

GCSU Department of Music

Guest Artist Recital

Playing with Words

Nicole Brancato, piano

Monday, Sept. 28, 2026, 7:30 p.m.

Max Noah Recital Hall

Livestreamed: www.youtube.com/@gcsumusicdept or

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCZPcWL7iNQ>



Program

Tonight's program will be announced from the stage.

Rather than listing individual works in advance, this program invites the audience to experience each musical moment as it unfolds, with titles, stories, and context revealed at different points throughout the evening. Nicole guides listeners through a blend of pianism, poetry, spoken word, contemporary techniques, and electroacoustic sound, bringing together several of her interdisciplinary projects to explore how music, language, sound, and imagination can inform one another.

This format is inspired in part by the practice of Claude Debussy, who placed the titles of his *Préludes* after rather than before the music, allowing pianists to form their own impressions before encountering the composer's words.

As the program unfolds, additional context and connections will be shared from the stage. You are invited to listen openly, follow your own associations, and discover where the music leads as its stories and meanings are revealed.

Program Note

Ever since I was a child, I've heard stories in music, and music in stories. At the piano, each piece in the classical canon insisted on having its own plot and characters, unfolding anew each time I practiced. And when I read books or poetry, the words would evoke such vivid flashes of melody and harmony that I'd find myself making my way back to the piano to discover what they were saying. For me, these worlds have never existed separately.

Playing with Words is where I've let those ideas run loose. Through original piano works, improvisation, poetry, storytelling, and electroacoustic sound, the program explores what happens when language and music are allowed to speak to one another without regard for disciplinary boundaries. Sometimes the music uncovers something hidden in the words; sometimes the words reveal something that was already waiting inside the music.

Performed from the piano with live narration woven throughout, the program recreates this way of listening. Some moments unfold through expansive musical textures, while others grow from a single word, memory, or image, the kind that arrives fully formed and simply asks to be followed. Together, they invite listeners into a space where music can be read like a story and stories can be heard like music.

At its heart, *Playing with Words* is an invitation to listen with curiosity, openness, and without needing to know exactly where one art form ends and another begins.

Biography

Nicole Brancato makes music to unlock wonder. Fascinated with contemporary expressions of our shared human experience, the NYC-based pianist merges curation, composition, and performance in collaborations across the arts.

Described as “brilliant” and an “immense talent” (*New York Magazine* and *Connect Savannah*), Nicole is “redefining the very notion of classical music” (*Atención San Miguel*). Her credits range from the Guggenheim Museum (NYC), Rai Italia, and the Banff Centre (Canada) to Lincoln Center, Bellas Artes (Mexico), and Brooklyn's underground warehouse scene.

Over the past decade, Nicole has curated more than 100 productions featuring over 200 new works and commissions. Her work has earned more than 50 international awards, honors, and grants, including the New York Foundation for the Arts (2024, 2022), National Sawdust's Hildegard Commission (2022), and the New York State Council on the Arts (2026, 2024). She was a 2024 recipient of the IPaT/GTRI Research & Engagement Grant for *Democratizing Creative Agency through Interactive Technologies and Music Education*, a project bridging engineering and music.

Commissioned by Pure.Art Circle (Italy, 2024), Nicole created *Infinitesimal*, a “desperately moving and intimate” (*Harmonious World*) chamber opera, in partnership with baritone/theater artist Jeremy Weiss. A genre-shattering work for voice, piano, and electronics, *Infinitesimal* interweaves memoir with cutting-edge research on near-death experiences to illuminate what connects us all. Directed by Kevin Newbury (Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera) and hailed as “moving and sensitively crafted” (*Art Bath NYC*), *Infinitesimal* has been presented at the Conservatoire de Pantin (Paris), World Heart Beat Theatre (London), and Bolzano Art Weeks (Italy), and was in residence at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music.

Her multimedia commissioning project *The Illustrated Pianist* — featured in *The San Francisco Chronicle* and KALW Open Air — honors the centenary of the science fiction author Ray Bradbury. The project has been described as “ingenious,” “mysterious,” and “inspiring,” and featured 24 new commissions by new commissions by the likes of Adam Tandler, Anthony de Mare, and Kathleen Supové, as well as Brancato's own work. Nicole's modern big band project *The Titanics* reimagined chart-topping songs with dozens of guest comedians and actors, including Jackie Hoffman and Justin Vivian Bond. During its residency at the Cutting Room and the Ace Hotel, the big band made special appearances at Joe's Pub and for HBO, and was lauded in *The New Yorker* and *Time Out New York*.

Described as a “piano virtuoso” (*The Daily Gazette*, Saratoga Springs), Nicole approaches performance as a kinetic exchange between collaborators and audience alike. In 2021, she began her partnership with visual artist Douglas Paulson to create *.soundfulness*: a sculptural piano installation that transforms outdoor spaces into places of deep listening, including Socrates Sculpture Park, Make Music New York (headlining artist), and Flux Factory. Her collaborators have also included artist and author Sam Morris in “wait-list-only” performances at actor Alan Cumming's NYC club.

With Duo Extempore, she and bassist Evan Jagels have created cross-disciplinary films and site-specific performances featuring everything from improvisation-based storytelling to amplified plant biorhythms. And at the Guggenheim, Nicole participated in a “night at the museum” multimedia staging of Satie's *Vexations* with Christian Wolff, Philip Corner, David Del Tredici, and Joshua Rifkin — all of whom performed in John Cage's legendary premiere of the work in 1963.

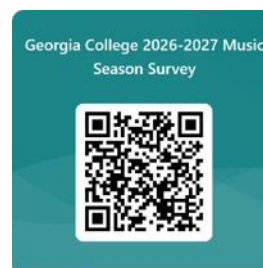
A frequent guest presenter of workshops, master classes, and residencies, Nicole has delivered sessions for the Gesellschaftshaus Magdeburg (Germany); Lunigiana International Music Festival (Italy); Columbia University; and universities across the US. In 2025, she joined the Georgia Institute of Technology Research Institute (GTRI) as Artist in Residence and curriculum specialist, collaborating with researchers to explore new intersections of STEM and arts education.

Nicole was a 2024-2025 Artist in Residence with the New York City Department of Education, curating interdisciplinary critical inquiry projects with public school students over the course of the academic year. Since 2022, she has served as Artistic Director of Seven Hills Chamber Music, curating its acclaimed summer festival of classical and contemporary chamber music, educational programming, and pop-up events in the heart of Virginia.

Nicole holds degrees from CUNY Hunter College, Georgia State University, and Manhattan School of Music. She is a proud Yamaha Artist and a voting member of The Recording Academy.

www.nicolebrancato.com

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Jazz Jam Session at Amici Café Tuesday, Sept. 29, 7-9 p.m. Amici Café Downtown Milledgeville	GCSU Saxophone & Flute Studio Recital Andrew Allen & Elise Naber-Allen, directors Lev Ryabinin and Hue Jang, piano Sunday, Oct. 4, 3 p.m. Max Noah Recital Hall	Faculty and Guest Artist Recital <i>Northern Echoes</i> Bryan Hall, violin Allison Gagnon, piano Tuesday, Oct. 6, 7:30 p.m. Max Noah Recital Hall	Faculty Recital Kristina Sell, oboe Laurie Peebles, flute Rebecca Cooke, clarinet Hue Jang, piano Thursday, Oct. 15, 7:30 p.m. Max Noah Recital Hall
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