

Opera on the High Line: The Week in Classical Music

 [nytimes.com/2018/10/05/arts/music/classical-music-youtube.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/05/arts/music/classical-music-youtube.html)

5 October 2018

Credit Caitlin Ochs for The New York Times

[[Read all of our classical music coverage here.](#)]

Hello! I'm back in the office after spending time in Paris for [the opening of the Opéra's 350th-anniversary season](#). What a joy to have Meyerbeer's "Les Huguenots" brought back by the company that birthed it, for the first time since 1936. (And in a coolly stylish, excellently sung production, no less.)

I met with Stéphane Lissner, the Opéra's general director, who will depart because of French age limits in 2021. He said he wouldn't be putting any names of possible successors forward, [but rumors abound](#).

Also in opera news, [Rufus Wainwright's new opera, "Hadrian," opens next weekend](#) in Toronto. I don't think I was alone in finding his first one, "Prima Donna," slow going. But he's learned some things from that process, which he calls "a nightmare."

Turning to the violin: Joshua Barone spent some time at home in Massachusetts with Hilary Hahn, who, 21 years after her debut recording, [is returning to Bach for the rest of his solo works](#).

And congratulations to Leila Josefowicz, [who's won the \\$100,000 Avery Fisher Prize](#).
ZACHARY WOOLFE

For any faults it may have, it's impossible to not be moved by "The Mile-Long Opera," a sleek and poignant project by the architect Liz Diller and the composer David Lang, with text by Anne Carson and Claudia Rankine. The work unfolds along the length of the High Line, with a clever score that urges you forward with lures, in the form of chord resolution always just a little bit farther down the path.

Stories — dealing, obliquely, with themes of urban development and everything that accompanies it, good and bad — are sung and spoken by 1,000 performers plucked from professional and amateur choirs from around New York. "Rent's gone crazy," they sing amid the condos that create a valley of luxury on either side of the elevated park, but there are also lighter moments.

And serendipitous ones, like when they sang "I love the way after rain the smell of wet cement will stay in the streets all day," shortly after it happened to rain on Thursday evening, or when a woman fussily said "Just so noisy" as a helicopter took off just a couple of hundred feet away on the Hudson River.

The opera has the feel of an elegy, one that people can easily relate to if they've lived in New York and experienced how rapidly, and sometimes cruelly, it can change. Remaining performances are sold out, but a 360-degree video version created by Target is available at milelongopera.com. *JOSHUA BARONE*

The hangar-size Drill Hall of the Park Avenue Armory is probably no one's idea of the perfect space for Bach. But it has become home to some of New York's most memorable Bach performances of recent years: the large-scale "St. Matthew's Passion," performed by the Berlin Philharmonic in a searing staging by Peter Sellars, and also the deeply intimate "Goldberg" Variations played by the pianist Igor Levit in a collaboration with the artist Marina Abramovic. Now comes "The Six Brandenburg Concertos," a striking setting by the choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, played by the Baroque ensemble B'Rock (through Sunday).

Each of these Bach spectacles may have had elements that could dismay purists, but each turned a masterpiece into a generally thrilling event, thanks to smart programming and collaborations with top-notch artists. And events are all too rare for a composer who wrote no operas, and whom symphony orchestras have been shy about playing since the rise of period specialists. *MICHAEL COOPER*

Any time a new work by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker arrives in New York, it's as much a musical event as a dance one. That was especially the case with "The Six Brandenburg Concertos." Her pieces, like "Partita 2" (also to Bach) and "Vortex Temporum" (to Grisey), tend to explore the relationship between music and movement, often to revelatory effect. With her latest dance, she has shed new light on the "Brandenburgs"; this is a reading of the revolutionary concertos as joyous, youthful and borderline improvisatory. No need to look at this music, her choreography says, as some stuffy museum piece. *JOSHUA BARONE*

High-profile cancellations are far from unusual in the opera world. But when a bout of bronchitis forced Maria Callas to cut short a 1958 performance of "Norma," the press upbraided her as an ungrateful and unreliable diva. "My lynching had begun," she later said.

Such misunderstandings play a central role in director Tom Volf's new film, "Maria by Callas," which had its New York premiere at the Film Society of Lincoln Center's New Film Festival on Sunday. Delivering a wealth of rare footage of the great soprano, a lot of it personal and filmed at home with her poodles, the documentary probes Callas' fame: the popular myths that both cemented her "La Divina" status in the late 1950s and '60s and erased her as a private person offstage.

While Mr. Volf falls just short of hagiography at times and ultimately succumbs to other equally mythological narratives about her later life — the notion that her demise was hastened by a jilted heart, for one — there's enough fresh stuff here that the documentary deserves plaudits for its archival meticulousness. Those used to less-than-vivid stock of her concert performance of "Casta diva" in Paris or her Covent Garden "Habanera," for

instance, are in for a colorful treat. And if the interviews with David Frost and a baby Barbara Walters aren't enough to capture her essence, the mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, a diva in her own right, is on hand to read from private letters. *JOEL ROZEN*

Puccini's "La Bohème" may be the world's most familiar opera. But the cast currently appearing in the Metropolitan Opera's revival of Franco Zeffirelli's production brings wonderful freshness, spontaneity and warmth to their performances. Each singer in the six main roles is outstanding, especially the exciting tenor Vittorio Grigolo as Rodolfo, the appealing soprano Nicole Car as Mimì, and the charismatic Angel Blue as Musetta. Best of all, they worked together like a true ensemble of equals.

For this, the American conductor James Gaffigan, making his Met debut at 39, deserves credit. He is best known as a dynamic conductor of 20th-century repertory, like the Prokofiev symphonies. (Here he is expounding on Prokofiev's Fifth in conjunction with a performance in Toronto.) Earlier this year he conducted Bernstein's "Serenade" for Violin and Orchestra with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, a gripping account. And I was very impressed in 2015 when he led the New York Philharmonic in a crackling premiere performance of Andrew Norman's breathless "Split" for piano and orchestra.

He has also appeared at major opera houses and that experience came through in "Bohème." While giving his impassioned singers expressive leeway, he maintained cohesion and momentum in Puccini's episodic score. The Met and the Philharmonic should keep him in their rosters. *ANTHONY TOMMASINI*

Trending