now and was featured as a guest soloist with the Moscow Symphony Orchestra, the Pacific Region International Summer Music Academy Orchestra, and the Jakarta Simfonia Orchestra. She has also performed with the Cincinnati, Richmond, and Virginia Symphony Orchestras.

Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge, Opus 10

Benjamin Britten (1913–76)

Born in Suffolk, England, to a middle-class family, Benjamin Britten demonstrated a talent and interest in music from a young age. His mother was an avid amateur musician who ensured that her son's talent was cultivated. At age fourteen he began private study of theory and composition with the noted composer Frank Bridge. Today, Bridge is not generally remembered as a teacher. In fact, Britten was his only student. However, Bridge's influence on the young Britten was profound. Throughout his career, Britten stayed in touch with his first important teacher and always remembered Bridge's principles of "...find[ing] yourself and be[ing] true to what you [find]."

Britten's first attempt to utilize one of Bridge's themes was a set of variations for piano in 1932, that was left incomplete. Opus ten, this particular set of variations, was a result of commission by conductor Boyd Neel in May 1937. Neel approached Britten in desperate need of a new work by an English composer for his string orchestra, which was scheduled to play a few months later at the Salzburg Festival. Britten returned to the idea of a set of variations upon a theme of his beloved teacher and within ten days had the entire work sketched out. Neel described the creation of the *Bridge Variations* as "one of the most astonishing feats of compositions in [his] experience." The work was unveiled to an international audience through a live radio studio concert two days before its Salzburg concert premiere. The work was exceptionally well received and is generally considered to be the work that brought Britten to the music world's attention.

The work's structure is relatively straightforward: a brief introduction and statement of the theme is followed by a series of ten variations. Although the structure is uncomplicated, the music is not. The variations are exceptionally imaginative and employ a wide range of string performance techniques that provide a rich palette of sounds and timbres. In Neel's opinion, "Britten exploited [the string orchestra] with a daring and invention never before known." Each

variation bears a descriptive title that reveals the musical style or genre that spawned it. The variations are not only honoring Frank Bridge, but also reveal a kaleidoscope of Britten's compositional influences such as Igor Stravinsky, Gioachino Rossini, Maurice Ravel, and Gustav Mahler. In the score that Britten presented to Bridge as a gift, he also appended several more personal subtitles that disclose aspects of the teacher's personality. These subtitles, listed below, suggest this composition is much more than a set of variations; it is a complex character study of an inspirational teacher who molded one of the most creative composers of his generation.

Variation	Variation Name	Britten's subtitle
	Introduction and Theme: Lento maestoso; Allegretto poco lento	Himself
1	Adagio	His integrity
2	March: Presto alla marcia	His energy
3	Romance: Allegretto grazioso	His charm
4	Aria Italiana: Allegro brillante	His humour
5	Bourrée Classique: Allegro e pesante	His tradition
6	Viennese Waltz: Lento; Vivace	His enthusiasm
7	Moto Perpetuo: Allegro molto	His vitality
8	Funeral March: Andante ritmico	His sympathy
9	Chant: Lento	His reverence
10	Fugue and Finale: Allegro molto vivace; Lento e solenne	His skill and our mutual affection