



BACH
to school

VIRTUAL ASSEMBLY
LISTENING GUIDE

WFMT host **Robbie Ellis** interviews
James Hall and **Esme Arias-Kim**

with performances by **Esme Arias-Kim, violin**
and **the Chicago Arts Orchestra** conducted by
Conner Gray Covington

and **the Chicago Musical Pathways Initiative String Quartet**

Featured music:

Violin Concerto in D, 1st movement, 2nd half

by Erich Wolfgang Korngold

String Quartet No. 1, 2nd movement: Lyric for Strings

by George Walker

Strum

By Jessie Montgomery

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About the Listening Guide

WFMT'S Bach to School virtual assembly features [Chicago Musical Pathways Initiative](#). WFMT Presenter Robbie Ellis will interview James Hall, Project Director of CMPI, and CMPI fellow, violinist Esme Arias-Kim.

The mission of Chicago Musical Pathways Initiative is to identify and develop gifted and motivated orchestral students from underrepresented backgrounds for acceptance into top-tier conservatory, college, or university classical music programs in preparation for careers as professional musicians. They will discuss how their involvement in music has shaped their lives. We will share Esme's performance with the Chicago Arts Orchestra of Erich Wolfgang Korngold's Violin Concerto in D Major. The CMPI String Quartet virtual performances will include George Walker's String Quartet No. 1, 2nd movement, known as *Lyric for Strings* and Jessie Montgomery's *Strum*.

WFMT's **Bach to School Music Program** helps teachers build the foundation for understanding classical music for the youngest members of our community by donating instruments, online resources, and sets of classical music recordings to classrooms in the Chicago area and beyond.

Today's Program

Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 35: 1st movement (second half)

By Erich Wolfgang Korngold

Esme Arias-Kim, violin
Chicago Arts Orchestra
Connor Gray Covington, conductor

Performed January 30, 2022 at Ganz Hall, Roosevelt University, Chicago
Video supplied by the International Young Artist Concerto Competition

Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957) was an Austrian composer known for both his concert works and his many film scores. He traveled from Europe to work in Hollywood multiple times during the mid-1930s, however when Austria was annexed to Nazi Germany in the Anschluss of 1938, he and his family – being Jewish – moved to the United States permanently. He became a naturalized US citizen in 1943. During the Hitler regime, he vowed to compose movie music exclusively, which enabled him to support his family. However, following World War II, Korngold returned to his unfinished orchestral works.

One of those was his Violin Concerto, which is dedicated to Alma Mahler, the wife of his childhood mentor Gustav Mahler. The concerto was premiered by violinist Jascha Heifetz, whose performance received high praise and effectively inducted the concerto into the standard repertoire. Many of the concerto's themes come from Korngold's film scores for Warner Bros. productions.



In this virtual assembly, we'll hear the second half of the first movement, with Esme Arias-Kim as soloist. After a flashy solo section, we hear the yearning second theme of the movement, taken from the 1939 film *Juárez*, set in 19th-century Mexico. Following that, we hear echoes of the opening theme to close the first movement: the soaring melody from the 1937 film *Another Dawn*, set in a fictional British colony in North Africa.

Visit the Website: korngold.com

"I always remained true to my own beliefs."

– Erich Wolfgang Korngold

String Quartet No. 1, 2nd movement: *Lyric for Strings*

By George Walker

Chicago Musical Pathways Initiative String Quartet:

Esme Arias-Kim, violin
Sameer Agrawal, violin
Ella Saputra, viola
Jonathan Miller, cello

Performed December 13, 2022 at the Jewel Box Recital Hall, Steinberg Fine Arts Center, Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago

WATCH: [Video by WFMT](#)

George Walker was the first African American graduate of the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music with a dual diploma in Piano and Composition. In 1945, he was the first African American to debut with a solo recital at Manhattan's Town Hall and the first to perform with the Philadelphia Orchestra as the soloist for Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3. In 1950, he became the first African American artist to sign with a major artist management company, and he spent the next several years playing high-profile concerts in nearly every European capital. In 1956, Walker became the first African American to graduate with a doctoral degree from the Eastman School of Music. In 1961, he was hired by Smith College where he became the first tenured African American faculty member in any department. Finally, in 1996, Walker was the first African American to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Music in recognition of his composition *Lilacs* for voice and orchestra. At his death in August 2018, Walker was one of the most decorated and revered composers in American history.

Lyric for Strings was composed when Walker was only 24 years old, but it has remained one of his most enduring compositions. The sound, structure, and instrumentation of the piece are all clearly inspired by the famous *Adagio for Strings* composed by Walker's Curtis Institute classmate Samuel Barber in 1936. Walker first conceived the music that became *Lyric* as a middle movement for his first string quartet and originally titled it "Lament" in dedication to his grandmother who died the year prior. The piece fluidly and dramatically alternates between lush harmonies and stark solo passages which showcase the range of sounds possible in the string orchestra. In an interview not long before his death, Walker



commented: "I never played a string instrument, but somehow strings have always fascinated me." In *Lyric*, we hear the beginning of this life-long fascination.

– Program Notes from Charleston Symphony

Visit the Website: georgetwalker.com

"George Walker is one of the greatest composers of our time"

– Fanfare Magazine, Jan/Feb 2015

Strum

By Jessie Montgomery

Chicago Musical Pathways Initiative String Quartet

Ella Saputra, violin
Sameer Agrawal, violin
Esme Arias-Kim, viola
Jonathan Miller, cello

Performed December 13, 2022 at the Jewel Box Recital Hall, Steinberg Fine Arts Center, Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago

Watch: [Video by WFMT](#)

Jessie Montgomery is the winner of both the Sphinx Medal of Excellence and the ASCAP Foundation's Leonard Bernstein Award. She has just been appointed to a three-year term as Mead Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Montgomery's music interweaves classical music with elements of vernacular music, improvisation, language, and social justice, placing her squarely as one of the most relevant interpreters of 21st-century American sound and experience. Her growing body of work includes solo, chamber, vocal, and orchestral pieces, commissioned by such organizations as the Albany Symphony, American Music Festival, Chicago Sinfonietta, Joyce Foundation, National Symphony Orchestra, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Sphinx Organization, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, and Young People's Chorus of New York. The first recording devoted to her music, *Strum: Music for Strings*, was released by Azica Records in 2015. She is currently a Graduate Fellow in Music Composition at Princeton University.

Jessie Montgomery on her music:

"*Strum* is the culminating result of several versions of a string quintet I wrote in 2006. It was originally written for the Providence String Quartet and guests of Community MusicWorks Players, then arranged for string quartet in 2008 with several small revisions. In 2012 the piece underwent its final revisions with a rewrite of both the introduction and the ending for the Catalyst Quartet in a performance celebrating the 15th annual Sphinx Competition.



Originally conceived for the formation of a cello quintet, the voicing is often spread wide over the ensemble, giving the music an expansive quality of sound. Within *Strum*, I utilized texture motives, layers of rhythmic or harmonic ostinati that string together to form a bed of sound for melodies to weave in and out. The strumming pizzicato serves as a texture motive and the primary driving rhythmic underpinning of the piece. Drawing on American folk idioms and the spirit of dance and movement, the piece has a kind of narrative that begins with fleeting nostalgia and transforms into ecstatic celebration." – Jessie Montgomery

"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." – Jessie Montgomery

Visit the Website: jessiemontgomery.com

"Turbulent, wildly colorful and exploding with life, *Strum* sounded like a handful of American folk melodies tossed into a strong wind, cascading and tumbling joyfully around one another."

– Washington Post

About the Performers

James Hall is a double bassist, administrator and educator in the Chicago area. Originally from Baltimore, Maryland, James holds degrees in Double Bass Performance from the Peabody Institute



of Johns Hopkins University and from Northwestern University, where he was the recipient of a full-tuition scholarship. James was a member of the Civic Orchestra of Chicago from 2008-2010, and has also performed with numerous professional ensembles in the Chicago area and the Midwest, including the Chicago Composers Orchestra, Dubuque Symphony and others. As an educator, James was previously a public school orchestra director in Howard County, Maryland, overseeing increased enrollment in each successive year of his tenure. James joined the Chicago Musical Pathways Initiative as its Project Manager in July, 2019, and was promoted to Project Director in September, 2021. Prior to joining CMPI, James served as the Manager of Community



Programs and Civic Orchestra Engagement at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, where he managed the prestigious Civic Orchestra Fellowship program and worked to expand access to classical music in communities throughout Chicago.

Esme Arias-Kim, 16, is a Merit Scholarship Fellow at the Music Institute of Chicago's Academy, a training center for advanced pre-college students, and studies violin with Almita Vamos. Esme is also a fellow of Chicago Musical Pathways Initiative. Esme's solo orchestral debut was at the age of 10 with the Oistrakh Symphony and was featured on WFMT's *Introductions* and NPR's *From the Top*. She has given solo performances with the Buffalo Philharmonic, Fairbanks Symphony, Sinfonia da Camera, Fox Valley Orchestra, Chicago Arts Orchestra, Ottawa Chamber, Lincolnwood Chamber, Accademia d'Archi Arrigoni and the Civic Orchestra of Chicago at Orchestra Hall after receiving first alternate in The Crain-Maling Foundation CSO Young Artists Competition. She has also played solo recitals at The Peninsula Music Festival, Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, Chicago Cultural Center, 92Y New York, Musikferien am Starnberger See, Germany, and Palácio Foz, Portugal.



Esme is a First Place winner in many competitions including the Sphinx Competition 2020, Walgreens National Concerto, International Young Artist Concerto Competition, Arthur D. Montzka 2022 Young Artists Concerto Competition, Fox Valley, Enkor International, New York International Artist Association, Sejong, Confucius, DePaul Concerto Festival, Illinois MTNA Competition and most recently the Minnesota Orchestra's concerto competition.

Esme performs on a 1920 violin by Alfredo Contino, courtesy of Guarneri Hall NFP and Darnton & Hersh Fine Violins, Chicago.



Chicago Musical Pathways Initiative String Quartet: From left to right: Sameer Agrawal, Esme Arias-Kim, Jonathan Miller, and Ella Saputra



Chicago Musical Pathways Initiative (CMPI) exists to identify and develop gifted and motivated orchestral students from underrepresented backgrounds for acceptance into top-tier conservatory, college or university classical music programs in preparation for careers as professional musicians. CMPI provides students with financial support for private lessons, youth ensembles, summer camp programs, instrument purchases, SAT/ACT prep classes, and travel expenses to camps, competitions, auditions, and trial lessons. Other essential program components include professional musicians as family mentors, family education meetings, complimentary tickets to classical performances, recitals, master classes, and studio classes, and membership in a robust, like-minded community.

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