

Eating Flowers (2015)

Hannah Lash (b. 1981)

[World Premiere | Festival Commission]

This work is the fifth commission made possible by composer John Adams and his wife, photographer Deborah O’Grady, at the Cabrillo Festival in support of emerging young composers; the commission was funded by their Pacific Harmony Foundation. Hannah Lash has provided the following note:

When I sat down to write *Eating Flowers* I felt in many ways that I was responding to the energies of orchestral music whose colors I find irresistible: music of Ravel, Rimsky-Korsakov, Debussy, and Messiaen particularly. My piece does not quote or even explicitly refer to this older music, but the energy and the color were certainly an influence. Because of this kind of indirect relationship I found my own work forming to the music I find so colorful and appealing, I titled my piece *Eating Flowers* to capture the sense of having tasted the delicious and delicate colors of my favorite orchestral music, which nourishes my own creative process.

—Hannah Lash

Not recorded

River Rouge Transfiguration (2013)

Missy Mazzoli (b. 1980)

[West Coast Premiere]

“...all around me and above me as far as the sky, the heavy, composite, muffled roar of torrents of machines, hard wheels obstinately turning, grinding, groaning, always on the point of breaking down but never breaking down.”

—Louis-Ferdinand Céline,
from *Journey to the End of the Night*

I first fell in love with Detroit while on tour with my band, Victoire, in 2010. When I returned home to New York I dove into early Detroit techno from the late eighties, Céline’s novel *Journey to the End of the Night*, and early 20th century photographs by Charles Sheeler, who documented Detroit’s River Rouge Plant in 1927 through a beautiful, angular photo series. In my research, I was struck by how often the landscape of Detroit inspired a kind of religious awe, with writers from every decade of the last century comparing the city’s factories to cathedrals and altars, and *Vanity Fair* even dubbing Detroit “America’s Mecca” in 1928. In Mark Binelli’s recent book *Detroit City Is the Place to Be*, he even describes a particular Sheeler photograph, *Criss-Crossed Conveyors*,

as evoking “neither grit nor noise but instead an almost tabernacular grace. The smokestacks in the background look like the pipes of a massive church organ, the titular conveyor belts forming the shape of what is unmistakably a giant cross.” This image, of the River Rouge Plant as a massive pipe organ, was the initial inspiration for *River Rouge Transfiguration*. This is music about the transformation of grit and noise (here represented by the percussion, piano, harp, and pizzicato strings) into something massive, resonant and unexpected. The “grit” is again and again folded into string and brass chorales that collide with each other, collapse, and rise over and over again.

—Missy Mazzoli

River Rouge Transfiguration was commissioned by the Detroit Symphony in honor of Elaine Lebenbom. It was premiered on May 31, 2013, at Orchestra Hall in Detroit with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Leonard Slatkin.

Not recorded

Blue Blazes (2012)

Sean Shepherd (b. 1979)

[West Coast Premiere]

I believe the Shakespeare truism goes that brevity is the soul of wit. I’m not completely sure that it isn’t the other way around. There is something deeply satisfying about hearing a piece that doesn’t beat around the bush; it’s one of the reasons why it’s easy to love a good concert overture. Whether it’s Beethoven’s *Egmont* or Dvorak’s *Carnival*, or delightfully clipped ruminations on fireworks by Stravinsky (and later Knussen), or the modern marvels of transport in works like Honegger’s *Pacific 231* and John Adams’ *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, I love sitting down for a concert and being promptly and efficiently dazzled. These classic works take their task, the *fêtes en miniature*, deadly seriously, and don’t mince their notes while charming us, yes, to bits.

Imagine my surprise: it’s a tough job, saying a lot by saying a little. With no time to explain oneself, the musical distillation process is best kept to the sketches. I went about it by looking at the words I’d chosen for the title (yes, those netherworldly blue blazes, and part of one of my favorite examples of that very important linguistic sub-category: the ever-useful exasperation idiom) and re-interpreting them as I liked, with hellish abandon. The piece’s eight minutes unfold variously as orchestra intrada, with different sections introduced in sequence, starting with the low strings, percussion and clarinets (after marking, point by point, a new

trail by peeling back bark on a tree, revealing the torchlike *blaze*), noble fanfare (after the German *blasen*, to blow), and wild, distracted, self-satisfied romp (what the ..., indeed).

Pondering blue, my thoughts tended toward the subtle, and the sensual. Perhaps a cool breeze or a visual cue—the gentle bobbing of boats of different sizes, all tethered to the same dock somewhere on the Mediterranean Sea—might make itself apparent. While considering the musical blue, I gravitated, among many other places, toward jazz: toward blue notes, toward luscious complex harmonies. Unlike many concert composers of the 20th and 21st centuries and several close friends, I’m not a jazz aficionado in any deep sense. But my admiration grows for the musical ethos of someone like pianist Bill Evans, of doing something for the hedonistic pleasure of hearing it, of lingering (or even wallowing) in great washes of cool blue sounds. I’d be surprised to hear someone point out a jazzy moment in this piece; any presence of homage is intended as a spiritual, not a literal, one.

—Sean Shepherd

Blue Blazes was commissioned by the National Symphony Orchestra, Washington, D.C. It was premiered on May 31, 2012, at the Kennedy Center Concert Hall with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Christoph Eschenbach.

Not recorded

Wish You Were Here (2007)

For those who are in danger by reason of their labor or their travel

Nico Muhly (b. 1981)

[West Coast Premiere]

I’ve always suspected that cartoons and illustrations do a better job capturing the emotional content of the unknown than pictures and first-hand narration. I have a picture in my head of the illustrators of the 1940s and 1950s, holed up in Belgium drawing the tribal peoples of the Congo, or in California articulating gorgeous Arabian landscapes for early animated films, participating along the way in all of the politically charged problems that arise from empires, colonies, and the abuses of political power. There is something inherently romantic about willfully ignoring the complexities of drawing on sources; artists who ignore political overtones go on to inspire the next generation who, in turn, worry about them too much, and so on and so forth in an unending cycle of guilt and influence. *Wish You Were Here* pays homage to Colin McPhee, one of the first western musicologists to study Balinese

gamelan, as well as to the great illustrators Carl Barks and Hergé (responsible for Donald Duck & Tintin, respectively). I tried to write a completely romantic and fanciful gamelan-influenced piece, attempting nothing but the most superficial authenticity. On top of this twittery and excited music, a long, lonesome melody unfolds. After a desolate interlude with severe, ship-horn brass, the energetic patterns start again and the long line returns, this time with a triumphant, revelatory ending.

—Nico Muhly

Wish You Were Here was written for the Boston Pops and was premiered in June 2007, at Symphony Hall, Boston, conducted by Keith Lockhart.

Not recorded

Double Concerto for Violin and Cello (2010)

Philip Glass (b. 1937)

[West Coast Premiere]

Philip Glass' Double Concerto for Violin and Cello was composed in the spring of 2010 as an original score for the ballet *Swan Song* by choreographers Sol León and Paul Lightfoot. The original commission was simply for an

orchestral work from Glass. However, the composer had wanted to compose a double concerto for violin and cello for quite some time, and this provided the perfect occasion to realize the piece. Glass felt that the solo instruments would make perfect dramatic analogs to the lead dancers on stage. The dance world has long been a birthplace for concert works (including Glass' own *Heroes* Symphony) and the Netherlands Dance Theater and its choreographers graciously embraced this idea.

The form of the concerto is unique. Conventional knowledge makes available two methods of approaching the composition of concertos. The first is to cast the soloist as hero battling against the orchestra. The second method is to have the soloist supported by and playing with the orchestra in a still defined solo role. Glass' concerto is unique because the composer largely ignored those two models, composing a duet to precede each of the three orchestral movements. These movements, while undeniably Glassian, are quite intimate and possess a timeless classical tone while reminding the listener more of chamber music. By contrast, the orchestral movements are dramatic symphonic statements without necessarily featuring the soloists in virtuosic technical shows.

After the opening duet, we move into the first fast movement, infused with energy and force. The second movement—the heart of the concerto—opens with a slowly building dirge in the brass to an incredible volume, before erupting into an explosive, rollicking dance for the soloists. It is here that perhaps the dance element is at its most present in Glass' orchestral writing. After the climax of the second movement, the third duet then leads into a mad dash of wonderful vibrancy. Curiously, and consistent with the individual character of this concerto, Glass concludes the work not on the triumphant emotional conclusion of the third orchestral movement, but with a final, somber duet. It is a fitting epilogue and satisfying conclusion to this atypical and exceptional work.

—Richard Guérin

The Double Concerto for Violin and Cello was commissioned by the Netherlands Dance Theater. It was premiered on April 22, 2010, with violinist Cecilia Bernardini, cellist Maarte-Maria den Herder, and the Residentie Orkest (The Hague Philharmonic), conducted by Jurjen Hempel.

Recommended Recording: Philip Glass: The Concerto Project, Vol. 4. Residentie Orkest with soloists Tim Fain and Wendy Sutter, conducted by Jurjen Hempel. Orange Mountain.