

### ***Starburst for String Orchestra***

**Jessie Montgomery (b. 1981)**

The title itself—*Starburst*—evokes images of energy and motion, an explosion of star formation, or the sparkle of bright light rays emanating from a central source. In this brief one-movement work for strings, the explosive brilliance of star formation is translated into a kaleidoscope of tone colors in the strings. Pulsing repeated notes, scurrying melodic fragments, rocketing arpeggios, and brief moments of calm, interrupted by colorful and wild turbulence fill this soundscape.

Composer Jessie Montgomery is the recipient of numerous honors, including the prestigious Leonard Bernstein Award from the ASCAP Foundation. *Starburst* was premiered by the Sphinx Virtuosi, the flagship professional touring ensemble of The Sphinx Organization, which supports young African-American and Latino string players.

### ***Sinfonia (for Orbiting Spheres)***

**Missy Mazzoli (b. 1980)**

The term “sinfonia” most commonly refers to a type of Baroque music for a small chamber ensemble. But during the medieval period, the term also referred to the hurdy-gurdy, which is a string instrument that produces a constant wheezing drone as a foundation for melodies that gradually emerge. The effect is somewhat like that of a bagpipe. In imitation of the hurdy-gurdy, the underlying component of this composition is a series of sustained harmonies over which brief melodies gradually emerge and then disappear. The shifting dissonances of the harmony evoke the feeling of outer space, the orbiting spheres, the infinity of the cosmos.

The music gradually becomes more rhythmic and dancelike, creating an atmosphere described by some as a *gymnopédie*, which was the annual festival of ancient Sparta consisting of ceremonial songs and dances performed by the young men. Gradually the sounds fade into the quietness with which the music began. Throughout, the music explores a wide variety of tone colors produced not only by the instruments, but also a synthesizer, recorded electronics, and even several harmonicas to imitate the wheezing drone of the hurdy-gurdy.

The composer Missy Mazzoli, who has received four ASCAP Young Composer Awards as well as a Fulbright Grant to the Netherlands, has composed music for numerous prestigious ensembles. Her *Sinfonia (for Orbiting Spheres)* was commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

### ***The Planets***

**Gustav Holst (1874-1934)**

English composer Gustav Holst’s orchestral suite *The Planets* has remained among the most popular orchestral works since its premier in 1918. The suite reflects Holst’s deep fascination with astrology and horoscopes, as each of the seven planets known in his day reflects something of the astrological character associated with it.

1. **Mars, the Bringer of War** captures the violence and terror of war with its clash of keys, dissonant harmonies, and uneven meter. The special *col legno* effect of playing string instruments with the wooden part of the bow contributes to the menacing tone of the work. The movement reaches a violently dissonant climax with a horrendously loud chord at the end of the movement.
2. **Venus, the Bringer of Peace** creates a slow and tranquil evocation of outer space and includes warm expressive passages with gentle accompanying harmonies.

3. **Mercury, the Winged Messenger**, the shortest of the movements, is fast and light-hearted, with breathless energy! Holst's quick melodic juxtaposition of two conflicting keys—B-flat and E—contribute to the busy, restless character of the movement.
4. **Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity** is probably the best-known movement of this suite. The buoyant exuberance of the music represents the jovial cheerfulness of Jupiter's astrological character. The broad, stately melody of the middle section was later named "Thaxted" by Holst after the English village where he spent a good portion of his life. He later adapted the tune to fit the patriotic poem "I Vow to Thee, My Country," and in 1926 Ralph Vaughan Williams included the tune in his *Songs of Praise*.
5. **Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age** opens with a back-and-forth melody that has been compared with the ticking of a clock, a motive that can be heard in various guises throughout the movement, as though marking the passage of time. The solemn and inexorable procession of this movement reaches a loud climax just before the movement slowly fades to close quietly.
6. After a brief introduction in the brass, **Uranus, the Magician** moves into a dancelike mood with startling key changes and rhythmic fluctuations that create rather unexpected transformations in the music. The real magic occurs when an abrupt halt to the tumult fades into a quietness as distant as the planet itself in the night sky.
7. The otherworldly character of **Neptune, the Mystic** quietly introduces a wordless chorus that gradually fades into silence.

**Renee McCahren, Professor**

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