



Colonel Jason K. Fettig, Director

CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES
Sunday, March 17, 2019 at 2:00 P.M.
John Philip Sousa Band Hall
Marine Barracks Annex
Washington, DC

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Violin Sonata in E, BWV 1016

Adagio
Allegro
Adagio ma non tanto
Allegro

SSgt Foster Wang, violin
GySgt Russell Wilson, harpsichord

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91)

String Quartet in F, K. 590

Allegro moderato
Allegretto
Menuetto
Allegro

GySgt Erika Sato and SSgt Sara Matayoshi, violin
GySgt Tam Tran, viola
SSgt Clayton Vaughn, cello

INTERMISSION

Mark O'Connor (b. 1961)

“Limerock”

GySgt Chaerim Smith, violin

SSgt Sarah Hart, viola

Garth Knox (b. 1956)

“Geostationary” from *Satellites* (2015)

GySgt Chaerim Smith and SSgt Karen Johnson, violin

SSgt Sarah Hart, viola

SSgt Charlaire Prescott, cello

This piece was commissioned for *Fifty for the Future: The Kronos Learning Repertoire*, a project of the Kronos Performing Arts Association. The score and parts are available for free online. kronosquartet.org.

Kenji Bunch (b. 1973)

String Circle (2005)

Lowdown

Shuffle Step

Ballad

Porch Picking

Overdrive

SSgt Karen Johnson and SSgt Foster Wang, violin

SSgt Sarah Hart and MSgt Christopher Shieh, viola

SSgt Charlaire Prescott, cello

The Marine Chamber Orchestra will perform Sunday, March 24 at 2:00 P.M. in the Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center at Northern Virginia Community College, Alexandria Campus. The program will include works by Gilbertson, Prokofiev, and Schubert.

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PROGRAM NOTES

Violin Sonata in E, BWV 1016

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Johann Sebastian Bach's Six Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin are a cornerstone of the violin repertoire, studied by every conservatory student and played by concert violinists in recitals worldwide. Yet Bach wrote another set of six violin pieces, the Sonatas for Violin and Harpsichord, which are performed less often but are nonetheless great works, full of invention and expression. Even Bach's son Carl Philipp Emanuel, known as an innovator and proponent of newer musical styles, wrote that these "are among the best works of my dear departed father. They still sound excellent and give me much joy, although they date back more than fifty years."

These sonatas most likely originated during Bach's tenure as Kapellmeister in the city of Cöthen from 1717 to 1723. During his time in Cöthen, Bach benefited from the patronage of the German Prince Leopold, himself a musician and connoisseur of the arts. At Leopold's court sacred music was of secondary importance, so Bach concentrated his compositional efforts on instrumental music, resulting in such works as the Brandenburg Concertos, The Well-Tempered Clavier, the Six Suites for Solo Cello, and the aforementioned Six Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin.

The Violin Sonata in E follows a standard structure of the day with four movements ordered slow–fast–slow–fast. In the opening Adagio movement, the harpsichord assumes a supporting role for the violin's melody. The harmonies move slowly throughout this movement, creating a sense of space and improvisation. In fact, the left hand of the harpsichord remains on the same note for the first seven measures before changing. The two instruments become more equal partners in the second movement, a chatty and playful Allegro, in which the voices mimic each other, showing off Bach's musical craftsmanship. The third movement, another Adagio, is a passacaglia, a musical form built on a repeating bass line. The harpsichord's left hand anchors the movement with this recurring pattern, while the violin and right hand of the harpsichord take turns with the melodic material. The poignant movement ends without resolution and leads directly into the final Allegro, a virtuosic tour de force for both instruments.

String Quartet in F, K. 590

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote his String Quartet in F, K. 590 in 1790. It was his last string quartet, written the year before he died, and the third in what he had intended to be a set of six quartets written for a particularly influential amateur cellist: the King of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm II. In much the same manner that Prince Leopold's interest in instrumental music led to a fruitful period of string music for Bach, King Friedrich Wilhelm II's patronage impacted Mozart's string writing. Rather than follow the tradition of the earliest string quartets in which the second violin, viola, and cello played mostly supportive roles to the first violin part, Mozart catered to his patron's taste by featuring the cello prominently.

The quartet is beautiful, complex, and full of surprising twists. The most virtuosic writing occurs in the first movement, where the singing melody incorporates fast downward spirals that the four instruments trade amongst themselves. The second movement Allegretto, features a simple but somewhat wistful melody decorated by various elegant accompaniments. In the Menuetto, Mozart plays with uneven rhythmic groupings and experiments with instrumental pairings, as if trying out different sets of dance partners: two violins together, second violin with viola, first violin with cello. The joyous last movement features all four voices in a brilliant and fun finale.

“Limerock”

Mark O’Connor (b. 1961)

St. Patrick’s Day is the perfect occasion to feature a short fiddle tune! Though “Limerock” is an American tune composed and developed in Texas, fiddle music in this country shares stylistic roots with the much older tradition of Irish fiddling. This tune is upbeat and challenging, moving through several different keys and employing dazzling sliding harmonics.

This duo version of Limerock was arranged by Mark O’Connor, a composer and violinist described by *The New York Times* as a versatile musician who can give his listeners a “complex, sophisticated piece of early twenty-first-century classical music and then [knock] them dead with the brown-dirt whine of a Texas fiddle.” O’Connor recorded “Limerock” with bassist Edgar Meyer on his Grammy-winning record *The New Nashville Cats*. He currently offers four different adaptations of the lower part, for second violin, viola, cello, or bass.

“Geostationary” from *Satellites* (2015)

Garth Knox (b. 1956)

Like fiddling styles, composer Garth Knox has Irish roots. Born in Dublin, raised in Scotland, and currently based in Paris, Knox cites his upbringing as giving him a comfort with traditional Celtic music, which he fuses with his years of experience performing new music as the viola player of the Arditti Quartet and the Ensemble InterContemporain.

The newest piece on today’s program, “Geostationary” was commissioned by the Kronos Quartet in 2016 as part of a project called *Fifty for the Future*, which explores contemporary approaches to the string quartet by featuring twenty-five male and twenty-five female composers over a period of five years. This short movement joins “Spectral Sunrise” and “Dimensions” in a collection called *Satellites* that can be performed either as a set or as separate pieces.

Knox describes his inspiration in a video available on the *Fifty for the Future* website:

In this one I’m thinking of those satellites that hover over our heads in the same place....

They are actually hurtling through space at an enormous speed, but because we are hurtling through space at the same enormous speed, they seem to be stationary to us. This idea of something that’s moving and getting nowhere interested me greatly.

To portray this paradox, Knox writes at least one instrument at a time, usually the viola, in quick perpetual motion, while the violins float above with a more static melody. He calls for very unique types of pizzicato by plucking with different fingers, on different places on the string, and in different directions. The resulting music sounds quite evocative, including several moments that Knox describes as “our four astronauts (being swept) through the same meteor shower where they are bombarded by high-energy microparticles scattering in every direction.”

String Circle (2005)

Kenji Bunch (b. 1973)

American violist and composer Kenji Bunch has been hailed by *The New York Times* as “a composer to watch.” Bunch draws on vernacular musical traditions, such as folk music, along with his classical training to create new concert music with a uniquely personal vocabulary. He considers his mission to be the continuing search for and celebration of shared emotional truths about the human experience.

Bunch writes about his quintet:

String Circle refers to the continuum of history and tradition that string instruments offer us. Our country is particularly rich in a variety of approaches to string playing, so each of the work’s five movements offers tribute to a particular idiom of American music.

The first movement, Lowdown, recalls the uniquely raw, driving music of old-time Appalachian fiddling.... A scherzo, Shuffle Step, follows, paying homage to Texas swing....

Ballad, the third movement, is a setting of the folk song “Wayfaring Stranger,” interrupted by an ascending line in the first viola, gradually imitated by the others at different rates, creating a wash of tenuous, ever-changing harmonies suggesting the ascension to heaven to which the song refers.

Next comes Porch Picking, a second scherzo played entirely pizzicato, with twangy slides between pitches evoking the unique sounds of the banjo. Amid the plucking, the second viola begins to strum, suggesting another instrument—the ukulele.

The work ends with Overdrive, a fast, furious dance that updates the musical influences from folk to funk, celebrating the versatility of the string instruments and their continuing relevance in music of a more contemporary vernacular.

String Circle’s translation of folk music into a concert work follows in a tradition championed by Hungarian composer and ethnomusicologist Béla Bartók. In an homage to the older composer, Bunch modeled the structure of this quintet after Bartók’s fourth string quartet, with a fugal first movement and scherzo culminating in a slow dramatic center, followed by a pizzicato scherzo and a fast dance finale.