

YOUNG CAESAR

June 13, 2017



PRESS RECAP

PREVIEWS

LA Times: <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-lou-harrison-centennial-review-20170515-story.html>

The 24-hour Joshua Tree party to celebrate Lou Harrison's 100th birthday

Joshua Tree festivities honor art and music on the composer's 100th birthday.

A celebratory sun shone brightly. The sky revealed the carefree transparent blue of an unpolluted tropical ocean. The rock formations of Joshua Tree National Park glistened like crystals. The soundtrack for all this Sunday morning splendor was the jovial banging of percussion instruments and jingle-jangle of ankle bells as a motley party marched uphill to the straw-bale house that composer Lou Harrison had built toward the end of his life.

The merrymakers sang an off-key “Happy Birthday” as they reached the imposing yet capricious new gate in front of Harrison House. Made of girders from the Oakland Bay Bridge by Bay Area sculptor Mark Bulwinkle, the gate had its dedication just that morning, becoming an instant landmark.

What is wrong with this idyllic picture of a community heartily commemorating the 100th birthday of a great late American composer whom most of America inexplicably continues to ignore? Could the takeaway be that the neglect isn't inexplicable? Lovable Lou he unquestionably was, and when people finally come across his music well presented, so does much of it prove.

But Harrison, who died in 2003, remains on the edge of the musical establishment not simply because he challenged norms. That's the definition of an important artist. What he can't escape is the lovable part.

In his later years, portly and white bearded, bedecked in his overflowing red shirt and bolo tie, Harrison had the reputation of being the Santa Claus of new music. Often pictured at his side was his partner, Bill Colvig, whose full white beard and red shirt doubled the image. You might have found them seated at the gongs of one of the versions of an Indonesian gamelan he and Colvig made.

Harrison was a student of Elizabethan court music, Korean court music, Japanese court music. He was a poet, calligrapher, illustrator, portrait painter, music theoretician (particularly of alternate tuning systems), environmentalist and craftsman. He practiced sign language and espoused the universal language of Esperanto.

I'm probably forgetting something. But this should be more than enough to suggest how easily it is to see Harrison — who wrote music in dozens of styles, ancient and modern, Western and Eastern (and, for that matter, Northern and Southern) as having been a protean amateur. He adored outsider artists and has been treated as one himself by the music establishment.

But what if he were neither amateur nor any more outsider than Beethoven, who railed against the establishment with every new symphony, sonata or string quartet? An illuminating and engrossing new biography by Bill Alves and Brett Campbell is titled “Lou Harrison: American Musical Maverick.” They could have just as easily called it “Lou Harrison: Mother of Us All,” given the extent of his influence.

Let's begin with that out-of-tune "Happy Birthday." I'm not sure it really was out of tune. There was a sense of enchantment in the chant this time that, while helped by the setting, wasn't because of the setting. No, the revelers were channeling, whether intentionally or not, Harrison's interest in pure intervals, not the kind that are compromised by the piano.

The "Happy Birthday" came around halfway through the 24-hour "Lou Harrison 100: A Global Day of Art and Conservation" at Harrison House, which was turned into a center for arts and ecology after his death. The celebration was the main event for the centennial, which has gotten only occasional attention.

Because of his interest in microtones, the annual MicroFest this spring is concentrating on Harrison in concerts throughout the Los Angeles area; there was a splendid one at Boston Court in Pasadena, offering revelatory early pieces not heard since they were written and a preview of alluring interludes to "Young Caesar," Harrison's neglected opera that the Los Angeles Philharmonic will mount on June 13 at Walt Disney Concert Hall.

The Bay Area is the other place where Harrison programs are taking place, with small concerts held over the weekend in Santa Cruz, Harrison having lived from the early 1950s in nearby Aptos. But Joshua Tree on Sunday was ground zero.

And sky zero. When I arrived a little after midnight, local engineer, ecologist and astronomer Tom O'Key had set up a large telescope and was regaling night owls about the sky. The telescope was aimed at Saturn, and its rings could be seen with startling vividness.

Night and day, indoors and out, an irregular mix of music and message followed. Trees were planted, and they became a symbol of a composer who planted musical seeds, such as providing both impetus and know-how for the world music movement we now take for granted. Balinese gamelan Burat Wangi (Fragrant Offering) from the California Institute of the Arts ended its evening of traditional music and dance with Harrison's "Main Bersama-Sama," mixing jazz saxophone with gamelan. (It works better with the original French horn.) Harrisonian melodic inspiration in this instance became a kind of offering to the fragrant gongs and bells in the cold night air on a stage behind the house.

But the essence of the composer happened to be distilled into an afternoon hour inside Harrison House. The living room — a narrow shoebox shape with a high domed ceiling — has unique acoustical properties that give sound an embracing fleshiness.

In a gorgeous performance of Harrison's 1949 Suite for Cello and Harp, Emil Miland's cello sounded 10 times its size and caused the walls to feel elastic, while Meredith Clark's harp made the skin tingle. The String Quartet Set from three decades later was given a luminous yet corporeal performance by the Del Sol String Quartet in a room where luminous and corporeal were not antithetic — nor were the evocations of a 12th century troubadour in the first movement or danceable Turkish percussion music implied by the last movement.

It is actually not all that difficult to celebrate Lou Harrison. You need only follow his example. He loved nothing better than celebrating himself, but he always did so by wanting to bring the whole world along with him. To feel better about Harrison, you had to also feel better about yourself and your surroundings, which is precisely the quality of his music.

GED Mag: <http://gedmag.com/afterdark/on-stage-june-2017/>

On Stage – June 2017



YOUNG CAESAR – Los Angeles: This one-night presentation promises to be very exciting. A chamber opera by Lou Harrison, celebrating what would have been his 100th birthday, is the story of Julius Caesar's love for a young man before his rise to power and dalliances with that Egyptian hussy. The music has a strong oriental flavor, with added Western lushness. The production will be conducted by Marc Lowenstein, narrated by Bruce Vilanch, and features Adam Fisher as Caesar, David Adam Moore as Nicomedes, six male dancers, and the Men of the Los Angeles Master Chorale. Truly a unique experience. Walt Disney Concert Hall 6/13 (LAPhil.org/tickets).

LA Times: <http://timelines.latimes.com/2017-spring-preview/>

All of the L.A. arts events and exhibitions to check out this spring

MicroFest 2017: A Lou Harrison Centennial Celebration

The self-described “world’s leading concert series devoted to the glorious universe of non-standard tunings” celebrates Lou Harrison with concerts, films and a 24-hour birthday bash of music, dancing and tree-planting at Harrison’s straw-bale house in Joshua Tree on May 14. Also, the Yuval Sharon-directed L.A. Phil New Music Group will perform Harrison’s controversial theater work about Julius Caesar’s love for another man, “Young Caesar,” at Walt Disney Concert Hall on June 13. (the Green Umbrella blurb warns, “Contains mature content.”).

San Francisco Classical Voice: <https://www.sfcv.org/events-calendar/artist-spotlight/harmonic-convergence-yuval-sharon-the-industry-and-the-los-angeles>

Harmonic Convergence: Yuval Sharon, The Industry, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic Join Forces.

By: Jim Farber / September 22, 2016



Yuval Sharon | *Credit: Katerina Goode*

On September 2, 2015 the Los Angeles Philharmonic announced the appointment of Yuval Sharon, the founding director of **The Industry** (presenters of Christopher Cerrone's *Invisible Cities* and the mobile opera, *Hopscotch*) to the newly created post of Artistic-Collaborator. The three-year agreement began in 2016 and will last through the orchestra's celebratory centennial season, 2018-2019

Speaking at the time, Philharmonic Music Director, Gustavo Dudamel commented, "Yuval is an extraordinary director and producer. His projects challenge us to think differently about how music and the arts can play a part in our lives, and they make us look at the world around us in different ways. We're giving him the platform of the L.A. Phil to work with creatively, and I can't wait to see the results."

According to a Philharmonic press release, Sharon's mandate was to:

Curate multiple projects for the L.A. Phil using his experience in developing new works and reinterpreting established works. These projects will cut across the L.A. Phil's various series and incorporate several performance genres. These varied performances will take place not only within Walt Disney Concert Hall, but also outside of the venue in diverse locations throughout Los Angeles. The collaboration marks the first multi-year association Sharon has entered into with a major U.S. orchestra.

On October 1, the first manifestation of the Sharon/Philharmonic partnership will be unveiled as part of a 12-hour marathon of concerts (including eight world premieres commissioned by the Philharmonic) all under the banner of the Green Umbrella called “Noon to Midnight.”

The participants will include: the L.A. Phil Bass Quintet, the Los Angeles Percussion Quartet, wildUp, Piano Spheres, gnarwhallaby, the St. Lawrence String Quartet, wasteland, the USC Percussion Ensemble, Jacaranda, and the Los Angeles Percussion Quartet. (For a complete list of the performances and times, see the L.A. Philharmonic ["Noon to Midnight" website](#).)

Reminiscent of the Bay Area’s meandering musical odyssey, “Garden of Memory,” the performances will take place simultaneously throughout the Walt Disney Concert Hall. The performances will include a featured 8 p.m. concert on the main stage conducted by John Adams, who was instrumental in organizing the event with Chad Smith (the Philharmonic’s Chief Operating Officer). Sharon’s contribution is a collaborative art/music installation called “Nimbus,” with music by Rand Steiger, which will be on display for a year.

I spoke with Yuval Sharon about what his future with the L.A. Philharmonic and the Industry has in store.

Tell us about the conversations you had with the Philharmonic that led to your appointment as their first Artistic-Collaborator.



Yuval Sharon | *Credit: Katerina Goode*

The Philharmonic was a major draw for me when I made the decision to move to Los Angeles from New York. I don't think The Industry could exist in Los Angeles without the groundwork in new music and adventurous programming the Philharmonic has done.

They proposed the idea of a residency that would go beyond just doing projects, but thinking about them in a broader context. They were interested in a deeper, long-lasting relationship with the orchestra that would focus on the interaction between artists and audiences, which is also central to what we've been doing with The Industry. It would also involve outreach and connecting in new ways to the community. The orchestra's centennial season is coming (the actual date is Oct. 24, 2019) and I think they hired me very much with that in mind.

In your work with The Industry you've stressed a unique fusion of music, theater, the environment and the audience. Could you talk about that relationship?

I like to think the projects I have done with The Industry have been experiential more than anything else. Merging the arts should create a large-scale experience rather than a more straightforward presentation. We've been able to do projects, like *Invisible Cities* and *Hopscotch* on an audacious scale. The collaborations with the LA Phil have the potential speak to a much wider, more inclusive audience. I'm also interested in bringing the approach we've taken with The Industry to more standard repertory. I want to expand the conventional concert experience in new ways.



A scene from Yuval Sharon's *Hopscotch* | Credit: Jim Farber

Was that the idea behind *Night of Dreams: A Schubert & Beckett Recital* (on March 21, 2017) in which you plan to interpolate Schubert songs (sung by Ian Bostridge) with Beckett's short plays: *Catastrophe*, *Ohio Impromptu*, *Rockabye*, *That Time*, *Come and Go*, and "Act Without Words II"?

I've had the idea for awhile: Beckett's short plays are like recital pieces and I want to look at the recital form with new eyes. Schubert was Beckett's favorite composer. I think for a lot of people that would come as a surprise. You'd think he would love a composer like Morton Feldman, not an arch-romantic like Schubert. But when you really get to know Schubert's songs you find longing, melancholy, and a sense of despair, the same atmosphere that pervades Beckett's plays.

Recitals are about context and the order in which songs are put together. It's not really about the individual song. It's about curating a journey through tonalities, through major and minor shifts. That's what led me to the idea of not just songs alternating with songs, but alternating with theater pieces.

Your first project with the Philharmonic is not a performance, but the installation piece, *Nimbus*. It is at the same time part of the "Noon to Midnight" which is a multi-performance event. It's similar, in that way, to your work with *The Industry* isn't it, in that it encourages the audience to create their own individual experience?



A view of the *Nimbus* installation at the Walt Disney Concert Hall | Credit: *The Industry*

People assume when they go into a theater they're going to have a monolithic experience; everyone is going to be moved at the same time, laugh at the right moment, everyone is going to cry at the right moment. I like the idea that an art piece like *Nimbus* and a large-scale event like "Noon to Midnight" is like

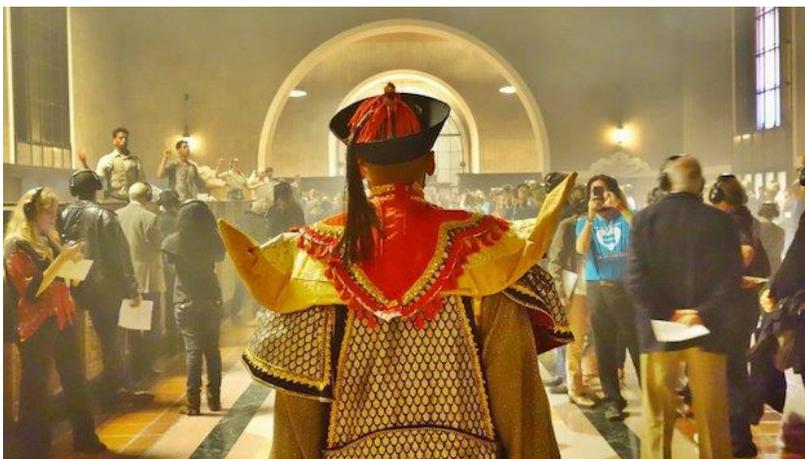
a forest that allows the audience to wander through it and make their own unique piece out of what they see. That was certainly true with *Hopscotch*, where the audience had to really work at finding their own footing. *Nimbus* is an ever-changing installation piece. There is no correct or incorrect way to view it. That's the kind of relationship that visual artists deal with all the time. I'm interested in creating performances that work the same way."

On June 13, 2017 you are going to present a staging of Lou Harrison's opera *Young Caesar* at Walt Disney Concert Hall. That's a piece with deep California roots. It had its premiere at Cal Tech in Pasadena in 1971. Talk about what attracted you to the opera and your interest in Lou Harrison.

One of my goals with the Philharmonic is to create new stagings of great works by the composers of California's counterculture, like John Cage, Harry Partch, and Lou Harrison. It's part of a long-term project I'm calling, "Highway One." The Industry's production of Terry Riley's *In C* (at the Hammer Museum) was part of it. I thought *Young Caesar* would be an ideal fit with the Philharmonic. We're creating a new performance edition that will coincide with the Harrison centennial. We're working with Robert Gordon, who wrote the original libretto. Our idea is to make it an amalgamation of the various versions. We'll be using shadow puppets and dancers and, of course, there will be a gamelan orchestra."

Can you say anything about The Industry's next big project?

We are working on an operatic reimagining of Bertolt Brecht's play, *Life of Galileo* with music by Andy Akiho.



A scene from Yuval Sharon's *Invisible Cities* | Credit: *The Industry*

Paris LA: <http://www.paris-la.com/young-caesar-at-disney-hall/>

YOUNG CAESAR AT DISNEY HALL

By [Barlo Perry](#) on Sunday, June 11, 2017

The 100th-birthday celebrations of the late avant-garde composer, painter, essayist, pacifist, and early civil- and gay-rights activist Lou Harrison continue. This week, the LA Phil presents a rare, one-night-only performance of Harrison's 1971 opera *YOUNG CAESAR*—directed by Yuval Sharon and conducted by Marc Lowenstein—at the Walt Disney Concert Hall.

1967, the Summer of Love, was a turning point in Harrison's life. San Jose State invited him to join their faculty—providing a level of financial security Harrison had not previously enjoyed—and he met Bill Colvig, a musician and brilliant instrument-maker. Lover, best friend, collaborator, it was Colvig who suggested a same-sex theme for Harrison's opera project, and the composer chose young Gaius Julius Caesar's love affair with Nicomedes, the Orientalist king of Bithynia. The LA Phil production, part of their Green Umbrella series, stars Adam Fisher in the title role, Hadleigh Adams as Nicomedes, and Bruce Vilanch as the narrator.

Harrison had studied and absorbed his close friend Harry Partch's theories about Just Intonation—a tuning system of corrected intervals and precise pitch. Since *YOUNG CAESAR* would incorporate world music from the East as well as the West, for its creation Harrison and Colvig built a gamelan of tuned metal slabs, dubbed "Old Granddad."

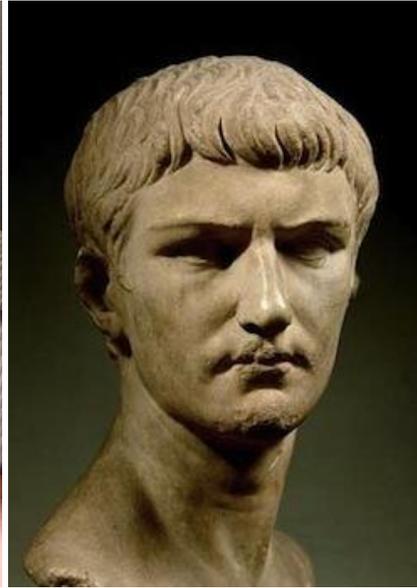
YOUNG CAESAR (libretto by Robert Gordon) will be performed by the LA Phil New Music Group and experimental opera company The Industry. The choreography for this production is by Danny Dolan.

YOUNG CAESAR, Tuesday, June 13. Sold out.

WALT DISNEY CONCERT HALL, Music Center, downtown Los Angeles

See: laphil.com/lou-harrisons-capital-cs

(From top): Bust of **Lou Harrison** by **Bruce Kueffler**, **Adam Fisher**, **Hadleigh Adams**, bust of **Julius Caesar**, bust of **Nicomedes**.



REVIEWS

Daily News: <http://www.dailynews.com/arts-and-entertainment/20170616/la-philis-young-caesar-lives-up-to-composer-lou-harrisons-radical-legacy>

LA Phil's 'Young Caesar' lives up to composer Lou Harrison's radical legacy

By Jim Farber / June 16, 2017



Hadleigh Adams portrays the king of Bithynia, Nicomedes, shadowed by puppets in the LA Phil's production of Lou Harrison's "Young Caesar." (Photo by Craig T. Mathew/Mathew Imaging)

'YOUNG CAESAR'

★★★★

What: Los Angeles Philharmonic's presentation of the Lou Harrison opera.

Next concert: "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets" — In Concert.

When: 8 p.m. July 6.

Where: Hollywood Bowl, 2301 Highland Ave., Los Angeles.

Tickets: \$14-\$147.

Information: www.hollywoodbowl.com.

It's been quite a week for Gaius Julius Caesar.

First, New York's Public Theater created a firestorm of criticism for its production of Shakespeare's play in which the assassinated emperor bares a striking resemblance to President Donald Trump. Then on Tuesday, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, as part of its Green Umbrella series, presented a much kinder and gentler version of the story, Lou Harrison's opera, "Young Caesar."

Ironically, when Harrison's openly gay opera was premiered at Caltech in 1971, it was deemed too radical a subject to be depicted on stage. And just like the current reaction to the Public Theater's production, several of its primary backers withdrew support.

Tuesday, after a tempest-tossed odyssey of almost 50 years, "Young Caesar" finally received its first full-scale professional staging, thanks to a collaboration between the LA Philharmonic, director Yuval Sharon and his opera company, The Industry. The only disappointment is that this wonderful production will only receive that single performance.

Around the world, orchestras and ensembles have been celebrating the 100th anniversary of Harrison's birth. He was born in Portland, Oregon, May 14, 1917, and died Feb. 2, 2003. If you are not familiar with his music, don't be surprised. Harrison was one of those California maverick composers who refused to play by the rules. And he paid the price.

Ultimately, Harrison's sin was his refusal to adhere to the academic school that worshiped at the altar of Arnold Schoenberg and his system of 12-tone composition. "The difference between East Coast and West Coast composers," he once said, "is that we give ourselves permission to write beautiful music." And that is exactly what he did.

Harrison also was a scholar of World Music who saw enormous potential for a theatrical and musical fusion of Eastern and Western musical traditions. He openly embraced the music (and instruments) of Korea, China, Japan and especially the Balinese gamelan orchestra. He explored unusual tunings and constructed (with the aid of his lifelong partner, Bill Colvig) original instruments. All of these elements came together Tuesday in this celebratory staging of "Young Caesar."

The opera's episodic plot traces a period of coming-of-age for Caesar, beginning with his initiation into manhood, his marriage to Cornelia (Delaram Kamareh) and the birth of his daughter. But the real emotional core of the opera takes place in its second half when Caesar (sung by Canadian tenor Adam Fisher) accepts a diplomatic mission to the court of King Nicomedes in Bithynia, Asia Minor.

Young and naive, Caesar is seduced by the sensuality of the king and his court and begins a monthlong affair with Nicomedes (New Zealand baritone Hadleigh Adams).

In its 1971 version, the story was presented as a puppet opera with an emphasis on Asian instruments for the accompaniment. Sharon, with a great deal of assistance from the opera's original librettist, Robert Gordon, and artistic consultant, Eva Soltes, created a self-described "hybrid" — a 90-minute opera performed without an intermission. The score emphasizes Western instrumentation and tonality during the first-half scenes, which are set in Rome. But during the voyage to Bithynia the tonalities and instrumentation shift entirely to the microtones of Asian string instruments, clanging bells, pounding drums and the deeply resonating tones of one-of-a-kind instruments created by Colvig.

A background screen was used to project shadows of six dancers who don elaborate masks representing the characters, along with brilliantly designed and animated shadow puppets. The tone of the production contrasted classical forms with humor that was decidedly contemporary, especially in the flamboyantly gay, sequined persona of Bruce Vilanch who served as the opera's cosmopolitan-sipping narrator.

What may have been shocking in 1971 now seems sweet and lovingly from the heart. Sharon's direction created a succession of dynamic stage pictures that were classically stylized one moment and playfully of-the-moment the next. Marc Lowenstein's conducting was precise and skillfully modulated. The choreography by Danny Dolan was lithe and sensuous. The shadow puppets' design and fabrication was by Christine Marie, Emily Franz and Heidi Tungsten.

The members of the LA Phil's New Music Group were supplemented by a corps of superb musicians playing instruments such as the guzheng, qin, erhu, piri and the xiao. The men's chorus was prepared by Grant Gershon.

One could easily imagine Harrison looking on and smiling.

Jim Farber is a Los Angeles-based freelance writer.

'YOUNG CAESAR'

Rating: 4 stars.

What: Los Angeles Philharmonic's presentation of the Lou Harrison opera.

People's World: <http://www.peoplesworld.org/article/the-ever-controversial-caesar-comes-out-in-lou-harrison-opera/>

The ever-controversial Caesar comes out in Lou Harrison opera

By: Eric A. Gordon / June 16, 2017



Adam Fisher as Caesar and Hadleigh Adams as Nicomedes / Craig T. Mathew/ Mathew Imaging

LOS ANGELES—Gaius Julius Caesar (100-44 BCE) invented the Julian calendar of 365.25 days, the one we still use today, and was the pivotal figure in the devolution of the Roman Republic into the Roman Empire. His assassination still evokes the warning, Beware the Ides of March!

The calendar is not controversial, and the facts surrounding his death are well documented, though with some disputes among historians.

But the *representation* of Caesar stays in the news as the subject for much debate and acrimony. Was he straight, gay or bi (terms that none in his era would have recognized)? Composer Lou Harrison, whose centennial is being honored this year, decided back in the late 1960s and early 1970s—the early wave of Gay Lib, when homosexuality was still illegal—that yes, Caesar did have at least one important homosexual liaison. With librettist Robert Gordon (no relation), he wrote *Young Caesar*, an opera considered scandalous at the time with such a plot line.

Other controversies are making the news these days. Here in L.A. recently a reworking of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* appeared as the [Tragedy of JFK](#). But that was not the first time the semblance of a public figure had been “relevantly” inserted into the role. In 2012, the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis cast Caesar as a tall, spindly black man that inevitably suggested President Barack Obama. Before that, productions of the work had Caesar resembling Abraham Lincoln, Ronald Reagan, Bill

Clinton and George W. Bush. Orson Welles put on a “fascist” *Julius Caesar* with his Mercury Theatre back in the 1930s, restoring the Roman setting and its leather-clad citizens à la Mussolini. Currently an angry storm is circling around the New York Public Theater production of the play, which began previews on May 23 and officially opened two weeks later. Caesar is represented by blond-haired Gregg Henry, who appears in a modern business suit and long tie, possessed of a gold-plated bathtub and what one critic described as a “pouty Slavic wife.”

How *anyone* could have seen Donald Trump in this representation is anyone’s guess, but Breitbart News and then Fox News went ballistic. In response, Delta Air Lines and Bank of America promptly withdrew their support, no doubt fearful of a massive right-wing consumer boycott. What they spinelessly seemed to be missing is Shakespeare’s point: The play continues for two-plus acts after the Act III, scene 1 killing, to deplore what happens to the remaining characters as a result of this impulsive act, and indeed what happens to democracy itself. The play is no endorsement for assassination.

Commentators are piling on, many pointing out the inherent dangers of corporate sponsorship. Will CEOs now start deciding that nothing more controversial or “relevant” than *Anne of Green Gables* will now be staged, or published, or seen in museums? Of course we know there are dangers, too, in government support of the arts. He who pays the piper.... It’s an old debate which must be renegotiated in every time and place. When was art ever completely autonomous from public life?

When Caesar was young

Let’s go back to a time maybe 35 years or so before he was murdered at age 55, when Caesar was coming into his manhood, a bright, athletic fellow just married to Cornelia and father of a daughter, ambitious and in the service of General Marcus Minucius Thermus. In that capacity he was dispatched to Bithynia, a kingdom on the Black Sea coast of northwest Asia Minor, or what is now Turkey, today an hour’s flight from Rome, but then a sea voyage of some duration. His mission was to get King Nicomedes to hurry up and return some ships loaned by Rome.

That summarizes Act I of the newly revised *Young Caesar*, performed for one sold-out night only, June 13, at Walt Disney Concert Hall, and directed by the young hotshot of contemporary opera, Yuval Sharon, with his experimental company, The Industry. The LA Phil New Music Group under conductor Marc Lowenstein comprised a modest-sized Western orchestra with five players of ancient Asian instruments and the Los Angeles Percussion Quartet. In Lou Harrison’s conception, Bithynia was an Eastern land and the incorporation of an Asian gamelan-type ensemble suitably represented the abyss between West and East.

Retained from the original iteration of the opera when it was first, and somewhat disastrously produced in 1971 at Cal Arts in Pasadena, was the conceit of Indonesian shadow puppetry acting out the plot. Robert Gordon, who worked intimately with Harrison on the opera, was on hand to tighten the libretto down to an announced 90 minutes—by my watch it ran closer to 110—while preserving virtually all of Harrison’s music.

Speaking of that original production, with its flying shadow phalli, certain Pasadena patronesses of the arts quickly reneged on their funding for Harrison’s opera, leaving company members stranded in Southern California, foreshadowing the current debacle in New York. Gordon observed that one of those ladies was in fact in the audience tonight. It must have been one of the high points of Gordon’s life to see this opera produced in such a lovingly prepared edition, almost half a century after its uncertain premiere.

In Act II, following an orchestral interlude but without intermission, we find Caesar at the court of Nicomedes. The king is pleasantly shocked to find the Roman emissary is a muscled blond hunk, barely more than a teenager, of considerable charm and erudition. He proceeds to seduce him with banquets and wine, exotic dancing, sex orgies, opulent Oriental luxuries (among them the royal bed), sumptuous gifts, hunting trips and excursions on horseback to interesting historic sites in Bithynia, including the tomb of Hannibal. Nicomedes is in no rush to prepare the Roman ships as he wishes to continue enjoying this mutually agreeable meeting of souls.

In short, they fall in love, ignoring the grumbling among their entourage on both sides. Caesar took a chance on this last phase of his education as a man, ignoring what would become the taunt in his future: "Look at the queen of Bithynia." Eventually they must part, but not before Nicomedes has shared with Caesar his wisdom about life: "One year we lose a battle, the next we get a throne, / but Time's the real master and keeps his victories for his own." If Caesar had stayed, the entire course of history may well have veered off in another direction.

The closing credits on the shadow screen ended, like all Hollywood movies, "Copyright MMXVII."

The opera has seen other productions, including one in 1988 by the Portland Gay Men's Chorus that featured mostly choral singing, but never at the level of professionalism as this, resplendently costumed, movingly choreographed, the shadow puppets cleverly interacting with the live performers, and a cast of internationally renowned singers. Caesar was sung by tenor Adam Fisher, Nicomedes by baritone Hadleigh Adams, Caesar's aunt and consigliere Julia by Nancy Maultsby, Cornelia by Delaram Kamareh, and the role of Dionysus, Caesar's thrill-seeking gay friend, by Timur, a most promising high tenor of part Kazakh background. Men of the Los Angeles Master Chorale sang, and six dancers with strong acrobatic skills delighted the eye with their revealing demi-togas, flowing veils and leather straps. As our guide through the narrative, veteran jack of all Hollywood trades Bruce Vilanch gave a queer's eye overview of the proceedings (some of whose commentary was unfortunately lost, however, in the general noise).

Lou Harrison died in 2003, an out and proud gay man with a longtime partner Bill Colvig, who helped him build some of the instruments Harrison composed for. His work in many genres is still awaiting a major revival of interest. This masterful opera, now not quite so outrageous as it once appeared, and in a form that might be considered finally and successfully "realized," with Handelian recitatives, full-blown arias and choral pieces, may well be the piece that restores his name to music lovers' minds when they think of important 20th-century American composers.

The performance was filmed, I am guessing not only for archival purposes, but for editing into something showable. It would truly be a shame if only one audience in L.A., still on a high from the GLBT [Resist March](#) that took place only two days before (now estimated at 100,000 participants), were to experience this seminal work, pathbreaking both in subject and in its intriguing, visionary score.

YOUNG CAESAR EMERGES TRIUMPHANT AT DISNEY HALL AFTER YEARS OF FRUSTRATION

By Richard S. Ginell / June 16, 2017

LOS ANGELES: If the troubled history of Lou Harrison's problem-child opera *Young Caesar* can be compared to that of any other work in the musical theatre world, one candidate would be Leonard Bernstein's *Candide*. Both pieces were considered flops when first unveiled, with their books catching most of the flak. But their scores ensured that they would not be forgotten, and there would be several attempts over decades to make them stage-worthy.

There is still no consensus about a definitive edition of *Candide*, but at least it now has a secure spot in the repertoire in whatever version. And now, thanks to a beautiful production from Yuval Sharon and The Industry in collaboration with the Los Angeles Philharmonic in Walt Disney Concert Hall Tuesday night (June 13), *Young Caesar's* time may have come at last in Harrison's centennial year.

But the road has been long, sporadic and rocky. *Young Caesar* was a pioneering outlier in its time – an opera with gay subject matter written in 1971 only two years after the Stonewall uprising, with a melodious Asiatic-flavored score guaranteed to give the still-powerful serial-music-oriented Establishment fits. The first performance at Caltech in Pasadena that year created a scandal, and a subsequent 1987 revision in Portland in which Harrison recast the score for Western instruments didn't catch on either.

Yet another, more operatic version was created for the Lincoln Center Festival in the late 1990s, but the project was eventually canceled after years of dithering (in any case, librettist Robert Gordon recalled at the pre-concert talk, "We were not happy with what they would have done at Lincoln Center."). San Francisco's Opera Parallèle staged a reportedly uneven production of that version in 2007.

So Sharon – the LA Phil's artist-collaborator as well as the mastermind behind The Industry – had this ominous history behind him, but also some huge advantages. Attitudes have changed dramatically since 1971, or even 2007. Basic LGBTQ rights are now the law of the land. Operas with gay subject matter like Charles Wuorinen's *Brokeback Mountain* or Peter Eötvös's *Angels In America* are increasingly common. Not only that, Sharon had the backing of the most adventurous and most fiscally-robust major orchestra in America, as well as the keepers of the Harrison flame. And the cooperation of Gordon, who said that he has been trying to cut his libretto since 1971, but the stubborn Harrison wouldn't let him change a word.

Young Caesar, as the title succinctly suggests, is a chronicle of Gaius Julius Caesar as a young man, nurtured by his Aunt Julia who wants him to become a great man for the ages. An engagement to an unsuitable bride Cossutia is called off, and he is wed to another, more desirable woman, Cornelia, who bears him a child. But while undertaking a diplomatic trip to the kingdom of Bithynia on the Black Sea, he captivates – and is captivated by – the hedonistic King Nicomedes. The King invites Caesar to an orgiastic banquet, they become lovers, and Nicomedes takes him on a tour of his kingdom, pointing out historical sites. But all of this historical resonance reawakens the ambition in Caesar, and he leaves Nicomedes and Bithynia to fulfill his destiny.

What Sharon came up with is a "hybrid" edition of *Caesar*, trimmed to about 102 minutes and change, integrating elements of the original version and the revisions. There was a 13-member Western instrument ensemble comprised of personnel from the LA Phil's New Music Group and, in a reversion to the original version, five Asian instruments and replicas of the homemade percussion instruments that

Harrison's companion, William Colvig, built for him. The use of puppetry, dropped since Portland, was restored, with shadow puppets and hi-tech projection techniques unknown in Harrison's day providing some of the action.

The main attraction of the piece – as it apparently always was – is the music, a lovely, quirky, at times exciting score entirely representative of Harrison who often is working at the peak of his powers. The arias are beautifully written for the voice, with long, sustained melodic lines rare in contemporary opera. The ensemble of conventional and exotic instruments produces a handsome, hypnotic mix of pentatonic gamelan lines and dynamic hammering of the percussion brigade, with an occasional solo viola soulfully reflecting the plight of a character here and there. The Industry's music director Marc Lowenstein, who had a hand in producing the new edition of the opera, conducted with the evident joy of discovery.

While I can't vouch for the quality of Gordon's original libretto, the writing as heard in this version sounded graceful, well-turned, and reasonably clear, with a sensibility of Broadway from an earlier time and surprising amounts of humor in spots. Evidently, the editing process was successful in producing a coherent script; only during Caesar's sightseeing tour toward the end did the pacing seem a bit slack. The production used a narrator (as, incidentally, do some versions of *Candide*), the television comedy writer/actor Bruce Vilanch lounging in a big easy chair applying small doses of camp (no harm done) as he related part of the storyline.

Sharon reconfigured the stage of Disney Hall so that the ensemble was playing in a simulated sunken pit, while still in a position to take advantage of the hall's acoustics to fling the sounds of Harrison's exotic instruments into everyone's laps. Surrounding the pit was an oval runway for the singers, gently raked on the left and right sides, with a screen in the rear for the shadow puppetry and cartoonish computer animated backgrounds.

Sharon, his projection designers Kaitlyn Pietras and Jason H. Thompson and lighting designer Christopher Kuhl could produce dazzling images (the vivid study in blue and yellow colors as Caesar is sent off on his diplomatic mission) and some humor (the outlines of cute sharks in the water during the voyage to Bythinia). Occasionally a cultural anachronism was thrown in to get a laugh, like a take-out pizza to drown the sorrow of the overweight Cossutia after being jilted. Since some of you want to know, there was sex of sorts in the animations – flying erect penises during the banquet sequence that produced a few uneasy laughs – but the onstage affection between Caesar and Nicomedes was gentle and tasteful, never going further than that.

Unlike previous productions – if the reviews were accurate – the singing in this one was uniformly excellent. Adam Fisher started out depicting the young Caesar in a clear, innocent tenor but toward the end, his voice acquired the appropriately heavier gravitas of an aspiring head of state. Baritone Hadleigh Adams was a compassionate-voiced Nicomedes, mezzo-soprano Nancy Maultsby's Aunt Julia offered good advice to Caesar at the times when she could be clearly heard over the ensemble. A collection of 14 male singers from the Los Angeles Master Chorale flanked each side of the stage, singing strong.

Disney Hall was reportedly sold out months in advance for this production; word had spread among Harrison enthusiasts celebrating his centennial, and presumably the gay community as well. Yet for all of the trouble and care that Sharon, Lowenstein, The Industry and the Philharmonic organization had lavished upon this production, only one performance was scheduled. The LA Phil has repeatedly shown that adventurous contemporary programming can draw, especially in a region the size of Southern California (pop. 23.77 million as of 2015), yet they've hedged their bets again (another example being its innovative, well-attended *Nixon In China* in March, which received only two performances). But maybe this one successful production of Harrison's neglected ground-breaking opera will lead to more, now that we know it can work.

LA Times: <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-young-caesar-review-20170614-story.html>

The puppet orgy is back in a triumphant reworking of 'Young Caesar' at Disney Hall



Adam Fisher portrays the "Young Caesar" title character in a one-night presentation brought to life with animated projections and shadow puppets. (Glenn Koenig / Los Angeles Times)

Now we know.

It has been 45 years since Lou Harrison's "Young Caesar," an overtly gay opera for puppets with penises, had its hapless premiere in Pasadena, to the outrage of some of its sponsors. But after various unsuccessful attempts to turn it into a real opera, the [Los Angeles Philharmonic](#) finally and triumphantly did so with the work's first professional production Tuesday night in [Walt Disney Concert Hall](#).

L.A. Phil artist-collaborator Yuval Sharon created a new version of the opera that uses the most workable aspects of the composer's rewrites over the years, trims about 45 minutes from the score and finds a viable dramatic structure. Sharon, in conjunction with his opera company, the Industry, mounted a fanciful, visually stunning, endearingly mercurial, marginally risqué, momentarily over-the-top and ultimately touching production. The L.A. Phil New Music Group, conducted by Marc Lowenstein in the final Green Umbrella program of the season, was sensational, revealing layer upon layer of sheer musical gorgeousness capable, from the first bars, of lifting the spirits.

"Young Caesar" can finally be heard as what Harrison's admirers had long suspected it must be — a marvelous, uniquely American outlier opera. It is Harrison's most ambitious work and one that he wouldn't let go of from the time of its 1971 premiere to his death at 85 in 2003.

Unlike gay operas that came before (and have come since), [Lou] Harrison's is not a tragic tale about the anguish of being an outsider." — Mark Swed

Unlike gay operas that came before (and have come since), Harrison's is not a tragic tale about the anguish of being an outsider. The production's creative consultant, Eva Soltes, a longtime associate of Harrison, described the composer in the preconcert talk as the proudest gay man she has ever known and the opera's invitation into gay culture as a call for everyone to enjoy life.

Erotic amusements are certainly offered. Back in 1971, Pasadena's putative little old ladies did not quite go for Harrison's "eroticon," with its flying phalluses, but "Young Caesar" is much more than that. Harrison uses pleasure for subversion. The original version was written at the height of the Vietnam War, and the opera is a potent and entirely original form of persuasion to make love not war.

Having gone through his rites of manhood in Rome, the ambitious young Julius Caesar — Gaius in the opera — is sent to Bithynia to collect ships from King Nicomedes. History is a little uncertain about this, but there is reason to believe that Nicomedes enticed Caesar into a dalliance as yet another rite of manhood.

For Harrison and his librettist, Robert Gordon, who worked with Sharon on this new version, Nicomedes dazzled the naive and uptight Gaius with opulence and sensuality. A wiser, older leader attempting to mold a young man who would one day take over the world, Nicomedes tried, and almost succeeded, in getting Gaius to slow down, to take notice of and learn from the world around him. Let love be his guide.

Gaius falls for Nicomedes, but duty prevents him from, as Nicomedes urges him to, stay. Had Nicomedes' sensual enticements worked, Caesar might not have gone on to slaughter 1 million men in Gaul, and history might have been radically different.

Harrison was, himself, a Nicomedes who refused to deny himself an abundance of pleasures, and he put much of what he knew and loved into "Young Caesar." That is what got him into trouble.



(Glenn Koenig / Los Angeles Times)

This began with the Gordon's original libretto, which was long on narrative and just plain long. Harrison's initial idea had been that the opera would be Eastern in aspect, with Asian instruments along with some homemade ones, and recitative chanting reminiscent of the Chinese opera he enjoyed going to while growing up in the Bay Area. There was much more, and over the years as the opera accrued Western instruments, a chorus and arias, it blossomed into a magnificent hybrid of East and West, with nods historically from Elizabethan music and Handel to the present. It was always thought, however great the charm, an impossible mess.

What Sharon and crew came up with, in this new, 112-minute version of two acts performed without break, is not a mess but a celebration. There is now a little bit of everything, and the crew is the key. Sharon retains something from all the versions and then adds his own glosses, giving Caesar every reason in the world to be dazzled.

One insight was to have traditional instruments dominate the first act, which takes place in Rome, while the Asian ones (most traditional Chinese) and homemade bells and the like are reserved for exotic Bithynia and exotic sex.

The opera's narration always has been a problem, but the narrator here is another inspiration. The hilarious Bruce Vilanch, seated on a lounge chair, cocktail in hand, might have been a cross between Percy Dovetonsils (Ernie Kovacs' outlandish impersonation of a poet on his 1950s television show) and the delightfully pleasure-loving composer.

Puppetry was retained, this time shadow puppets projected behind a screen against clever animation that takes its impetus from Harrison's own graphic illustrations. Yes, for an orgy scene, phalluses did merrily fly. A ramp surrounded the musicians for singers and dancers. The dancers were male, scantily dressed as for a gay pride parade, and choreographed with flair by Danny Dolan.

The costumes by Daniel Selon, who also designed the puppets, included goofy togas and fright wigs, but nothing so silly as to prevent moving characterizations from the singers, all of whom excelled. Adam Fisher's Gaius touchingly flowered from gullible teenager to sensual lover to warrior. Hadleigh Adams emphasized wistful wisdom, not lechery, as Nicomedes. Nancy Maultsby (Gaius' pushy aunt Julia), Delaram Kamareh (Gaius' wife, Cornelia) and Timur (Gaius' slave-boy Dionysus) brought subtle touches to their short arias.

The arias are among the glories of Harrison's score, these brief, lyric meditations on something beautiful or meaningful in life (becoming a man, grasping a daughter, taking chances). The recitatives that had been thought to be the opera's longueurs here were shown to be, in fact, as subtly inflected as Gregorian chant.

But it is the orchestra that holds the greatest glories of all. Harrison had as much a genius for processions and dances as he did for haunting introspection, and he took full advantage of his wondrous collection of instruments. Trumpets and percussion thrilled. Harp and violin and flute solos produced moments of delicious intimacy. An upright piano with tacks on its strings did not sound barrel-house tacky but mysterious. The instrumental colors never stopped changing.

If all of this seems an extravagance for one performance, it was an extravagance of necessity. If you weren't there you missed it. But this was exactly what will get the word out.

Someone will pick up the production. Others will do the opera. And they'll know to do it because the performance was recorded live for digital release, probably early next year.

"Young Caesar" lives.

LA Times <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-young-caesar-20170613-htm1story.html>

Julius Caesar, young and gay: A groundbreaking 1971 opera gets revived for a new era

By John Rockwell



Margaret Fishe

A scene from the Portland Gay Men's Choir performance of "Young Caesar" in 1988. Los Angeles Philharmonic artist-collaborator Yuval Sharon has developed yet another iteration of Lou Harrison's work. (Margaret Fisher)

Lou Harrison, the beloved California composer, would have turned 100 this spring, and arguably the most important centenary event will come Tuesday at Walt Disney Concert Hall with a sold-out staged production of his long-evolving opera "Young Caesar."

"Young Caesar" was especially dear to Harrison's heart. When the Encounters music series in Pasadena asked for an opera, Harrison was at a loss for a subject until his partner, Bill Colvig, proposed in 1969 that he explore a gay subject. The result was what may well have been the first overtly male gay opera in history, complete with a love affair between the teenage Julius Caesar, as an emissary from Rome, and Nicomedes, the king of distant Bithynia, on the south shore of the Black Sea. It even had a gay orgy, depicted with puppets.

The opera was a testimony to Harrison and Colvig's then-new love, speculates Yuval Sharon, the [Los Angeles Philharmonic](#)'s artist-collaborator, stage director of "Young Caesar" and leader of the performance group the Industry. The Industry is presenting "Young Caesar" with the L.A. Phil New Music Group and Harrison House Music, Arts and Ecology in Joshua Tree.



The original shadow puppet performance of "Young Caesar" at [Caltech](#) in 1971. (Harrison House Music, Arts and Ecology)

The story derives from the Roman historian Suetonius. Sexual fluidity among young men in ancient times may have been more prevalent than in later centuries. Like most men of the Roman upper classes, Caesar had wives and children. (An adopted son became the Emperor Augustus.) Caesar later denied that he had an affair with Nicomedes, despite his long dalliance in Bithynia. Still, the opera is hardly an ahistorical fantasy.

Heartfelt "Young Caesar" may have been, but a success it was not. It has suffered a long, tortured history. I reviewed its premiere at Caltech for the Los Angeles Times in 1971. Then it was a chamber opera for five players of mostly Asian or Asian-inspired instruments, plus the rod-and-stick and shadow puppets, singers and a narrator. I praised the considerable beauties of its instrumental music and set pieces but complained about the protracted recitatives, the "long, arid patches of spoken narration" and the "precious, self-indulgent libretto by Robert Gordon." I concluded by grumping about "pervasive, embarrassing ennui."

There was a subsequent performance in San Francisco, but Harrison and Gordon recognized the need for improvements. In 1987, the Portland Gay Men's Chorus in Oregon commissioned a new version (with assistance from another beloved Californian, the patron Betty Freeman). Harrison added choruses, eliminated the puppets and revised the orchestration for Western (albeit equal-tempered) instruments. To judge from a video, this version lacked the charm provided by the puppets and Asian instruments and still dragged.



Portland Gay Men's Choir performance of "Young Caesar" in 1988. (Margaret Fisher / Margaret Fisher)

By 1997, I was director of the Lincoln Center Festival in New York, and I did a public conversation with Harrison. At the time, filmmaker and producer Eva Soltes told me Harrison was still eager to make "Young Caesar" into a successful opera. I commissioned Harrison to turn "Young Caesar" into a "real" opera, with consistent Western instrumentation and proper arias.

But the revision remained imperfect, due largely to Harrison's unwillingness to trim Gordon's libretto. After I returned to journalism and became a critic at the New York Times in 1998, my successor with the Lincoln Center Festival, Nigel Redden, tried to stage "Young Caesar." My idea had been to enlist as director the choreographer Mark Morris, who loves Harrison's music and has set many dances to it. I figured he would be sympathetic and that his name would attract audiences.

Morris declined, citing scheduling conflicts (though Soltes, now the keeper of the Harrison flame and director of the Harrison House artist residency and performance program, said Morris also felt the score needed improvements). Dennis Russell Davies was to have conducted the New York production, and according to Soltes, he suggested the choreographer Bill T. Jones as director — though Jones too was unwilling to proceed without alterations. His partner, Bjorn Amelan, worked up a revised, tightened version of the libretto, which Harrison refused to accept. Redden finally canceled the Lincoln Center project in 2001.

In 2007, four years after Harrison's death, Opera Parallèle in San Francisco finally staged the Lincoln Center score, honoring the composer's 90th birthday. This may have been the best version so far, but "Young Caesar" still suffered from dramaturgical clumsiness and excessive length.



And now: An image from a promotional video for "Young Caesar" directed by Yuval Sharon, the Los Angeles Philharmonic's artist-collaborator and leader of the experimental opera company the Industry. (Joshua Lipton)

So now we have yet another version, which sounds as if it will be much closer to what Redden and Jones were trying to achieve. Sharon first heard arias from the opera in New York 15 years ago. He has been discussing a new staging with Soltes (creative consultant for this production) for five years.

The new version has been compressed by a quarter — to 90 minutes, no intermission. With Gordon's and Soltes' eager acquiescence, Sharon and his conductor, Marc Lowenstein, worked with Bill Alves and Brett Campbell, authors of a new, definitive, critical biography of the composer. They cut down the recitatives and narration and some internal repeats and, adds Sharon, made tiny adjustments to the music to accommodate the shortening.

The instrumentation now comprises a 13-player Western ensemble and, especially for the scenes in exotic Bithynia, five obbligato Asian instruments and a full American gamelan, meaning a Javanese-style mostly metallic percussion orchestra made in America. (There are several replicas of the Harrison-Colvig original now; this one comes from South Dakota.) Sharon calls the new score a "hybrid" of the earlier versions.



(Los Angeles Philharmonic)



Daniel Selon's costume sketches for the new production of "Young Caesar." (Los Angeles Philharmonic)

Would Harrison have resisted the re-instrumentation and cuts? Will Harrison loyalists object to them? Soltes, Sharon and Robert Hughes, a longtime Harrison collaborator and conductor of the 1971 original Pasadena performances, think not.

"Lou liked to allow his interpreters a lot of leeway," Hughes said in a recent phone interview from Emeryville in the Bay Area. Sharon added that by the 1990s both Harrison and Gordon had become more open to cutting both the words and the music.

The hope is that the new version will finally validate "Young Caesar" as an opera that other companies will want to perform. Certainly a Harrison clan of admirers and collaborators will congregate at Disney Hall on Tuesday, in celebration but maybe also in apprehensive expectation.

Rockwell was a Los Angeles Times music and dance critic from 1970 to 1972, and later a New York Times critic, correspondent, columnist and editor.



'Young Caesar'

Where: Walt Disney Concert Hall, 111 S. Grand Ave., L.A.

When: 8 p.m. Tuesday

Tickets: Sold out

Information: (323) 850-2000, www.laphil.com