

Hopkins Center for the Arts

at Dartmouth

presents

Ruckus

Strawberry Fields

Handel, Sancho and English Country Dances

featuring Emi Ferguson, flute and Rachell Ellen Wong, violin

Elliot Figg, harpsichord

Evan Premo, bass

Coleman Itzkoff, cello

Paul Holmes Morton, guitar

Dušan Balarin, guitar and lute

Clay Zeller-Townson, bassoon

Tuesday, April 22, 7:30 pm

Our Savior Lutheran Church • Hanover, New Hampshire • 2025

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Program

Approximate duration: 60 minutes without intermission

Lady Mary Montagu’s Reel—Culford Heath Camp—Ruffs and Rhees From <i>12 Country Dances for the Year 1779</i>	Ignatius Sancho (1729–1780)
Trio Sonata in G major, Op. 5, No. 4 A tempo ordinario Allegro Passacaille Gigue: Presto Minuet: Allegro moderato	George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)
Bushy Park—Lord Dalkeith’s Reel	Sancho
Trio Sonata in E minor, Op. 5, No. 3 Andante larghetto Allegro Sarabande: Largo assai Allemande: Andante allegro Rondeau Gavotte: Allegro	Handel
The Royal Bishop—Lindrindod Lasses—Strawberries and Cream	Sancho
Trio Sonata in D major, Op. 5, No. 2 Largo (from Trio Sonata in B minor) Adagio Allegro Musette Allegro Musette Marche Gavotte	Handel
Duchess of Devonshire’s Reel—Trip to Dillington	Sancho
All of One Mind—Mungo’s Delight—Lady Mary Montagu’s Reel	
[Encore: Strawberry Fields Forever]	

About *Strawberry Fields*

Strawberry Fields is a joyous feast of rustic dances from the 18th century. Featuring Ruckus's dazzling arrangements of Ignatius Sancho's *12 Country Dances for the Year 1779* and the evergreen trio sonatas of George Frideric Handel, this program will have audiences craving to get on their feet.

Country dances in the 18th century were among the most available and widely used music of their day, bringing people together through the joyous ritual of social dancing. In *Strawberry Fields*, our country dances come from Ignatius Sancho: a once-enslaved person living in London in the late 18th century who, upon gaining his freedom, lived a vibrant life as a shop owner, musician and abolitionist. Ignatius Sancho is widely unknown to many today, yet was a crucial figure in London at the end of the 18th century in music and

politics alike. He was very likely the first person of African descent to vote in England, and his writings helped ignite the abolitionist movement. He published many compositions, including right at the end of his life, his *12 Country Dances*. Originally set for the harpsichord, they are playfully written and set with delightful titles. Ruckus lights these tunes on fire with their infectious energy and colorful arrangements for violin, flute and big band continuo.

Perhaps known to Ignatius, the Opus 5 Trio Sonatas of Handel are among his best instrumental chamber works, evoking pastoral bliss and the joy of good company. These sonatas also bring dances to the fore: they are full of zesty gavottes, warm minuets, and one time-stopping passacaille.

Program Notes

While George Frideric Handel and Ignatius Sancho never met each other, they inhabited the same world, and shared one thing for certain: the transcendent joy that comes from a life of music and dance with good company. And if there is one thing that encapsulates the joy of togetherness in 18th-century England it was the English country dance. These dances rose above class distinction: they were found in ballrooms, barnyards, gardens and pubs alike. The country dance, more than those formal minuets and French dances, is what the Brits wanted to dance to until the sun came up. Sweating, laughing, spinning, holding hands...propelled onwards by the unrelenting groove of the music.

Ignatius Sancho was a remarkable member of 18th-century London and was a pivotal figure in the abolition movement in England. He is one of the first Black musicians to publish their compositions and was likely the first British African to vote. He was born on a slave ship en route from Africa to the Caribbean in 1729, and was brought to England as an enslaved person when he was two years old. In Greenwich, England, he was given to three young girls, who decided to give the child the surname of Sancho (after the Cervantes character). Ignatius's luck began to change upon meeting a family friend, the Duke of Montagu, who fostered Ignatius's education and became his leading advocate. Ignatius eventually escaped his enslavement and was supported by the Montagu family, from

whom he received a modest inheritance. This allowed him to support himself and pursue his dream of becoming an actor. Following a brief acting career, he opened a grocery and oil supply business in Westminster where he worked and created community until his death. Ignatius began to be known in wider circles when, in 1766, correspondence between himself and the popular novelist Laurence Sterne was published.

I am sure you will applaud me for beseeching you to give one half hour's attention to slavery, as it is at this day practised in our West Indies.— That subject, handled in your striking manner, would ease the yoke (perhaps) of many—but if only of one—Gracious God! – what a feast to a benevolent heart!

—Sancho to Sterne

The publication of Ignatius's writing on slavery in this manner had a galvanizing effect on the abolition movement, and began his life as a publicly known person and his shop became known as the place in London to gather and talk not only about politics, but also about music, dance, and the arts. Upon his death, many of his letters were collected and published, and were popular enough to go through multiple editions. They are full of humor, passion, humility, and document a vibrant life full of love, friendship, music and dance.

Program Notes *continued*

Ignatius's musical output is largely dances: minuets, country dances, cotillions, etc. One can imagine the social gatherings at his store, and at the houses of his friends, where dances long into the night included his newest material. Ignatius also published *A New Collection of Songs*, for voice and basso continuo, which includes settings of Shakespeare and contemporary poets. He even wrote a musical theory treatise which has sadly been lost to time.

His *12 Country Dances for the Year 1779* are dedicated to "Miss North," who scholars generally conclude must be one of the three daughters of Lord Frederick North, Prime Minister of England from 1770-1782. Sancho would have come into contact with this family through his second family of patronage, the Brudenells. This is a set of functional country dances, complete with instructions for dancers alongside each score. They are occasionally danced today in English country dance circles. While many of Ignatius's compositions are distinctly galant, the *12 Country Dances* are spare—with a direct, earthbound style. The melodies are earworms, the rhythms propulsive and the set order very considered.

The titles of Ignatius's dances in the *12 Country Dances* seem to be a mix of characters familiar to the dedicatee: these are friends, acquaintances, favorite desserts ("Strawberries and Cream"), vacation places. However, the final dance was most definitely for Ignatius himself: "Mungos Delight," a remarkable dance, outside of the norm of the rest of the collection both in melodic style (extreme leaps) and with a mixed major/minor mode. "Mungo" likely references a character from the play *The Padlock* by Issac Bickerstaffe (1769), a part Ignatius

probably performed during his acting career. There's an air of wistful melancholy to this tune, and as the last word of this collection, it makes one wonder what it meant for Ignatius.

George Frideric Handel loomed large over all English concert music of the 18th century, and is referenced in Ignatius's letters as being among his favorite composers. Though born in Germany, George became one of England's most celebrated composers both in his lifetime, and still today. George's Op. 5 trio sonatas were written in 1738, probably after constant nagging from his friends (and publisher) to publish more instrumental chamber music. In private company, George was known for showing off at the keyboard and performing arias from his operas and oratorios, but the only trios that had been published up until then was a bootlegged set cobbled together by a publisher from his early days in Italy. The Op. 5 collection shows George, decades into his time in England, at the full height of his compositional ability, creating brilliant works in the British pastoral manner. These are more dance sets than abstract sonatas: they are full of musettes, gavottes, minuets and the like.

The British slave trade also touched Handel's life. Scholars are debating now about the extent to which Handel engaged in investing in the Royal African Company, as Handel was often paid for his work through receiving stock. He typically would cash out the stocks soon after receiving them—he was often cash-strapped thanks to his obsession with the never-lucrative opera business. And the objects for sale in Sancho's store? Sugar, tobacco, tea and oil.

About the Artists

Ruckus is a shapeshifting, collaborative baroque ensemble with a visceral and playful approach to early music. Described as "the world's only period-instrument rock band" (*San Francisco Classical Voice*), Ruckus' core is a continuo group, the baroque equivalent of a jazz rhythm section: guitars, keyboards, cello, bassoon and bass. The NYC-based ensemble aims to fuse the early-music movement's questing, creative spirit with the grit, groove and jangle of American roots music, creating a unique sound of "rough-edged intensity" (*New Yorker*) that's "achingly

delicate one moment, incisive and punchy the next" (*New York Times*). The group's members are among the most creative and virtuosic performers in North American early music.

Ruckus' debut album, *Fly the Coop*, a collaboration with flutist Emi Ferguson, was *Billboard's* #2 Classical album upon its release. Performances of *Fly the Coop* have been described as "a fizzing, daring display of personality and imagination" (*New York Times*). *The Boston Musical*

Intelligencer describes the group as taking continuo playing to “not simply a new level, but a revelatory new dimension of dynamism altogether... an eruption of pure, pulsing hoedown joy.”

Ruckus is the “house band” for Hudson Hall’s baroque opera productions, directed by R.B. Schlather. The *New York Times* reviewed the 2023 production of Handel’s *Rodelinda*, praising Ruckus’ uncondacted playing as “mercurial, almost improvisatory spirit that responded to the drama in real time.” Ruckus returns to Hudson Hall for *Giulio Cesare* in spring 2025. The ensemble made its Ojai Festival debut in 2022, performing a wide range of music: from Bach, to the improvisational scores of Roscoe Mitchell and George Lewis, to a recital featuring Anthony Roth Costanzo, and an original opera by bassist Doug Balliett. Recent highlights include debuts at the Shriver Concert Hall Series in Baltimore, Boston’s Celebrity Series, the Caramoor Festival, and NYC’s Town Hall.

Upcoming projects include a co-commission of a large-scale work by pioneering artist and NEA Jazz Master Roscoe Mitchell alongside the Immanuel Wilkins Quartet and Emi Ferguson. The work, produced by the Metropolis Ensemble, premieres at DaCamera in Houston in February 2025. In 2025, Ruckus will release *The Edinburgh Rollick*, bringing new life to the tunes of Niel Gow, one of the most influential figures in traditional Scottish music. In 2024–25 Ruckus conducts a nationwide tour of *Strawberry Fields*, featuring Emi Ferguson and Rachell Ellen Wong: bringing the music of Ignatius Sancho to audiences across the country.

A 2023 recipient of the Avery Fisher Career Grant, **Emi Ferguson** can be heard live in concerts and festivals with groups including AMOC*, Ruckus, the Handel and Haydn Society, the New York New Music Ensemble, the Manhattan Chamber Players and as the music director of Camerata Pacifica Baroque. Her recordings celebrate her fascination with reinvigorating music and instruments of the past for the present. Her debut album, *Amour Cruel*, an indie-pop song cycle inspired by the music of the 17th-century French court, was released by Arezzo Music in September 2017, spending four weeks on the classical, classical crossover and world music Billboard charts. Her 2019 album *Fly the Coop*: Bach Sonatas and Preludes, a collaboration with continuo band Ruckus, debuted at #1 on the iTunes classical charts and #2 on the Billboard classical charts, and was called “blindingly

impressive ... a fizzing, daring display of personality and imagination” by *The New York Times*. Emi has been a featured performer at the Marlboro, Lucerne, Ojai, Lake Champlain, Bach Virtuosi and June in Buffalo festivals, often premiering new works by composers of our time. Emi has spoken and performed at several TEDx events and has been featured on media outlets including the Discovery Channel, Amazon Prime, WQXR and Vox talking about how music relates to our world today. As part of WQXR’s Artist Propulsion Lab, she created the series “This Composer is SICK!” with Max Fine that explored the impact of Syphilis on composers Franz Schubert, Bedřich Smetana and Scott Joplin, and is currently one of the hosts of WQXR’s Young Artists Showcase. Her book, *Iconic Composers*, co-written with Nicholas and David Csicsko, was released in June 2023, introducing music lovers of all ages to 50 incredible composers. Born in Japan and raised in London and Boston, she now resides in New York.

Violinist **Rachell Ellen Wong** made history in 2020 when she was awarded the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant, becoming the only baroque artist to receive the honor. Her exceptional blend of technical virtuosity on gut strings, expressive musicianship and understanding of period performance practices has garnered international critical acclaim and a dedicated following. With performances across six continents, she has established herself as one of the leading historical performers of her generation, collaborating with esteemed ensembles such as the Academy of Ancient Music, Jupiter Ensemble, Bach Collegium Japan, The English Concert and Les Arts Florissants, among others. Equally accomplished on the modern violin, Rachell made her first public appearance with Philharmonia Northwest at age 11 and has since performed as a soloist with orchestras such as the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and the Seattle Symphony. Currently, she serves as concertmaster of the Seattle Baroque Orchestra, and is on faculty at the Valley of the Moon Music Festival in Sonoma, California.

Notable appearances from Rachell’s 2023–24 season include performances with the New World Symphony, Camerata Pacifica, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, Illumina Festival in Sao Paulo, Reno Chamber Orchestra, The Northwest Sinfonietta and The Rome Chamber Music Festival.

About the Artists *continued*

Alongside the exceptional conductor and keyboardist David Belkovski, Rachell is co-founder of Twelfth Night. Founded in 2021, Twelfth Night's notable engagements include Early Music at Carnegie Hall, Cal Performances at UC Berkeley, San Diego Early Music, the Friends of Chamber Music Kansas City, Chamber Music Society of Logan and New World Symphony.

Among her many awards, Rachell was the Grand Prize winner of the inaugural Lillian and Maurice Barbash J.S. Bach Competition. Originally from the Pacific Northwest, she lives in New York City with her husband and two bunnies. Rachell performs on a baroque violin from the school of Joachim Tielke ca. 1700, and a violin made in 1953 by Carlo de March. For more information about Rachell, please visit her website at www.rachellwong.com.

Arts in the Curriculum & Community

During their time on campus, the artists will lead a public workshop on English Country Dance. They will also visit the Music Department's class "Global Sounds" and have lunch with the students.

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