

Europerras 1 & 2

November 8-10, 2018



Press Recap

PREVIEWS

LA Times: <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-fall-arts-preview-events-20180914-story.html#laphil>

September 14, 2018

‘Dear Evan Hansen,’ LA Phil’s centennial season and 71 more arts events to check out this fall

With the new fall season comes a whole new list of cultural events, exhibits and shows.

This season’s highlights include the Los Angeles premiere of the Tony-winning Broadway sensation “Dear Evan Hansen,” Chinese artist Ai Weiwei’s first substantive solo show and a slew of special programming timed to celebrate the L.A. Phil’s centennial season.

Below, Los Angeles Times critics and writers guide you through the season in art, books, dance, theater, music and more. For more in-depth coverage of what’s to come, explore our complete fall arts preview.

Fluxus Festival: Cage’s ‘Europeras’ 1 & 2

John Cage’s exhilarating, funny and surprisingly moving crazy-quilt of arias, sets, costumes and individual orchestral parts from different historic European operas will get its West Coast premiere (and first home-grown performance by any American arts institution) in a production by Yuval Sharon. Sony Picture Studios, 10202 Washington Blvd, Culver City. \$40-\$55. (323) 850-2000. www.laphil.com

Nov. 8-10

LA Weekly: <https://www.laweekly.com/arts/fluxus-festival-a-ritual-convening-around-shared-sound-10004550>

Fluxus Festival: A Ritual Convening Around Shared Sound

By: Falling James / October 26, 2018

What is salad? Is making a salad music?" Christopher Rountree wonders. The leader of the local experimental music ensemble wild Up is talking specifically about visual artist Alison Knowles' very literal 1962 performance art/music piece Proposition #2: Make a Salad, but he also could be describing the Fluxus Festival that he's curating for L.A. Philharmonic over the next eight months.

The festival, which occurs primarily at Disney Hall and runs through June, celebrates the madcap collision of art, music, words and ideas from the contrarian group of multidisciplinary artists who composed the Fluxus scene in the 1960s and '70s. Fluxus — whose name evokes Henry Miller's autobiographical trilogy of novels Sexus, Plexus and Nexus — was actually a movement that celebrated the process of creation over the finished work and raised numerous questions about the definitions of, and barriers between, art and music.

"Our bent is focusing on sound, but all this work lives within the art world," Rountree, 35, explains in a phone interview while parked on a Silver Lake street. "It just happens to be in a music building." He surmises that L.A. Phil's Fluxus Festival might be the biggest and most ambitious homage to Fluxus yet.

"I think it's a fair statement," concurs Nancy Perloff, curator of the modern and contemporary collection at the Getty Research Institute, which has a large collection of Fluxus material and is assisting Rountree and L.A. Phil with the festival. "I personally have never seen anything on this scale."



Ragnar Kjartansson Elisabet Davids

The festival, which commenced with a provocative participatory workshop at the Getty Center on Oct. 14, and a barely noticed performance-art action that was hidden among the thousands of bicyclists pedaling along the streets of Los Angeles during the orchestra's CicLAvia party on Sept. 30, will total 16 events

across L.A. Phil's 100th-anniversary season. The next Fluxus-related concert occurs on Tuesday, Nov. 6, when visually inventive director Yuval Sharon stages a new interpretation of composer John Cage's *Europerras* amid the imposing backdrop of film sets at Sony Pictures Studios in Culver City.

But the most ambitious part of the festival will occur on Saturday, Nov. 17, when conductor-curator Rountree and director R.B. Schlather present *Fluxconcert*, a massive tribute involving works by artist-composers La Monte Young, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Ken Friedman, Knowles, Cage and others, which will occur both inside and outside Disney Hall.

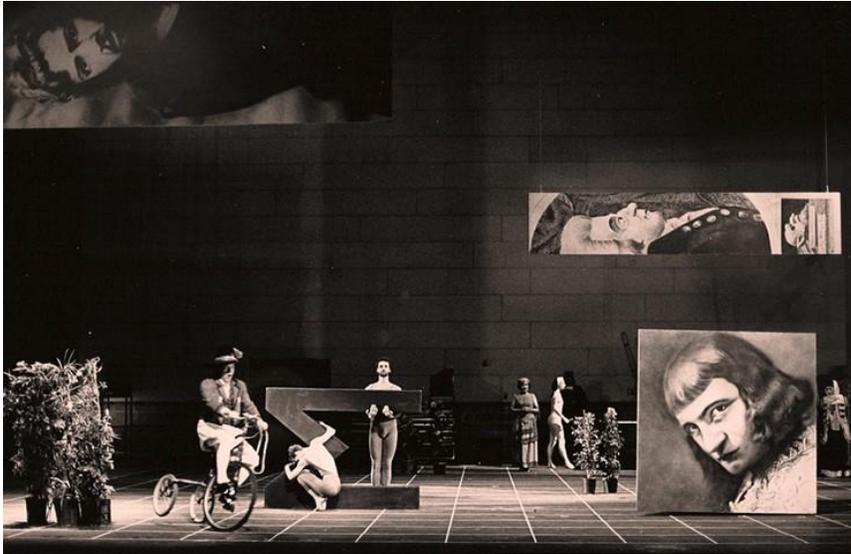
"He's kind of the master of ceremonies," Rountree says about Schlather, half-jokingly describing the director's piece *Karaoke* as "mandatory karaoke [by the audience before being allowed] to find their seats."

Fluxconcert is so big, it will be delivered in three separate parts on Nov. 17. The first section centers on a slowly unwinding, two-hour extract from Young and light artist Marian Zazeela's *The Second Dream of the High-Tension Line Stepdown Transformer*, which is part of Young's sprawling and hypnotic *The Four Dreams of China*. The second part includes pieces by Pauline Oliveros, George Maciunas, Ono, Friedman and Knowles that blur the line between performance art and avant-garde music. The third section encompasses more works by art-musical adventurers Luciano Berio, Dick Higgins, Paik, Ono, Cage and Young alongside the world premiere of Steven Takasugi's *Howl*, a piece commissioned by L.A. Phil.

"We have 50 pieces happening simultaneously or consecutively all around the hall," Rountree says about the second portion of *Fluxconcert*. "There will be a carnival feel; some of these pieces have a madness to them. We want people to be surprised. [These works] are like Einsteinian thought experiments. Some of these pieces, they happen in your brain only," he adds. "So many of these pieces took six months to work on, and they're going to be over in a minute."

One of Ken Friedman's works, *Sonata for Melons and Gravity*, involves the sight and sound of watermelons hurled from the roof of Disney Hall down into an amplified trough. Higgins' *The Thousand Symphonies*, meanwhile, utilizes two long strips of blank manuscript paper that have been shot up by automatic machine-gun fire and then arranged by Rountree into something resembling a musical score.

Because machine guns are now illegal to own in California, the conductor had to hire shooters who have grandfathered permits to use the weapons. "It's about chance, but then I start to put some filter to it," Rountree says about overlaying a kind of musical pattern to the assemblage of holes and torn paper, which will be mounted at Disney Hall on a large wooden sculpture by installation artist Elise McMahon. "Maybe you should shoot a little more over here," Rountree recalls instructing the shooters as part of his arrangement. *The Thousand Symphonies* is a three-headed piece that literally blasts away the distinctions between art and music. "You'd have similar patterns that would occur but in different parts of the page. I'm creating a big matrix in addition to what's on the pages. It will exist as a sculpture that the audience can walk up to, then a video with clips of [the shooting] event, and then the orchestra interprets it."



Europeras 1 & 2 (Schiller #3) by Beatriz Schiller
Courtesy John Cage Trust

It is one of many Fluxus Festival works that invite questions about “what music is, how much of it overlaps with performance, and how much of it overlaps with ritual,” Rountree proposes. “How are all these pieces music — if they are music? We want people to see them and form an opinion whether it’s music or not. Many of the Fluxus pieces exist as polemics — they make people fall on one side of the fence or the other. Music is a ritual convening around shared sound.”

The rituals at Fluxconcert encompass everything from Knowles’ aptly titled *Wounded Furniture*, which celebrates the percussive sounds of tables being axed to bits, to the concert’s in-house mixologist, Arley Marks, who will serve specialty cocktails. “One of the tenets of Fluxus is that art is all around you,” Rountree continues. “What do we say when the bar is now a piece? On every side, no matter where everybody looks, they will be besieged by art.”

Despite all that dizzying and head-spinning activity, the major focus at the Fluxconcert will be on the program’s compositions by La Monte Young and John Cage. “He is absolutely central to all this work, even if he doesn’t think he’s the [Fluxus] type,” Rountree says of Young. “Fluxus is such a strange movement. Many of [the artists] say, ‘I’m not a Fluxus artist.’ La Monte says, ‘I don’t think of myself as Fluxus but I do feel that I’ve birthed the movement.’”

“La Monte is pleased about *The Second Dream* being performed,” says Perloff, who is working with Getty Research Institute chief curator and associate director Marcia Reed in assisting Rountree and L.A. Phil. (She and Reed have even been enlisted to perform Friedman’s piece *Explaining Fluxus* at Fluxconcert — “We don’t even know what we’re doing,” Perloff admits.)

“He’s playing a very, very strong role,” Perloff says of Young. Although the composer will be unable to attend Fluxconcert in person, she says that Young is ensuring the work will be “performed in a light and sound environment” designed by his wife, Zazeela. “The work is more about light and sound and duration than about Fluxus. ... La Monte has always been interested in duration — ‘How long is it going to be? When do I stop?’” she points out.

“Chris is expanding the definition of Fluxus by including John Cage, David Lang” and other composers who are not technically part of Fluxus, Perloff says, noting Rountree’s “intentionally fluid, spontaneous quality.” Discussing Cage, she says, “With Cage, it becomes a little more complex. Cage is in his own space. I don’t think most Cage scholars would call him a Fluxus composer. Cage didn’t want to be called

a Fluxus composer but he was heavily influential on Fluxus. ... His method of 'chance operation' was very, very influential on Fluxus composers."

Cage's Apartment House 1776, written during the U.S. Bicentennial as a celebration of this nation's multiplicity of voices and beliefs, will be performed at Fluxconcert by an unusual assortment of disparate singers, including R&B/soul stylist Georgia Anne Muldrow, jazz vocalist Dwight Trible, Brazilian performer Rodrigo Amarante, gentle folk singer Mia Doi Todd and even hard-rock party warrior Andrew W.K.

"It's such a beautiful piece for this time in history," Rountree says, citing the intersection of history, religion and family relationships that takes place in Apartment House 1776. "Describing these pieces to the performers is also difficult — 'I can't control what key it's in!'"

Despite Cage's aversion to being lumped in with Fluxus, parts one and two of his late-career 1987 Europeras are being included as part of Fluxus Festival, with performances by L.A. Phil New Music Group and a host of adventurous local opera vocalists at Sony Pictures Studios on Tuesday, Nov. 6; Saturday, Nov. 10; and Sunday, Nov. 11. The work is hardly a traditional opera, and Cage once famously joked, "For 200 years, the Europeans have been sending us their operas. Now I'm sending them back."

"Europeras fit into Fluxus," Rountree insists. "This is so in line with the way Cage wanted his work performed," he adds about the visual presentation from the Industry mastermind Yuval Sharon, who's in the midst of a three-year residency with L.A. Phil. "Yuval is so brilliant at creating a circumstance and waiting for it to play out. ... What happens when we put all sorts of things together that one might think might not work together? We don't know how they're going to work," Rountree admits.

Given Fluxus' original impetus as a multidimensional, multidisciplinary and immediate reaction to the turbulent era of the 1960s and early '70s, how can the Fluxus Festival avoid coming off as merely nostalgic?

"One of my goals is to not just present the historical hits of Fluxus," Rountree says. "Performance art and process pieces are a huge part of what contemporary art is made of. The aim of classical music seems to be changing, to be more performative. Classical music is [historically] about definitions of what is music and what is not, but [in the future] classical music will be more about creativity than replication. It's like we're making new Fluxus pieces now."

"I have seen a lot of Fluxus [revival] performances that were bad, trite and just very silly," Perloff says. "The way Chris directed the performance of Ben Patterson's Instruction No. 2 (Please Wash Your Face) was serious — a serious activity that he did very carefully and methodically," she says of the performance by members of L.A. Philharmonic that literally involved washing their faces at the Fluxus workshop at the Getty Center in October. She describes Instruction No. 2 as "a quintessential Fluxus piece ... collapsing the distinctions between art and life."

Many Fluxus pieces challenge traditionally trained classical musicians by utilizing enigmatic "event scores," such as George Brecht's Drip Music, which are little more than simple descriptions that are left to open-ended interpretations. The event score for La Monte Young's Piano Piece for David Tudor No. 1, for instance, says little more than to "Bring a bale of hay and a bucket of water onstage for the piano to eat and drink." The thrashed piano, stuffed with hay, "is retelling its own story of being destroyed. The thing about Fluxus is that they destroyed a lot of instruments," says Rountree, who estimates that three pianos and at least one violin will be sacrificed in the name of art during the Fluxus Festival.

The only instruction in Young's event score for #10, from his Compositions 1960, is "Draw a straight line and follow it," so L.A. Phil bassist David Allen Moore and wild Up bassoonist Archie Carey dutifully got a dry-line marker (the kind used for marking chalk lines on baseball diamonds) and left a line of blue chalk as they paraded through L.A. Phil's CicLAvia event in late September. Although L.A. Phil had gotten

permission beforehand from the LAPD and L.A.'s Department of Transportation, the duo were only a mile into their route when puzzled cops halted their performance. "To us, it felt innocuous and somewhat meditative. These pieces are a process," Rountree muses. "Whenever they stop is the right moment."

Upcoming Fluxus events at Disney Hall include the world premiere of visual artist Ryoji Ikeda's 100 Cymbals (which will require 60 percussionists) paired with Knowles' Proposition #2: Make a Salad (Feb. 15); a day celebrating the performance art and music of Yoko Ono (March 22); a solo performance by radical violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja (April 6); wild Up's rendition of Ragnar Kjartansson's Bliss, a maddening repetition of a theme by Mozart (May 25); and David Lang's Crowd Out, which utilizes the entire audience (June 1). Other Fluxus-style works will be interspersed among L.A. Phil's more traditional classical-music performances, such as an installation of Young's Piano Piece for David Tudor No. 1, which will appear during pianist Emanuel Ax's concert of selections by Beethoven and Mozart (May 2-5).

"Can you repeat something so often past exhaustion and go into bliss?" Rountree wonders about Bliss, which takes two minutes from W.A. Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and repeats it for 12 (!) hours. "They will feed and serve drinks to the orchestra onstage. Twice during the piece, there will be a feast," he adds about wild Up's only appearance at the Fluxus Festival.

"It's been an expensive project to make, and I'm proud of L.A. Phil for taking it on," Rountree says. "I think when you have Alison Knowles as a guest, you have to make a lot of salad."

Art Net: <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/art-industry-november-5-2018-1387381>

November 5, 2018

Art Industry News: A Selfie-Taking Girl Squad Knocks Over an Entire Wall of Artworks at a Russian Museum + Other Stories

Plus, Richard Prince launches a Stormy Daniels top with Supreme and Qatar's National Museum gets an opening date.

Art Industry News is a daily digest of the most consequential developments coming out of the art world and art market. Here's what you need to know this Monday, November 5.

FOR ART'S SAKE

LA Philharmonic Takes Fluxus Opera to Hollywood – The LA Phil is performing works by [Yoko Ono](#), John Cage, and [Nam June Paik](#), among others, as part of its centennial season's Fluxus Festival. John Cage's opera *Europas 1 & 2* will take over a soundstage at Sony Studios in Hollywood on November 6, 10, and 11. The 1987 opera, Cage's first, mixes up and layers fragments from 64 European operas. The full season is supported by LA's Getty Research Institute. (Press release)

KUSC: <https://www.kusc.org/culture/arts-alive-blog/yuval-sharon-europeras/>

Yuval Sharon on John Cage and Crafting an American Work from a European Tradition

By: Sheila Tepper / November 7, 2018



Yuval Sharon at the KUSC Studios | Photo by Susie Goodman

Yuval Sharon is the Artistic Director of LA's experimental opera company [The Industry](#), and he's in the midst of a three-year residency with the LA Phil. His latest project with the Phil is an ambitious production of [John Cage's *Europaras 1 & 2*](#) taking place this weekend at the Sony Pictures Lot in Culver City. Sharon says it's a "true delight", but also a major challenge for everyone involved in the performance. He told KUSC contributing reporter Sheila Tepper about how he tackled the challenge, and how Cage created the piece from the perspective of an American outsider artist looking at the European "center" of the classical world.

<https://youtu.be/go4HYld30Zw>

REVIEWS

LA Times: <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-laphil-europeras-review-20181107-story.html>

Review: As L.A. voted, John Cage's anarchic 'Europeras 1 & 2' set the tone for election day

By: Mark Swed / November 7, 2018



The Los Angeles Philharmonic's West Coast premiere of John Cage's "Europeras 1 & 2" in a production directed by Yuval Sharon at the Sony Studios on Tuesday. (Craig T. Mathew / Los Angeles Philharmonic)

“For two hundred years the Europeans have been sending us their operas,” John Cage once wrote only half jokingly about his “Europeras 1 & 2.”

“Now I’m sending them back.”

That’s about as good of ad copy as you will find, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic has understandably latched on to it in its promotion of what is technically the work’s West Coast premiere.

The premiere, directed by Yuval Sharon and a co-production between the orchestra and his company, The Industry, took place Tuesday night (with further performances Saturday and Sunday) in the unlikely location of Soundstage 23 on the Sony Studios lot in Culver City. Not only could this wind up being the most audacious, let alone dauntingly complex, event in the orchestra’s dauntingly audacious centennial season, it is much more than a West Coast premiere.

This is, astonishingly, the first American effort to send back home a milestone in American opera.

An effort will be required to understand why a singer dressed as a Chinese warrior sings an aria from Mozart's "Marriage of Figaro," and why a mermaid is in the picture. What's up with the maid wearing a welding helmet hitting a rubber anvil placed on a sawhorse? And how about that barber dressed for a disco of yore singing the Toreador Song from "Carmen" while cutting hair? Or the Cleopatra standing in front of a painting of snowy pines, while every member of the orchestra is playing something different, and the lighting and dancers are going their own way?

We need context.

"Europeras 1 & 2" was commissioned by Frankfurt Opera as part of the celebration of the composer's 75th birthday in 1987 and given its first performance in December of that year. Cage had never shown much interest in opera. As far as I could tell, the only operas he cared for were by Mozart (his favorite classical composer) or Arnold Schoenberg (his teacher), although he fell in love with Verdi's "Falstaff" when he heard it in Frankfurt while preparing "Europeras."

He was serious about the shipping of European opera, lock, stock and barrel. His idea was for the opera company to delight in all that it had. A packrat himself, Cage found a way for a large European opera house to retrieve the old costumes and sets and yellowing pages of orchestral parts molding away in storage and has given them new life and new light. The same would go with old operas.

Nineteen opera singers, each a different voice type, were asked to select arias from operas in the public domain. Mind-bogglingly intricate computer-generated chance operations based on coin throws for the Chinese oracle "I Ching" were used to determine when something was sung, what the lighting would be, what the costumes would be, as well as the action and just about everything. Each member of the orchestra had individual parts to play, also taken, by chance, from 49 operas in public domain.

Nothing could happen, there could be silence, or you could have six arias being sung simultaneously in front of heaven-knows-what backdrops surrounded onstage by any old thing.

Dancers dressed in black served as the singer's shadows and helped guide them. Bodies were the only element not suitable for collision.

There was even more.

A tape collage of 101 operas played at once was occasionally broadcast, serving as a kind of operatic wind blowing through the auditorium. No conductor tells anyone what to do. "Europera 1" lasts exactly 90 minutes and "Europera 2," 45. A large clock keeps track.

The result proved unbelievably beautiful and powerfully moving.

There was an Old World elegance to this operatic antique shop of costumes and decor. There was also intensity of the concentration required by singers to remain superbly focused individuals, in the midst of all the noise around them. What "Europeras" proved in the end was a celebration of humanity.

But how to bring what I would assert is America's most profound comic opera back to America? No one has, until now, tried. Frankfurt Opera imported its production, along with 150 members of its company, to a summer festival outside New York City in 1988. That's been the last of it. There have been other European productions and what I've seen of them, unimpressive.

The problem, of course, is that "Europeras" is "their" operas. Few American opera houses have the resources. But even if they do, using them in this way goes completely against the deeper implication that "Europeras" is cleansing the New World of the Old.

Sharon's fascinating idea was to employ the Sony studios. Let all their old costumes and props and painted backdrops be excavated. That's what resonates with Americans — and especially with Angelenos. Plus a soundstage is a pretty cool and acoustically lively space. It's not a European-style opera house and getting there adds to the sense of adventure.

What is lost is the elegance.

The performance was for the most part brilliant but brash. As the mastermind of "Hopscotch," the mobile opera, Sharon has shown he is the world's most adroit stage director when it comes to logistics, which makes him the ideal traffic cop for the "Europeras 1 & 2" obstacle course.

The 19 singers, too many to name but every one stunning, included many regulars from The Industry and the L.A. new music scene. In Frankfurt, the singers had a huge job overcoming the unfamiliarity of their surroundings and the acoustical challenges of singing against a cacophony. It was hard to get the orchestra players to take their role seriously. At one performance I heard in Frankfurt, after Cage had left town, an obnoxious trombone player started screwing around playing jazz and there were chuckles from the pit.

The members of the L.A. Phil New Music Group, who were seated in two groups on either side of the stage, were a joy, although too much of a joy at times. Rather than being in the pit, in their own sound world, they were right there in your face competing with the singers, and things got a little intense at times. Wagner stood out.

The movie costumes also had the curious effect of making “Europeras” seem less radical than it does in the opera house. This was for the simple reason that the characters, instead of looking like they came from another century and were now in our century, appeared as they already *were* of our age. In an era of, say, updated “Carmen” productions, the toreador might actually be a barber dressed for the disco.

I could have also used less of the staged silliness. Chance takes care of that perfectly well on its own.

Still, the challenge, and surely one that Cage relished, is that any performance of “Europeras 1 & 2” is a next-to-impossible, yet meaningful, challenge to make relevant, and this was done with full knowledge of what the piece is and what kind of world we live in now.

What I found resonated on election eve remarkably well was the concentration of each performer focusing on what matters no matter what the noise. That alone proved not just exhilarating but downright mood-altering.

LA Dance Chronicle: <http://www.ladancechronicle.com/la-phil-presents-john-cages-provocative-europeras-i-ii-at-sony-pictures-studios/>

LA Phil Presents John Cage's Provocative Europeras I & II at Sony Pictures Studios

By: Jeff Slayton / November 8, 2018



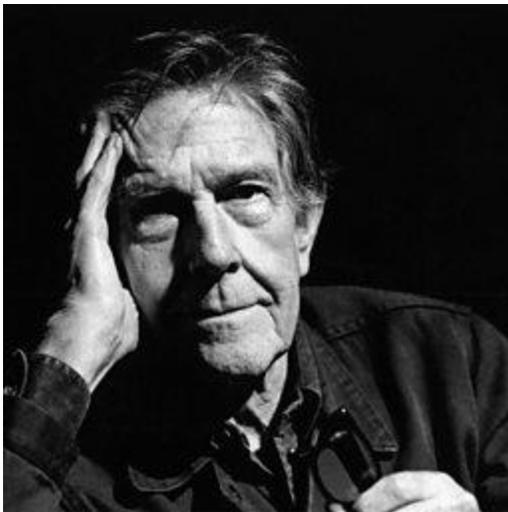
As part of [FLUXUS Festival](#), the [LA Phil New Music Group](#) presented ***Europeras 1 & 2*** at the [Sony Pictures Studios](#) in Culver City on Wednesday, November 6, 2018, with following performances on November 10 and 11. Directed brilliantly by artist-collaborator Yuval Sharon, the performance took place in Sound Stage 23, a high-ceiling, cavernous space equipped with a temporary stage and bleachers. The orchestra was divided and lined along each side of the stage, with a bright red opera house style curtain hung in front.

Europeras I & II was written by the composer who many consider the father of electronic music, John Cage and first performed by the Frankfurt Opera in December of 1987. It was commissioned as part of the celebration of Cage's 75th birthday. An avid student of the *I Ching* and a pioneer in the techniques of indeterminacy, Cage divided the stage into 64 quadrants, incorporated 19 singers, 6 dancers and what felt like an endless assortment of scenic drops, costumes, lighting shifts and whimsically used props arranging from a funeral casket to an old-fashioned bike called *ordinaries* in the 1980s and '90s. Represented throughout the evening were a total of 113 operas. The 19 singers not only sung beautifully against Cage's dissonant and sometimes loud music, but they acted out their roles with sincerity and professionalism as well as a requisite sense of humor.

Large digital clocks were positioned at key points in the room to help the performers keep track of time. Like his partner and colleague Merce Cunningham, Cage was interested in the different elements of his work sharing and being unified by time and space. With Cunningham, the dance and music were connected primarily, if not solely, by the length of the works, and they occurred within the same space or venue. There was no conductor for ***Europeras 1 & 2*** and the same rules of engagement were evident. The musicians, the singers and the dancers each had a time period or schedule that they followed within the score, the arias, the staging and the dance solos. Time was their guide; Sound Stage 23 was their space.

Even if you do not attend with a strong knowledge or love of opera, or the music for which John Cage is so well known, there was an abundance of visual stimulation, humor and irony packed into this stimulating production to help navigate through the 90 minutes of *Europeras 1* and the 45 minutes of *Europeras 2* separated by a 20-minute intermission. I was pleasantly surprised that the vast majority returned for *Europeras 2* considering how Cage's music sometimes sent audiences fleeing from Cunningham concerts.

Where one sat in the audience dictated what one saw and how one saw it. Scenic backdrops continuously flew in and out, blocking off large areas of the space. Wait two minutes, however, and it all shifted again. Cage said, "*What I wanted to do was to have the programs such that if twelve people were sitting in a row each one would be looking at a different opera.*" I read that to make this even more inevitable, he passed out "separate sets of librettos to the audience at the premiere, themselves culled from previous operatic works". Indeed, the synopses insert in my program was different than the one in my partner's program.



Composer John Cage

Cage often toured with Merce Cunningham's dance company when I was also a member of the company. I had the honor to get to talk with him, share meals and to watch him work. Aside from his musical genius and intellect, Cage had an amazing sense of humor and an infectious laugh. That wit shines throughout ***Europeras 1 & 2*** in tandem with his vast knowledge of music, history and the world. Cage could carry on an in-depth conversation with almost anyone on just about any subject. Here, he pokes fun at the art of Opera while clearly demonstrating his knowledge and respect for the genre. As Cage described it, "*For two hundred years the Europeans have been sending us their operas. Now I'm sending them back.*" He did so with a jam-packed production of arias, theater and dance.

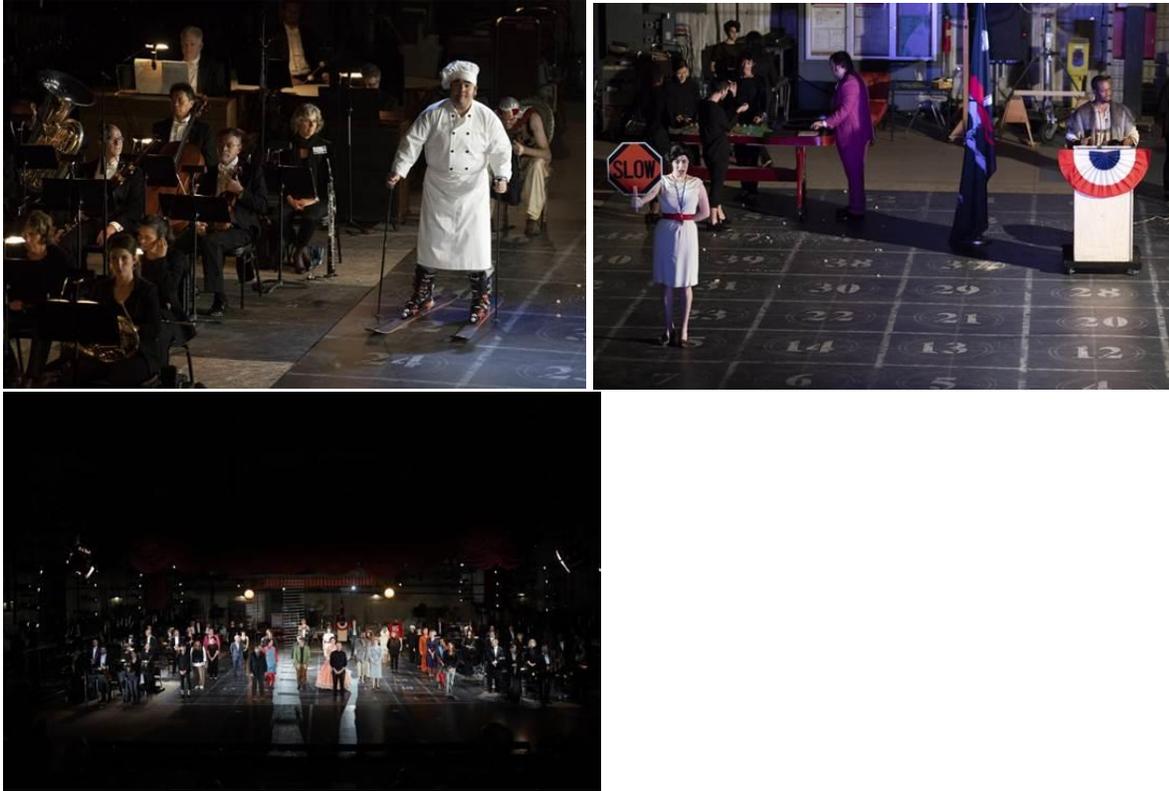
Lights focused on one quadrant and then quickly highlighted as many as 15. They sometimes danced around the stage as white specials or dazzled like disco lights in shades of blue and purple. Singers performed separately, but sometimes as many as four arias were sung in as many languages. It was an cornucopia of the senses. Also, their costume and props had little to do with the opera that was being represented. Examples: A female singer performed her aria dressed as a cowgirl. Another woman sang while holding a long narrow net to catch a "fish" wearing an opalescence unitard and swim cap. We witnessed a nun carrying a surf board, a

man dressed as an astronaut lying on a bed, and a woman dressed as a restaurant server wearing a welder's face guard hammering away at a horseshoe.

The list of ironic and humorous juxtapositions of costumes and props to arias was as long as the list of operas. We saw Cleopatra, a Samurai, Genghis Khan, Anna Leonowens and the King of Siam from *The King and I*, and a man in drag burning her bra. The audience chuckled at some of these and laughed out loud at others. A few pointed out Cage's affinity towards anarchy. Obviously, Cage left the options open for the subject matters used in the productions to accommodate times like those we are currently experiencing. He certainly challenged one's concept of what opera was and opened doors for it could be in the future.







Europeras 1 & 2 - Schiller 3 by Beatriz Schiller, courtesy of the John Cage Trust.

All these characters wove their way around shifting drops with painted scenes of deserts, ancient and modern cities, mountains, hallways, buildings, familiar and unfamiliar vistas, famous paintings and much more. There were two florescent light sculptures that flew in and out, as well as a very large movie set flood light. The entire production was so well choreographed and directed that at no time was there ever a hint of collision between performer, sets or flying scenery. I am certain that the numbered square quadrants and Cage's timed instructions helped to maneuver around the space, but it was abundantly clear that this work was beautifully rehearsed.

The dancers, costumed in all black, each had brief solos that did and did not relate to what else was transpiring onstage. They took on the jobs of stage crew to carry props and sets on and off stage as well as those of actors performing scenes with the singers. One example was Andrew Pearson portraying a Yoga instructor with a somewhat reluctant female student. He also took part in a scene with a bathroom toilet that must be experienced to fully appreciate. The other very talented dancers from varying backgrounds included Richard Biglia, Liz Bustle, Raymond Ejiolor, DaEun Jung, and Eden Orrick.

I will not spoil the fun for those who plan to attend the performance of ***Europeras 1 & 2*** this coming **Saturday and Sunday, November 10 and 11**. If you have not experienced John Cage, enter with an open mind and be ready to "go with the flow". Leave your preconceived notions of music and opera at the door and let yourself be absorbed into the wonderful, irritating, confusing, funny and entertaining world of Cage's complex mind.

The entire production staff did a fantastic job of creating a parallel universe for Cage's operatic vision. They were Yuval Sharon, director; John Iacovelli, scenic design; Marc Lowenstein, music

advisor; Chris Kuhl, lighting designer; Emma Kingsbury, costume designer; Jody Elff, sound designer; and Alexander Gedeon, associate director.

The talented and versatile singers were Maria Elena Altany, soprano; Justine Aronson, soprano; Julianna Di Giacomo, soprano; Sara Hershkowitz, soprano; Laurel Irene, soprano; Sarah Beaty, mezzo-soprano; Suzanna Guzmán, mezzo-soprano; Joanna Lynn-Jacobs, mezzo-soprano; Renée Rapier, mezzo-soprano; Ashley Faatoalia, tenor; Jon Lee Keenan, tenor; James Onstad, tenor; Babatunde Akinboboye, baritone; David Castillo, baritone; David Williams, baritone; Cedric Berry, bass-baritone; James Hayden, bass; and Colin Ramsey, bass.

The extraordinary musicians of the LA Phil included Nathan Cole, Mark Kashper, violins; Dale Hikawa Silverman, viola; Ben Hong, cello; Christopher Hanulik, bass; Catherine Ransom Karoly, Elise Shope Henry, Diane Alanrcraig, flutes; Ramón Ortega, Anne Marie Gabriele, Carolyn Hove, oboes; Boris Allakhverdyan, Andrew Lowy, David Howard, clarinets; Whitney Crockett, Michele Grego, bassoons; Jaclyn Rainey, Gregory Roosa, horns; James Wilt, Christopher Still, trumpets; David Rejano Cantero, James Miller, John Lofton, trombones; Scott Sutherland, tuba; Joseph Pereira, timpani; James Babor, percussion; and Gavin Martin, Mark Robson, keyboards.

For more information and to purchase tickets for ***Europerras 1 & 2***, [click here](#).

For information on FLUXUS, [click here](#).

Featured image: FLUXUS: Cage's *Europerras 1&2* @ Sony Pictures Studios Photo Credit: Craig T. Mathew/Mathew Imaging

Promotion trailer for ***Europerras 1 & 2***

<https://youtu.be/go4HYld30Zw>

San Francisco Classical Voice: <https://www.sfcv.org/reviews/the-industry/a-night-at-the-europeras>

A Night at the Europeras

By Jim Farber / November 10, 2018



A scene from Fluxus: John Cage's *Europeras 1 & 2* at Sony Pictures Studios | Credit: Craig T. Mathew/Mathew Imaging

“And now on with the opera,” Groucho Marx proclaims! “Let joy be unconfined. Let there be dancing in the streets, drinking in the saloons and necking in the parlor.” And a moment later mayhem reigns supreme in the Marx Brothers’ classic 1935 comedy of errors, *A Night at the Opera* — there’s baseball in the pit and *Il trovatore* on the stage. But what a stage!

As the “Anvil Chorus” clangs and the romantic tenor belts “Di quella pira,” Harpo Marx flies through the air with the greatest of ease causing backdrops to rise and fall until the hapless tenor is singing in front of vegetable push cart, a streetcar stop, and the deck of a battleship.

Tuesday, 83 years after *A Night at the Opera* was filmed on the Culver City lot of Metro Goldwyn Mayer (now Sony Studios), director Yuval Sharon and conductor Marc Lowenstein, 19 singing members of their opera company, **The Industry**, six dancers, and 28 musicians from the Los Angeles Philharmonic took over soundstage No. 23 on the very same lot to present their version of *Europeras 1 & 2* by John Cage.

Produced in collaboration with the Getty Museum, the show is the first part of a season-long exploration of the post-Dada, modern arts movement of the late 1950s, known as **Fluxus**, once described as a fusion of Spike Jones and Marcel Duchamp. It was a movement that celebrated the concept of “anti-art,” and its guru and theoretician was John Cage.



A scene from Fluxus: John Cage's *Europeras 1 & 2* at Sony Pictures Studios | Credit: Craig T. Mathew/Mathew Imaging

A champion of random juxtapositions and the notion that all sounds are created equal, Cage created his two *Europeras* as a crash course (literally) in the European opera tradition. They were premiered in December 1987 at the Frankfurt Opera.

The large cast of singers perform (often simultaneously) bits and pieces of arias from 50 operas ranging from Monteverdi's *Orfeo* to Alban Berg's *Lulu*. At the same time, but with no particular effort at coordination, the musicians create an operatic smorgasbord drawn from 63 different scores. There is no conductor, only strategically placed clocks, which dictate the arias and the bracketed section of the score that is to be performed. No two performances are ever exactly alike.



A scene from Fluxus: John Cage's *Europeras 1 & 2* at Sony Pictures Studios | Credit: Craig T. Mathew/Mathew Imaging

As in *A Night at the Opera*, the singers performed as an endless array of backdrops rose and fell: pastoral forests, Egyptian temples, a French palace, New York

skyscrapers, a palm tree island, snowy mountaintops. It was a perfect visualization of Cage's creation.

The number of incongruously colliding scenes, movie references, crazy props, and operatic characters (as directed by Sharon), are beyond remembering, as are the myriad costumes accumulated by Emma Kingsbury, and the scene changes designed by John Iacovelli. There's the singing nun carrying a surfboard, Rudolf Valentino from *The Sheik*, *The Bride of Frankenstein*, and "Little Alex" the Droog from *A Clockwork Orange*. But, most appropriately, there's Harpo Marx.



A scene from Fluxus: John Cage's *Europeras 1 & 2* at Sony Pictures Studios | Credit: Craig T. Mathew/Mathew Imaging

The singers (who are forced to perform all their different arias at the same time, with hardly any orchestral pitch to latch on to), ventured boldly into Cage's musical circus, snippet by snippet, changing costumes and characters as they went while the members of the Philharmonic made the most of every semiquaver.

The one concession to election night was a map of the U.S. that rolled onstage and was filled in with red and blue pens. If you tried to analyze the performance or struggled to make sense of it, you were doomed to failure and frustration. The only way to appreciate the constant barrage of disconnected music and visual imagery was to surrender to it and smile.

NY Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/11/arts/music/la-philharmonic-fluxus-festival.html>

What Happens When Fluxus Enters the Concert Hall?

By: Joshua Barone / November 11, 2018



The Los Angeles Philharmonic's Fluxus Festival features a rare staging of John Cage's "Europas 1 & 2," directed by Yuval Sharon. Credit: Craig T. Mathew

LOS ANGELES — Fluxus is fraught with contradiction. The interdisciplinary art movement, which emerged in the 1960s, is funny but serious; indefinite but authoritative; destructive but full of possibility.

So perhaps it is only fitting that Fluxus — for all its anti-bourgeois, anti-establishment, even anti-art swagger — [is being celebrated here by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Getty Research Institute](#), institutions with the baggage of corporate sponsors, an aging clientele and the cultural canon.

Yet, with sensitive programming and musicality both rigorous and open-minded, the two organizations have assembled a convincing festival of Fluxus music for the Philharmonic's 100th-anniversary season. If Fluxus is about questioning the nature of art, then this festival is about an orchestra questioning the boundaries of performance as it reflects on the past century and looks ahead to the next.

“Fluxus forces us to think about how and why we do what we do,” said the composer and conductor Christopher Rountree, who organized the festival with Nancy Perloff of the Getty Research Institute.

They have assembled music by some of the movement’s icons like La Monte Young and Yoko Ono, as well as George Maciunas, who coined the term Fluxus and wrote its scrappy manifesto in the early 1960s. Works by those artists, and about a dozen more, will be featured in [a marathon performance at Walt Disney Concert Hall](#) on Nov. 17.

Fluxus pieces will also be paired with more conventional programming. In the past few days, for example, people coming to hear Sibelius’s “The Tempest” have been greeted with George Brecht’s “Drip Music” outside before taking their seats.

“I think the audience who is used to going to the concert hall is going to realize right away that this is different,” Ms. Perloff said.

Of course, programming also includes John Cage, Fluxus’s father — though he is said to have preferred the term uncle. (He wasn’t the only one to resist association with the movement; in an interview, Mr. Young said he doesn’t consider himself a Fluxus artist, since it makes an anti-art statement and he views his music as “some of the most beautiful art in the world.”)

As a teacher at the New School for Social Research in the ’50s, Cage preached the gospel of chance and possibility in music. Those principles guide performances of his “Europeras 1 & 2,” a wild sendup of the European opera tradition, which last week received a rare and extraordinary staging by Yuval Sharon and his experimental company, [the Industry](#), as one of the first major Fluxus Festival events of the season.

The scores of many Fluxus compositions are one-sentence directions like “Please wash your face” and “Draw a straight line and follow it.” Cage described his “Europeras” with similar concision: “For 200 years the Europeans have been sending us their operas. Now I’m sending them back.”

Created for the Frankfurt Opera in 1987, the piece was an anarchic pastiche of opera history. Elements of the production — musicians, costumes, lighting, set design — existed independently, sometimes harmoniously but often not, and they were presented through chance operations on a stage laid out in a grid of 64 hexagrams like the I Ching, the Chinese book of divination that inspired Cage.



The music in "Europeras" was assembled from fragments of European operas. But the sets came from the storage vaults of Sony Pictures Studio. Credit: Craig T. Mathew

There's a reason, aside from its difficulty, that this work doesn't get staged in the United States. "Europeras" — which suggests the phrase "your operas" — amounted to a rejection of European art, returning it whence it came. And the piece's concept relied on the nature of an opera house like Frankfurt's: a repository of the costumes, sets and institutional expertise of a centuries-long history.

Mr. Sharon, [who put a feminist spin on Wagner's "Lohengrin"](#) this summer at the Bayreuth Festival, came up with a creative solution to bringing "Europeras" across the Atlantic without contradicting its conceit: He staged it in the cavernous Stage 23 at Sony Pictures Studio in Culver City. If opera is the great European art form, his production argues, then movies are the American analogue.

In executing this idea, Mr. Sharon's "Europeras" was loyal to the work's Fluxus spirit while playfully satirizing Hollywood history. In the absence of opera sets and costumes, this production raided the collection of the film studio: hand-painted backdrops and a wide selection of outfits like everyday attire and the gaudy armor of epics in the vein of ["Cleopatra."](#)

Everything was familiar; nothing was connected. Verdi's "Un Ballo in Maschera" was interrupted by Ghostface from "Scream." A tuba played "The Flight of the Valkyries" as, fittingly, a donkey piñata was hoisted from the rafters. Backdrops came down in front of singers mid-aria, and occasionally "Truckera," a prerecorded track of 101 layered fragments from European operas, briefly drowned out everything like a passing subway train.

The juxtapositions were sometimes enlightening, revealing how Hollywood and opera share similar visual language and emotional sweep. But most often they were laugh-out-loud funny.

Mr. Sharon smartly emphasized the humor of "Europeras." Cage must be taken seriously, but not too seriously. The same could be said for the Fluxus works on deck at the Philharmonic.

Keeping this in mind may be the best way to approach the festival. Consider what it means when a performance by Emanuel Ax is paired with Mr. Young's "Piano Piece for David Tudor

#1,” which instructs the musician to “bring a bale of hay and a bucket of water onstage for the piano to eat and drink.” But don’t be afraid to laugh.

And don’t shy away from rejecting a piece like that, either. Many people walked out of “Europeras”; this is likely to be a common occurrence during the festival.

“It’s O.K. for people to push back and say, ‘That is a step too far for me,’” said Chad Smith, the Philharmonic’s chief operating officer. “We don’t care how people respond to it. We just want people to respond to it.”

Mr. Rountree’s contribution to the festival, “[Commitment Booth/Commitment Anthology \(for Hope\)](#),” engages directly with the question of whether people buy into what Fluxus defines as music — which amounts to more or less anything, with some pieces consisting of nothing more than a thought in your head.

Audiences are asked to enter the booth and make a commitment, with three color-coded options. Green means you hear music in everything, yellow means you’re ambivalent, and gray means you don’t buy into Fluxus as music.

There are four additional performances of “Commitment Booth,” planned through June 1. I hope people visit it more than once. The Fluxus Festival is just warming up, and as people are increasingly exposed to its mind-opening music, who knows? Maybe some of those gray buttons will turn green.

Art Now LA: <https://artnowla.com/2018/11/12/the-los-angeles-philharmonic-the-industry/>

The Los Angeles Philharmonic & The Industry Chaos & Cacophony Meet In John Cage's "Europeras 1 & 2"

By: Victoria Looseleaf / November 12, 2018



Where else could one find a yogini singing **Mozart's *Queen of the Night*** aria from ***The Magic Flute*** but in **John Cage's 1987 *Europeras 1 & 2***, as staged by the brilliant **Yuval Sharon**, he of the avant-garde opera troupe **The Industry**, and in collaboration with the magnificent **Los Angeles Philharmonic**. Performed on **Sony's Soundstage 23** on the **Culver City** lot, this was a daring, wildly amusing and wholly relevant mashup of music, costumes, sets and, well, chutzpah.



Los Angeles Philharmonic Association – Cage, *Europeras* at Sony Studios

An escape – of sorts – from the devastating mass shooting that had taken place in **Thousand Oaks**, coupled with the raging, relentless and horrifying fires all over **California** last week – there was plenty to think about while listening to dozens of singers and musicians each playing and vocalizing in this long overdue **West Coast** premiere. Commissioned by **Frankfurt Opera** as part of Cage's 75th birthday, the work featured arias from no less than 50 operas, with the orchestral parts north of that.



Los Angeles Philharmonic Association – Cage, *Europeras* at Sony Studios

Sharon, who gave the world *Hopscotch*, an opera performed in and around 24 limousines in 2015 and last year's [War of the Worlds](#), made use of Sony's costumes, props and painted backdrops, while the acoustics of the space were pristine, with the members of the **L.A. Phil New Music Group** seated in two groups on either side of the stage. And though **Marc Lowenstein** was credited with music advisor, there was no conducting, but instead the musicians and singers were guided by large digital clocks. In addition, there was a tape collage of 101 operas also playing simultaneously, if only occasionally. In other words, we were awash in sound, glorious sound.



Los Angeles Philharmonic Association – Cage, *Europeras* at Sony Studios

This being Cage, of course, nearly two dozen singers had been asked to select arias from operas in the public domain, with computer-generated chance operations based on coin throws for the **Chinese** fortune-telling book, *I Ching*, to determine when said music was to be sung, as well as what the lighting, costumes and sets would be. This writer was content to recognize such favorite tunes as the **Toreador Song** from *Carmen* emanating from a singer dressed as a barber and a soprano warbling **Song of the Moon** from Dvořák's *Rusalka*.



Los Angeles Philharmonic Association – Cage, *Europaras* at Sony Studios

There was also a chef on skis, a pussy hat-wearing chanteuse, a blind military man, a dude in a bathrobe pushing a lawn mower, a grieving woman serenading a body in a casket, a **Harpo Marx**-type artist painting on a make-shift easel and a *Tosca*-esque diva singing *Vissi d'arte*. And the list goes on...



Los Angeles Philharmonic Association – Cage, *Europaras* at Sony Studios

Experiencing the **Sunday** performance (the last of three), seemed a good way to face the world again. And if the physical traumas that were unleashed upon California last week seemed unnecessarily cruel, there was at least some good news: The mid-term election had the **Democrats** winning back the **House**. Of course, it's now recount time and one has to wonder what Cage would have thought – was this random or inevitable?

All photos by Craig T. Mathew/Mathew Imaging; @mathewimaging

Musical America: CAGE'S EUROPERAS 1 AND 2 ON A HOLLYWOOD MOVIE STAGE

By Richard S. Ginell / November 13, 2018

The LA Phil and The Industry stage Cage's opera-to-end-all-operas where if two or more things happen to agree, it is a coincidence. For awhile, it was ecstatic.

CULVER CITY, CA – “For two hundred years, the Europeans have been sending us their operas,” wrote John Cage. “Now I’m sending them back.” A wag or two might have amended that to read, “sending them up.” But no, Cage’s purpose for coming up with the idea of “Europeras” was quite serious, using chance procedures a la the I Ching to create a constantly changing operatic environment where each listener makes his or her own associations and patterns.

So the Los Angeles Philharmonic, ever eager to place itself on the cutting edge of whatever, gave maverick director Yuval Sharon and his group The Industry the freedom to stage Cage’s “Europeras 1 and 2” this past week (I caught the Sunday afternoon performance Nov. 11). It was the first time that “Europeras 1 and 2” had been seen on the West Coast, although Long Beach Opera sort of paved the way 25 years ago when that company staged “Europeras 3 and 4” (an audio souvenir of which is still available for streaming from the Mode label).

It was also the first major event in the LA Phil’s Fluxus Festival, which will pop up in various guises throughout the Phil’s centennial season. Cage was considered a father figure of the Fluxus movement of the 1960s which tried – with often humorous results – to erase the line between art and everyday tasks in life.

As is occasionally said of New York City or even Los Angeles, a Cage “Europera” is a great place to visit upon your initial immersion. But I wouldn’t want to live there, for a little of it went a long, long way.

Cage has been sometimes accused of giving performers total freedom, which of course is not true – and indeed, for all of their apparent sonic chaos, these “Europeras” have very strict rules. “Europera 1” is supposed to last exactly 90 minutes and “Europera 2” 45 minutes. A computer that simulates I Ching chance procedures maps out time schedules for each component of an operatic performance – the music, the lighting, the scene changes, the costumes, the props, everything. If two or more elements of a production just happen to agree, it is a coincidence.

Rather than use a conventional concert space, Sharon chose Stage 23 deep within the Sony Pictures Studios lot in Culver City. The motive behind that was to translate Cage’s notion of European opera houses as treasure chests of operatic “symbols and fantasies” into what he thought were their equivalents in America – namely, the movie studios. So The Industry raided Sony’s considerable storehouse of costumes, props, hand-painted scenery, etc. for material, and the back of the stage resembled what you would imagine a Hollywood antique store looks like.

Stage 23 is a large, chilly barn of a space, equipped with bleachers with room for a little over 600 patrons at a time. Two huge digital clocks behind the seats, plus two smaller ones on either side of the stage, showed the elapsed time of the performances. A tape of 101 fragments of European operas mashed together in a thick layer called “Truckera” roared directionally through the speakers at random points again dictated by chance procedures; indeed, it did sound like a speeding truck passing by in a whoosh. The sound quality was excellent – clear, reverberant, and evenly balanced between instruments and voices thanks to another successful installation of a Meyer Sound Constellation system.

The singers get to sing arias of their choice but the members of the orchestra are required to stick to pre-determined excerpts from the operas' orchestral scores. There was a fascinating letter in the program book in which Cage chews out the orchestra – albeit in his inimitably gentle fashion – in a Zurich production for playing familiar melodies against his wishes. He wanted “a certain space and lightness” in the orchestral sound, and we certainly got that from the first-class players in the LA Phil New Music Group. Also, interestingly, the list of the orchestral excerpts was limited to repertory that began with Gluck and ended with Puccini, whereas the singers could venture further ahead to Stravinsky, Britten, Weill, Berg, and even Cage's old teacher Schoenberg.

Of what could be made out from the cacophony of mostly young singers – ten of them for "Europera 1" and a different cast of nine for "Europera 2" – Mozart stood out the most, "Don Giovanni," "Le Nozze di Figaro" and "The Magic Flute" in particular. The orchestral excerpts were so spare and fragmentary that I could hardly identify any of them other than Wagner's "Siegfried's Rhine Journey." Possibly as a result – and here, this music critic may be on a different wavelength – what the orchestra was playing was not as musically involving as what the singers were singing.

Inevitably the parade of costumes, sets and humorous stage business conjured images of Hollywood films and personalities – Harpo Marx's hat and curly wig, Charlie Chaplin playing with a bouncing globe of the world in "The Great Dictator," Dorothy from "The Wizard Of Oz," ruby slippers and all, on a weight-reducing belt machine. But name-that-tune or name-that-film, though fun, was probably not the point of the exercise.

Entering "Europera 1" was like walking into the hallway of a university opera department with all of the rehearsal rooms going at once and all of their doors opened. It was an ecstatic feeling at first, eavesdropping on a beehive of activity and energy that nevertheless had a airy quality that enticed, rather than overloaded, the listener. At one point when Dorothy was getting her waist reduced, there was a brief, chance-determined passage of silence (except for the whirring sound of the machine). Everything was expertly played and sung at all times.

Yet after awhile, I started to fidget and stare at the digital clocks longingly. With so much music coming at the audience simultaneously and at random, it all began to sound the same after a certain point. It was as if opera had been reduced to the continuous background noise of everyday life, and not the heightened emotional experience that it can be. Again, a great place for a short visit but not a residency.

Cage's Fragmented Opera, Re-Gifted to West Coast

By Brandon Rolle / November 15, 2018

As part of the LA Phil's FLUXUS festival the LA Phil New Music Group teamed up with [The Industry](#) to produce John Cage's *Europerras 1 & 2*—a late work by the American Experimentalist that submits Europe's great operatic repertoire to a radical fracturing and re-compiling that divorces all aspects of the music, production, and lighting from one another (and even from itself in the case of the orchestra and singers). As independent voices, music, lights, and staging overlay one another in a new, atomized context, the audience is left "wandering through the forest of opera" as director [Yuval Sharon](#) put it in a promotional interview with music advisor [Marc Lowenstein](#).

Europerras 1 & 2 were originally conceived by Cage as a sending-back of the robust opera repertoire imported to American opera houses from Europe—albeit after undergoing a particularly Cagean postmodern treatment. Now staged at Sony Pictures Studios some 30 years later, it was perhaps appropriate that this imagining of the work introduced a further degree of de- and re-construction in which the audience was privy to action taking place off-stage, to the sides and behind the stage. This was effective in helping to incorporate the sounds of production (e.g., ropes and pulleys, rolling props, actors entering and exiting the stage) into the sound world of the work, though the pre-recorded tape component would have better suited the production had it been panned across the stage (perhaps even through separate speakers on stage) rather than across the audience. As it stood, the recording felt too removed from the action of the production to be perceived by the audience as an incorporated part of the work. The taped excerpts aside, though, the sound was good and The Industry rightfully resisted the urge to micromanage the balance of particular combinations for more traditional aesthetic effects. It was a clean and measured performance that carried a calm, well-rehearsed sense about it. If there was something to criticize musically, the performers themselves might have been given license for a bit more of the "delight in noticing" that Sharon and Lowenstein mention in the taped interview; instead of the wonder of unexpected moments of collision and harmony between elements, the various components felt very separate and compartmentalized.

Admittedly, I understand the impulse to let the individual components speak for themselves without heavy-handed coordination. But I think the trap that a work like *Europerras* confronts is that the absurdity can easily become admired for its disjunct comedy rather than for the beauty of its composite subtleties. It is no doubt that a work of this length and style will have moments that are funny, chaotic, disjointed. But other moments must be allowed to breathe, to embrace, to demonstrate that beauty and art arise naturally and without our intervention if we are open to experiencing them.

To quote Sharon once more, as he described this sentiment so eloquently: "Opening up to chance allows us to see that our perspective of things being as they are limits us to the potential of how things can be." At moments I felt the production focused too heavily on the importance of chance itself as an anti-rhetoric or aesthetic, rather than as a tool for exploring and embracing new coincidences that resonate with us as humans. The moments that did revel in that admiration of how things can be, of surprise, of resisting ego, though, were powerful.

The Theatre Times: <https://thetheatretimes.com/laphil-the-industry-flexes-fluxus-with-cages-europeras/>

(LA)Phil/The Industry Flexes Fluxus With Cage's "Europeras"

Posted by Lauren Deutsch / November 19, 2019



Los Angeles Philharmonic Association. A scene from Fluxus: John Cage's "Europeras 1 & 2" at Sony Pictures Studios | Credit: Craig T. Mathew/Mathew Imaging @mathewimaging Photo by Craig T. Mathew/Mathew Imaging (Please tag @mathewimaging on all social media platforms.)

John Cage's *Europa 1* and *Europa 2*, (aka [Europeras 1 & 2](#)) was presented by [The Industry](#), the opera company directed by Yuval Sharon / conducted by Mark Lowenstein, in collaboration with 23 members of the Los Angeles Philharmonic's New Music group at Sony Studios November 6, 10 and 11, 2018. It is a highlight of the [Phil's FLUXUS](#) Festival honoring the orchestra's centenary and supported by The Getty Research Institute. Sharon is artist-collaborator of the LA Phil and dedicated to unconventional staging of equally unconventional operas, such as [Hopscotch](#), about which [I also wrote a piece](#).

First performed in Frankfurt in 1987, the 2 pieces (of the total 5) recycles 18th and 19th-century European operatic arias presented in "random" staging. Cage built the work upon an armature of oracular divination with the iChing, a process that was automated in 1984 by Andrew Culver by means of a computer language designed to mimic the millennia-old system. Theatrical elements (vocal and instrumental music, scenery/lighting/props and acting/blocking/words) were arranged in time and space dictated by Culver's original algorithmic functions.

Through this process Cage doesn't ask the participants (actors, musicians, audience, designers, and crew) to make "sense" of it so that it fits some mold; rather, he wishes to emphasize the independence of each "element." Thus, the work is not de-construction, but perhaps pre-construction. Still, there is some expectation by the audience and performers.



A scene from Fluxus: John Cage's *Europeras 1 & 2* at Sony Pictures Studios | Credit: Craig T. Mathew/Mathew Imaging @mathewimaging

Not being well versed in the European operatic oeuvre, I was happy to take it for what it would be...more an *ichi go ichi e* opportunity...that Zen Buddhist principle that just this one moment in time cannot be repeated and can be appreciated for whatever it is.

Given that we live in an era driven by critical studies, in preparing for the spectacle and the writing of this piece afterwards, I wondered whether it is OK to be in a heightened state of anticipation, not to mention expectation, for a work that is specifically designed to defy both impulses. Wishing to be in synch with the spirit and letter of Cage's process, I also threw my fate to chance by consulting two oracles of my own choosing.

The first was [Google](#). The following are some of the chance results:

- [Wikipedia entry about the *Europeras*](#)(1 – 5)
- [An in-depth analysis of *Europera*](#)
- [Mark Swed's great review of the *Europeras* in *The Los Angeles Times*](#)
- [Cage's Bio complements of the LA Phil](#)
- [Andrew Culver's DOS – based experimental music software utility programs \(*ic and tic*\)](#)for simulating the I Ching coin oracle. These developed out of Culver's programming of the iChing for use by John Cage.
- [iChing.exe](#)
- [Culver's Bio complements of AnarchicHarmony](#)
- [More images from FLUXUS: Cage's Europeras 1&2](#)

The second oracle I approached also was the [iChing itself](#). In this system, everything in life can be expressed through the correlation of the 8 elements of the BaGua: fire, wind, water, lake, mountain, earth, thunder, and heaven, with 64 possibilities of their combination.

Then, as a result of current events in Los Angeles, I lost focus...My attention has been consumed by the tragedy of the monstrous [fire we are experiencing in Los Angeles](#). The fire on the mountains, fire devouring the earth, moisture-sucking wind driving fire, fire assaulting Pacific Ocean beaches, fire engulfing homes along Malibu Lake, fire under heaven! In the iChing system "fire" challenges clinging impulses. What can we let go? A house? A pet giraffe? Photos? Hopes? Dreams? Favorite surfboards?



A scene from Fluxus: John Cage's *Europeras 1 & 2* at Sony Pictures Studios | Credit: Craig T. Mathew/Mathew Imaging @mathewimaging

Cage once wrote, "For two hundred years the Europeans have been sending us their operas. Now I'm sending them back." Europe, the source of those arias in Cage's work, couldn't be farther from my mind, and yet the work couldn't be timelier! These beautiful artworks were imported and vaulted into "high" culture of our midst by the same colonial forces would deny refugee status to desperate migrants at our borders today.

Thinking about the great local loss to the elements (not to mention the recent wonton slaughter of 12 people in a nearby bar by an ex-Marine with a loaded gun, PTSD, and a history of mental instability), the soundtrack of this moment became the magnificent operatic poem [Unetaneh Tokef](#) came. Written about a thousand years ago by an unknown [author](#) in Northern Europe, the [liturgical poem](#) is traditionally sung during religious services at the commencement of each Jewish new year. It includes the litany of wonder about fate:

How many will pass and how many created? ...

Who by fire and who by water? ...

Who by the sword and who by wild beast? ...



A scene from Fluxus: John Cage's *Europeras 1 & 2* at Sony Pictures Studios | Credit: Craig T. Mathew/Mathew Imaging @mathewimaging

In this well-planned approach, chance still rules life. What were the chances that in this heightened state of awareness that I would miss having this once in a lifetime experience? 1:10,000? That's what happened. So what! It proves Cages premise, that even up the curtain time, things were changing. Hence I'm writing this essay and sharing production stills.

Michel Foucault described the situation perfectly in an article at [Slate](#) about the power of algorithms to solve problems: It's "... a sort of distributed force, one that derives from the way we internalize norms and expectations rather than from the dictates of presidents and kings. [It's] not the power of an individual actor who knows too much, but the power of a system to which we've *already submitted*."

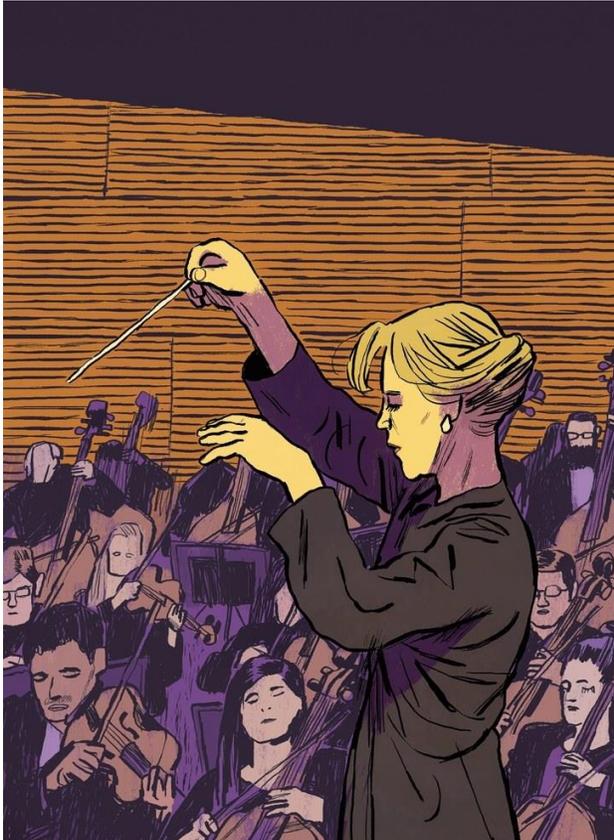
Note: Thanks to [Jim Farber](#) who mentions that the Marx Brothers filmed [A Night At The Opera](#) (1935) on the lot when it was MGM's facility!

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/11/26/the-radical-splendor-of-the-la-phil>

The Radical Splendor of the L.A. Phil

By Alex Ross / November 26, 2018

The nation's most vital orchestra celebrates its centennial by commissioning major new works and recharging the repertory.



Susanna Mälkki, the principal guest conductor, plays a formidable role.

Illustration by Mikkel Sommer

“Season of the Century” is the slogan that the Los Angeles Philharmonic is using to tout its centennial season. The phrase is emblazoned on a sign outside Disney Hall and on street banners across the city. The double meaning is apparent: not only is this season intended to celebrate the orchestra’s past hundred years; it aims to make history itself. Ordinarily, such marketing effusions don’t withstand scrutiny, but the L.A. Phil’s 2018-19 season invites superlatives. The ensemble has commissioned pieces from more than fifty composers, ranging from such venerable figures as [Philip Glass](#) and Steve Reich to young radicals on the fringes. It is launching a slew of theatrical events and collaborations with pop and jazz artists. It is honoring African-American traditions and exploring the experimental legacy of the Fluxus movement. Gustavo Dudamel, the orchestra’s music director, is leading new works by John Adams and Thomas Adès. Esa-Pekka Salonen, the orchestra’s previous director, is presenting a nine-day Stravinsky festival. Meredith Monk’s opera “ATLAS,” from 1991, will receive a long-awaited revival. And so on. No classical institution in the world rivals the L.A. Phil in breadth of vision.

Two months in, the centennial program has already brought three fairly staggering events, any one of which would have counted as the highlight of an ordinary season. First was the première of Andrew Norman's "Sustain," a forty-minute, single-movement piece that may become a modern American classic. Dudamel introduced it on a program that included Beethoven's Triple Concerto and Salonen's "LA Variations." In an inversion of the usual orchestral priorities, the Norman came last, and elicited the most excitement. In Los Angeles, decades of promotion of living composers have eroded the skepticism that so often greets new music.

Norman, who is thirty-nine and lives in L.A., made his name as a composer of kinetic, frenetic music that mirrors the distracted habits of the digital age. The outer movements of "Play," a three-part symphonic work that Dudamel conducted at the Phil in 2016, evoke the ricocheting, try-and-try-again tempo of video games. Having mined that vein enough, Norman slows things down in "Sustain." The opening pages of the score consist largely of gorgeous smears of string sound, hypnotically gliding from one instrument to the next. These ethereal atmospheres turn hazy and rough, then give way to intertwining vines of melody in the winds. Rapid-fire patterns course through the orchestra, first chattering and then hammering. That energy subsides into near-silence, with strings producing whispers of tone rather than clear pitches. The sequence undergoes a series of repetitions, with deviations, disruptions, and accelerations. The final iteration ends in glorious chaos: the conductor cedes control, the players fall into an ad-libitum frenzy, and percussionists scrape slabs of plywood. The score is punctuated by a kind of signal: two pianos, tuned a quarter tone apart, arpeggiating upward into silence. With that gesture, the piece also ends.

Norman has always been a deft orchestrator, but in "Sustain" he reveals himself as a magician of the art. He has spent enough time in Disney Hall that he understands its secret resonances: I was often unsure whether I was hearing tones or overtones, pitches or their ghosts. Even the heaviest textures have an immaterial glow—a counterpart to Frank Gehry's whirling architecture, which Norman has studied closely. Above all, the composer succeeds in maintaining tension and cohesion across a huge span—"one long unbroken musical thought," as he writes in his notes. It is thrilling to see a composer tackling a big canvas with such confidence and skill. It is no less thrilling to see a composer being given the opportunity to do so. The orchestra performed expertly and fervently under Dudamel's direction.

When I returned two weeks later, the L.A. Phil was playing Prokofiev's ballet "Romeo and Juliet," again with Dudamel on the podium. His full-throttle, rhythmically vital interpretation would have been enough to hold the attention, but Benjamin Millepied was on hand to choreograph select scenes, working with performers from the L.A. Dance Project. When a large orchestra occupies Disney's stage, there is little room for dancers. So Millepied had the idea of sending them into spaces elsewhere in the Gehry complex and following them with a video camera. Images were streamed on a screen in the auditorium. Romeo killed Tybalt in the orchestra's administrative offices, next to a filing cabinet. The Balcony Scene took place in Disney's outdoor garden. The crypt scenes were set in an industrial-looking room below the stage. Millepied, holding the camera, was effectively dancing with his performers, weaving around them or running after them.

The choreographer made a point of casting the lead roles in unconventional fashion. Each night, a different pair performed: first, an interracial straight couple; then two women; and, finally, two men. I saw the last duo, Aaron Carr and Mario Gonzalez. The dance scenes were not only dazzling to the eyes but also wrenchingly expressive: balletic moves alternated with naturalistic gestures of ardor or sorrow. As Prokofiev's love music was reaching its peak, Carr and

Gonzalez lay side by side in the garden, looking up into orchid and coral trees. I found myself wishing that more of the score had been choreographed—Millepied will eventually make a full-length film in this style—but the impact was all the greater for being interspersed with purely orchestral surges of passion and lament.

Come early November, the L.A. Phil was dividing its attention between two radically different presentations: a staging of portions of [Shakespeare's](#) "The Tempest," with Sibelius's incidental music as accompaniment; and [John Cage's](#) "Europeras 1 and 2," a chance-controlled collage of familiar operatic arias and orchestral parts. The instigator of the latter was Yuval Sharon, the L.A.-based director and the founder of the indie opera company the Industry, which, three years ago, presented the opera "Hopscotch" in locations across the city. The venue for "Europeras," a co-production of the Industry and the L.A. Phil, was a spacious soundstage at Sony Studios. Sharon and his collaborators repurposed old film props—hand-painted backdrops, B-movie costumes, and the like—to create visual counterpoints to Cage's operatic kaleidoscope. Thus we saw an Asiatic warrior singing "Non più andrai," from "The Marriage of Figaro"; an astronaut in a hospital bed belting Wagner's Song to the Evening Star; and a chef, on skis, essaying "Now the Great Bear and Pleiades," from "Peter Grimes."

The orchestra, meanwhile, tootled unrelated instrumental parts; lighting changed at random; and the backdrops, going up and down on squeaky pulleys, added inapt settings. An excellent cast of singers performed heroically under taxing conditions. Babatunde Akinboboye, for example, gave a secure rendition of the Toreador's Song while dressed as an infomercial host demonstrating hair-care products. A spirit of joyous absurdity reigned, yet the show had a poignant undertow. Attempting to sing one's song above the din is a general condition these days.

Sibelius wrote music for "The Tempest" in the mid-nineteen-twenties, toward the end of his mysteriously abbreviated composing career. The L.A. Phil, under the baton of Susanna Mälkki, its principal guest conductor, gave a brilliant account of the score, but the staging failed to do justice to Sibelius's mercurially shifting moods, which range from kitschy sweetness to explosions of dissonance. The director was Barry Edelstein, who brought with him actors from the Old Globe theatre in San Diego, and their overmiked voices dominated the sound picture, pushing the orchestra and assisting vocal forces into the background. Still, the production unfolded with the smoothness of a long-running show—this in a week when the orchestra was mounting an equally complex spectacle across town.

The L.A. Phil's offbeat ventures are well and good, you sometimes hear people in the classical world mutter, but how's its [Beethoven](#)? Isn't the programming better than the playing? That put-down is unconvincing: an organization that can bring "Sustain" into the world is more valuable than one that executes yet another hyper-polished Beethoven Seventh. Still, the L.A. Phil has sometimes come up short in mainstream repertory, lagging behind the Cleveland Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony, or the best European groups.

A raft of new players have added depth to the ensemble. Ramón Ortega, who started as principal oboe this season, has a characterful, pungent timbre and arresting phrasing. His Old World style complements the purer, silkier styles of the clarinetist Boris Allakhverdyan and the flutist Denis Bouriakov, both of them recent additions to the ranks. In the brass, Andrew Bain, the principal horn, and Thomas Hooten, the principal trumpet, have solidified a section that was erratic a decade ago. In the strings, Dudamel has pressed for a fuller, richer sound.

Before “The Tempest,” Mälkki led a virtuosic, vibrant performance of Mahler’s Fifth Symphony. She is best known for her advocacy of new music—she conducted Kaija Saariaho’s “L’Amour de Loin” at the Met in 2016—but she has quietly emerged as a formidable interpreter of the Romantic and early-modern repertory. Last season at the L.A. Phil, she made Strauss’s “Alpine Symphony” sound like a towering masterpiece, which it is not. Her Mahler felt less like a moment-to-moment drama than like a vast landscape undergoing spectacular geological upheavals. The L.A. players’ immersion in new music, far from hindering their work in standard repertory, surely helped them to deliver a fresh account of a familiar score; before intermission, they had given the première of Reich’s Music for Ensemble and Orchestra, a vista of shimmering desert stillness. If the orchestra has a future, it is here. ♦

Notable Performances and Recordings of 2018

By [Alex Ross](#) / December 6, 2018

One evening in November, puzzled pedestrians gathered outside Walt Disney Concert Hall, in downtown Los Angeles, to watch watermelons being dropped from a parapet onto the sidewalk. Every few minutes, a melon would detonate in a plastic-walled splatter zone. This was not a reboot of the “Late Show with David Letterman”; it was an exacting performance of Ken Friedman’s “Sonata for Melons and Gravity,” composed in 1966. The score reads, in its entirety: “Drop melons from a great height. Listen to the sound.” The Los Angeles Philharmonic presented the piece as part of a day devoted to the artistic anarchy of the Fluxus movement. Chad Smith, the orchestra’s chief operating officer and longtime artistic guru, exercised his duties to the fullest by operating one of the melons himself.

The L.A. Phil’s centennial celebrations, which began in September, have overrun my list of the year’s notable events. As I [wrote last month](#), no classical-music institution is more creative in its programming or more committed to fostering new work. And that work is not always—indeed, is not often—of the please-everyone, neo-anodyne variety. It comes from all corners of [twenty-first-century composition](#), including the ever-active experimental wing. The Fluxus celebration, which goes on all season, is taking the orchestra into regions of controlled bedlam. At a Fluxconcert in Disney, Nathan Cole, the L.A. Phil’s first associate concertmaster, gave a forceful rendition of Nam June Paik’s “One for Violin Solo,” which involves a ritual smashing of the instrument. (A budget violin was sacrificed for the occasion.) The orchestra followed with Dick Higgins’s “The Thousand Symphonies,” playing from a score that had been generated by firing machine guns into music paper and treating the resultant holes as notes.

For some concertgoers, this was all a bit much. During a presentation of La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela’s “The Second Dream of the High-Tension Line Stepdown Transformer,” a ninety-minute cluster of gorgeous, glacial microtonal drones, numerous patrons made premature exits. Yet, over the decades, the L.A. Phil has succeeded in inverting the norms of classical-music culture, so that even the most outré events attract big, diverse audiences. The orchestra does not stint on traditional fare: amid the splattering melons and machine-gunned music paper, it offered potent performances of Mahler’s Fifth and Prokofiev’s “Romeo and Juliet.” The L.A. Phil has become a museum that also functions as an avant-garde gallery.

The centennial programs are notable for their social inclusivity. At a time when some orchestras are unspooling entire seasons devoid of female and nonwhite composers, the L.A. Phil has [commissioned](#) twenty-two women and twenty-seven people of color. In October, at an event in the orchestra’s Green Umbrella new-music series, I was shaken by Tina Tallon’s “. . . for we who keep our lives in our throats . . .,” a response to sexual abuse. The electronic portion of the piece evokes, in Tallon’s words, the “muted whispers, tortured murmurings, and choked admissions of those who have been forced to remain silent far too long.” Agonizingly, those voices do not quite succeed in being heard: after hovering at the edge of comprehensibility, they lapse back into the fractured texture from which they emerged.

Last season, Deborah Borda, the L.A. Phil's longtime C.E.O., decamped to the New York Philharmonic. Not surprisingly, L.A. Phil-ish things have been showing up on the New York schedule: late-night new-music concerts, composer talks, high-profile commissions of lesser-known composers. The [first concerts of the season](#) featured Ashley Fure's "Filament," a high-tech soundscape far outside of orchestral routine. To be sure, L.A. Phil-ishness was also a pattern of the Alan Gilbert era, which saw the inauguration of a new-music series in the Green Umbrella mode, one that is now defunct. The San Francisco Symphony, for its part, [just announced](#) the hiring of Esa-Pekka Salonen, the principal agent of the L.A. Phil's transformation. How easily the Los Angeles model can be transplanted elsewhere remains to be seen. For now, Disney Hall is the chief laboratory of the orchestral future.

TEN NOTABLE PERFORMANCES OF 2018

John Cage's "Europerras 1 and 2" at the L.A. Phil, November 6th

Yuval Sharon, having staged a revisionist "Lohengrin" at the [Bayreuth Festival](#), found wit, heart, and unexpected Hollywood glamor in Cage's chance-controlled operatic collages. [Read more.](#)