



Colonel Jason K. Fettig, Director

MARINE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Saturday, August 28, 2021 at 7:30 P.M.
Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center
Northern Virginia Community College
Alexandria Campus
Major Ryan J. Nowlin, conducting

Jessie Montgomery (b. 1981)

Strum (2006, rev. 2012)

Eric Ewazen (b. 1954)

Concerto for Violin and Strings (1997)

Allegro con brio

Andante

Allegro molto

GySgt Christopher Franke, soloist

INTERMISSION

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47)

Sinfonia No. 9 in C, *Swiss*

Grave; Allegro

Andante

Scherzo (La Suisse)

Allegro vivace

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PROGRAM NOTES

***Strum* (2006, rev. 2012)**

Jessie Montgomery (b. 1981)

It is not often that classical string players are called upon to strum their instruments; certainly there are very few examples in the core repertoire. In recent years it has become less of a rarity, as composers explore elements of dance, folk, and popular music in an important effort to evolve with the culture that surrounds them. Jessie Montgomery's *Strum* for string orchestra is not only a unique entry into the contemporary repertoire, but also a step forward in the effort to keep classical music relevant to the modern world, an effort in which Montgomery has been at the forefront, taking inspiration for her works from a wide array of musical forms. Regarding *Strum*, which she originally conceived as a string quartet before then expanding to this string orchestra arrangement, the composer says the following:

Strum is the culminating result of several versions of a string quintet I wrote in 2006. It was originally written for the Providence String Quartet and guests of Community MusicWorks Players, then arranged for string quartet in 2008 with several small revisions. In 2012 the piece underwent its final revisions with a rewrite of both the introduction and the ending for the Catalyst Quartet in a performance celebrating the fifteenth annual Sphinx Competition.

Originally conceived for the formation of a cello quintet, the voicing is often spread wide over the ensemble, giving the music an expansive quality of sound. Within *Strum* I utilized texture motives, layers of rhythmic or harmonic ostinati that string together to form a bed of sound for melodies to weave in and out. The strumming pizzicato serves as a *texture motive* and the primary driving rhythmic underpinning of the piece. Drawing on American folk idioms and the spirit of dance and movement, the piece has a kind of narrative that begins with fleeting nostalgia and transforms into ecstatic celebration.

A native of New York City, Jessie Montgomery grew up in the 1980s surrounded by art and activism during a transitional time in the city's history. She began her violin studies at the Third Street Music School Settlement and went on to study at the Julliard School and New York University, both in New York City, and is now a graduate fellow at Princeton University in New Jersey. Notable among her many accomplishments is her selection by the New York Philharmonic as a featured composer for their Project 19 initiative, celebrating the ratification of the 19th amendment, which finally made equal voting rights for women the law of the land. She has also worked with the Sphinx Organization on various initiatives since 1999, helping promote the careers of young African American and Latinx string players, and is currently the composer-in-residence for the Sphinx Virtuosi, the Organization's professional touring ensemble.

***Concerto for Violin and Strings* (1997)**

Eric Ewazen (b. 1954)

Within the larger classical music family, there is arguably no other instrument as quintessential as the violin. It is as symbolic of the genre as the saxophone is of jazz. While the solo violin repertoire is comprised of many dynamic works, Eric Ewazen's *Concerto for Violin and Strings* certainly ranks highly among them, offering a dynamic and engaging showcase for the instrument's range and for the soloist's mastery of it.

Written while he was in residence with the Orchestra of St. Luke's of New York City and premiered in May 2000, the Concerto for Violin and Strings is, in Ewazen's words:

[...] a large-scaled three-movement work exploring the incredible range of expressive possibilities and colors inherent in the violin. The first movement has a crackling energy, with dynamic, sweeping gestures in both the solo part and the accompanying string orchestra. Dramatic, rhapsodic motives are tossed back and forth and agitated accents permeate the movement. The energy creates a non-stop momentum through to the final chords, although there are moments of playfulness which contrast the more aggressive main themes. The second movement is a plaintive Adagio, with the solo violin singing a somber, lyrical line. Contemplative and melancholy, this melody becomes the basis for a variation form in which it becomes ever more embellished and dramatic. A climactic middle section and quasi-cadenza lead to a final whispered statement of the opening theme. The final movement has a joyful energy. Contrasting the first two movements with their predominantly minor modes, the last movement is primarily sunny and bright with major modes and themes which skip and dance.

Ewazen's adventurous harmonic shifts and deftly threaded melodies make this work simultaneously challenging and enjoyable to any listener willing to engage. The effortless lyricism of his melodic lines belie the tremendous demands placed on the soloist in the form of large intervallic leaps, string crossings, and double stops throughout. The concerto requires a full mastery of the instrument in order to successfully bring this work to life. Despite this, the technical challenges are never in the forefront, never featured for their own sake, but rather always made to serve the larger musical story being told.

Ewazen was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and received music degrees from the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, as well as the Juilliard School in New York City, where he has been a faculty member since 1982. His orchestral works have been performed around the globe by ensembles such as The Cleveland Orchestra, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, and the Thailand Philharmonic. Additionally, his compositions for wind ensemble have been performed by "The President's Own" United States Marine Band, the U.S. Navy Band, and many other premier military bands throughout the country.

Gunnery Sergeant Christopher Franke, violin

Violinist Gunnery Sergeant Christopher Franke of Springfield, Virginia, joined "The President's Own" United States Marine Band in January 2007. He was appointed assistant principal violin in April 2019. Gunnery Sgt. Franke began his musical instruction on violin at age five. After graduating in 2002 from West Springfield High School, he earned his bachelor's degree in violin performance from the Cleveland Institute of Music in Ohio in 2006. He also has pursued graduate studies at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. His notable instructors include Cyrus Forough from Carnegie Mellon, David Updegraff from the Cleveland Institute of Music, and Lisa-Beth Lambert of the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington and the Philadelphia Orchestra. Gunnery Sgt. Franke is the son of Master Gunnery Sgt. Philip Franke, USMC (ret.), a former Marine Band euphonium player, and Master Sgt. Susan Franke, USMC (ret.), a former Marine Chamber Orchestra violist. In addition, Gunnery Sgt. Franke's grandfather, the late Master Gunnery Sgt. David Johnson, was a retired Marine Band trumpet/cornet player. The Frankes are the first family to span three generations within "The President's Own."

Sinfonia No. 9 in C, Swiss
Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47)

There has always been something alluring about child prodigies, whether their talents manifest in the arts, athletics, or academics. As with the discovery of a new celestial body, seeing a prodigy in action sparks the collective imagination and inspires sheer awe of her or his existence. Modern day examples include musicians such as Midori, or computer programmers like Isabel Sieh, who founded Girls Will Code, when she was only thirteen.

In his day, Felix Mendelssohn represented an equally improbable talent, and his accomplishments continue to be awe-inspiring to this day, despite the innovation and progress that has been made in the interim. Mendelssohn created an impressive body of work by age fifteen, which is still enjoyed today. His string symphonies were written between 1821 and 1823. These were primarily intended as student works that were only fully appreciated posthumously, nonetheless they stand up to many of the more mature works of his contemporaries at the time.

Mendelssohn's Sinfonia No. 9 in C was composed in March of 1823, and exhibits strong influences from the three pillars of classical music: Johann Sebastian Bach, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Ludwig van Beethoven. The work also hints at a unique style all Mendelssohn's own, one that would become fully formed as early as 1825 when he began composing his symphonies. The first movement of the sinfonia bristles with energy, even during the slow Grave introduction in C minor that beautifully sets up the C major theme, creating a sense of anticipation for the excitement to come. Melodically Mendelssohn shows the strong influence of Mozart, with effortless lines and the judicious use of repetition, making it seem impossible that it could have been composed any other way. Harmonically, he demonstrates the adventurousness of Beethoven, with sudden, almost jarring shifts to seemingly disparate tonalities, skillfully navigating his way back home such that one forgets they were ever adrift in the first place. During the development section (after a brief, but shocking move to E-flat major following a grand pause) Mendelssohn shows his affinity for Bach, moving into a thrilling fugue before the recapitulation, which is punctuated by flourishes of melodic embellishment on the primary theme. The second movement experiments with orchestration techniques: uncommonly splitting the violin section into four-part harmony for a feature, then giving way to a feature for the lower voices, offering an adventurous contrapuntal interplay between the instruments. Interestingly, Mendelssohn withholds a full "meeting" of all voices until the very end, without any fanfare or bombast, winding down to a satisfying close back where he began in E major. The third movement, Scherzo (*La Suisse*), is a relatively uncomplicated ABA form, featuring a middle Trio section based on a folk melody from which the sinfonia derives its nickname. The final movement, Allegro vivace, sets fire to the ensemble from the outset and, once again, shows the influence of the masters, with yet another Bach-like fugue in C minor, albeit with dramatic harmonic and dynamic shifts more reminiscent of Beethoven. Finally moving back to the home key of C major for the extended coda section, the Sinfonia No. 9 comes to an ecstatic close, in a joyous whirlwind brimming with youthful vitality.