



Tessa Lark. Photo by Lauren Desberg.



Joshua Roman. Photo by Shervin Lainez.



Edgar Meyer. Photo by Jim McGuire.

Sunday, October 20, 2024, 3pm
Hertz Hall

Tessa Lark, *violin*
Joshua Roman, *cello*
Edgar Meyer, *double bass*

PROGRAM

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) Sonata for Viola de Gamba in G major,
BWV 1027 (1730s/1740s)
Adagio
Allegro ma non tanto
Andante
Allegro moderato

Edgar Meyer (b. 1960) *Trio 1986*
I
II
III
IV

New Work (2024)
(*Bay Area Premiere, Cal Performances*
Co-commission)

I
II
III
IV

*Commissioning support provided by: Aspen Music
Festival and School, Robert Spano, Music Director;
Big Ears Festival; Cal Performances; Jay and Susie
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The Lied Center of Kansas – University of Kansas*

INTERMISSION

Trio 1988
I
II
III
IV

*Leadership support for this performance is provided by Nadine Tang.
This performance is made possible, in part, by Dr. Rupali Das-Melnyk and Dr. Ostap Melnyk.*

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Johann Sebastian Bach
Sonata for Viola da Gamba in G major,
BWV 1027

In 1713, the frugal Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia dismissed his household musical establishment in Berlin. The young, cultured Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, north of Leipzig, took the opportunity to engage some of the finest of Friedrich's musicians, and he provided them with excellent instruments and established a music library for their regular court performances. In December 1717, Leopold hired Johann Sebastian Bach, then organist and *Kapellmeister* at the court of Weimar, as his director of music. Inspired by the high quality of the musicians in his charge and by the Prince's praise of his creative work, Bach produced much of his greatest instrumental music during the six years of his tenure at Cöthen: the *Brandenburg* Concertos; suites for orchestra; violin concertos; *The Well-Tempered Clavier*; many chamber pieces; and the sonatas, suites and partitas for solo strings with and without accompaniment.

Bach's three sonatas for viola da gamba and harpsichord quite likely also date from his tenure at Cöthen, when they could have been written for the virtuoso Christian Ferdinand Abel, who had joined Leopold's musical establishment around 1715 and become a close friend of Bach when he arrived two years later; Bach stood as godfather to Abel's first daughter in 1720. The Prince was himself a gambist of some accomplishment (Bach wrote one of the gamba parts in the sixth *Brandenburg* for him), and may even have tried out his *Kapellmeister's* challenging sonatas for himself. The dating to Cöthen, however, is not fully settled, since the manuscript sources from which the sonatas are known today originated around 1740. Some scholars therefore conjecture that they were composed not for Christian Ferdinand Abel but for his son Carl Friedrich, also a gifted gambist, who came to

Leipzig to study with Bach after his father's death in 1737. (In the 1760s, Carl Friedrich became a partner with Bach's youngest son, Johann Christian, in an important concert venture in London.)

The six-string, slope-shouldered, silver-voiced viola da gamba, a hold-over from the old Renaissance viol family, was losing favor during Bach's lifetime because of the wide adoption of the cello, first given its modern configuration around 1560 by the Cremonese craftsman Andrea Amati. The instrument gained its name because it was supported between the knees ("gamba" is Italian for "leg") so as not to touch the floor, and it was used, generally, to carry the bass line in ensemble works, and, occasionally, to act as soloist. Bach was the last important composer to write for the viola da gamba, featuring it in the *Brandenburg* Concerto No. 6, *St. Matthew* and *St. John Passions*, and several cantatas. Its music is often played today on the modern cello. Though the gamba is now relegated to the performance of early music, the modern double bass, with its tuning in fourths and its sloping shape—compare its profile with the square shoulders of the other orchestral strings—is a flourishing descendent of the noble viol family.

As with every genre he took up, Bach brought the development of the Baroque duo sonata to its zenith with his sonatas for melody instrument and keyboard. The twin forms of the sonata—for solo instrument with keyboard accompaniment (optionally doubled by a bass instrument) and for two treble instruments with the same supporting players—had gestated in Italy early in the preceding century, and been nurtured into mature musical genres by Arcangelo Corelli in the first five sets of his published works. The solo and trio sonatas were further categorized according to use and style as either *sonata da chiesa* ("church sonata," serious in expression and contrapuntal in texture) or *sonata da camera* ("chamber sonata," lighter in mood and

dance-like in idiom). Bach's most important technical contribution to the duo sonata was in fully notating the keyboard part rather than just indicating the customary chord symbols below the bass notes, which the player had to realize at his discretion. This specificity allowed Bach to raise the keyboard from its role as accompanist to that of equal partner by using the right hand to play an independent melodic line, so that his examples of the form exhibit a richness of texture approaching that of the trio sonata. (In this arrangement, violin plays the original gamba line and the two hands of the keyboard are shared between cello and bass.)

The Sonata in G major is Bach's adaptation of his Sonata for Two Flutes and Basso Continuo in G major, BWV 1039; the first flute part was assigned to the right hand of the keyboard, and the gamba given the second flute part, transposed down an octave. The sonata follows the structure and style of the *sonata da chiesa*—four movements (slow-fast-slow-fast), largely contrapuntal

in texture and serious in nature: a pastoral Adagio, an intimately conversational Allegro, an introspective Andante, and a brilliant closing Allegro.

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A Note from Edgar Meyer

In 1986-1988, I wrote a series of three string trios that I premiered with Daniel Phillips and Carter Brey at the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival. These were the first longer pieces that I had conceived as such, and they set the tone for my next four decades. Only one was partially recorded. After meeting Tessa Lark and Joshua Roman a few years ago, I realized that they were perfect for helping me document this personal milestone. I also have set out to write a new trio for us to "complete the thought." Following the tour, we will record the old trios and the new one as a set. Tonight, we will be performing both the 1986 and 1988 trios, the new trio, and we will open the concert with the Bach Gamba Sonata, BWV 1027.

—Edgar Meyer

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Violinist Tessa Lark is one of the most captivating artistic voices of our time, consistently praised by critics and audiences for her astounding range of sounds, technical agility, and musical elegance. In 2020, she was nominated for a Grammy Award in the Best Classical Instrumental Solo category, and she is also a highly acclaimed fiddler in the tradition of her native Kentucky.

Recent highlights include the world premiere of Carlos Izcaray's Violin Concerto and performances of Michael Torke's violin concerto, *Sky*—both pieces written for her—as well as her European orchestral debut with the Stuttgart Philharmonic. Lark also performed recently with the Virginia Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic, England's City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra,

and others, and gave duo concerts with double bassist Michael Thurber and jazz guitarist Frank Vignola.

Lark's most recent album, *The Stradgrass Sessions*, was released in 2023. Her debut commercial recording was the Grammy-nominated *Sky*, and her discography also includes *Fantasy*; *Invention*, recorded with Michael Thurber, and a live recording of Piazzolla's *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*.

In addition to her busy performance schedule, Lark champions young aspiring artists and supports the next generation of musicians through her work as co-host/creative of NPR's *From the Top*.

Lark plays a ca. 1600 G.P. Maggini violin on loan from an anonymous donor through the Stradivari Society of Chicago.

Joshua Roman is a cello soloist and composer, hailed for his “effortlessly expressive tone... and playful zest for exploration” (*The New York Times*), as well as his “extraordinary technical and musical gifts” and “blend of precision and almost improvisatory freedom... that goes straight to the heart” (*San Francisco Chronicle*). His genre-bending programs and wide-ranging collaborations have grown out of an “enthusiasm for musical evolution that is as contagious as his love for the classics” (*Seattle Times*).

Committed to bringing classical music to new audiences, Roman has collaborated with world-class artists across genres and disciplines; along with Edgar Meyer, these include DJ Spooky, Tony-winner/MacArthur “Genius” Bill T. Jones, Grammy Award-winning East African vocalist Somi, and Tony Award-nominated actor Anna Deavere Smith. His concert of the complete Bach Solo Cello Suites after the 2016 US presidential election had nearly a million live viewers, and his solo performance with the YouTube Symphony at Carnegie Hall was viewed by 33 million people across nearly 200 countries, with Yo-Yo Ma introducing him as “one of the great exemplars of the ideal 21st-century musician.”

As a soloist with an “exceptionally high quality of performances” (*Los Angeles Times*), Roman has performed with leading orchestras including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Toronto Symphony, BBC Scottish, and Mariinsky Symphony Orchestra. As a composer, he has been commissioned by Music Academy of the West, the Illinois Philharmonic, ProMusica Chamber Orchestra. Roman has also premiered new works composed for him by Mason Bates, Reena Esmail, Timo Andres, Gabriela Lena Frank, Aaron Jay Kernis, Lisa Bielawa, and others.

Hailed by the *New Yorker* as “...the most remarkable virtuoso in the relatively unchronicled history of his instrument,” **Edgar Meyer’s** uniqueness in the field was recognized when he became the only bassist to be awarded the Avery Fisher Prize in addition to a MacArthur Award. He was honored with his fifth Grammy Award in 2015 for his *Bass & Mandolin* recording with Thile. Edgar Meyer’s current projects include the recent recording entitled *As We Speak* with Béla Fleck, Zakir Hussain, and Rakesh Chaurasia, released in May 2023. The first leg of the *As We Speak* tour in April and May of that year preceded the album release, with the artist going out on tour again in November of 2023. Meyer recently completed a duo recording with Christian McBride, as well as a recording of his three concertos with The Knights, conducted by Eric Jacobsen and produced by Chris Thile. In June of 2023, to complete the concerto project, he recorded his Concertino for Bass and 14 Strings in the UK with the Scottish Ensemble led by Jonathan Morton, who commissioned and toured the piece with Meyer in spring of 2022. Additionally, Meyer was part of a five-composer group, each of whom composed a movement for a US premiere with Joshua Bell and the New York Philharmonic in September of 2023. Meyer is the subject of an ongoing documentary filmed and produced by Tessa Lark, Andrew Adair, and Michael Thurber.