FROM THE PRESIDENT

What Does Your Contribution Do?

Since tax day is fast approaching and you will be remembering how much you donated to KUSC in 2014, I want to take this opportunity to give you a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the impact of your contribution. You definitely made it possible for us to continue to broadcast the last standing FM classical service in Southern California, but that only scratches the surface of what you have accomplished.

You have helped listeners through illnesses and loss. You have helped listeners celebrate their most joyous moments. You have prevented more episodes of road rage than any of us will ever know. You have made long commutes bearable and provided companionship in the workplace and at home. You have provided a classical music service to people in other cities and countries who do not have a local station to call their own.

You have introduced classical music to countless numbers of babies and children directly and through teachers who play KUSC in the classroom. You have helped arts organizations throughout Southern California sell tickets and fill concert halls. You have helped launch the careers of talented young musicians, and supported the work of established artists. And you have helped all of our listeners learn more about great music that has withstood the test of time.

Every single day listeners call and write us to tell us how important KUSC is to them, and every day we are grateful to you for your support that makes this service possible. When you are preparing or reviewing your taxes, I hope you will take a moment to reflect on the contribution to KUSC that you are deducting, and the major impact it has had on hundreds of thousands of people.

If you are interested in doing more to help KUSC accomplish its important mission, we would be happy to talk with you about charitable gift annuities and other financial vehicles that allow you to contribute more to the organization and receive tax benefits.

Thank you so much for your dedication to KUSC!

Brenda Barnes

COVER PHOTO: LACO, CONDUCTED BY JEFFREY KAHANE, AT THE PIANO, PERFORM NORMAN’S FRANK’S HOUSE. PHOTO COURTESY LOS ANGELES CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

TOP PHOTO: MUSICIANS OF LACO PERFORM NORMAN’S FRANK’S HOUSE. PHOTO COURTESY RAELEE MARCUS

FINDING THE SOUND OF Frank’s House
Rising Young Composer Andrew Norman Melds Music & Architecture

BY BRIAN LAURITZEN & KELSEY MCCONNELL

In recent years, top music critics—from the New Yorker’s Alex Ross to the LA Times’ Mark Swed and beyond—have been singing the praises of composer Andrew Norman. Some have gone so far as to dub Norman’s Play, premiered in 2013, the greatest large-scale piece of orchestral music written thus far in the 21st century. The 35-year old is currently in his final season of a three year stint as composer-in-residence of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra (LACO).

“I actually moved to LA for year one, so I really feel like I’m truly ‘in-residence’ with this orchestra,” he told KUSC. “It’s been great to get to know the players, [Music Director] Jeffrey Kahane and the audience, and to feel like I’m part of that community.”

For Norman, the move to LA was technically a move back to the city. A native Midwesterner, he earned both a bachelor’s and master’s from the USC Thornton School of Music, and lived in Los Angeles for several years before decamping to Brooklyn. He feels the LA music scene transformed during his years away. He admits he sometimes misses Brooklyn and New York, but says, “those are places with very active music scenes, but they’re established. We kind of know what’s what when we’re there. LA has this boundless energy about it. There’s this huge amount of potential and this feeling of excitement that we could do almost anything with the music scene here, because there are so many people, and so much imagination and creativity. I just love it.”

Norman is also back on his old stomping grounds as a composition teacher at Thornton. “It’s a little humbling to be wandering around amidst all my old professors—all these people who scared me to death when I was 18 and now I’m supposed to be one of them. But I’m gradually getting used to the idea that I’m in charge of these impressionable young minds, opening them up and furthering them along.”

Composition, like any creative venture, is such a subjective endeavor: how does one teach it? Norman says he’s thought a lot about that challenge and finds it both complicated and exciting.

“It’s nothing like the other branches of conservatory music training,” he says. “When you go to study with a violinist, you’re learning to play the violin the way they play the violin. But composing is totally different. I’m not training my young composers to sound like me. I want them to be themselves, because ultimately the world needs fresh voices. Classical music needs fresh voices. So it’s a very tricky balance of making kids aware of the tradition in which they’re writing, so they need to know a lot of music and they need to know a lot of the skills that older composers used throughout the generations. But they also need to figure out how they can use those skills to be themselves. I must say, today’s younger generation is very exciting, because they listen to everything, even more than when I was
in school. At its very best, it creates a very egalitarian “open-earedness.” They don’t judge, they don’t say ‘here are the boundaries of my field.’ It can be very daunting, too, as both a professor and a student, because you can deal with any sonic resources. I end up talking with my kids a lot about ‘why’. To me, the ‘why’ questions are perhaps more interesting and fruitful than the ‘how’.

One of Norman’s own frequent sources of inspiration is architecture. “When I was still in school and struggling with modernism and what that means in music, I went to the architecture library at USC and looked at all these models and books about buildings and I realized there was a way for me to think about sound and modernism in music through thinking about architecture.”

That early realization surely paid off earlier this year when Norman debuted with LACO a new composition called Frank’s House, inspired by the home of architect Frank Gehry. When he purchased it in the late 1970’s, Gehry’s residence was a fairly typical two-story Santa Monica house. With only a shoestring budget for remodeling, Gehry used industrial materials like corrugated metal and chain-link fencing to “surround the old house with the new house,” as he told KUSC.

Recently, Gehry invited Norman to visit the home. Norman said he observed how Gehry took the original pink bungalow and “blew it up, using industrial materials to build a kind of shell. In my piece Frank’s House, there’s an old piece of music kind of stuck in the middle that I’m pulling apart. The idea is to take a set of Brahms waltzes that to me represent 19th century domestic music and explode it in the rest of the piece.”

Norman gathered some of the same materials Gehry added to his home and experimented with what they could sound like. Or as he says: “I mined the expressive potential of chain-link fence by whacking it with certain sticks.”

Frank’s House premiered on February 5th at the Moss Theater in Santa Monica. It was part of LACO’s Westside Connections series, which has been exploring the connections between music and architecture. The final Westside Connections concert takes place April 30th, and will include insight from LA Times architecture critic Christopher Hawthorne and a West Coast premiere of Bradbury Studies by composer Gabriel Kahane.

Norman is currently hard at work not only molding minds at USC, but also creating a new commission from the LA Phil to premiere next February as part of the Phil’s series Dudamel & Music from the Americas. Keep up with Norman at his website, andrewnormanmusic.com.

Brian Lauritzen is heard weekdays from 1PM to 4PM on Classical KUSC. He’s also the host of Arts Alive (Saturdays at 8AM), Soul Music (Sundays 6AM-9AM) and the LA Philharmonic Live from Disney Hall series, which is part of KUSC SoCal Sunday Night at 7PM.

Kelsey McConnell is the Assistant Program Director of KUSC and the Executive Producer of Arts Alive.

Dry Acoustics Mar Recording of Romantic Masterworks

BY JIM SVEJDA

For the first recorded collaboration between two such potent and individual personalities as Sir John Eliot Gardiner and Maria João Pires, you’d expect something extraordinary: either a spectacularly successful case of opposites attracting, or another demoralizing example of what the British characterize as “chalk and cheese” (in this country, we call it Frankenstein meets the Wolfman). What you might not expect is the perfectly fine, but rather unremarkable, version of the Schumann Concerto offered here.

Part of the problem, certainly, is the dismal, notoriously dry acoustic of London’s Barbican. In the impulsive, but sometimes rhythmically spongy reading of the opening movement, the pianist’s dreamy ruminations often become so introspective that they’re drowned out by the clarinet, then by the oboe. Things pick up with a gently witty look at the Intermezzo, and get even better in a pleasantly buoyant finale, where the conductor’s vibrant rhythms clearly take charge. And while the soloist does some enchanting things with the delicate ornamental filigree, the reading generally lacks the propulsive excitement needed to make it truly competitive.

There’s certainly no lack of excitement in the Mendelssohn pieces—a bit too much, the conductor’s critics would suggest. Gardiner captures the Overture’s brooding intensity to perfection, while the faster music is taken by the scruff of the neck and shaken for all it’s worth. The effect is literally electrifying, like lighting flashing out of the lowering clouds. The LSO winds are especially responsive, chirping as magically as they did for a young Peter Maag in their classic recording from the late 1950’s. If anything, the version of the “Scottish” Symphony is even more impressive, both cogently argued and thrillingly played.

Again, it’s a shame that what would have been genuinely competitive versions of the Mendelssohn works should have been let down again by the sound of this hall. It’s high time the city fathers either totally revamp the place or—better yet—tear it down.
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Weekend Highlights

KUSC SoCal Sunday Night
Great local concerts every Sunday night at 7pm.

LA Philharmonic Live from Disney Hall
Sunday, April 5 | 7 pm
Juanjo Mena, conductor
Bezhod Abduraimov, piano

Prokofiev: Symphony No. 1 “Classical”
Prokofiev: Piano Concerto No. 3
Dvořák: Symphony No. 7

Sunday, April 12 | 7 pm
Esa-Pekka Salonen, conductor
Olivier Latry, organ

Janáček: Sinfonietta
Kajsa Saariaho: Mazn varjot (US premiere)
Sibelius: Lemminkainen Suite

Sunday, April 19 | 7 pm
Esa-Pekka Salonen, conductor
Jeremy Denk, piano

Mozart: Piano Concerto No. 20, K.466
Beethoven: Symphony No. 3, “Eroica”

Sunday, April 26 | 7 pm
Gustavo Dudamel, conductor
Cameron Carpenter, organ

Barber: Toccata Festiva for Organ and Orchestra
Scriabin (arr. Carpenter): Sonata No. 2 (for solo organ)
Stephen Hartke: Symphony No. 4 (world premiere)
Saint-Saëns: Symphony No. 3, “Organ Symphony”

Metropolitan Opera Broadcasts
Saturday, April 4 | 10 AM
Verdi: Ernani
Levine, conductor; Meade, Meli, Domingo, Belosselskiy

Saturday, April 11 | 10 AM
Verdi: Don Carlo
Nézet-Séguin, conductor; Frittoli, Gubanova, Lee, Keenlyside, Furlanetto, Morris

Saturday, April 18 | 10 AM
Shostakovich: Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk
Conlon, conductor; Westbroek, Jovanovich, Very, Kotscherga

Saturday, April 25 | 10 AM
Mascagni: Cavalleria Rusticana
Luisi, conductor; Westbroek, Álvarez, Lučić

Leoncavallo: Pagliacci
Luisi, conductor; Racette, Álvarez, Gagnidze, Meachem

The Record Shelf with Jim Svejda
Sunday, April 4 | 10 pm
Beecham’s Best?
Sir Thomas Beecham in historic recordings with the greatest of his London orchestras – and many thought the greatest orchestra of its time – the London Philharmonic.

Sunday, April 12 | 10 pm
Call Me Irresponsible.
In the first of two programs, great opera stars of the past sing popular songs.

Sunday, April 19 | 10 pm
Call Me Irresponsible.
In the second of two programs, great opera stars of the past sing popular songs.

Sunday, April 26 | 10 pm
The Classmates.
Leopold Stokowski leads of program of music by his old friend Ralph Vaughan Williams, including the American premiere of the composer’s 9th Symphony.