

PROGRAM NOTES

Starburst

Jessie Montgomery (b. 1981)

Composer-violinist-educator Jessie Montgomery hails from New York's Lower East Side and studied violin at The Juilliard School and New York University. She has been a member of the Providence String Quartet as well as the Catalyst Quartet - a project of the Detroit-based Sphinx Organization, which creates opportunities for African American and Latino string players.



Her compositions draw from diverse influences, such as African American spirituals, civil rights anthems, improvisational styles, modern jazz, and film scoring. *Starburst* was commissioned by the Sphinx Organization and premiered by its resident Sphinx Virtuosi in 2012. About the work, Montgomery writes:

This brief one-movement work for string orchestra is a play on imagery of rapidly changing musical colors. Exploding gestures are juxtaposed with gentle fleeting melodies in an attempt to create a multidimensional soundscape. 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 that premiered the work, the Sphinx Virtuosi, and I wrote the piece with their dynamic in mind.

Overture to Le nozze di Figaro (The Marriage of Figaro)

W. A. Mozart (1756-1791)

Mozart's opera *The Marriage of Figaro* premiered in May 1786 in Vienna at the Burgtheater and is one of three opera's that Mozart created with librettist Lorenzo da Ponte. The Overture is self-contained, meaning it does not quote any direct musical themes from the opera and it does not fade directly into the opening measures of the opera. The Overture serves as a wonderful introduction to the opera, its energetic and vivacious themes giving a foretaste of the comedic and madcap nature of the work. Mozart completed the overture just two days prior to the premiere of *The Marriage of Figaro* at which he conducted the work from the keyboard. To this day, the Overture continues to delight audiences as a separate concert piece.



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Piano Concerto No. 3 in C major – 1st Movt Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Sergei Prokofiev was a composer, pianist, and conductor whose works span numerous musical genres. He is regarded as one of the major composers of the 20th century. He began his Piano Concerto No. 3 in 1917 and completed it 1921. In the work he draws on material that he had sketched out over the prior decade. The work premiered on December 16, 1921 with Frederick Stock conducting the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and with the composer as soloist.



The first movement opens with a haunting theme in the clarinets singing what sounds like a slow and languid folk song. The tempo increases and energetic string pizzicatos make way for the piano entrance, which includes meticulous staccatos and emphatic chordal passages. The pace of the movement slows slightly, with an interlude for oboe, leading to the development on the opening melody, where the piano overlays the orchestra with exciting virtuosic playing and fireworks.

Nocturnes - Nuages and Fêtes Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Debussy composed the *Nocturnes* between 1897 and 1899. The first two movements, *Nuages* (Clouds) and *Fêtes* (Festivals) received their premiere on December 9, 1900 in Paris. The third movement was not included in the premiere because the female chorus required in the movement was not available. The first complete performance of the work followed nearly a year later, on October 27, 1901.



In an introductory note to the *Nocturnes*, which was included in the first complete performance in 1901, Debussy wrote that "The title '*Nocturnes*' is to be interpreted here in a general and, more particularly, in a decorative sense. Therefore, it is not meant to designate the usual form of the Nocturne, but rather all the various impressions and the special effects of light that the word suggests."

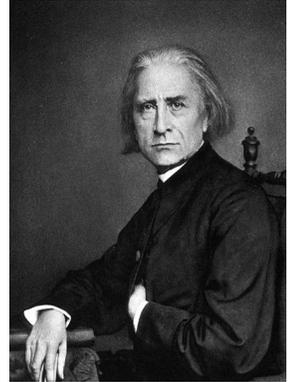
The first movement, *Nuages* (Clouds), evocatively depicts that slow, meandering motion of the clouds as they fade away in various shades of light. In the second movement, *Fêtes* (Festivals), we experience a festival complete with dancing rhythms, a musical procession, glimmering lights, and a blending of it all in a vibrant and festive display of joviality.

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Les Préludes

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Hungarian born Franz Liszt began his musical career as a child prodigy pianist and composer, studying in Vienna and then settling in Paris. After a period of severe illness, he considered giving up music and joining the Church. However, spurred on by such musical luminaries as Chopin, Berlioz, and Paganini, he rededicated himself to music and piano playing and by the early 1840s had established himself as one of the biggest musical stars in Europe.



By 1847, Liszt had earned enough from performing to settle down and focus on composing. Among his notable innovations was the “Symphonic Poem”, which departed from the more traditional methods of constructing a symphonic movement by utilizing themes and a narrative structure drawn from folktales, novels, historical events, and poems. *Les Préludes* is the second among Liszt’s twelve symphonic poems. Composed between 1848-53, the early drafts of *Les Préludes* were inspired by a cycle of poems about the classical four elements: air, earth, fire, and water. However, in a program note written by Liszt he indicated that the title of the work is adopted from a poem entitled “*Les Préludes*” by Alphonse de Lamertine and included the following note:

“What is our life but a series of preludes to that unknown song whose first solemn note is tolled by death? The enchanted dawn of every life is love. But where is the destiny on whose first delicious joys some storm does not break?... And what soul thus cruelly bruised, when the tempest rolls away, seeks not to rest its memories in the pleasant calm of pastoral life? Yet man does not long permit himself to taste the kindly quiet that first attracted him to nature’s lap. For when the trumpet sounds he hastens to danger’s post, that in the struggle he may once more regain full knowledge of himself and his strength.”