

**Tuesday Musical presents
Edgar Meyer — in person**

by Mike Telin



Virtuoso double bassist and composer Edgar Meyer is a musical omnivore. His collaborators read like a who's-who in folk, jazz, country, classical, and bluegrass music. Meyer's diverse discography includes the celebrated *Bach: Unaccompanied Cello Suites Performed on Double Bass*. In 2011 he teamed up

with Yo-Yo Ma, Stuart Duncan, and Chris Thile for *The Goat Rodeo Sessions*. And in addition to being a multi-Grammy winner, Meyer is the recipient of an Avery Fisher Career Grant, an Avery Fisher Prize, and a MacArthur Award.

On Tuesday, April 20 at 7:30 pm, [Edgar Meyer](#) and his bass will take center stage at Akron's E.J. Thomas Hall for an in-person recital presented by Tuesday Musical. The program will include Bach's First Cello Suite, as well as Meyer's own compositions. A limited number of tickets are available for advance purchase — click [here](#) for details — and free student tickets in the balcony can be secured the evening of the performance. The box office will open at 6:30 pm.

Thoughtful and soft-spoken in conversation, the Oak Ridge, Tennessee native has an 'it's all in a day's work' philosophy about his busy, multifaceted career. Answering his cell phone in Nashville, Meyer was happy to talk about his most recent project — preparing virtual concerts with violinist Tessa Lark and cellist Joshua Roman. "We recorded some old string trios of mine from '86 and '88. I enjoyed it and they did great," he said. "And I'm really pleased to have some documentation of this music."

When asked about the repertoire for Tuesday's concert, Meyer said he was still thinking about how to turn a full-length evening into a 60- to 70-minute concert with no intermission. "Normally I would play a Bach Suite, the piece that's being referred to as

the *Work in Progress*, and then some of my single-movement pieces. I'm not sure what I'm going to cut, but let's say that there will be Bach and some of my music after that."

Having learned to play the bass from his father, Meyer said that he was introduced to the Cello Suites around age ten or eleven. "They were in the house and I just started reading them," he recalled, adding that even at a young age he wanted to "spend time with those notes."

The cello suites are also part of Meyer's teaching life as visiting professor of double bass at the Curtis Institute of Music. He noted that there's more to learning a suite than imitating your favorite recordings. "One thing I try to emphasize to students is to get to know as much of Bach's music as they can. I also ask that they play them incredibly slowly — once you start playing fast you're not listening the same way. Another thing I try to communicate is that practicing slowly is not like taking your medicine — it's a great pleasure. I enjoy playing slowly, in fact, sometimes more. And I don't think students always comprehend that."

Does Meyer have a favorite Bach work? "Probably not," he said. "His output is so enormous, and there are dozens of pieces in my top drawer — from vocal and keyboard works to organ works to Brandenburg Concertos. It's a deep well."

Given his genre-defying career, was there a moment when he realized that he didn't need or want to follow the career path of a traditional classical double bassist? Again, his answer was a polite no. "When I was maybe seventeen I hadn't concluded that I would make my living in music."

Meyer said that during his first year of college he worked in a laboratory and his boss was an amateur musician. "vHe did numerical analysis specializing in sparse matrices and I really liked his life. I can't remember exactly how many recordings he had, but it must have been close to 2,000. And music was so personal to me that I wasn't sure I wanted to subject it to the stresses that go along with making a living at it."

Eventually Meyer found himself immersed in all types of music 24/7. "To a certain degree I didn't think about it — I thought about the music I wanted to make and things followed pretty naturally. These days I hear a lot of people encouraging their students to be more entrepreneurial, but that is not how I viewed it. I was in music because I loved it and I wanted to find ways to do things that I liked the most. And I figured that if I was able to do that, maybe someone else would like it too."

Although his career took time to develop, little by little it began to solidify. "The first trio — the one I just recorded with Joshua and Tessa — was the first large piece I ever wrote.

I was 25.” Around that same time Meyer was invited to join the bluegrass band Strength in Numbers. Both of those events gave him “a more relaxed feeling about things.”

As in any business, connecting with the right people is important to success — and for Meyer, that too happened organically, starting with progressive bluegrass mandolin player Sam Bush. “When I was in college I played in a string band that was the opening act for New Grass Revival, the band Sam was in. We became friends, then he and John Cowan said, ‘You got to meet this guy Béla Fleck.’ So they kind of match-made us and we became quite close. And between Béla and Sam, they convinced Jerry Douglas and Mark O’Connor to play on my first demo in 1985. I paid each of them \$50. Once that happened I gradually became a member of that community.”

Meyer said the “moral of the story” is to find a way to be in the same room with the best players. “You want to play with people who play better than you, and you want to learn how to make other people sound really great.”

Wrapping up our conversation, I told Meyer that I enjoyed his latest release *Not Our First Goat Rodeo*. “We gave it our all,” he chuckled. “Chris, Stuart, and I spent twenty days together together on the writing end — not consecutively but in several clumps. It was fun, and it was nice to have the chance to do that. Most of the times that I’ve been unhappy with the writing it was because I didn’t give it enough time. But if you give it enough time, you’re likely to find a way.” Click [here](#) to watch their NPR Tiny Desk performance of works from that album.

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