



This concert and the appearance of Ruckus is made possible by the generous support of **Hope Tschopik Schneider**

All works by Johann Sebastian Bach, realized and reimagined by Emi Ferguson and Ruckus.

There is no intermission during the concert.

Saturday, June 11, 2022 | 11:00am

Libbey Bowl

About Bach

Emi Ferguson *flute* | Miranda Cuckson *violin* | Keir GoGwilt *violin* | Carrie Frey *viola*

Ruckus: Coleman Itzkoff *cello* | Doug Balliett *double bass* | Clay Zeller-Townson *bassoon*
Joshua Stauffer *lute* | Stephen Stubbs *theorbo* | Elliot Figg *keyboard*

Johann Sebastian BACH

Prelude in G major, after BWV 884
Emi Ferguson *flute* | Ruckus

Sonata in E minor, BWV 1034
Adagio ma non troppo
Allegro
Andante
Allegro
Emi Ferguson *flute* | Ruckus

Prelude in C minor, after BWV 847
Elliot Figg *keyboard* | Coleman Itzkoff *cello* | Doug Balliett *double bass*

Sonata in C major, BWV 1033
Allegro
Adagio
Emi Ferguson *flute* | Ruckus

Partita in A minor, BWV 1013
Sarabande
Emi Ferguson *flute*

Sonata in E major, BWV 1035
Siciliano
Emi Ferguson *flute* | Ruckus

Prelude in E major, after BWV 815a
Emi Ferguson *flute* | Ruckus

Reiko FÜTING

tanz.tanz
Miranda Cuckson *violin*

Cassandra MILLER

About Bach
Miranda Cuckson *violin* | Keir GoGwilt *violin*
Carrie Frey *viola* | Coleman Itzkoff *cello*

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)
Prelude in G major, after BWV 884 from
Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 2 (c. 1742)
Sonata in E minor, BWV 1034 (1724)
Prelude in C minor, after BWV 847 from
Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1 (c. 1722)
Sonata in C major, BWV 1033: Allegro and
Adagio (c. 1731)

Partita in A minor, BWV 1013: Sarabande
(c. 1722-23)
Sonata in E major, BWV 1035: Siciliano (c. 1741)
Prelude in E major, after BWV 815a from French
Suite No. 4 (c. 1722)

Reiko FÜTING (b. 1970)
tanz.tanz (2010)

Cassandra MILLER (b. 1976)
About Bach (2015)

Taking Bach out of the museum and infusing his music with equal parts tradition, funk, whimsy, and fun, Emi Ferguson and Ruckus present a fresh take on some of Bach's most playful and transcendent works with their ever-evolving arrangements of Bach's flute sonatas and keyboard preludes, orchestrated for Baroque flute and the forces of Ruckus.

Ruckus explodes Bach's single bass line into a rainbow of textures and colors, continually shifting like light over the landscape as Ferguson's flute lines dance above — uniting Baroque performance practice with our experiences as 21st-century musicians.

—EMI FERGUSON and CLAY ZELLER-TOWNSON

The title of this program takes its name from Cassandra Miller's string quartet, *About Bach*. As she explains in her own program note, the opening phrase of the quartet was transcribed from a recording of violist Pemi Paull playing J.S. Bach's Chaconne; a process of exacting transcription that Miller "developed over some years to apprehend the exact rhythmic musicality of a performance." The resulting phrase, a kind of "soft-shoe jig" (in Miller's words), is harmonized and extended, though never exactly repeated, over the course of the 25-minute piece. Reiko Fütting's *tanz.tanz* is inspired in part by an analysis of Bach's Chaconne by musicologist Helga Thoene, who identifies melodic and harmonic affinities between the Chaconne and several of Bach's chorales. Miranda Cuckson plays *tanz.tanz* in our show with Bobbi Jene Smith and Or Schraiber, *With Care* (an early AMOC* production). Also on that piece, I perform Bach's D minor Chaconne — a connective cell whose absence perhaps makes this program about Bach all the more poignant.

—KEIR GOGWILT

Dance Dance Dance: About and Around Bach

An affinity between adventurers in the realms of early and contemporary music is one of the defining traits of AMOC* and their collaborators. That premise underlies today's program featuring several members of AMOC*, the intrepid Baroque band known as Ruckus, and their guests. For them, experimenting with period

instruments and practices is no antiquated detour but in fact another face of "new music." And the two contemporary composers we encounter, Cassandra Miller and Reiko Fütting, add their voices to a long tradition that has found creative renewal in and around J.S. Bach's D minor Chaconne.

For their debut album, *Fly the Coop* (2019), from which the first part of the program draws, Ruckus joined with AMOC*'s Emi Ferguson to explore Bach's instrumental music featuring the transverse flute. That instrument suddenly appears in Bach's compositions with the Brandenburg Concerto No. 5, later supplanting the

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DANCE DANCE DANCE: ABOUT AND AROUND BACH

recorder during the ensuing decades in Leipzig.

The album presents three of Bach's sonatas for flute and continuo as well as selected preludes (both familiar and less well-known) as reimagined and realized by Emi Ferguson and her Ruckus colleagues. The sonatas were chosen to chart various stages of the composer's career and artistic persona: Bach as architectural "craftsman," as counterpoint-obsessed "eccentric," and as mentor, whose music invites flights of fantasy from the performers—including, in the Sonata in C major (BWV 1033), an unexpected excursion into another of his own pieces (Variation 6 from the *Goldbergs* in the Allegro). On this program, we hear the sonatas in whole or in part, interwoven with the ensemble's trademark arrangements of varied keyboard preludes, as well as a movement from the Partita for solo flute.

Emi Ferguson's brand of virtuosity is combined with a radically reimagined execution of the continuo, the

accompanying, supporting musical line plus harmonic foundation. Ruckus founder and bassoonist Clay Zeller-Townson with his colleagues have expanded the continuo's palette beyond harpsichord and low strings to include a virtual mini-orchestra that grooves and bounces with the sounds of theorbo, Baroque guitar and bassoon, cello, viola da gamba, harpsichord, organ, bass, and even banjo.

Bach himself, in keeping with the musical thinking and custom of his era, frequently adapted and arranged preexisting material (his own as well as that of other composers) for other instruments. But it's not just a question of richer timbral combinations (and greater volume): the players stretch the improvisational aspect of Baroque continuo practice even further. As Ferguson and Zeller-Townson put it, they "explode Bach's bass line into a rainbow of colors," so that these pieces seem to be emerging from a particularly inspired jam-in-progress that makes room for the players' collective musical experiences and influences.

"Memory and quotation may function as a means to reflect upon contemporary artistic, cultural, social, and political phenomena," observes Reiko Fütting in a statement articulating his artistic credo. In *tanz.tanz*—the U.S. premiere of which Miranda Cuckson gave in New York in 2010—both memory and quotation come into play. The piece is a *mise en abyme* of quotation around the act of mourning as memory. Fütting, who came of age in the former East Germany, draws on Bach's putative quotations of his own choral music within the fabric of the Chaconne in D minor that concludes the Partita No. 2. In the process, he creates an entirely new composition.

The impulse came from the groundbreaking interpretation by the 20th-century German musicologist Helga Thoene of the Chaconne as a *tombeau*, a musical memorial for the composer's beloved first wife, Maria Barbara Bach. She died suddenly in 1720, the year Bach published the six sonatas and partitas for solo violin. (Thoene's work famously

inspired the bestselling 2001 ECM recording *Morimur*.)

Thoene—the dedicatee of Fütting’s piece—decoded a string of chorale tunes that she argues Bach hid in the Chaconne, tracing a “secret” path from raw grief through consolation to resigned acceptance. In this interpretation, the chorale Bach used in his early Easter cantata *Christ lag in Todesbanden* frames this grieving process, while the appearance of light in the central, major-key section voices a Lutheran Christmas hymn.

Fütting’s title, which means “dance.dance,” reveals still another layer of “quotation,” beyond music. He refers to being inspired by Haruki Murakami’s parody mystery from 1988, *Dance Dance Dance*. The protagonist, a commercial writer, searches for meaning and connection. “Dance. Don’t think. Dance,” one of Murakami’s characters encourages. “Dance your best, like your life depended on it. You gotta dance.”

Bach’s music for solo violin is the springboard for the Canadian composer Cassandra Miller’s *About Bach*—specifically, the Chaconne in D minor dating from the Köthen period that immediately preceded Bach’s move to Leipzig. This movement, a structure of 257 measures built out of a repeating harmonic sequence, encompasses such a vast emotional journey by itself that it has acquired an independent afterlife.

Miller, who resettled from British Columbia to London, has created new works by transcribing and recontextualizing a remarkable array of starting-points, from North American thrushes to the voice of Kurt Cobain. *About Bach*, another study in transformation, originated as a piece for solo viola that she subsequently expanded into a single string quartet movement spanning some 25 minutes, working in collaboration with Quatuor Bozzini.

Using her violist colleague Pemi Paull’s live recording of the Chaconne, Miller

isolated a short section from the midpoint, when Bach turns to D major, and transcribed it with special software she has developed that, she explains, allows her “to apprehend the exact rhythmic musicality of a performance, capturing as well various artifacts such as the viola’s upper partials as they change within each bow stroke.”

Miller overlays onto Bach’s phrase her own harmony, which “turns the phrase into a gently jaunty chorale,” for which her instruction to the players reads “gentle, but quick and crisp, like a soft-shoe jig (not at all ponderous).” As the violin line soars into the stratosphere, ethereal, Bach’s own grave music for solo violin recedes from memory. *About Bach* proceeds as “a constant meandering, a non-developmental piece in an extreme sense.”

—THOMAS MAY

This concert is approximately 70 minutes.