



## FELIX MENDELSSOHN

**Born** February 3, 1809, Hamburg, Germany

**Died** November 4, 1847, Leipzig, Germany

### Octet in E-flat major, op. 20

Oh, to have met Felix Mendelssohn as a teenager...

"He had the appearance of an angel," said one writer; "almost supernatural beauty," said another. He was already a complete musician: a skilled improviser, sight-reader, and composer. His intellectual dexterity dazzled all. And he was a talented visual artist.

Mendelssohn was no flash-in-the-pan. He carried his 15-year-old self with the bearing and maturity of a much older person, and his music already has the fingerprints of the mature Mendelssohn: charm, skill, beauty, emotional directness.

When he wrote the Octet, his family had recently moved to a large house in the countryside. They squeezed large audiences for weekly concerts. Mendelssohn played violin, viola, and piano, learning how to write for ensemble by experiencing it from the inside.

There is almost no precedent for the Octet's instrumentation, double string quartet. Anticipating confusion, Mendelssohn wrote in a note, "This Octet must be played by all the instruments in symphonic orchestral style. *Pianos* and *fortes* must be strongly emphasized."

The Octet hovers somewhere between the chamber parlor and the orchestral hall. It pushes all eight players to ensemble virtuosity, but its challenges for the first violin make it occasionally feel like a violin concerto.

The shortest movement is also its most evocative, a Scherzo inspired by a stanza from *Faust* by his mentor, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe:

*The flight of the clouds and the veil of mist  
Are lighted from above.  
A breeze in the leaves, a wind in the reeds,  
And all has vanished.*

**First public performance:** January 30, 1836, at the Leipzig Gewandhaus

**First SLSO performance:** January 18, 1951, Vladimir Golschmann conducting

**Most recent SLSO performance:** May 3, 1982, Jacques Israelievitch, Jenny Jones, Brent Akins, Deborah Bloom, violins; Thomas Dumm and Katy Mattis, violas; and John Sant'Ambrogio and Savelly Schuster, cellos

**Scoring:** String octet (4 violins, 2 violas, 2 cellos)

**Performance time:** Approximately 33 minutes

*Tim Munro is the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra's Creative Partner. A writer, broadcaster, and Grammy-winning flutist, he lives in Chicago with his wife, son, and badly-behaved orange cat.*



St. Louis Symphony  
Orchestra

stéphane denève : music director

20  
21

141st season

Xiaoxiao Qiang, violin  
Jessica Cheng, violin  
Andrea Jarrett, violin  
Asako Kuboki, violin  
Jonathan Chu, viola  
Andrew Francois, viola  
Jennifer Humphreys, cello  
Alvin McCall, cello

Saturday, October 31, 2020 at 11:00am  
Sunday, November 8, 2020 at 3:00pm

### JESSIE MONTGOMERY

(b. 1981)

**Strum** (2006, rev. 2012)

Xiaoxiao Qiang, violin  
Andrea Jarrett, violin  
Jonathan Chu, viola  
Jennifer Humphreys, cello

### GABIELA LENA FRANK

(b. 1972)

**Leyendas: An Andean Walkabout**  
(selections) (2001)

Chasqui  
Toyos  
Coquetteos

Jessica Cheng, violin  
Asako Kuboki, violin  
Andrew Francois, viola  
Alvin McCall, cello

### MENDELSSOHN

(1809–1847)

**Octet in E-flat major, op. 20** (1825)

Allegro moderato ma con fuoco  
Andante  
Scherzo—Allegro legierissimo  
Presto

Xiaoxiao Qiang, violin  
Jessica Cheng, violin  
Asako Kuboki, violin  
Andrea Jarrett, violin  
Jonathan Chu, viola  
Andrew Francois, viola  
Jennifer Humphreys, cello  
Alvin McCall, cello

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# Program Notes

By Tim Munro

You have taken your seats. Now, look to your left and right: empty seats. It is strange, certainly. But perhaps in this strangeness there is an opportunity.

When musicians gather together, without an audience, their music-making takes on a different quality. Laughter fills the room, and the playing loosens, becomes wilder. What if Covid-times allow us a glimpse into a private world, capturing the free-wheeling spirit of a private jam session?

Jessie Montgomery's *Strum* and Gabriela Lena Frank's *Leyendas* both dance with abandon. And Felix Mendelssohn's Octet provides a feast among friends, a chance to gather with joy.



## JESSIE MONTGOMERY

Born 1981, New York, New York

### *Strum*

Montgomery is a violinist and composer whose music is heard across the country. She is a member of the Catalyst Quartet and plays with the Silk Road Ensemble and Sphinx Virtuosi. Recent works include a nonet inspired by the Great Migration, and a reimagining of Scott Joplin's opera *Treemonisha*.

"I've always been interested in trying to find the intersection between different types of music," she has said. "I imagine that music is a meeting place at which all people can converse about their unique differences and common stories."

*Strum* is a celebration of "American folk idioms and the spirit of dance and movement," writes Montgomery. Its title refers to the guitar-like plucking of the strings that plays many roles: floating hum, earthy groove, rapturous thrum.

"The piece begins with fleeting nostalgia." Melodies weave in, over, and between layers of strumming. Several minutes in, there is a shift in gears. The music shifts, "transforming into ecstatic celebration."

**First performance:** April 2006 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, by the Providence String Quartet

**First SLSO performance:** These concerts

**Scoring:** String quartet

**Performance time:** Approximately 8 minutes



## GABRIELA LENA FRANK

Born September 26, 1972, Berkeley, California

### *Leyendas: An Andean Walkabout*

"There's usually a story line behind my music; a scenario or character," writes composer and pianist Gabriela Lena Frank. Her musical tales are often inspired by her mother's Peruvian heritage, and Frank's own extensive travels across South America.

Frank is currently Composer-in-Residence with the Philadelphia Orchestra and was named one of the most significant women composers in history by the *Washington Post*. She has written works that tell the story of the Spanish conquest of South America, the folk tale of *La Llorona* ("The Weeping Woman"), and the musical traditions of *El Día de los Muertos* ("the Day of the Dead").

*Leyendas* is a musical celebration of diversity. The term *mestizaje* refers to the cultural and ethnic melting pot in Latin America in Central and South America's. In *Leyendas*, Frank imagines a place "where cultures can coexist without the subjugation of one by the other," where western classical music and Andean musical traditions speak to one another as equals.

Three of *Leyendas*'s six movements will be performed in this concert. Although the work is written for a traditional string quartet, Frank evokes the sound of traditional Peruvian instruments, as she details in her descriptions:

"**Chasqui**" depicts a legendary figure from the Inca period, the chasqui runner, who sprinted great distances to deliver messages between towns separated from one another by the Andean peaks. The chasqui needed to travel light. [So I have chosen] the charango, a high-pitched cousin of the guitar, and the lightweight bamboo quena flute, both of which are featured in this movement.

"**Toyos**" depicts one of the most recognizable instruments of the Andes, the panpipe. One of the largest kinds is the breathy toyo which requires great stamina and lung power, and is often played in parallel fourths or fifths.

"**Coqueteos**" is a flirtatious love song sung by gallant men known as romanceros. As such, it is direct in its harmonic expression, bold, and festive. The romanceros sing in harmony with one another against a backdrop of guitars which I think of as a vendaval de guitarras ("storm of guitars").

**First performance:** July 27, 2001, South Hadley, Massachusetts, by the Chiara Quartet

**First SLSO performance:** These concerts

**Scoring:** String quartet

**Performance time:** Approximately 24 minutes