

Montgomery, Starburst

COMPOSER: Jessie Montgomery

BORN: December 8, 1981

COMPOSED: 2012

WORLD PREMIER: September 2012. Miami, Florida.

ABOUT THE COMPOSER: Jessie Montgomery is a violinist, composer, and educator based in New York. Her upbringing in Manhattan's Lower East Side introduced her to many musical influences. Rooted in the classical style, Montgomery's compositions often include elements of vernacular music, improvisation, modern jazz, and African American spirituals. She studied violin at the Juilliard School and composition at New York University. Her works are primarily for strings and voice.

WHAT YOU'LL HEAR: Commissioned in 2012 by the Sphinx Organization, a non-profit dedicated to supporting Black and Latino musicians, *Starburst* is a vibrant one-movement piece for string orchestra. It has a modern classical feel with unexpected twists in direction. Montgomery describes the work as a "play on imagery of rapidly changing musical colors," inspired by the phenomenon of a starburst. Starting with a low rumble, the orchestra rapidly ascends to the stars in the violin's upper register. Throughout the piece, you'll hear brief melodies interspersed over soundscapes. A recurring element is the sparkling ostinato in the high strings. Think of this piece as a glimpse through the telescope into the night sky. You'll stay grounded as you hear stars shimmering and exploding, with lots of brilliant motion in between.

Barber, Violin Concerto, Op. 14

COMPOSER: Samuel Barber

BORN: March 9, 1910. West Chester, Pennsylvania.

DEATH: January 23, 1981. New York City, New York.

COMPOSED: 1939-1940

WORLD PREMIER: February 7, 1941. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

ABOUT THE COMPOSER: Samuel Barber crafted a unique neo-Romantic style, coupled with expressive lyricism and simplicity of sound. He developed his compositional voice early in his career and for the most part stayed true to this style, not feeling the need to experiment for its own sake. Having written vocal, orchestral, and solo instrumental works, he is probably best known for his *Adagio for Strings, Knoxville: Summer of 1915* (for soprano and orchestra), and the violin concerto you will hear tonight.

WHAT YOU'LL HEAR: Barber was commissioned to write the concerto at the outset of World War II. When he shared it with Iso Briselli, the violinist for its premiere, Briselli did not find the music to his liking, and his mentors discouraged him from performing the work. Rather than revise the concerto to please them, Barber found another violinist, Herbert Baumel, to premiere the concerto. Had Briselli known the concerto would become a masterpiece, perhaps he would have reconsidered.

The first movement, *Allegro Molto Moderato*, begins with a lyrical melody in the solo violin that sounds both fresh and familiar. This dreamy melody gives way to a new theme, introduced by the clarinet, that is more playful and questioning. Later, brass and woodwinds interject with a bold version of this theme, as the solo violin plays virtuosic runs.

Andante Sostenuto, the second movement, features an oboe solo that is at once tender and penetrating. The solo violin enters with a soft ascending line that soon transforms into a heart-wrenching moment, joined by orchestra. At times, the melody in the violin solo seems to be searching for something and finds the answer by returning to the main theme.

After the lyrical lines of the previous movements, the *Presto in Moto Perpetuo* feels like a race to the finish. Barber makes full use of the violin's virtuosic capacities, with fast runs up and down the fingerboard. This movement features much more dissonance than the previous two. When the soloist has a break, the orchestra fills in with frenzied runs in the strings and striking chords in the winds and brass. Don't be surprised if you are left breathless when the orchestra and soloist reach the climactic end.