

Saturday, September 13, 2025
Sunday, September 14, 2025

ACRONYM:

The Complete Brandenburg Concertos

Concerts avec plusieurs instruments (about 1720)

Concerto No. 3, BWV 1048 (G major) Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

- I. [Allegro]
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegro

Concerto No. 2, BWV 1047 (F major) Bach

- I. [Allegro]
- II. Andante
- III. Allegro assai

Concerto No. 4, BWV 1049 (G major) Bach

- I. Allegro
- II. Andante
- III. Presto

INTERMISSION

Concerto No. 5, BWV 1050 (D major) Bach

- I. Allegro
- II. Affettuoso
- III. Allegro

Concerto No. 6, BWV 1051 (B-flat major) Bach

- I. [Allegro]
- II. Adagio ma non tanto
- III. Allegro

Concerto No. 1, BWV 1046 (F major) Bach

- I. [Allegro]
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegro
- IV. Menuet—Trio 1—Menuet—Polonaise—Menuet—Trio 2—Menuet

ISABELLA
SEWART GARDNER
MUSEUM

NOTE FROM THE CURATOR

We are thrilled to open the season with our dear friends in ACRONYM tackling the set of works that may be at once Bach's most famous and least representative. In these six pieces, a glorious miscellany of familiar and unfamiliar instruments explores the *concerto grosso* form, with star turns and opportunities for everyone to shine. Writing these works, Bach lovingly collected, reshaped, and re-orchestrated some of his own favorite music, and wrote flashy new movements to round out this magnificent set.

—George Steel, *Abrams Curator of Music*

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Johann Sebastian Bach's Brandenburg Concertos represent one of the crowning achievements of Baroque instrumental music, a dazzling compendium of musical forms, instrumental colors, and contrapuntal ingenuity. Though beloved today and almost ubiquitous in performance and recording, these six concertos were composed not as a unified set or commission, but rather were repurposed from earlier works and compiled in 1721 as a gift for Christian Ludwig, Margrave of Brandenburg. Bach's gorgeous autograph of the concerti was likely offered to the Margrave as an audition for the job of court composer. Bach enthusiasts have long wondered why the composer wasn't hired! The dedication to the Margrave is courtly and elaborate, but there is no evidence that Christian Ludwig ever responded, let alone arranged for the concertos to be performed. The autograph manuscript remained

untouched in the Brandenburg archives until its rediscovery in the 19th century. Ironically, the set may have been too ambitious—or simply too eccentric—for the Margrave's small ensemble.

Each concerto is scored for a different combination of instruments, and the stylistic variety is astonishing. Where Vivaldi, for example, typically explored different effects within a relatively fixed orchestral frame, Bach treats the concerto form more fluidly, ranging from dance suite to chamber symphony to intimate trio sonata.

Concerto No. 3 in G major, BWV 1048

The Third Concerto is scored for three violins, three violas, three cellos, and continuo. Its exuberant outer movements feature constant rhythmic drive and a tightly interwoven texture that blurs the line between soloist and ensemble. The second movement famously consists of just two chords—a notated cadence—between which performers typically interpolate an improvised or inserted slow movement.

Concerto No. 2 in F major, BWV 1047

If the First Concerto is symphonic, the Second is virtuosic. Its concertino group—trumpet, recorder, oboe, and violin—is both unconventional and dazzlingly bright. The high, clarino trumpet part is among the most demanding in the Baroque repertoire, written for a skilled natural trumpeter capable of delicate and agile playing in the instrument's upper register. The outer movements are jubilant and densely contrapuntal, and the central *Andante* is a conversation in three voices, with the trumpet silent.

Concerto No. 4 in G major, BWV 1049

The Fourth Concerto offers a different configuration of soloists to stand in contrast

with the whole ensemble, with a violin and two recorders as the “concertino” group. The solo violin part is among Bach’s most virtuosic, leading some to suggest the work may have originated as a solo violin concerto with later additions. The recorders, meanwhile, lend a pastoral quality, particularly in the lilting final Presto, a fugue that blends high Baroque counterpoint with a dance-like groove.

Concerto No. 5 in D major, BWV 1050

This concerto is often seen as the most forward-looking of the set. Featuring flute, violin, and harpsichord, it elevates the keyboard from its usual continuo role to that of a true soloist. The first movement culminates in a monumental cadenza for harpsichord alone—nearly unprecedented in orchestral music of the time and likely intended as a showcase for Bach’s own virtuosity. This work, more than any other in the set, foreshadows the development of the keyboard concerto as a genre. The serene *Affettuoso* second movement is a trio sonata in texture, while the buoyant final *Allegro* evokes the inventiveness of the Corellian musical style that had swept Europe during the previous decades.

Concerto No. 6 in B-flat major, BWV 1051

The final concerto in the set is the most intimate and perhaps the most subtle. It excludes violins entirely, focusing instead on two violas, two violas da gamba, cello, violone, and continuo. The darker, mellow sonority emphasizes inner voices, and the contrapuntal writing rewards close listening. The first movement unfolds in a tightly woven tapestry of imitation; the slow movement in E-flat is a model of lyrical repose; and the finale, a cheerful *gigue* instantly recognizable to NPR listeners, brings the piece to a joyful conclusion.

Concerto No. 1 in F major, BWV 1046

The most expansive of the set, the First Concerto stands out for its quasi-orchestral grandeur and festive scoring, including two horns, three oboes, bassoon, violin piccolo, strings, and continuo. It opens with a stately *Allegro* whose triple-meter vitality is punctuated by horn calls and contrapuntal interplay. A lyrical *Adagio* follows, which dissolves into a brief *Menuetto* section that introduces a sequence of three alternate dance movements (*trio*, *polonaise*, *trio II*), suggesting that the work may have originated as a kind of hybrid between orchestral suite and concerto.

While the six concertos are frequently performed and recorded as a set, they were not conceived as a cycle in the modern sense. Instead, they exemplify the diversity of what the term “concerto” could encompass in the early 18th century. Each work explores different instrumental balances, genres, and formal structures. From the dance-suite echoes of Concerto No. 1 to the proto-symphonic layering of No. 3; the soloistic display of No. 5 and the chamber intimacy of No. 6; Bach demonstrates the expressive potential of the concerto medium in its broadest sense. ACRONYM is grateful to be joined by the slew of wonderful guests necessary to perform this sprawling set live, and to the Gardner for featuring this fascinating music “in the round,” where its essential nature as chamber music is most easily enjoyed.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Chloe Fedor, Johanna Novom, violin
Adriane Post, Beth Wenstrom, violin & viola
Renée Hemsing, Kyle Miller, viola
Kivie Cahn-Lipman, viola da gamba & cello

Loren Ludwig, viola da gamba
Paul Dwyer, cello
Lizzie Burns, violone
Elliot Figg, harpsichord & organ
Steve Marquardt, trumpet
Elisabeth Axtell, Sadie Glass, horn
Priscilla Herreid, oboe & recorder
Heloise Degrugillier, traverso & recorder
Gaia Saetermoe-Howard,
Mary Cicconetti, oboe
Allen Hamrick, bassoon

Baroque band **ACRONYM**—an “outstanding young early-music string ensemble” (*New Yorker*)—is dedicated to giving modern premieres of the wild instrumental music of the 17th century. Playing with “. . . consummate style, grace, and unity of spirit” (*New York Times*), the group formed in 2012 and has released 10 critically acclaimed albums. Recent projects include the first modern performances and recordings of works by Biber, Rosenmüller, and Capricornus, among others. The band’s most recent album, *Cantica Obsoleta*, features the modern premiere recordings of nearly lost works from Sweden’s Dübén Collection. The *Boston Globe* raves, “this musical time-capsule offers enough resplendence to transport anyone.”

In 2025–26, ACRONYM returns to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, opening their fall season with all six Brandenburg Concertos. For Boston Early Music’s 36th season, ACRONYM will perform nearly all of the extant works by the Drese family of musicians, including Adam Drese’s funeral motet, *Wie selig sind die Toten*. This is the first known piece in music history to require slide trumpets, and ACRONYM’s performance will be the modern premiere.

Recent engagements includes repeat performances at the Boston Early Music Festival, Naumburg Orchestral Concerts

series in Central Park, and Music Before 1800 in New York, as well as a Baltimore debut with Shriver Hall Concert Series and appearances with Festival Oude Muziek Utrecht (Netherlands), Oberlin’s Artist Recital Series, Hamilton College Performing Arts Series (Clinton, NY), Lincoln Friends of Chamber Music (NE), Arizona Early Music, Indianapolis Early Music Festival, Renaissance & Baroque (Pittsburgh), Chamber Music Wilmington (NC), Electric Earth Concerts (Peterborough, NH), and Five Boroughs Music Festival in New York City. ACRONYM has held academic residencies at Youngstown State University and Vassar College, and the group’s musicians can be heard in Tafelmusik, Les Arts Florissants, Apollo’s Fire, Handel + Haydn Society, and the English Concert. ACRONYM collaborates frequently with internationally acclaimed artists, including baritone Jesse Blumberg and countertenor Reginald Mobley.

UPCOMING PERFORMANCES:

JUNCTION TRIO PLAYS JOHN ZORN
Sunday, September 21

CATALYST QUARTET
Sunday, September 28

**SPHINX VIRTUOSI WITH
STERLING ELLIOTT, CELLO**
Sunday, October 5

**MIRANDA CUCKSON, VIOLIN WITH
BLAIR MCMILLEN, PIANO**
Sunday, October 19

**RACHEL BARTON PINE, VIOLIN
& VIOLA D'AMORE**
Sunday, October 26

**CLAIRE CHASE, FLUTES WITH
AISSLINN NOSKY, KATINKA KLEIJN,
& ALEX PEH**
Sunday, November 2

CLAYTON STEPHENSON, PIANO
Sunday, November 9

**SASHA COOKE, MEZZO-SOPRANO
WITH MYRA HUANG, PIANO**
Sunday, November 16

MICHELLE CANN, PIANO
Sunday, November 23

Kindly turn off all electronic devices during the concert and refrain from any photography or filming in the hall. Also, please note the location of the emergency exit doors: across the hall from the doors through which you entered.

The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum resides on the homelands of the Massachusetts Tribe, who belong to this place and continue to regard these lands and waters as sacred.

Music at the Gardner is supported by Nora McNeely Hurley / Manitou Fund. The Museum thanks its generous concert donors: The Coogan Concert in memory of Peter Weston Coogan; Fitzpatrick Family Concert; James Lawrence Memorial Concert; Alford P. Rudnick Memorial Concert; David Scudder in memory of his wife, Marie Louise Scudder; Wendy Shattuck Young Artist Concert; and Willona Sinclair Memorial Concert. The piano is dedicated as the Alex d'Arbeloff Steinway. The harpsichord was generously donated by Dr. Robert Barstow in memory of Marion Huse, and its care is endowed in memory of Dr. Barstow by The Barstow Fund. Music at the Gardner is also supported in part by Barbara and Amos Hostetter, Nicie and Jay Panetta, and the Massachusetts Cultural Council, which is supported by the state of Massachusetts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

