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Photo credit: Owen Zhou.

Philharmonia Orchestra

Renee Gilliland, conductor

Monday, Sept. 22, 2025, 7:30 p.m.

Grusin Music Hall

PROGRAM

Overture in D minor

Emilie Mayer (1812-1883)

Shift, Change, Turn

Jessie Montgomery (b. 1981)

Intermission

Symphony in B minor “Unfinished” D. 759

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

I. Allegro moderato

II. Andante con moto

PROGRAM NOTES

Overture in D minor

Emilie Mayer (1812-1883)

Emilie Mayer was a prolific German composer, often celebrated as the “female Beethoven” for her outstanding contributions to romantic music. Overture No. 1 in D minor is a notable work in her orchestral repertoire and reflects Mayer’s desire to establish herself within the male-dominated world of 19th Century music.

This work stands as a testament to her orchestral mastery and emotional depth. Structured in a single movement, the piece opens with a solemn *Andantino* section, evoking reflection and anticipation. This gradually transitions into a more dynamic and dramatic *Allegro Vivace*, where Mayer’s command of orchestral textures comes to the forefront. Cascading strings, bold brass, and expressive woodwinds weave together here to create a rich tapestry of sound. The piece accents her unique harmonic style, marked by sudden shifts in tonality and use of extended chords with compelling resolutions, ultimately contributing to the atmosphere of dramatic tension and excitement.

This overture not only demonstrates Mayer’s technical brilliance but also captivates listeners, taking them on an emotional journey, firmly solidifying her place as a trailblazer whose music continues, and will continue, to resonate with audiences.

— Program note by Amalia Kravtsova and Lucy Wootton

Shift, Change, Turn

Jessie Montgomery (b. 1981)

Inspired by Tchaikovsky's *The Seasons*, *Shift, Change, Turn* is my opportunity to contribute to the tradition of writing a piece based on the seasons, as change and rotation is something that we all experience as humans. This piece is a musical exploration of both the external and internal seasons which at times seem to be changing along the same axis.

—Program note by Jessie Montgomery

Symphony in B minor “Unfinished” D. 759

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

There is a particular mystique surrounding unfinished works, their incomplete state inviting endless speculation. Franz Schubert's Symphony No. 8 in B minor became posthumously known as the “Unfinished,” yet it does not represent a final creative testament in the manner, say, of Mozart's *Requiem*. In fact, Schubert lived for another six highly productive years after composing this music—the full score is dated October 1822—and created one masterpiece after another.

The enigma as to why Schubert set the symphony aside after writing two perfectly complete movements remains unresolved. Sketches for a third-movement *Scherzo* exist, so the notion that Schubert had a radical experiment in mind and wanted to abandon the conventional four-movement design of a classical symphony seems unlikely. Indeed, a number of unfinished works in other genres can be found among this composer's prolific output.

One theory holds that Schubert reached an impasse in trying to devise a finale with sufficient weight to counterbalance the work's magnificent opening half. Another is that he was increasingly self-conscious of the impossibly high bar Beethoven had set for the symphony. In terms of his own well-being, Schubert experienced the devastating effects of contracting syphilis toward the end of 1822. This may have made the prospect of returning to work on the B minor Symphony too painful because of its association with such a dark period in his life.

Over the years, several attempts have been made to "complete" the "Unfinished" Symphony, but Schubert's two movements stand on their own as a uniquely compelling torso.

What to Listen For

The choice of B minor as the home key—thus setting the overall tone, as it were—was unusual at the time. A mysterious opening figure, played almost imperceptibly by basses and cellos, emerges from the abyss. It sets up an uneasy sense of expectation, which Schubert prolongs by giving us accompaniment before melody. Violins spin out a restless figure above plucked gestures—all of which is the backdrop for the melancholy theme sung by oboes and clarinets. Schubert builds climaxes of startling intensity from what at first seems such understated material. In the end, the grim, inescapable pathos of the opening idea returns, casting a shadow over the movement's final moments.

In contrast to the almost monolithic darkness of the first movement, the *Andante con moto* (in E major) is unexpectedly mercurial. At the symphony's long-delayed premiere in 1865, critic

Eduard Hanslick praised Schubert's "melodic stream" as so lucid that "one can see every pebble on the bottom." Yet passionate outbursts disturb the melody's calm waters, hinting at darker, more ambivalent moods that lend depth to Schubert's lyricism.

Scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, and strings.

—Program note by Thomas May, Nashville Symphony program annotator

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