



College of Music
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

TAYLOR JOHNSTON
EARLY MUSIC SERIES

Fly the Coop!

Bach Sonatas and Preludes

Emi Ferguson, Baroque flute

Ruckus

Adam Cockerham, Baroque guitar

Elliot Figg, keyboards

Paul Holmes Morton, Baroque guitar

Cullen O'Neil, Baroque cello

Doug Balliett, Baroque bass

Clay Zeller-Townson, Baroque bassoon

Tuesday, October 28, 2025
Fairchild Theatre, 7:30 p.m.

PROGRAM

All works by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), realized and reimagined by Emi Ferguson and Ruckus.

The Craftsman, BWV 1034, (ca. 1724)

Prelude in G Major, after BWV 884

Sonata in E Minor, BWV 1034

- I. Adagio ma non tanto
- II. Allegro

Prelude in E Minor, after BWV 855

Sonata in E Minor, BWV 1034

- III. Andante
- IV. Allegro

The Teacher and the Student, BWV 1033 (ca. 1717/1731)

Aria from *The Goldberg Variations*, BWV 988

Sonata in C Major, BWV 1033

- I. Andante. Presto
- II. Allegro

Prelude in C Minor, BWV 999

Sonata in C Major, BWV 1033

- III. Adagio
- IV. Menuetto
- V. Menuetto

The Unpredictable

Selections to be announced from the stage

The Eccentric, BWV 1035 (ca. 1741)

Sonata in E Major, BWV 1035

- I. Adagio ma non tanto
- II. Allegro
- III. Siciliano

Prelude in E Major, after BWV 815a

PROGRAM NOTES

The transverse flute underwent a major redevelopment in the 1680s thanks to musicians in the court of Louis XIV. While it became hugely popular in French aristocratic circles due to its sweet and pleasant tone and the ability to play both soft and loud dynamics, it took several decades for the instrument to develop widespread use across Europe. Bach was well into his thirties before he was introduced to the flute by the visiting French flute virtuoso Pierre-Gabriel Buffardin. This meeting is widely believed to have inspired Bach's first composition featuring the flute, his *Brandenburg Concerto No. 5*, (perhaps intended for Bach and Buffardin to play together) followed shortly thereafter by his *Partita* for unaccompanied flute. While most of Bach's secular instrumental chamber music was written between 1717-1723 during his time in Cöthen, he wrote six* sonatas for the flute over the course of his adult life in Leipzig in addition to featuring the instrument in other chamber music works and many sacred cantatas. (**The exact number of sonatas Bach wrote for the flute is hotly contested with many scholars disagreeing on the authenticity of BWV 1020, 1031, and 1033. While we may never know how many sonatas he wrote for the instrument, what we can agree upon is that hearing the instrument for the first time around 1720 inspired Bach to write secular chamber music for the flute for the rest of his life.*)

Bach's three flute and continuo sonatas, BWV 1033, 1034, and 1035, distill his most wonderful musical qualities down to just a two-line texture: treble (flute) and bass. While the flute part is obligato (the composer writes out all the notes they want performed), the bass part is a continuo line, an open-ended accompaniment part used in 17th- and 18th-century music consisting of a bass line melody along with numbers that indicate chords, similar to the chord changes that jazz musicians use, allowing performers to contribute unique improvised performances. Many composers, including Bach, understood that a composition was not complete until the performers had added their own interpretation to the piece. The use of continuo in a composition is an open-ended invitation from composers that allows ensembles the freedom to orchestrate, to shrink and grow from one person (most often keyboard or cello or guitar) to large groups of a variety of bass instruments like Ruckus. The epic forces of Ruckus – baroque bassoon, cello, viola da gamba, theorbos, baroque guitars, baroque bass, harpsichord, and organ – offer a wonderful array of possibilities that allow us to explode Bach's bass line into a rainbow of colors.

PROGRAM NOTES (cont.)

The three sonatas, and their accompanying preludes (arranged by Emi and Ruckus) each inhabit their own artistic world and represent three distinct stages and aspects of J.S. Bach's life.

The Craftsman: Bach's *E Minor Sonata, BWV 1034*, written in 1724, is musical architecture at its most grand. Possibly written during his early Leipzig years (during which he also composed over sixty cantatas) this sonata has the weight of his larger musical sermons, and its technical sophistication shows the hand of a seasoned craftsman. The first movement, Adagio ma non tanto, features a constant push and pull between the treble and bass, reminiscent of Sisyphus and the rock, that unfolds into a tour de force Allegro of the second movement that features running 16th notes that do not let up until the ecstasy of the third movement arrives. This Andante is one of Bach's most sublime, simple, and beautiful movements, and the perfect respite from the intensity of the other three movements of the sonata – a welcome break before the roar of the fourth movement Allegro that features all of Ruckus at their most intense.

The Teacher: Falling somewhere in between the poles of the E Minor and E Major sonatas is the slightly more anachronistic *C Major Sonata, BWV 1033*. Open-hearted, inviting, full of grace and generosity, this sonata features an unusually simple continuo line that may have been composed by a young C.P.E. Bach as part of his studies (possibly 1731) in response to an existing solo flute work by his father (possibly 1721). This collaborative compositional process invited us to join the Bach family fun. Using C.P.E.'s baseline as a springboard, we interwove other music by Bach, rewrote bass lines, and added newly composed material. The opening Andante is full of warm, almost romantic chord progressions that unfold into a Presto featuring a single pedal bass note with the flute dancing merrily above. The second movement of the C Major sonata bears uncanny similarities to the 6th variation from Bach's Goldberg Variations, and so, we felt that a mashup-of the two would show (in addition to our keyboard prelude arrangements) how Bach used material and instruments interchangeably and repeatedly throughout his career. We start our mash-up with the A section of the flute sonata, transitioning to the Goldberg 6th variation at the beginning of the B section, then returning to the flute sonata for the final B to round things out and get us back home to C Major. A newly composed bass line, based on the octave-jumping left hand of the Goldberg sixth variation,

accompanies the flute throughout, with C.P.E. Bach's original bass line now found several octaves higher in the baroque guitar - a playful homage. The third movement, Adagio, is a true aria in A minor, with the flute soaring above an intense and powerful bass line that mines the depths of the instruments on hand. Ending things are two spirited and joyful Menuetts. The first a more traditional dance, with the second borrowing its accent from French dances.

The Unpredictable: A moment where we interject other pieces by Bach and works by other composers that share in the spirit of Flying the Coop! Like any good realized continuo part, it's never the same twice! These sonatas are often introduced to flute players at a young age and while they are beloved standards in the repertoire, they continue to challenge and inspire with their capacity for individual interpretation. The way that we share them today is by no means the only way to play these pieces, and is our unique take on them, but we think our interpretation shows and augments all the characters and colors that these sonatas are naturally imbued with, turning them into true ensemble pieces.

The Eccentric: At the other end of the timeline, written in 1741, is the ***E Major Sonata, BWV 1035***. It is sensual, simple in form, and perfumed with luxurious harmony. There's a *galant* breeziness throughout, yet the harmonic twists and melodic interplay between flute and bass reveal Bach's love for thorny, contrapuntal music. A delicate Adagio ma non tanto, the yin to the yang of the BWV 1034 movement of the same name, is followed by a bawdy Allegro. The third movement Siciliano features Bach's original melodic interplay between flute and cello/bassoon with a newly added bass line, unique to *Fly the Coop*, providing a rhythmic groove alongside dueling baroque guitars and fantastical harpsichord - a true Baroque rhythm section that takes the listener to an exotic land of unusual sights and sounds. This raucous nighttime music is followed by the morning light haze of the fourth movement Allegro assai that brings the sonata to a gentle conclusion.

PROGRAM NOTES (cont.)

The album, *Fly the Coop: Bach Sonatas and Preludes*, was recorded in idyllic southern Vermont where we convened to live, work, rehearse, and record together in July of 2018. All of us involved with the album have been close friends and collaborators for many years, and so the evolution and creation of *Fly the Coop*, was one that felt very natural and organic both personally, and musically. Rehearsing for long days in a beautiful old barn with views of the Green Mountains was wonderful inspiration for us as we experimented with ways we could bring these pieces to life. All of the instruments and techniques used in today's performance are learned from historical treatises and practices, yet we are distinctly aware of the fact that we are influenced by the centuries between our time and Bach's. It was natural for some of these influences to sneak into our interpretations of these sonatas, in the same way that Bach himself was influenced by the music of his own time. It is our own attempt to take it out of the museum, and breathe life into them from a historically informed, yet personal and contemporary perspective. For more information, and to purchase or stream the album, please visit flythecoopbach.com".

Peppered throughout the program are our arrangements of iconic and obscure keyboard works by Bach. Movements from the Well-Tempered Klavier, addenda from his French Suites, and early drafts of pieces found in the Anna Magdalena and Wilhelm Friedrich notebooks are all featured. Bach's love of family and friends is evident in his writing, and our arrangements of these keyboard works are our love letter and homage to the sense of community imbued in his writing and work.

- Written by Emi Ferguson and Clay Zeller-Townson

*This concert is presented by arrangement with
Alliance Artist Management.*

ENSEMBLE BIO

Ruckus is a shapeshifting, collaborative baroque ensemble with a visceral and playful approach to early music. Described as “the world’s only period-instrument rock band” (*San Francisco Classical Voice*), Ruckus’ core is a continuo group, the baroque equivalent of a jazz rhythm section: guitars, keyboards, cello, bassoon, and bass. The NYC-based ensemble aims to fuse the early-music movement’s questing, creative spirit with the grit, groove and jangle of American roots music, creating a unique sound of “rough-edged intensity” (*New Yorker*) that’s “achingly delicate one moment, incisive and punchy the next” (*New York Times*). The group’s members are among the most creative and virtuosic performers in North American early music. Ruckus’ debut album, *Fly the Coop*, a collaboration with flutist Emi Ferguson, was Billboard’s #2 Classical album upon its release. Performances of *Fly the Coop* have been described as “a fizzing, daring display of personality and imagination” (*New York Times*). The *Boston Musical Intelligencer* describes the group as taking continuo playing to “not simply a new level, but a revelatory new dimension of dynamism altogether... an eruption of pure, pulsing hoedown joy.” Ruckus is the “house band” for Hudson Hall’s baroque opera productions, directed by R.B. Schlather. The *New York Times* reviewed the 2023 production of Handel’s *Rodelinda*, praising Ruckus’ unconducted playing as “mercurial, almost improvisatory spirit that responded to the drama in real time.” Ruckus returned to Hudson Hall for *Giulio Cesare* in spring 2025. The ensemble made its Ojai Festival debut in 2022, performing a wide range of music: from Bach, to the improvisational scores of Roscoe Mitchell and George Lewis, to a recital featuring Anthony Roth Costanzo, and an original opera by bassist Doug Balliett. Recent highlights include debuts at the Shriver Concert Hall Series in Baltimore, Boston’s Celebrity Series, the Caramoor Festival, and NYC’s Town Hall. Recent projects have included a co-commission of a large-scale work by pioneering artist and NEA Jazz Master Roscoe Mitchell alongside the Immanuel Wilkins Quartet and Emi Ferguson. The work, produced by The Metropolis Ensemble, premiered at DaCamera in Houston in February 2025. In 2025, Ruckus released *The Edinburgh Rollick*, bringing new life to the tunes of Neil Gow, one of the most influential figures in traditional Scottish music. In 2024-25 Ruckus conducted a nationwide tour of *Strawberry Fields*, featuring Emi Ferguson and Rachell Ellen Wong, bringing the music of Ignatius Sancho to audiences across the country.

GUEST ARTIST BIO

A 2023 recipient of the Avery Fisher Career Grant, **Emi Ferguson** can be heard live in concerts and festivals with groups including AMOC*, Ruckus, the Handel and Haydn Society, the New York New Music Ensemble, the Manhattan Chamber Players, and as the music director of Camerata Pacifica Baroque. Her recordings celebrate her fascination with reinvigorating music and instruments of the past for the present. Her debut album, *Amour Cruel*, an indie-pop song cycle inspired by the music of the 17th-century French court, was released by Arezzo Music in September 2017, spending four weeks on the classical, classical crossover, and world music Billboard charts. Her 2019 album *Fly the Coop: Bach Sonatas and Preludes*, a collaboration with continuo band Ruckus, debuted at #1 on the iTunes classical charts and #2 on the Billboard classical charts, and was called “blindingly impressive ... a fizzing, daring display of personality and imagination” by The New York Times. Emi has been a featured performer at the Marlboro, Lucerne, Ojai, Lake Champlain, Bach Virtuosi, and June in Buffalo festivals, often premiering new works by composers of our time. Emi was a featured performer alongside Yo-Yo Ma, Paul Simon, and James Taylor at the 10th Anniversary Memorial Ceremony of 9/11 at Ground Zero, where her performance of *Amazing Grace* was televised worldwide. Her performance that day is now part of the permanent collection at the 911 Museum. Emi has spoken and performed at several TEDx events and has been featured on media outlets including the Discovery Channel, Amazon Prime, WQXR, and Vox talking about how music relates to our world today. As a radio host and programmer, Emi first started working with New York’s WQXR as a member of their Artist Propulsion Lab where she developed the podcast series “This Composer Is Sick” with Max Fine, exploring the impact of Syphilis on composers Franz Schubert, Bedřich Smetana, and Scott Joplin. She is one of four new hosts for WQXR’s *Young Artists Showcase* and the host of *Once Upon A Composer*, sharing musical stories with the youngest radio listeners. Her book *Iconic Composers*, co-written with Nicholas Csicsko alongside illustrations by David Lee Csicsko, introduces music lovers of all ages to 50 incredible Western Classical composers from the past 1000 years. Born in Japan and raised in London and Boston, she now resides in New York.

TAYLOR JOHNSTON EARLY MUSIC SERIES

The Taylor Johnston Early Music Series is made possible through the generosity of Dr. Taylor Johnston and recognizes his lifelong interest in informed performance of music of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. Through public performances and workshops for MSU students, the Series provides those interested in this repertoire with increased opportunities to study, hear, and perform this music as it was originally performed.

Dr. Johnston studied both agriculture and vocal music at the University of Tennessee and received his M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in plant physiology at the University of Illinois. He served on the MSU faculty for 51 years, retiring in January 2019. While being captivated by the challenges and rewards of a career in science, he maintained his passion for music through singing as a soloist and ensemble member and by playing early music on wind instruments, primarily recorder. He studied recorder with Michael Lynn of the Oberlin Conservatory for eight years and formed the Beaumont Baroque Ensemble in 1985 as an outlet for his passion for early music. The group, featuring the renowned viola da gambist Enid Sutherland, performed throughout mid-Michigan for twelve years.

Dr. Johnston passed away in July 2019, leaving behind an enduring legacy in the Taylor Johnston Endowment for Early Music, which will fund this series in perpetuity.

PRIVATE GIFTS play a vital role in our ability to maintain and enhance the quality of the programs we offer. Donations support student scholarships, fellowships, student travel and performance opportunities, instrument acquisitions, guest artists, outreach activities, operations, and other crucial areas that make the College of Music an exemplary place of learning.

THANK YOU TO OUR 2025-2026 SPONSORS

- **Sam and Mary Austin Fund for New Music** (Musique 21 concerts)
- **Ken and Sandy Beall** (Cello Plus Chamber Music Festival Series)
- **James and Susan Bonfiglio** (Symphony Orchestra, Oct. 26; Fall Opera)
- **Jenny Chung and Family for Human Rights Fund** (Rucker, Feb. 15)
- **Joanne and Bill Church** (West Circle Series)
- **April Clobes and Glen Brough** (USA at 250 Years)
- **Trustee Emerita Dee Cook in memory of her husband Byron Cook** (Four Seasons)
- **Susan Davis** (Spring Opera)
- **Dean Transportation** (Celebrating the Spectrum)
- **Alena Fabian, M.D.** (Votapek, Mar. 23; Khristenko, Mar. 30)
- **Jim Forger and Deborah Moriarty** (Lunar New Year Celebration Concert)
- **John and Gretchen Forsyth** (Wagner, Sept. 19)
- **Barbara and Bill Given** (Four Seasons; Alegría Navideña)
- **Anonymous** (Rucker, Feb. 15)
- **Howard and Pam Gourwitz** (Lulloff, Oct. 30)
- **Kevin and Amy Guskiewicz** (Alegría Navideña)
- **Hamilton-Dodson African Diaspora Endowment for the College of Music** (Musekiwa Chingodza, Oct. 2)
- **Lauren Harris** (Symphonic Dialogues; Celebrating the Spectrum)
- **Anne Hiller** (Celebrating the Spectrum)
- **Stanley and Selma Hollander Endowment for Chamber Music** (Gems for Cello)
- **Eileen G. Houston** (Wagner/Johnson/Wang, Sept. 19; Thompkins/Dease/Tang, Oct. 14; Trombone Ensemble, Nov. 8; Kanda, Nov. 18; Tuba/Euphonium, Jan. 28; Huiet, Feb. 24)
- **Taylor Johnston Early Music Series Endowment established by Taylor Johnston** (Taylor Johnston Early Music Series)
- **Hari Kern and the late Ralph R. Edminster, M.D.** (Votapek, Mar. 23)
- **Michael and Paula Koppisch** (Votapek Piano Festival, Aug. 15-17; Sherman/Zuber, Mar. 24)
- **Lansing Chapter of the American Guild of Organists** (Organist Nicole Keller, Sept. 14; Organist Peter Sykes, Mar. 22)
- **Jill Canny and Robert Last** (MSU Federal Credit Union Jazz Artist in Residence, A. Cohen, April 18; Jazz Spectacular Finale Concert)
- **Eleanor H. and Harold E. Leichenko Opera Endowment established by Lauren Julius Harris** (Fall and Spring Opera)

- **Ann, John and Abby Lindley** (Alegría Navideña)
- **Merritt Lutz** (Celebrating the Spectrum)
- **Joseph and Jeanne Maguire** (A Jazzy Little Christmas)
- **Marshall Music Co.** (Symphonic Dialogues)
- **Pat and Mary McPharlin** (Jazz Infusion; Jazz: Spirituals Prayer and Protest)
- **Friends of Jay D. Meetz** (Fall Opera)
- **Dr. Roy and Christine Meland** (Four Seasons)
- **Gordon E. Miracle** (Four Seasons; Votapek, Mar. 23)
- **MSU Federal Credit Union** (Showcase Series; Spartan Spectacular; Celebrating the Spectrum; MSU Music on The Road in Detroit)
- **George Urban and Rae Ramsdell** (Jang/Moriarty, Feb. 8)
- **Liz and Tony Raduazo** (Pass a Good Time, Oct. 5; Sensory Friendly Spartan Concerts)
- **Charles and Nancy Seebeck** (Bagratuni, Mar. 16)
- **Leonard and Sharon Tabaka** (Jazz Spectacular Finale Concert)
- **TechSmith** (Celebrating the Spectrum)
- **Dr. Robert W. Uphaus and Dr. Lois M. Rosen** (Symphonic Dialogues; Four Seasons; Beethoven; Happy Birthday Mozart!; Yehuda/Warren, Jan. 29; Bagratuni, Mar. 16; and Bagratuni, Mar. 31)
- **Linn Van Dyne and Mike Knox** (Happy Birthday Mozart!)
- **Barbara E. Wagner** (Wagner Chamber Music Competition)
- **Anonymous** (Beacon Hill Music Series)
- **Richard Witter** (A Celebration of the Beautiful Voice)
- **Richard and Joan Witter Endowment for MSU Opera Theatre** (Fall and Spring Opera)
- **WKAR** (Artist-Faculty and Guest Recital Series)
- **Worthington Family Foundation** (Opera Season)
- **Andrea L. Wulf** (Piano Monster)

SPONSORSHIPS AND RECOGNITION

Sponsorships are available at \$1,000, \$2,500, and \$5,000. Sponsors will receive recognition in the form of event publicity, promotions, programs, and through online recognition. For information about event sponsorships and giving to the college, please call (517) 353-9872 or e-mail music.giving@msu.edu.



UPCOMING EARLY MUSIC SERIES EVENTS

Dark Horse Consort: The Sounds of St. Mark's Tuesday, January 13, 7:30 p.m., Fairchild Theatre

Named for the iconic bronze horses atop Venice's St. Mark's Basilica, the Dark Horse Consort brings to life the glorious brass traditions of the late Renaissance and early Baroque. This acclaimed ensemble recreates the inspiring musical atmosphere of 16th- and 17th-century Europe with a program of majestic canzoni for multiple choirs by Giovanni Gabrieli and Giovanni Picchi, alongside stunningly virtuosic sonatas by Dario Castello. Inspired by the rapturous kaleidoscope of sound for which St. Mark's was famous, this concert evokes the splendor and innovation of sacred music-making in churches of the time.

<https://www.dhconsort.org/>

UPCOMING EVENTS

10/29 Wednesday

Artist-Faculty and Guest Recital Series sponsored by WKAR

andPlay: Drifting Landscapes

Cook Recital Hall, 7:30 p.m. \$

10/30 Thursday

Halloween, Spooky Tunes for Carillon

Beaumont Tower, 9:00 p.m. free

11/1 Saturday

Chorale/State Singers: A Choral Tapestry

Fairchild Theatre, 7:30 p.m. \$

11/3 Monday

Joanne and Bill Church West Circle Series

Four Seasons

Fairchild Theatre, 7:30 p.m. \$\$

TICKET PRICES

\$ \$14 Adults, \$12 Seniors (age 60 and older), Students with ID and anyone under age 18 are free but require a ticket for admission.

\$\$ \$19 Adults, \$17 Seniors, \$9 Students with ID and anyone under age 18.

\$\$\$ \$24 Adults, \$22 Seniors, \$14 Students and those under age 18.

Please note: *All events scheduled in Murray Hall are general admission seating.*