

Meet Jessie Montgomery!

Name _____



JESSIE MONTGOMERY

Born in 1981, Manhattan's Lower East Side, New York City

In her music, she uses old classical styles with the new—vernacular, improvisation, and social justice.

Her work brings together her passions for composing, performing, teaching, and advocacy.

8 FAST FACTS! Circle one fact that seems most important to Jessie Montgomery's work as a composer.

- Jessie grew up in a family that appreciated the arts. Her dad was a musician and her mother was an actress and storyteller.
- Jessie took violin lessons as a child at the Third Street Music School Settlement, the longest-running community music school in the country.
- Growing up, her neighborhood was the center of community activism and development. Jessie's parents often brought her to rallies, performances, and parties where activists and artists gathered.
- In 1999, she became involved with the Sphinx Organization of Detroit, a non-profit that supports young African American and Latino string players. Jessie earned several awards and grants through the organization as both a performer and composer, and now serves now as composer-in-residence.
- Jessie earned a bachelor's degree in violin performance from The Juilliard School and a master's degree in composition for film and multimedia from New York University. She is currently a Graduate Fellow in Music Composition at Princeton University.
- She actively performs in her own film, theater, and concert music, including with her own ensembles and Yo-Yo Ma's Silkroad Ensemble. The Catalyst Quartet, in which Montgomery also plays violin, formed several years ago with the support of the Sphinx Organization.
- Montgomery's compositions are mainly for solo instruments, chamber ensembles such as string quartets, vocal works, and larger orchestral works. One of her most talked about works is "Banner," commissioned for the 200th anniversary of "The Star-Spangled Banner." The New York Philharmonic has also selected Jessie Montgomery as one of 19 women composers to commemorate the centennial of the 19th Amendment which gave women the right to vote.
- One of Montgomery's mentors has been Joan Tower.

Write one sentence about something you already know that connects to these FAST FACTS!

“Banner” (2014) was a commissioned work for the 200th anniversary of “The Star-Spangled Banner”

When she began this commission, Montgomery was personally conflicted. As an African American living in the United States, she felt “The Star-Spangled Banner” never applied to her... and now she was trying to find her way with it.

What does an anthem for the 21st century sound like in today’s environment?

“Banner” represents what Jessie Montgomery sees when she thinks of the United States.

- Phrases of 12 work songs and anthems of the United States and neighboring countries are layered and woven together.
- In the middle of the piece, a lyrical melody comes from the double bass section in the back of the orchestra—“Lift every voice and sing”—the black national anthem.

The result makes a political statement, but it is also celebratory—a piece to consider all of what makes us who we are.

Watch this performance by the Catalyst Quartet and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. Jessie Montgomery is the violinist in the quartet wearing the black dress.

<https://content.thespco.org/music/concert-library/composition/banner-jessie-montgomery> (11:24)

What are some of the traditional, classic elements in “Banner” and/or this performance?	What are some of the contemporary or less usual elements in “Banner” and/or this performance?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• _____• _____• _____• _____• _____• _____• _____• _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• _____• _____• _____• _____• _____• _____• _____• _____



Following the performance of “Banner,” answer your choice of 3 questions. Be sure to give details.

1. Jessie Montgomery intended “Banner” to be a piece for celebration. Has she succeeded in conveying that sense of celebration to you through her music?

2. How do all the musicians stay together without a conductor in front of them?

3. Do you think the performers liked to play this piece? How can you tell?

4. Audience applause at the end was very appreciative. Do you suppose they were responding to the music or the performance?
