



Yo-Yo Ma Edgar Meyer Chris Thile

Yo-Yo Ma / *Cello*

Edgar Meyer / *Bass*

Chris Thile / *Mandolin*

Saturday Evening, April 22, 2017 at 8:00

Hill Auditorium

Ann Arbor

Tonight's presenting sponsor is Michigan Medicine.

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Media partnership provided by Michigan Radio 91.7 FM and WEMU 89.1 FM.

Yo-Yo Ma, Edgar Meyer, and Chris Thile appear by arrangement with Opus 3 Artists.

In consideration of the artists and the audience, please refrain from the use of electronic devices during the performance.

The photography, sound recording, or videotaping of this performance is prohibited.

PROGRAM

Bach Trios

This evening's program will be announced from the stage by the artists and will be performed without intermission.

THIS EVENING'S PROGRAM

Put any random combination of musicians in a room together, and no matter their instruments, histories, or personalities, it's more than likely that they'll find common ground playing Bach.

This is partly because Bach addressed so many musical contexts over the course of his lifetime. Though he is revered as a protean creator and obsessive craftsman, he was also equal parts humble artisan and compulsive speed-writer. Suffering was not yet a requirement for 18th-century artists; in Bach's music, one senses instead a musician eager to make himself as useful as possible, to find every outlet for his immense skill and energy.

In a musician's repertoire, therefore, Bach is both a foundation and a pinnacle. You start your training with something from the *Notebooks for Anna Magdalena*, a two-part invention, or simple prelude — music that teaches you not just how to play, but how to listen to harmony, counterpoint, voice-leading, and form. And you gradually ascend to the heights of instrumental and compositional virtuosity — the *Goldberg Variations*, the d-minor Chaconne, or *The Art of the Fugue*.

In these epic pieces, the performer necessarily channels the composer through a kind of individual heroism. But at the core, Bach was an intensely collaborative musician. Part of the utility of his music is its protean adaptability to any number of instrumental combinations; the labor of performing is divided easily into voices or parts, each a satisfying narrative thread on its own.

The more diverse the voices, the more it becomes possible to tease

out the movement of these separate lines. There's always something interesting happening, no matter which frequency you decide to listen to at a given moment. The act of hearing the mercurial a-minor fugue from *The Well-Tempered Clavier Book II* becomes a kind of auditory tennis match, as subjects and sequences volley among players at warp speed.

One of the joys here is the extraordinary chamber group, comprised of three virtuosos: Chris Thile, Yo-Yo Ma, and Edgar Meyer. Mandolin, cello, and double bass are, at face value, an unlikely instrumental combination, but this is an obviously harmonious set of personalities and musical predilections. The history of collaboration between these three is long and wide-ranging.

Each has recorded Bach individually and in 2012, when thoughts turned to encores during the Goat Rodeo Sessions, Bach was a natural choice. There is a huge range of possibility in Bach interpretation, from the revisionist, almost authorial approach (Busoni or Glenn Gould) to the scholarly and historically informed (epitomized by John Eliot Gardiner). There's much to be gained from both schools, and, wisely, the Thile/Ma/Meyer trio finds its voice somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. Here, drawn in by the directness of the music itself, it's entirely possible to lose oneself for long stretches, just listening.

The trio sonatas bookending their album released in April are straightforward and direct, with all the athletic rhythmic snap of the

best period-instrumentalists. In fact, through some sleight-of-hand sonic mimicry, it sounds remarkably baroque. Chris Thile's mandolin takes on the personae of harpsichord, lute, or even something close to a piano; Yo-Yo Ma's cello, a whole chorus of human voices and a few centuries of stylistic string playing besides. Other moments, though, are unmistakable musical signatures. The rollicking arpeggios in *Kommst du nun, Jesu*, jaunty with the barest hint of swing, could only be Mr. Thile; the chorale tune answering it, complete in its shape and phrasing, characteristically Mr. Ma. Mr. Meyer's bass, vaulting far above the instrument's typical continuo register, makes the melody in *Wachet auf* all the more strivingly human. This unique and shifting orchestration brings an unexpected transparency to some familiar music.

Though one thinks of cello and bass as similarly dark-hued instruments, here they tend to take opposite roles in the three-part harmony, with the cello melody soaring above. The mandolin, so idiomatically suited to moving, contrapuntal lines, keeps the pulse while maintaining a crystalline clarity. Similarly, when the mandolin takes the highest voice, as in the bustling *Sonata for Viola da Gamba*, its short reverberation moves aside quickly, allowing the ear to parse the maze of interchanges and switchbacks between cello and bass. Even more complex is the massive *Prelude and Fugue No. 18 in e minor*, originally an organ piece. Far from making things simpler, dividing the soloist's labor among three creates an opportunity for some fun. The central section of the fugue is transformed

into an over-the-top chase scene, cello pouncing on the mandolin's tail in endless barrages of running notes. This technique, called *hocket*, in which musicians interrupt each other at just the right moment to form a continuous musical line, is found in everything from central African Pygmy music to the work of the contemporary Dutch composer Louis Andriessen.

Not everything is quite so rough-and-tumble. Moments of suspended, almost shocking harmonic beauty abound, especially in the chorale-derived works. In the second phrase of *Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ*, the continuo (bass accompaniment) stubbornly clings to the same note two beats longer than the ear expects — interrupting long enough that the arc of the vocal line (here a plangent and nearly vibrato-less cello) turns into a sequence of unstable, dissonant intervals on its downward path, sounding simultaneously inevitable and lost.

The organ chorale *Erbarm dich mein, o Herre Gott* also features the cello as vocalist, though it is the uncharacteristically stark accompaniment that stands out — plucked bass, with Mr. Thile now joining on guitar, strumming a constant eighth-note pulse. The complete absence of contrapuntal activity draws attention to a sly harmonic ambiguity: beginning seemingly in b minor, constantly feinting at D Major, but never quite sticking the landing. The final phrase ends on b minor's dominant, F-sharp, as if to say, "Again." Light and shade give way to each other in an endless cycle.

Bach's music gives the player a sense of making something tangible, conjuring the physical out of the abstraction of a fugue or chorale. A musical score is, of course, just a set of instructions — the steps to take in construction, with little specified about the finished product. In Bach's catalogue, we have an entire city in plans, its cathedral ringing with organ preludes, its back rooms full of chamber music. That everyone has access to this trove — and can, with a little experience, will these same creations into being — is one of the most profoundly democratic facts I know of, and stands as a great equalizer in an unequal world.

Program note by composer and pianist Timo Andres, from the recently released album Bach Trios on Nonesuch Records.

UMS ARCHIVES

This evening's performance marks **Yo-Yo Ma's** 13th performance under UMS auspices following his UMS debut in April 1982 at Hill Auditorium with the Philadelphia Orchestra under the baton of Eugene Ormandy. Mr. Ma most recently appeared at UMS in March 2013 at Hill Auditorium with the Silk Road Ensemble, where they received the UMS Distinguished Artist Award. This evening's performance marks **Edgar Meyer's** fifth appearance under UMS auspices, following his UMS debut in November 1995 at Rackham Auditorium with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. **Chris Thile** makes his fourth UMS appearance this evening, following his UMS debut in October 2009 at the Power Center with Punch Brothers. Mr. Meyer and Mr. Thile most recently appeared under UMS auspices together in October 2014 at the Michigan Theater.

ARTISTS

The many-faceted career of **Yo-Yo Ma** (*cello*) is testament to his continual search for new ways to communicate with audiences and to his personal desire for artistic growth and renewal. Mr. Ma maintains a balance between his engagements as soloist with orchestras worldwide and his recital and chamber music activities. His discography includes over 100 albums, including 18 Grammy Award-winners.

Mr. Ma serves as the artistic director of Silkroad, an organization he founded to promote cross-cultural performance and collaborations at the edge where education, business, and the arts come together to transform the world. More than 80 works have been commissioned specifically for the Silk Road Ensemble, which tours annually. Mr. Ma also serves as the Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's Negaunee Music Institute. His work focuses on the transformative power music can have in individuals' lives, and on increasing the number and variety of opportunities audiences have to experience music in their communities.

Mr. Ma was born in Paris to Chinese parents who later moved the family to New York. He began to study cello at the age of four, attended The Juilliard School, and in 1976 graduated from Harvard University. He has received numerous awards, among them the Avery Fisher Prize (1978), the National Medal of Arts (2001), and the Presidential Medal of Freedom (2010). In 2011, Mr. Ma was recognized as a Kennedy Center Honoree. Most recently, Mr. Ma has joined the Aspen Institute Board of Trustees. He has performed for eight American presidents, most recently at the invitation of President Obama on the

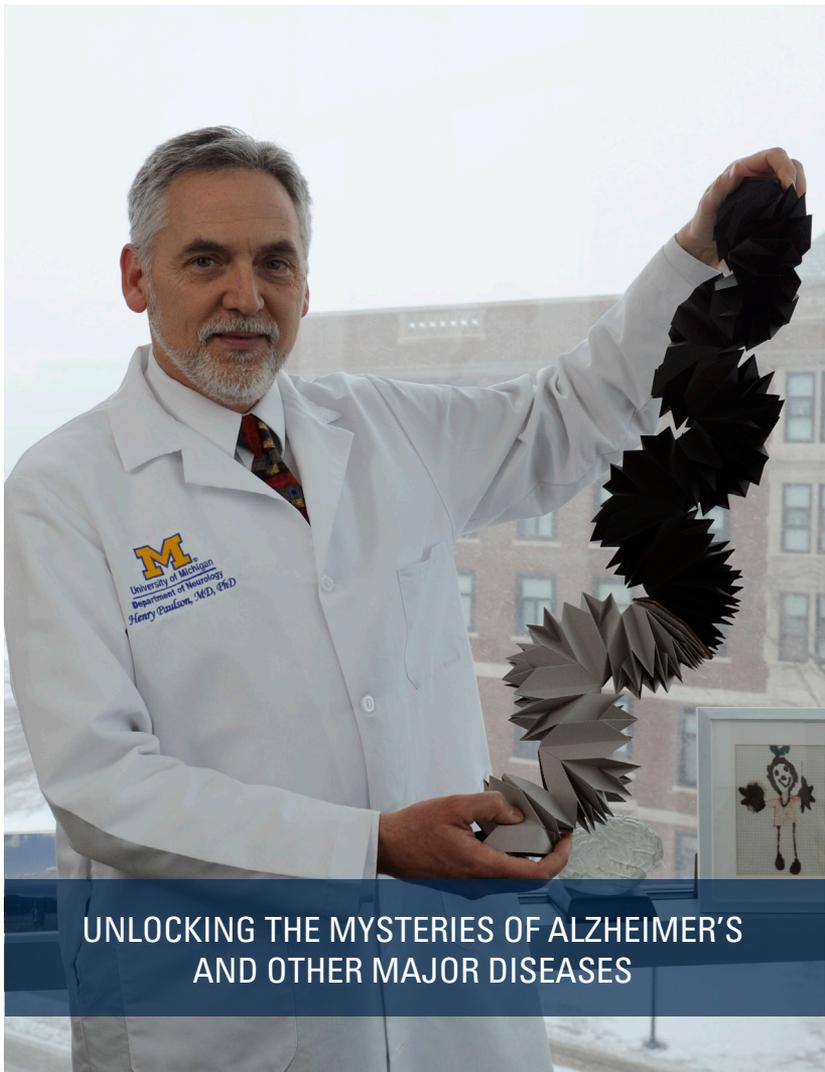
occasion of the 56th Inaugural Ceremony. For more information, please visit www.yo-yoma.com, www.silkroadproject.org, and www.opus3artists.com.

In demand as both a performer and a composer, **Edgar Meyer** (*bass*) has formed a role in the music world unlike any other. Hailed by *The New Yorker* as "...the most remarkable virtuoso in the relatively unchronicled history of his instrument," Mr. Meyer's unparalleled technique and musicianship in combination with his gift for composition have brought him to the fore. His uniqueness in the field was recognized by a MacArthur Award in 2002.

As a solo classical bassist, Mr. Meyer can be heard on a concerto album with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra conducted by Hugh Wolff featuring Bottesini and Meyer concertos both alone and with Yo-Yo Ma and Joshua Bell. He has also recorded an album featuring three of Bach's *Unaccompanied Suites for Cello*. Mr. Meyer was honored with his fifth Grammy Award in 2015 for "Best Contemporary Instrumental Album" for his *Bass & Mandolin* collaboration with Chris Thile.

As a composer, Mr. Meyer has carved out a remarkable and unique niche in the musical world. His music has been premiered and recorded by Emanuel Ax, Joshua Bell, Yo-Yo Ma, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Béla Fleck, Zakir Hussain, Hilary Hahn, and the Emerson String Quartet.

Collaborations are a central part of Mr. Meyer's work. He has been and remains a member of numerous groups whose members include Chris Thile, Béla Fleck, Zakir Hussain, Sam Bush, Jerry Douglas, Mark O'Connor, Yo-Yo Ma, Emanuel Ax,



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Joshua Bell, Mike Marshall, and Amy Dorffman. His debut album in 1985 featured the first public appearance of Strength in Numbers, whose members were Mr. Bush, Mr. Douglas, Mr. Fleck, Mr. O'Connor, and Mr. Meyer.

Mr. Meyer began studying bass at the age of five under the instruction of his father and continued further to study with former U-M professor of music Stuart Sankey. In 1994 he received the Avery Fisher Career Grant and in 2000 became the only bassist to receive the Avery Fisher Prize. Currently, he teaches bass in partnership with Hal Robinson at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. For more information, please visit www.edgarmeyer.com.

Multiple Grammy Award-winner and MacArthur Fellow **Chris Thile** (*mandolin*), a member of Punch Brothers and Nickel Creek, and now the host of *A Prairie Home Companion*, is a mandolin virtuoso, composer, and vocalist. With his broad outlook that encompasses classical, rock, jazz, and bluegrass, Mr. Thile transcends the borders of conventionally circumscribed genres, creating a distinctly American canon and a new musical aesthetic for performers and audiences alike.

A child prodigy, Mr. Thile first rose to fame as a member of Grammy Award-winning trio Nickel Creek, with whom he released three albums and sold over two million records. In 2014, along with a national tour, the trio released a new album, *A Dotted Line*, their first since 2005.

As a soloist, Mr. Thile has released five albums including his most recent, *Bach: Sonatas and Partitas, Vol. 1*, which was produced by renowned bassist Edgar Meyer. In February 2013, he won

a Grammy Award for his work on *The Goat Rodeo Sessions*, collaborating with Yo-Yo Ma, Edgar Meyer, and Stuart Duncan. In September 2014, Mr. Thile and Mr. Meyer released their latest album collaboration, *Bass + Mandolin*, which won the Grammy Award for "Best Contemporary Instrumental Album." Punch Brothers released their latest album, *The Phosphorescent Blues*, in January 2015, and a follow up EP, *The Wireless*, in November 2015. Most recently, Mr. Thile released a double-album with Brad Mehldau titled *Chris Thile & Brad Mehldau* in January 2017.

Beginning in fall of 2016, Mr. Thile took the helm of *A Prairie Home Companion*, a public radio favorite since 1974. Garrison Keillor, the show's creator and host announced: "He is, I think, the great bluegrass performer of our time and he is a beautiful jazz player. There just isn't anything he can't do — and he is very enthusiastic about live radio."

Everybody In, Nobody Out.

UMS is pleased to announce the Ken Fischer Legacy Endowment Fund.



When UMS President Ken Fischer first arrived in 1987, UMS presented 40 concerts each season, primarily classical music.

Fast forward 30 years.

Today UMS presents 60–75 performances each season that represent the best in theater, dance, jazz, global music, and classical music, as well as innovative new work from emerging artists. And every year, over 100 UMS education and community engagement activities enrich thousands of students, educators, and community members, with an impact that extends far beyond the stage.

Leading with an inclusive philosophy of “Everybody In, Nobody Out,” Ken has brought UMS to global prominence as an internationally respected arts presenter, recognized in 2014 with the National Medal of Arts.

Please join UMS in honoring Ken’s 30 years of extraordinary leadership with a gift of any size to the Ken Fischer Legacy Endowment Fund. As a permanent endowment at UMS, the Fund will support a performance or unique opportunity each season.

The Ken Fischer Legacy Endowment Fund will not only honor Ken’s legacy, but will also help ensure the continued success of UMS.

**To make a gift, please visit
ums.org/support or call 734.764.8489.**

We extend our deepest appreciation to the following donors who have made leadership gifts to honor Ken Fischer:

\$100,000 and above

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We also want to extend an additional thank you to all those who have already made a gift to the Ken Fischer Legacy Endowment Fund. All donors will be recognized at a public retirement celebration for Ken later this spring.

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Edgar Meyer, and Chris Thile.*