

CU ★ PRESENTS

COLLEGE OF MUSIC 2025-26 EVENTS



College of Music
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CU Boulder is a **SMOKE-FREE CAMPUS**.



Photo credit: Owen Zhou.

Faculty Tuesdays

Quite the Pair

Nathan Mertens, saxophone

Gillian Blair, saxophone

Margaret McDonald, piano

Tuesday, Oct. 21, 2025, 7:30 p.m.

Grusin Music Hall

PROGRAM

The Other Dust (2018)

Lucy Armstrong (she/her)

Two Canvases (2025, World Premiere)

Robert Spillman (he/him)

I. Monet

II. Rousseau

as one (2019)

Jack Roberts (he/him)

Fine As Gucci (2025, World Premiere)

Gracie Fagan (she/her)

Ballad in Memory of Shirley Horn (2005)

Richard Rodney Bennett (she/her)

Saxophone Concerto (2024)

Lucy Armstrong (she/her)

I. Extremely Joyful

Chōjū-Jinbutsu-Giga (2015)

Nobuhito Sato (he/him)

- I. Prelude
- II. Scroll 1
- III. Scroll 2
- IV. Scroll 3
- V. Scroll 4

Far Away (2008)

Takatsugu Muramatsu (he/him)

PERSONNEL

Margaret McDonald, piano

Nathan Mertens, saxophone

Gillian Blair

Praised for her “flawless and accomplished” performances (Peterborough Telegraph) and “honest and genuine music-making” (D’Addario Competition), Gillian Blair enjoys a varied career as a concert saxophonist, chamber musician and educator. She has won first prize in competitions including the International Young Musician Competition at the Llangollen Eisteddfod, the D’addario Single Reed Competition, the RNCM Woodwind Competition, the Charles Scarratt Award for Young Musicians and the RNCM’s Sir John Manduell Prize.

As a soloist, she has performed around Europe, North America and Asia at festivals and concert series’ including the BBC Proms, EurSax, Koganei Miyajigakki Hall (Tokyo), PepsiCo Recital Hall (Texas), University of Arkansas, World Saxophone Congress, Oklahoma State University, North American Saxophone Alliance Conference, the Palaver Festival and several broadcasts on BBC Radio 3. She has appeared as a guest soloist with ensembles including the Band of the Coldstream Guards, Commonwealth String Orchestra, Piccadilly Symphony Orchestra, University of Arkansas Saxophone Ensemble, City of Peterborough Symphony Orchestra, Wirral Symphony Orchestra, Bolton Chamber Orchestra, the RNCM Percussion Ensemble and the RNCM Saxophone Orchestra. In June 2023, Blair gave the premiere of Lucy Armstrong’s Saxophone Concerto with the Arch Sinfonia in London. In November 2022, Blair released her debut solo album *Infinite*

Stories. This project focuses on works which have been inspired, commissioned or composed by women. The album includes collaborations with pianist Lauryna Sableviciute and two works with string ensemble.

Blair is a keen advocate of new music and has commissioned numerous works as a soloist and for her various chamber ensembles from emerging and established composers including Gary Carpenter, Zack Browning, Lucy Armstrong, Tom Harrold, Lucy Pankhurst, Paul Mitchell-Davidson, Grace Evangeline Mason, Andrew Boss, Esther Swift, Jenni Watson and Melissa Douglas.

Blair is passionate about chamber music and performs regularly with the Polaris Duo (saxophone and harp) and the Borealis Saxophone Quartet. Both ensembles have enjoyed competition success and have performed in some of the U.K.'s most prestigious venues as well as performances overseas in Croatia and Serbia. A decade-long collaboration with American saxophonist Nathan Mertens has led to joint commissions of several works for two saxophones and piano. They have given performances and masterclasses in Japan, the U.K., the U.S. and Croatia, and are looking forward to recording their commissioned works in the coming year.

Larger ensembles that Blair has worked with include the Halle Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra of Opera North, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Manchester Concert Orchestra, London Concert Orchestra, European Union Youth Wind Orchestra and the Tenor Saxophone Collective.

Blair holds bachelor's and master's degrees from the Royal Northern College of Music, where she was a finalist in the RNCM's prestigious Concerto and Gold Medal competitions and received scholarships from the Oglesby Charitable Trust, the Helen Mackaness Award and the Countess of Munster Trust. Upon graduating, Blair was awarded the Timothy Reynish Award for outstanding contribution to the RNCM. She has received tuition and appeared in masterclasses with acclaimed international artists and studied at the renowned l'Université Européenne de Saxophone in Gap, France.

Blair is an active educator. She is a saxophone and chamber music tutor at the Junior Royal Northern College of Music, Saxophone Tutor at the University of Sheffield and Saxophone and Clarinet Tutor at the Grange School, and has previously taught at the Universities of Bangor and Huddersfield. She has presented masterclasses around the U.K. and U.S. and enjoys leading workshops for woodwind days and summer schools throughout the U.K.

Blair is a Henri Selmer Paris Artist and a Vandoren UK Artist.

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*Photos: On this page, University Chorus, Fall 2024.
Photo credit: Erika O'Connor; On the cover, Cross-
Genre Ensemble, 2025. Photo credit: Owen Zhou.*

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*The Drowsy Chaperone (2023).
Photo credit: Bennet Forsyth.*

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