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*Photo credit: Owen Zhou.*

# Early Music Ensemble

Lillian Gordis, harpsichord and direction  
Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2025, 7:30 p.m.  
Grusin Music Hall

## PROGRAM

### Dances from *Les Indes Galantes*

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764)

Ouverture

Adoration du soleil

Air des Incas

Les Sauvages

Chaconne

### L'Espagnole (Les Nations)

François Couperin (1668-1733)

Sonade

### Deuxième leçon de ténèbres pour le Mercredi saint

François Couperin

*Mae Harrell, soprano*

*Ray Pragman, viola da gamba*

*Lillian Gordis, harpsichord*

# Orchestral Suite 2 in B minor BWV 1067

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Ouverture

Rondeau

Sarabande

Bourée I-II

Polonaise

Menuet

Badinerie

*Santiago Reveiz Lopez, flute*

# PROGRAM NOTES

This Early Music Ensemble performance brings together “High Baroque” orchestral and chamber works from France and Germany. The composers of the works on this program—François Couperin (1668–1733), Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764) and Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)—shared many cultural references and took inspiration from many of the same artistic trends; at the same time, however, the way they interpreted and developed those sources of inspiration could not be more different.

François Couperin is the best known of a dynasty of organists and composers that was based in and around Paris. His uncles, Louis, Charles, and François, all played the harpsichord, viol and lute, and his father, Charles, was the organist at the church Saint-Gervais Saint-Protais. When François was 11, his father died, and he gradually took over the post. He later became the King’s harpsichordist and composed music for the court events. Couperin is often referred to with the epithet *le grand* (“the great”), to distinguish him from his uncle, who shared the same first name. Although Couperin is remembered today for his four books of harpsichord pieces, his primary employment was through the Church and the royal court. In 1717, he published a set of three *Leçons de ténèbres* (Tenebrae Lessons) for Holy Wednesday, presumably for a famous convent outside Paris, Longchamp Abbey, which hired opera singers and professional musicians to perform music in the week before Easter. In the Catholic church, Tenebrae services were sung for Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday of Holy Week, the days leading up to Easter Sunday. The Tenebrae services (*tenebrae*, Latin: “darkness, shadows”) represent one

of the darkest periods in the liturgical Catholic calendar and traditionally took place at matins and lauds, in the morning before dawn. By the seventeenth century, however, they were performed the previous evening around sundown, when audiences were able to attend more easily. As each psalm was recited or sung, a candle was extinguished so that, by the end of the service, the sun had set and the room was plunged into darkness. The texts for Couperin's *Leçons de tenebres* come from the *Book of Lamentations* and detail the fall of Jerusalem—an allegory for the death of Christ.

As part of his work for the court, Couperin also composed “concerted” sonatas to be played in different permutations by professional court musicians—including himself. *Les Nations* (1726) is a follow-up to his first two chamber music collections, *Les Concerts royaux* (1714) and *Nouveaux concerts, ou Les goûts réunis* (1724), which Couperin published long after he said he had composed them for Louis XIV. These trio sonatas take inspiration from French and Italian sources, especially the sonatas of Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713) and the ballets of Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687), and brings them together in what Couperin called the “reunited tastes”—les goûts réunis. *Les Nations* consists of four “ordres” associated with different “nations.” Each of these includes dance forms that are typically found in suites (allemande, courante, sarabande, gigue) as well as non-standard or optional dances. On tonight’s program is the opening movement of *L’Espagnole*, a “sonade” or sonata that juxtaposes the virtuosic passagework, harmonic sequences, and chromaticism so characteristic of Italian music from this period with French harmonies, phrase structures, and ornamentation.

Nearly 1000 kilometers northeast of Paris, a younger Johann Sebastian Bach avidly collected and studied French organ, harpsichord, and chamber music. While Bach did not have a copy of *L’Espagnole*, he did copy and arrange parts of other sections of *Les Nations*. Fascinated by the French dance suites—whose form underwent some transformations in transit, Bach composed suites for unaccompanied violin and unaccompanied cello, as well as six *English Suites*, six *French Suites*, six *Partitas* and four suites for orchestra, the second of which is on tonight’s program. The orchestral suites were likely written between 1738 and 1740, during Bach’s time in Leipzig, making it possibly the last orchestral work that he wrote. It consists of a grand overture in the French style, followed by a rondeau, a sarabande, a pair of bourrées, a polonaise with a double, a menuet and a badinerie. The use of the French style of overture was extremely fashionable at this time, but Bach transformed the form by writing a virtuosic solo part for obbligato traverso, or Baroque transverse flute, which is showcased in the double of the Polonoise and, most famously, in the Badinerie.

Jean-Philippe Rameau, a contemporary of Bach, began publishing his music relatively late in his life and embarked on a career as an opera composer in his fifties. Nevertheless, over the 30 years during which he composed, revised and revived his operas, Rameau finetuned his orchestral writing to correspond with his theoretical claims as well as the organological advancements that took place in this short timespan. Rameau was the first to formulate his music in terms of chords defined by their “fundamental” or “root” rather than the scale degree in the bass and one of the first major composers to explore the new timbral



and textural possibilities of mixing stringed instruments on gut with rapidly changing woodwinds and brass.

His first major operatic success, *Les Indes Galantes* (1735/6) belongs to the genre of the opéra ballet, which consists of four “entrées” with distinct storylines exploring cross-cultural—and oftentimes allegorical—encounters between the Old and New Worlds, rather than a single overarching plot. Rameau revised the work several times and published it as a reduced score twice. The second time, he added what has become his most iconic work, “Les Sauvages.” In this concert, the Early Music Ensemble will perform a “pastiche”—a suite constructed of excerpts from the instrumental airs and dances from *Les Indes galantes*, a common practice in the eighteenth century. Following the French overture is an *Air grave pour les polonais* (Serious air for the Polish) from the Prologue, the *Adoration du soleil* (Adoration of the Sun) and *Air des Incas* (Air of the Incas) from the second entrée, the *Danse du grand Calumet de la Paix* (the Dance of the Ceremonial Peace Pipe)—otherwise known as “Les Sauvages”—from an entrée Rameau added in 1736, and the Chaconne that closes the work.



# PERSONNEL

**Lillian Gordis**, harpsichord and direction

## Early Music Ensemble

### Violin

Eli Pouliot

Daniel Yu

Ryannah Blackman

### Viola

Shelley Armer

### Cello and viola da gamba

Ray Pragman

### Contrabass

Willem Rohwer

### Flutes

Santiago Reveiz Lopez

Alexander Westervelt

### Recorder

Ohad Nativ

### Oboe

David Paull

### Bassoon

Larissa Harrison

### Trumpet

Henry Lesser

### Theorbo

Alysse McDowell-Deffes

### Harpsichord

Saraswathi Shukla

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*The Drowsy Chaperone (2023).  
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