

Vanderbilt University Orchestra
Robin Fountain, conductor

Jessie Montgomery's "Banner"

Date and Location

Friday, October 22, 2021, 8:00 PM, Ingram Hall

Repertoire

Title: Banner for String Quartet and Chamber Orchestra

Composer: Jessie Montgomery (1981-)

Solo quartet: Clair Thaler, Elena Lim, Alison Wang, Griffin Seuter

Title: Concerto for Alto Saxophone and String Orchestra

1. Lento, Cadenza e Allegro

Composer: Pierre-Max Dubois (1930-1995)

Soloist: John Di Fatta

Title: Ballade for Flute, String Orchestra and Piano

Composer: Frank Martin (1890-1974)

Soloist: Sara Kang

INTERMISSION

Title: Symphony No. 36, *Linz*

1. Adagio – Allegro spiritoso

2. Andante con moto

3. Menuetto

4. Presto

Composer: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Conductor

Robin Fountain

Violin 1

Claire Thaler (Principal)

Joseph Wang

Maxwell Vanhoeij

Vivian Kung

Katherine Gao

Ian Stripling Jenson
Rachel Lawton
Alexandra Maynard
Sarah McGuire
Catherine McLean
Gabriel Esperon

Violin 2

Elena Lim (Principal)
Gabija Zillinskaite
Avery Hsieh
Elizabeth Chun
Nandika Chirala
Phoebe Cao
Jonathan Jesalva
James Thompson
Riku Korenaga

Viola

Alison Wang (Principal)
Damon Zavala
Annabelle Spoto
Julia Reparip
Lucas Legan
Ryan Cho
Esther Zhu
Ansley Moe
Madeline Mehra
Calvin Yoon

Cello

Griffin Seuter (Principal)
Alex Cho
Kyle Pinzon
Aaron Chen
Melanie Chen
Solomon Hearn

Bass

James Butler (Principal)
Luke Faessler
Alyssa Burkhalter
Lacy Tier

Flute

Elise Park (Principal)
Lena Jin

Oboe

Molly Dench (Principal)

Ethan Morris
Clarinet
Olivia Harrison (Principal)

Bassoon
Tom Klink (Principal)
Nina Susich

Horn
Demi Adetona (Principal)
Peter Sarsfield

Trumpet
Nick Van de Bogarede (Principal on Montgomery)
Rachel Stahel (Principal on Mozart)

Percussion
Josh Weinfeld (Principal)
Nupur Thakkar

Piano
Jack Allen

Administrative Support
Eric Whitmer (Principal)
Daniel Dardon

Librarians
Julia Reparip
Melody Sim

Program Notes Orchestra Oct 22

Pierre Dubois Concerto for Alto Sax and Strings
Lento espr.; allegro (i.e. 1st Mvt. only)

Born in 1930, Pierre Dubois was a prominent French composer just removed from the generation of the famous “Les Six,” a group of French composers that included his composition teacher, Darius Milhaud. Influenced by his teacher, his compositions carried the quirky modernist style of Les Six into the mid-20th century.

His *Concerto for Alto Saxophone and String Orchestra* is one of many works that Dubois wrote for saxophone, an unusual solo instrument in the classical tradition. The first movement of the concerto features two contrasting sections. The soloist plays a subdued yet expressive cadenza in the aptly marked “Lento Espressivo” section, with minimal orchestral accompaniment. A swift transition into the second half of the movement, “Allegro,” features a sudden change in style. A light yet flashy technical solo line in the saxophone is accompanied by an ear-catching string

orchestra part featuring ascending melodic lines and unabating repetitive chords. At times, the soloist and orchestra move as in a shared conversation, while at others, they move more independently. The resulting effect is a thoroughly enjoyable essay in the concerto genre.

Frank Martin

Ballade for Flute (the version for strings and piano)

Following a tradition dating at least as far back as Frédéric Chopin, Frank Martin composed a total of six Ballades. Capturing the essence of this genre, a review of a 1976 performance of Martin's *Ballade for Flute, Piano and Strings* states that "the Ballade was a musical transposition of 'what in poetry would be a story or a dramatic narration.'"

In this piece, the flute takes the role of narrator, telling a dichotomous tale of tranquility and agitation. At times the voice becomes unrelenting and insistent, only to break away into a quiet and emotional melody supported by the string orchestra and piano.

Although Martin is known for his harmony-centered compositional style, and experimentations within an expanded realm of tonality, this piece has been described as "flirt[ing] with atonality." Unlike many of his contemporaries, he doesn't fully abandon tonality. Rather, developing an elastic sense of tonal center allows Martin to tell a hauntingly beautiful and mysterious story.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Symphony No. 36, Linz

Travelling from Salzburg back to Vienna in 1783, Mozart stopped in Linz, where he composed his 36th symphony for a concert just 4 days later.

An unusual twist to the story is that this is the only symphony written after his Twelfth for which an original autograph manuscript does not exist. Most editions today stem from a manuscript likely copied by a Viennese music dealer, which Mozart then sold to the Donaueschingen Court in 1786 for a meager profit.

Throughout the symphony, woodwinds and strings are heavily featured in a conventional style. The first movement takes on a noble character from the beginning, with a defiant Scotch snap rhythm and flowing melodies. The second movement, a somber andante centered in F major yet featuring many harmonies in a minor mode, makes use of the delicate timbre of the woodwinds in conjunction with a lamenting melody in the upper strings. The following movement, titled "Menuetto", is the shortest. The grounded and emphatic opening, along with a light, dance-like feel in the trio section, were typical of the era. The finale is upbeat and takes on the feeling of a fanfare in a suspenseful race to an exclamatory end at the finish line.

Jessie Montgomery

Banner

Banner is a tribute to the 200th Anniversary of the Star Spangled Banner, which was officially declared the American National Anthem in 1814 under the penmanship of Francis Scott Key. Scored for solo string quartet and string orchestra, Banner is a rhapsody on the theme of the Star Spangled Banner. Drawing on musical and historical sources from various world anthems and

patriotic songs, I've made an attempt to answer the question: "What does an anthem for the 21st century sound like in today's multi-cultural environment?"

In 2009, I was commissioned by the Providence String Quartet and Community MusicWorks to write *Anthem: A tribute to the historical election of Barack Obama*. In that piece I wove together the theme from the *Star Spangled Banner* with the commonly named *Black National Anthem Lift Every Voice and Sing* by James Weldon Johnson (which coincidentally share the exact same phrase structure). *Banner* picks up where *Anthem* left off by using a similar backbone source in its middle section, but expands further both in the amount of references and also in the role play of the string quartet as the individual voice working both with and against the larger community of the orchestra behind them. The structure is loosely based on traditional marching band form where there are several strains or contrasting sections, preceded by an introduction, and I have drawn on the drum line chorus as a source for the rhythmic underpinning in the finale. Within the same tradition, I have attempted to evoke the breathing of a large brass choir as it approaches the climax of the "trio" section. A variety of other cultural Anthems and American folk songs and popular idioms interact to form various textures in the finale section, contributing to a multi-layered fanfare.

The *Star Spangled Banner* is an ideal subject for exploration in contradictions. For most Americans the song represents a paradigm of liberty and solidarity against fierce odds, and for others it implies a contradiction between the ideals of freedom and the realities of injustice and oppression. As a culture, it is my opinion that we Americans are perpetually in search of ways to express and celebrate our ideals of freedom — a way to proclaim, "we've made it!" as if the very action of saying it aloud makes it so. And for many of our nation's people, that was the case: through work songs and spirituals, enslaved Africans promised themselves a way out and built the nerve to endure the most abominable treatment for the promise of a free life. Immigrants from Europe, Central America and the Pacific have sought out a safe haven here and though met with the trials of building a multi-cultured democracy, continue to find rooting in our nation and make significant contributions to our cultural landscape. In 2014, a tribute to the U.S. National Anthem means acknowledging the contradictions, leaps and bounds, and milestones that allow us to celebrate and maintain the tradition of our ideals.

— Jessie Montgomery

Jessie Montgomery is a violinist, composer and music educator from New York City. She performs and gives workshops in the US and abroad and her compositions are being performed by orchestras and chamber groups throughout the country.

Jessie was born and raised in Manhattan's Lower East Side in the 1980s during a time when the neighborhood was at a major turning point in its history. Artists gravitated there and it was a hotbed of cultural activity and community development. Her parents (father a musician, her mother, an actress) were engaged in the activities of the neighborhood and regularly brought Jessie to rallies, performances and parties where neighbors, activists and artists gathered to celebrate and support the movements of the time. It is from this unique experience that Jessie has created a life in which performance, creativity, education and advocacy merge.

Jessie began her violin studies, at the Third Street Music School Settlement, one of the oldest community organizations in the country. Upon graduating with her Bachelor's degree from the Juilliard School in Violin Performance in 2003, she joined forces with Community MusicWorks in Providence, Rhode Island, a nationally recognized leader in community development and music education. With this appointment came her first experience as a professional chamber musician as a member of the Providence String Quartet. She continued her chamber music endeavors as a founding member of PUBLIQuartet, a string quartet made up of composers and arrangers, featuring their own music as well as that of emerging and established contemporary composers. Since 2012 she has held post as a member of the highly acclaimed Catalyst Quartet, raved by the New York Times as "invariably energetic and finely burnished...performing with earthly vigor", touring regularly in the United States and abroad. Most recently she has become a collaborator with Yo-Yo Ma's Silkroad Ensemble and will tour with them in the upcoming 2018-19 season.

Since 1999, Jessie has been affiliated with The Sphinx Organization, which supports the accomplishments of young African-American and Latino string players. As a member of the Sphinx network she has played numerous roles within the organization, as a teacher, juror, orchestra member and concertmaster, panelist and ambassador, as well as being a two-time laureate in their annual competition. Jessie was also Composer-in-Residence with the Sphinx Virtuosi, a conductor-less string orchestra which toured her music for 3 seasons. The tours resulted in radio broadcasts on Performance Today, WFMT in Chicago, Q2 and others, and a review in the Washington Post calling her music "Turbulent, wildly colorful and exploding with life." In 2014, Jessie was awarded Sphinx's generous MPower grant to assist in the recording of her acclaimed debut album, *Strum: Music for Strings* (October, 2015, Azica Records). The *Whole Note* states that the album displays "a remarkable self-assurance and confidence together with a striking musical inventiveness and imagination"; and Second Inversion, Seattle's alternative classical radio station, remarks that "The album combines classical chamber music with elements of folk music, spirituals, improvisation, poetry and politics, crafting a unique and insightful new-music perspective on the cross-cultural intersections of American history."

In 2012, Jessie completed her graduate degree in Composition for Film and Multimedia at New York University, at which point composing became a true focus on her path. Opportunities came about to partner with the American Composers Orchestra, the Sphinx Organization and chamber groups throughout New York City. Other commissions began to emerge from the Albany Symphony, the Joyce Foundation, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and the Young People's Chorus of NY.

In fall 2018, Jessie will be an incoming Virginia B.Toulmin Fellow at the Centre for Ballet and the Arts, where she will complete work on a new ballet for Dance Theater of Harlem and the Virginia Arts Festival, in collaboration with choreographer Claudia Schreier. Other upcoming highlights include premieres of new work for soprano Julia Bullock, The Muir Quartet and performances by the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra.

Teachers and mentors include Sally Thomas, Ann Setzer, Alice Kanack, Joan Tower, Derek Bermel, Mark Suozzo, Ira Newborn and Laura Kaminsky.

Program notes by Emma Kirby unless otherwise notated.