Gotham Early Music Scene (GEMS) presents

MIDTOWN CONCERTS

Thursday, March 12, 2026 1:15 pm
St Malachy's Church – The Actors' Chapel in New York City

Live Streamed to YouTube

Aquitaine
Splendor and Spotlight

Eleanor Legault, piccolo violin ~ Lydia Becker, Lara Mladjen, Gracie Carney, violins and viola ~ Allen Maracle, cello
Charlie Reed, viola da gamba ~ Yunyi Ji, harpsichord ~ Ezra Gans, bassoon

Intrada in C Major for Chamber Ensemble, E. 62 (C Major) — Johann Joseph Fux (1660–1741)
Intrada ~ Sarabande ~Menuett ~ Gigue

Sonata Sesta for Piccolo Violin and Viola da Gamba (F Major) — Philip H. Erlebach (1657–1714)
Affetuoso-Allegro-Grave ~ Allemande ~ Courante ~ Sarabande & Variatio ~ Gigue

Sonata for Violino Piccolo and Basso Continuo (F Major) — Johann Heunisch
Andante ~ Presto — (Dates unknown – manuscript c. 1800)

Quartet à 4 for Piccolo violin, violins, and cello (C Major) — Anonymous
Menuet ~ Sauvage — (Dates unknown – manuscript c. 1790, provenance Saml.Wenster L:28)

Concerto à 4 per la chiesa (B-flat Major) — Carl Heinrich Biber (1681–1749)
Adagio ~ Allegro ~ Adagio ~ Presto

Concerto for Piccolo Violin (F Major) — Johann Pfeiffer (1697–1761)
Largo ~ Allegro ~ Menuet

Rondeau à 7 (C Major) — Johann Joseph Fux (1660–1741)

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Aquitaine is a research-based ensemble dedicated to uncovering hidden gems of the Baroque repertoire. Founded together at The Juilliard School, they have performed at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, concerts presented by Silentwoods Collective, and community outreach concerts. Performing on period instruments, and often obscure ones, they present enriching programs from music of the past.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The piccolo violin is still a bit of a mystery to players, builders, and audiences alike. While it is mainly tuned a minor third higher than the traditional violin, some scores call for a tuning only a half step higher than the traditional violin, or up to a fourth above. Some strings are tuned higher than others (in *scordatura*). Existing violins vary in neck shapes and body sizes — some are wildly disproportionate in comparison to the standard Baroque violin neck to body size ratio. Some are simply smaller violins, as in this case.

So why play the piccolo violin, when modern violin technique can go much higher than the piccolo violin's fingerboard even permits? I would argue that the piccolo violin does not really serve a technical purpose, but rather creates a color and sound world that is unique and special on its own. Used in much sacred music, depicting angels, it often feels to me that I am playing into a golden halo of sound! Brightly splendorous or treacly sweet, the piccolo violin has its own glow.

The music performed today is some of the only known instrumental works for piccolo violin. In the two existing compendiums of works for piccolo violin, more than half of the pieces listed are declared lost or incomplete. Johann Pfeiffer, who wrote potentially as many as nine concerti for piccolo violin only has one surviving work remaining for the instrument. Johann Fux, who bookends this program, wrote more sonatas for the instrument that are now lost, as did Phillip Erlebach, whose primary output was destroyed in a fire.

Johann Heunisch, the third composer on this program, is a complete mystery to me. Not mentioned in either catalogue of works for the instrument, it seems he was one of the few galant era composers who continued to write for the piccolo violin as it fell into disuse, but later came back and transcribed this sonata for a standard Baroque violin.

Karl Biber, Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber, wrote his *Concerto per la chiesa* for a piccolo violin tuned very low — or a violin tuned very high. Generally the piccolo violin's standard tuning limits composers by keys, but Biber's tuning (while specifying violino piccolo in his manuscript) lets the strings go slack, and writes in a more muted key than the brightness usually associated with the instrument.

I would like to thank the Monical family and Gabriela Guadalajara for making it possible for me to own this Klingenthal piccolo violin. Thanks to Daniel Lee for his groundbreaking research on the piccolo violin and the Pfeiffer concerto, and to the libraries of Universitetsbiblioteket Lund Webster archive and Polsko-Niemieckie Centrum Bibliotek for providing me with manuscripts of works by Heunisch and Anonymous.

~ Eleanor Legault

Next Concert: Two Cellos from Silentwoods
The Cello Through Time

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