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## American Contemporary Music Ensemble (ACME) and Roomful of Teeth

Office of Arts + Cultural Programming

PEAK Performances at Montclair State University

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Dr. Susan A. Cole, President  
 Daniel Gurskis, Dean, College of the Arts  
 Jedediah Wheeler, Executive Director, Arts & Cultural Programming

# American Contemporary Music Ensemble (ACME) Roomful of Teeth

*Works of Caroline Shaw, Gavin Bryars, and Henry Purcell*

## ACME

Clarice Jensen, Artistic Director

Ben Russell, violin  
 Laura Lutzke, violin  
 Yuki Numata Resnick, viola  
 Clarice Jensen, cello

## Roomful of Teeth

Brad Wells, Artistic Director

Estelí Gomez, soprano  
 Sarah Brailey, soprano  
 Caroline Shaw, alto  
 Virginia Warnken, alto  
 Eric Dudley, tenor  
 Avery Griffin, baritone  
 Dashon Burton, bass-baritone  
 Cameron Beauchamp, bass

## PROGRAM

<i>Fantasia no. 10 in E Minor, Z.741</i> (1680)	Henry Purcell (1659–1695)
<i>Fantasia upon One Note, Z. 745</i> (1680)	Purcell
<i>Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet</i> (1971)	Gavin Bryars (b. 1943)
<i>Partita for 8 Voices</i> (2009–2012)	Caroline Shaw (b. 1982)
Allemande	
Sarabande	
Courante	
Passacaglia	

~~Intermission~~

<i>Fantasia no. 6 in F Major, Z. 737</i> (1680)	Purcell
<i>Ritornello 2.3</i> (2015; world premiere of version for strings and voices) Film by Caroline Shaw	Shaw

Arts and Cultural Programming at Montclair State University is honored to have been awarded a 2015 Citation of Excellence from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts for achieving the highest standard of excellence as recognized by our peers.

Duration: 1 hour 35 minutes, including one 15-minute intermission.

In consideration of both audience and performers, please turn off all electronic devices. The taking of photographs or videos and the use of recording equipment are not permitted. No food or drink is permitted in the theater.

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Montclair State's **Office of Arts & Cultural Programming (ACP)** presents and produces leading artists of the world in dance, music, theater, and opera. Under its signature series Peak Performances, ACP has produced works such as *Zinnias: The Life of Clementine Hunter* by Robert Wilson, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Toshi Reagon, and Jacqueline Woodson; *Dog Days* by David T. Little and Royce Vavrek; Harry Partch's *Oedipus*; and Ridge Theater's *The Difficulty of Crossing a Field* by David Lang. In addition, ACP has commissioned works by Bill T. Jones, Kronos Quartet, Jan Fabre, Liz Lerman, Wayne McGregor, Laurie Anderson, Romeo Castellucci, Richard Alston, Susan Marshall, Fred Hersch, and David Gordon.

## Major Donors

### Alexander Kasser Theater

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### The 2014/15 season is made possible in part by funds from:

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation  
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To view our complete season and for more information, visit [peakperfs.org](http://peakperfs.org).



# Peak Performances

THE 2014-15 SEASON

# American Contemporary Music Ensemble (ACME) Roomful of Teeth

*Works of Caroline Shaw, Gavin Bryars, and Henry Purcell*



February 7, 2015 • 8:00pm  
 Alexander Kasser Theater



## Program Notes

In 2013, I gave myself a challenge to write the same music for voices and for strings, separately. It was a way for me to consider both the history of early viol and vocal music as well as my own relationship to my two main musical arms—my voice and my violin. This became *Ritornello 2.0*, a 30-minute work in two versions, one for Roomful of Teeth and one for a string quartet subset of ACME.

Tonight’s performance is a dream of mine—a collaboration between ACME and Roomful of Teeth, my closest musical friends and partners of the last five years. It was with ACME that I first discovered Gavin Bryars’s *Jesus’ Blood Never Failed Me Yet*; played the music of Jóhann Jóhannsson, Lutoslawski, and Cage; and toured in a van with A Winged Victory for the Sullen (recently on the stage of Peak Performances with 2014’s *Atomos*). With Teeth, beginning in 2009, I quite literally began discovering my own voice through the singing traditions of others far and near, and alongside these dear friends I wrote and performed the four movements that comprise Partita.

Threaded throughout this concert are several of Purcell’s Fantasias for Viols, published in 1680. Viols come in many ranges, much like their close relatives in the violin family, and were often combined in consorts—the predecessor to the modern string quartet. As instrumental music making became more popular in private homes throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, the viol consort was the perfect medium for composers and performers to explore complex, polyphonic textures. Music for viol consorts was especially popular in England, and Purcell’s Fantasias represent the culmination of this rich tradition.

These pieces illustrate the transition from the prevalence of polyphonic vocal writing in the 15th and 16th centuries to the rise of instrumental “chamber music.” The Fantasia upon One Note is particularly interesting in that a single pitch is threaded throughout the entire three minutes of music, which is never static. (For tonight, I have made a version of this piece for voices and strings together, alternating who holds “The Note.”) Likewise, Bryars uses this idea of threading a hauntingly unchanging element throughout his ecstatic *Jesus’ Blood Never Failed Me Yet*. The first half of the concert closes with Partita for 8 Voices, which is as much a demonstration of how voices are instruments with many colors as it is a playful riff on the idea of the baroque suite. The program closes with the premiere of a new version of *Ritornello*, combining voices and strings in ways both very old and, perhaps, a little bit new.

—*Caroline Shaw*

### *Jesus’ Blood Never Failed Me Yet*

In 1971, when I lived in London, I was working with a friend, Alan Power, on a film about people living rough in the area around Elephant and Castle and Waterloo Station. In the course of being filmed, some people broke into drunken song—sometimes bits of opera, sometimes sentimental ballads—and one, who in fact did not drink, sang a religious song, “Jesus’ Blood Never Failed Me Yet.” This was not ultimately used in the film, and I was given all the unused sections of tape, including this one.

When I played it at home, I found that his singing was in tune with my piano, and I improvised a simple accompaniment. I noticed, too, that the first section of the song—13 bars in length—formed an effective loop that repeated in a slightly unpredictable way. I took the tape loop to Leicester, where I was working in the Fine Art Department, and copied the loop onto a continuous reel of tape, thinking about perhaps adding an orchestrated accompaniment to this. The door of the recording room opened onto one of the large painting studios, and I left the tape copying, with the door open, while I went to have a cup of coffee. When I came back I found the normally lively room unnaturally subdued. People were moving about much more slowly than usual, and a few were sitting alone, quietly weeping.

I was puzzled until I realized that the tape was still playing and that they had been overcome by the old man’s singing. This convinced me of the emotional power of the music and of the possibilities offered by adding a simple, though gradually evolving, orchestral accompaniment that respected the tramp’s nobility and simple faith. Although he died before he could hear what I had done with his singing, the piece remains as an eloquent but understated testimony to his spirit and optimism.

—*Gavin Bryars*

*(Source: gavinbryars.com; reprinted with permission.)*

### Partita for 8 Voices

The score’s inscription reads: “Partita is a simple piece. Born of a love of surface and structure, of the human voice, of dancing and tired ligaments, of music, and of our basic desire to draw a line from one point to another.”

Each movement takes a cue from the traditional baroque suite in initial meter and tone, but the familiar historic framework is soon stretched and broken, through “speech, whispers, sighs, murmurs, wordless melodies, and novel vocal effects” (Pulitzer jury citation). Roomful of Teeth’s utterly unique approach to singing and vocal timbre originally helped to inspire and shape the work during its creation, and the ensemble continues to refine and

reconsider the colors and small details with every performance. Allemande opens with the organized chaos of square dance calls overlapping with technical wall drawing directions of the artist Sol LeWitt, suddenly congealing into a bright, angular tune that never keeps its feet on the ground for very long. There are allusions to the movement’s intended simulation of motion and space in the short phrases of text throughout, which are sometimes sung and sometimes embedded as spoken texture.

Sarabande’s quiet restraint in the beginning is punctured in the middle by an ecstatic, belted melody that resolves quietly at the end, followed soon after by the Inuit-inspired hocketed breaths of Courante. A wordless quotation of the American folk hymn “Shining Shore” appears at first as a musical non sequitur but later recombines with the rhythmic breaths as this longest movement is propelled to its final gasp. Passacaglia is a set of variations on a repeated chord progression, first experimenting simply with vowel timbre, then expanding into a fuller texture with the return of the Sol LeWitt text. At Passacaglia’s premiere in 2009, there was spontaneous applause and cheering at the explosive return of the D-major chord near the end—so feel free to holler or clap any time if you feel like it.

Of the premiere of Partita, *New York* magazine wrote that I had “discovered a lode of the rarest commodity in contemporary music: joy.” And it is with joy that this piece is meant to be received in years to come.

—*Caroline Shaw*

## About the Artists

### Caroline Shaw

Caroline Adelaide Shaw is a New York–based musician appearing in many different guises. Trained primarily as a violinist from an early age in North Carolina, she is a Grammy-winning singer in Roomful of Teeth and in 2013 became the youngest winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Music, for her enigmatic composition Partita for 8 Voices (also nominated for a Grammy for Best Classical Composition). She will make her solo violin debut in 2015 with the Cincinnati Symphony (MusicNOW). She was the inaugural musician-in-residence at Dumbarton Oaks in fall 2014, and she will be the composer-in-residence for two years (through 2016) with Vancouver’s Music on Main. Shaw has also performed with American Contemporary Music Ensemble (ACME), the Trinity Wall Street Choir, Alarm Will Sound, the Mark Morris Dance Group Ensemble, the Knights, Victoire, the Yehudim, and many others. (And she has appeared incognito as a backup singer or violinist on *Saturday Night Live* with Paul McCartney, on the *Late Show with David Letterman* with The National, and on the *Tonight Show* with the Roots.)

### *Ritornello 2.3*

*Ritornello 2.3* is the newest iteration of a long-term musical project, *Ritornello*, that has its roots in the 17th-century music of Monteverdi and its recent branches in experiments with Roomful of Teeth and ACME.

Sometimes it is the smallest things that return—again and again and again. Sometimes repetition enhances meaning. Reinforces meaning. Depletes it, warps it. Envelopes it. The simplest words, when repeated aloud, develop a strangeness that is delightful and chilling at the same time. Repetition folds and unfolds a signifier until the relationship between the signifier and the signified breaks down, articulated best in fragments and distilled to something nonverbal. Elusive semiotic theory aside, this, I think, is where some of our music comes from. And maybe this is why some music keeps coming back.

*Ritornello* does not exist in a single, finished form. It’s designed intentionally as a general project that could expand and contract like an accordion (or be unfolded and folded and unfolded again, slightly differently each time). I know that it will be something I return to, again and again, for many years.

—*Caroline Shaw*

to perform barefoot whenever possible). Shaw loves the color yellow, avocados, otters, salted chocolate, kayaking, Beethoven opus 74, Mozart opera, the smell of rosemary, and the sound of a janky mandolin.

### American Contemporary Music Ensemble (ACME)

The American Contemporary Music Ensemble (ACME), celebrating its 10th season in 2014–2015, is dedicated to the outstanding performance of masterworks from the 20th and 21st centuries, primarily the work of American composers. The ensemble presents fresh work by living composers alongside the classics of the contemporary. ACME’s dedication to new music extends across genres and has earned them a reputation among both classical and rock crowds. NPR calls them “contemporary music dynamos,” and the *New York Times* describes ACME’s performances as “vital,” “brilliant,” and “electrifying.” *Time Out New York* reports, “[Artistic Director Clarice] Jensen has earned a sterling reputation for her fresh, inclusive mix of minimalists, maximalists, eclectics and newcomers.” ACME has performed at leading venues across the country including (Le) Poisson Rouge, Carnegie Hall, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Joyce Theater, Noguchi Museum, Whitney Museum, Guggenheim Museum, Columbia University’s Miller Theatre, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Symphony Space, Stanford Live, UCLA’s Royce Hall, Virginia Tech, Newman Center at the University of Denver, Flynn Center, South Milwaukee Performing Arts Center, Montclair State’s Peak Performances, and All Tomorrow’s Parties in the UK, among others. ACME can be heard on the New World Records and New Amsterdam Records labels.

ACME’s instrumentation is flexible and includes some of New York’s most sought-after, engaging musicians. Core ACME members include violinists Caleb Burhans, Ben Russell, Caroline Shaw, Yuki Numata Resnick, and Laura Lutzke; violists Nadia Sirota and Caitlin Lynch; cellist and artistic director Clarice Jensen; flutists Alex Sopp and Andrew Rehrig; pianist Timo Andres; and percussionist Chris Thompson. Since its first New York concert season in 2004, the ensemble has performed works by John Adams, John Luther Adams, Louis Andriessen, Gavin Bryars, Caleb Burhans, John Cage, Elliott Carter, George Crumb, Jacob Druckman, Jefferson Friedman, Philip Glass, Charles Ives, Donald Martino, Olivier Messiaen, Nico Muhly, Michael Nyman, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, Frederic Rzewski, Arnold Schoenberg, Caroline Shaw, Toru Takemitsu, Kevin Volans, Charles Wuorinen, Iannis Xenakis,

Chen Yi, and more. ACME has also collaborated with bands and artists including Grizzly Bear, Low, Matmos, Craig Wedren, Micachu & The Shapes, and composers/performers Hauschka, Jóhann Jóhannsson, Max Richter, and Dustin O’Halloran.

ACME was founded by cellist Clarice Jensen, conductor Donato Cabrera, and publicist Christina Jensen and has received support from The Aaron Copland Fund for Music, New Music USA’s Cary New Music Performance Fund, and the Greenwall Foundation. **acmemusic.org**.

### Roomful of Teeth

Founded in 2009 by Brad Wells, Roomful of Teeth is a vocal project dedicated to mining the expressive potential of the human voice. Through study with masters from nonclassical traditions the world over, the eight-voice ensemble continually expands its vocabulary of singing techniques and, through an ongoing commissioning project, invites today’s brightest composers to create a new repertoire without borders.

The ensemble gathers annually at Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (Mass MoCA), where they have studied Tuvan throat singing, yodeling, belting, Inuit throat singing, Korean P’ansori, Georgian singing, Sardinian cantu a tenòre, Hindustani music, and Persian classical singing with some of the world’s top performers and teachers of the styles. Commissioned composers include Rinde Eckert, Judd Greenstein, Caleb Burhans, Merrill Garbus (of tUnE-yArDs), William Brittelle, Sarah Kirkland Snider, Missy Mazzoli, Sam Amidon, and Julia Wolfe.

The project’s debut album, *Roomful of Teeth*, was released in 2012 and was nominated in three categories for the 56th Grammy Awards in 2014, including Best Engineer for Classical Album, Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance, and Best Contemporary Classical Composition for Caroline Shaw’s Partita for 8 Voices. The album subsequently received a Grammy for Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance.

In April 2013, ensemble member Caroline Shaw received the Pulitzer Prize for Music for Partita, the four movements of which appear on the group’s debut album. Composed over three summers from 2009 to 2011, in collaboration with Roomful of Teeth during their residencies at Mass MoCA, Partita is the only Pulitzer awarded to an a cappella vocal work. An iTunes exclusive EP of Partita was subsequently released and ranked no. 1 on iTunes Classical charts.