

WAR OF THE WORLDS

Sunday, November 12, 2017 & Saturday, November 18, 2017



PRESS RECAP

DOCUMENTATION

Audio Excerpt

<https://soundcloud.com/annie-gosfield/war-of-the-worlds-5-minute-version>

Short Video Documentary

https://youtu.be/f_O5JUg0HhE

Video on Twitter from public performance spaces

Siren 2

<https://twitter.com/waroftheworlds/status/931983971990118400>

Siren 3

<https://twitter.com/waroftheworlds/status/932015722636632064>

Siren 1

https://twitter.com/3_DIY/status/929850967830302720

REVIEWS

New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/13/arts/music/review-war-worlds-los-angeles-philharmonic.html>

Review: A ‘Fake News’ Opera on the Streets of Los Angeles

By Seth Colter Walls / November 13, 2017



Hila Plitmann, in red as the alien La Sirena, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic performing “War of the Worlds” at Walt Disney Concert Hall. Credit Michal Czerwonka for The New York Times

LOS ANGELES — In their 1938 radio adaptation of H.G. Wells’s “The War of the Worlds,” Orson Welles and his Mercury Theater troupe proved that [simulated news](#) — in that case, an uncannily realistic account of an alien invasion — could make for pulse-quickening, even panic-inducing entertainment.

Almost 80 years later, riffing on reportage still pulls an audience. The “Weekend Update” segment of “Saturday Night Live” and “The Daily Show” rely on familiar formulas. But some of the shock has gone out of the enterprise now that “fake news” has become a cliché. Bringing this once-audacious prank to the stage in 2017 faces a hurdle: how to make the original broadcast once again seem surprising.



At the premiere here on Sunday of an operatic version of “War of the Worlds,” the composer Annie Gosfield and the director Yuval Sharon responded to that challenge with a barrage of playful tricks that sprawled well beyond Walt Disney Concert Hall, where the performance was ostensibly taking place. Produced by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Industry (Mr. Sharon’s experimental opera company) and the public art organization Now Art, the production had both chuckle-out-loud moments and haunting ones.



Sigourney Weaver as the narrator in “War of the Worlds.” Credit Michal Czerwonka for The New York Times

In a speaking role, Sigourney Weaver was a crucial link between the original and this new work. Instead of Orson Welles’s radio announcer, whose between-song commentary is interrupted by a Martian invasion, Ms. Weaver introduced the opera by portraying a lightly fictionalized version of herself — that is, as a marquee Hollywood name, here to lend a classical performance some glamour.

Ms. Weaver’s opening lines promised an evening of planetary-theme odes by Ms. Gosfield. Then, after the aliens appeared, she was called upon to “interrupt” this planned concert, giving the audience regular updates and facilitating question-and-answer sessions with sources outside the hall, where extraterrestrial destruction is taking place.

This inside-outside dynamic allowed Mr. Sharon, a recent winner of a MacArthur fellowship and the director of productions that have ranged over a train station and in cars throughout Los Angeles, to indulge his passion for staging operas in [multiple locations](#) simultaneously. This time around, as the “traditional” audience listened to vocalists and members of the Los Angeles Philharmonic in Disney Hall, Ms. Weaver’s interlocutors and some other instrumentalists were stashed at three locations across the city, where additional crowds could attend, free of charge. (These [exterior sites](#) were chosen from among the locations of this city’s Cold War-era, now-defunct air raid sirens.)

Does this concept sound overstuffed? Initially, at least from inside Disney Hall, it threatened to feel disjointed. There, Ms. Gosfield’s thrilling chamber orchestra writing was, by necessity, often

cut off by the need to reintroduce Ms. Weaver’s narrator and her latest bit of news about the alien-induced pandemonium.



The actor James Hayden and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Credit Michal Czerwonka for The New York Times

Yet the hard-charging first movement, “Mercury,” was more than capable of standing on its own as a sizzling orchestral piece. Its references to vintage big-band jazz were refracted through some piercing microtonal harmonies. And the writing for brass instruments often merged seamlessly with buzzing, noisy motifs from the composer’s [“sampling keyboard,”](#) a vivid instrument of her own design, similarly prominent in some of her [earlier work](#).

By the narrator’s interruptions during the following movement — a witty modernization of a crooner-and-orchestra number — the transitions came across as forced and a touch repetitive. But this early clunkiness abated as soon as Ms. Gosfield’s music was allowed to merge with the dramatic passages for Ms. Weaver’s narrator and the various “outdoor” characters.

One ideal blend came during the opera’s most memorable aria, sung by the character Mrs. Martinez — a witness to the panic outside the hall. The mezzo-soprano Suzanna Guzmán performed the song at one of the raid siren locations, accompanied by pizzicato bass and a lyrically swooning violin stationed nearby. The music was relayed to the crowd in Disney Hall as Mr. Sharon’s staging there brought a visualization of the alien (dubbed La Sirena in the libretto) being described by Mrs. Martinez. The collapse of physical distance was simple in design, perhaps, but stunning in execution.

These dizzying shifts in narrative space helped the opera seem like more than just a collection of clever gestures. Mr. Sharon wrote in a program note that “there is no privileged perspective” from which to view the production. But at critical moments, it’s obviously hard for audience members *not* to wonder about which position confers the best possible view. Those unavoidable considerations, in turn, pull the opera away from the comparatively well-trod “fake news” conceit, and toward a poetic way of exploring how different communities might absorb the same developing news story from different vantages and through different media.



Ms. Plitmann as La Sirena. Credit Michal Czerwonka for The New York Times

Are we together during a crisis, or not? This “War of the Worlds” never becomes overtly didactic on this point, preferring to let the question linger in the air. The opera also seems to hold out hope for a truly communal experience. The finale unites players across the three siren stations and the concert hall for one last mutual gasp — even after audience members in Disney Hall have been told that the building’s titanium cladding has protected them alone from the aliens’ deadly heat ray. (Thanks, Frank Gehry!)

The “inside” crowd had the benefit of experiencing the chest-crushing low frequencies of Disney Hall’s organ, and a brief onstage cameo by Mayor Eric Garcetti of Los Angeles. But the off-site crowds might have enjoyed a more rollicking, street-fair experience, — while [still hearing](#) Ms. Gosfield’s imaginative score clearly. There was plenty of lively [crowd-captured video](#) from the [siren sites](#) posted on social media. And there were large-scale, [puppet-and-dance visualizations](#) of the aliens that the Disney Hall crowd never saw.

“War of the Worlds” plays again, twice, on [Nov. 18](#). An enterprising spirit could sign up for a free seat at a siren location, then pay to see the show directly afterward, inside Disney Hall. The rest of us may have to root for a souped-up recorded edition, perhaps one offering different vantage points.

It would also be ideal to have a distilled suite of Ms. Gosfield’s musical highlights. Even in a production that made a virtue of stalling and redistributing the flow of music, her contributions created a steady sense of momentum, conjuring some of that 1930s excitement, if (thankfully) a bit less mass hysteria.

LA Times: <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-war-of-the-worlds-review-20171114-story.html>

'War of the Worlds': Delirious opera rises from the death and destruction of L.A.

By Mark Swed / November 13, 2017



Alien singer Hila Plitmann and percussionist Matthew Howard perform with the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group in Annie Gosfield's "War of the Worlds" on Sunday at Walt Disney Concert Hall. (Craig T. Mathew / Los Angeles Philharmonic)

When the [Los Angeles Philharmonic](#) got the curious notion it needed another opera director on its payroll (Peter Sellars had been the first in the 1990s), it gave Yuval Sharon the vague title of “artist-collaborator” last season, after he rejected “disrupter at large” as having become too conventionally corporate. What Sharon really is is an *opera*-tor at large. He turns whatever he touches, and wherever he wanders, into opera, whether it wants to be or not.

So here’s what you need to know about the heavily hyped “War of the Worlds” that Sharon mounted at the [Walt Disney Concert Hall](#) on Sunday afternoon for the L.A. Phil, in collaboration with his own massively disruptive opera company, the Industry, and the nonprofit Now Art L.A. A new opera and new kind of opera by Annie Gosfield, it does everything an opera’s supposed to. It does a lot opera’s not supposed to do. That includes immersive opera, one of Sharon’s specialties as the mastermind of “Hopscotch,” the celebrated opera in autos two years ago.

There are two more performances of “War of the Worlds,” both on Saturday afternoon as part of the L.A. Phil new music marathon Noon to Midnight. Stop reading and go straight the [L.A. Phil website](#) and nab any seat you can find (tickets start at \$25).

On the most basic level, this is a fairly straightforward operatic adaption and update of Orson Welles’ famous 1938 radio broadcast, based on H.G. Wells’ science-fiction novel “The War of the Worlds.” At a

time when radio broadcasts were beginning to be interrupted by news flashes, Welles treated the play as an ordinary dance-band radio program with increasingly frightening bulletins of an alien invasion. The brilliantly theatrical night-before-Halloween prank caused panic among some gullible listeners, giving credence to Russian futurist Velimir Khlebnikov's prediction that radio had the power to become the Great Sorcerer. Sharon sees the panic as an early-warning sign of the imposing threat of fake news.



Sigourney Weaver is narrator of "War of the Worlds" at Walt Disney Concert Hall. (Craig T. Mathew / Los Angeles Philharmonic)

Riffing on the radio show, this "War of the Worlds" begins as a symphony concert, albeit one with a celebrity host, Sigourney Weaver. The opera will eventually take over the concert, which is meant to include Gosfield's new celestial orchestral cycle to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Holst's "The Planets."

The program book has elaborately descriptive program notes by one Alastair Featherbottom, of the new nine-planet suite, which begins with "Mercury, the Trickster." A bass (James Hayden) is part of the languorously sexy "Venus" movement that follows, offering camp intimations of some bisexual Elvis business. We get no further (no robot taking the orchestra or 99 women's voices lift us to random perfection of "Pluto").

Weaver breaks in again and again on the first two movements with reports from outdoors, which are beamed into the hall (audio only, this is radio). Astronomy professor Pierson (actor Hugo Armstrong), standing on a parking lot, attempts to allay fear with his soothing British accent. Mrs. Martinez (mezzo-soprano Suzanna Guzmán) offers a more feverish firsthand account of the scary machines and creatures somewhere on Main Street. Gen. Lansing (baritone Hadleigh Adams) haplessly leads the troops in attacking the aliens.

Before long the music creeps into the action. The Martians have an alien voice in soprano Hila Plitmann's stratospherically supernatural coloratura (and she does look like she might have stepped out of an outtake of "Alien"), accompanied by theremin and otherworldly percussion. Sharon's libretto follows Peter Koch's original radio play fairly closely. L.A. doesn't fare any better than New York City. Civic officials are of little help, although the mayor valiantly tries. There is political humor for all.

We're told at the end that Disney Hall's titanium reflected the Martians' death rays. (Of course, titanium proved too expensive to the Music Center bottom-liners, so architect [Frank Gehry](#) actually turned to steel. Fake news really may signal the end of us all.)

The best way to write about "War of the Worlds" is not to write about it, which is why I've left the show's secret weapon to the end, even though it should necessarily always be the first item of operatic business with a new work. It, though, is the greatest surprise of all.

Gosfield is a composer who often picks up old stuff and puts it to new use in her pieces, be it a piano score of Debussy, junk from decrepit factories or the scratchy cactus needles that were once used for playing 78 rpm records. Her approach to "War of the Worlds" seems to be that of a 22nd century post-Martian-invasion musician archaeologist trying to re-create the music of a time slightly earlier than our own, using a few clues and the broken remnants of instruments and rusty electronics.



Christopher Rountree conducting. (Craig T. Mathew / Los Angeles Philharmonic)

The electronics are pervasive in the orchestra, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group was conducted with exceptional vibrancy and dramatic flair by Christopher Rountree (yet another secret weapon). Those electronics at first can sound like they are meant to degrade modern instrumental timbre in a boneheaded effort toward authenticity, but they wind up doing the opposite, enhancing the color and atmospheric flavor of whatever they come near.

Still, half the time you don't know what is what. The solo cello that underscores professor Pierson, or the violin and bassoon for the acting secretary of the Interior (Estella Ramos) are so effective that they seem to amplify the spoken voice.

Finally, there are those decommissioned sirens left over from the Second World War that still peek out from behind billboards and buildings around town, noticed primarily by history buffs. They're the symbol of the production and were one of the motivating ideas for both Sharon and Gosfield, who was obsessed with them when she studied at CalArts in the 1980s.

In the end, they are about the least interesting thing visually, theatrically or sonically about the production. It is not that they aren't marvelous in their mysteriously antiquated way; it is just that every other aspect of this opera and its sensational production and performance happens to be more marvelous.

Go for the curtain call alone. That I won't give away.

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'War of the Worlds'

Where: Walt Disney Concert Hall, 111 S. Grand Ave., as well as at three siren sites to be disclosed with an online reservation

When: Noon and 2 p.m. Saturday

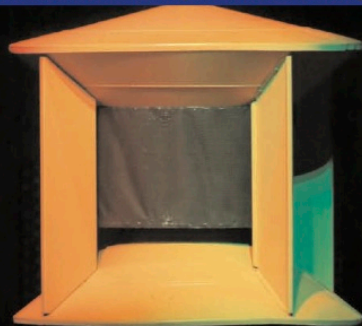
Price: \$25-\$58 (includes admission to the L.A. Phil's [Noon to Midnight](#) event); siren sites are free with reservation

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

Running time: 1 hour, 5 minutes

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OPERA EVERYWHERE

Gosfield: *War of the Worlds* (world premiere)

Los Angeles

Yuval Sharon, the iconoclastic stage director who was given a coveted MacArthur “Genius” Grant in October for his exploratory work in opera, was originally tapped to be the Los Angeles Philharmonic’s “disrupter-in-residence” until cooler heads prevailed (he became their “artist-collaborator” instead in 2016). He is dead-set on getting operas out of the opera houses and into the streets—or both at once—and managed to do just that November 12 in his latest more-than-heavily promoted project, a contemporary take on Orson Welles’s notorious 1938 radio adaptation of HG Wells’s novel, *War of the Worlds*. It was a co-production of Sharon’s company The Industry, NOW Art, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

There was serious intent behind this outlandish idea, an exploration of the concept of “fake news,” or in Sharon’s words “distinguishing fact from fabrication”. Also, in the end, this *War of the Worlds* reflects Sharon’s desire to encourage a feeling of community in a fragmented city where there isn’t much of it.

On the way to its solemn conclusion, *War of the Worlds* was mostly a hoot and a half—highly entertaining. It wouldn’t scare or mislead anybody, but no one expected it to. These are

far more cynical times than 1938. The whole thing took place on four separate stages: Walt Disney Concert Hall and the downtown L.A. sites of three decommissioned refurbished air raid sirens left over from World War II. Actress Sigourney Weaver played host at Disney Hall, introducing Christopher Rountree and the LA Phil New Music Group, who were about to play Annie Gosfield’s suite of pieces about the nine planets, a nod to the centenary of Holst’s *Planets* but without any references.

Following the overall arc of Howard Koch’s script for the Welles broadcast, the orchestra’s journey to ‘Mercury’ was suddenly interrupted by reports of explosions hurtling toward the Earth from the planet Mars. Weaver took us by audio feed to eyewitness accounts at the siren sites, including an innocent bystander (mezzo-soprano Suzanna Guzman) wildly bewailing the invasion, and a general (Hadleigh Adams) who sounded like he was gradually becoming unglued at the sight of invading Martians. The orchestra was interrupted again and again by news reports or deafening bassy electronic eruptions. Somehow, the producers got Los Angeles’s Mayor Eric Garcetti to play himself, showing his skill with a Teleprompter in delivering the bad news about the invaders. There was no video from any of the sites, since Sharon wanted to preserve our “theatre of the mind”. The complicated synchronizing of the sites worked well.

In previous big-thinking projects like *Invisible Cities* and *Hopscotch*, Sharon’s razzle-dazzle productions masked rather weak scores. But this time he got a good one from Gosfield, full of imagination, radio static, and weird, wonderfully perverse scoring. ‘Mercury’ was a goofy, galumphing electro-acoustic piece of work, ‘Venus’ a hilarious avant-garde pop song where the stiffly-outfitted bass James Hayden was interrupted in the middle of dissecting tabloid rumors about Elvis’s “bisexuality” by the first explosion.

Later on, huge crunches of the Disney Hall pipe organ signified ‘Earth’, and the percussion section got a Varese *Ionisation*-like workout as the general flipped out. The swoops of a theremin matched the ultra-sonic vocal burblings from the fearless-as-ever soprano Hila Plittmann, made up to look like an alien (or perhaps a rock star). At a certain point, the orchestra was allowed to play on without interruption as an undercurrent to the chaotic scenario outside the hall, and the framework of the planets, as goofily described in the program notes by one Alastair Featherbottom, seemed to disappear altogether until the ‘Pluto’ coda.

I saw the production again November 18, but this time near Siren 1, on the top level of a parking structure overlooking downtown, one block from Disney Hall. Here, we were supposedly at the Mt Wilson Observatory, facing a table filled with lab glassware and boiling chemicals where Prof Richard Pierson (Hugo Armstrong), speaking in an accent of unknown provenance, preened and assured and finally gave in to despair. The old yellow air raid siren represented the “cylinder” where the Martians landed; we heard the creepy vocalises of Plittmann coming from it midway through the production. Toward the end, a giant mechanical spider from Mars lurched our way.

Outdoors, the piece seemed even more involving, funny, and entertaining, and there was the added bonus of serendipity as police or fire sirens roared through the streets during the general’s meltdown. Mayor Garcetti didn’t show up this time, though; he sent an e-mail.

One last fine point: near the end, a stage hand cried out that the “titanium” walls of Disney Hall repelled the Martians’ heat rays and saved everyone in the building. Uh, Disney’s walls are clad with steel because they decided not to use titanium to save money. Fake news!

RICHARD S GINELL

The New Yorker: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/11/the-dark-side-of-the-gold-rush>

The Dark Side of the Gold Rush

By Alex Ross / December 11, 2017

November was a good month for new opera in the Golden State. Down south, the Los Angeles Philharmonic presented Annie Gosfield's "War of the Worlds," an adaptation of Orson Welles's hoax broadcast of 1938, which fooled some radio listeners into believing that a Martian invasion was under way. As with "Girls of the Golden West," an episode from the American past proves uncomfortably relevant to the present. Gosfield, a New York-based composer with a virtuosic command of classical, pop, and avant-garde styles, began the score before "fake news" entered the lexicon. Like Welles, she places the reality-bending power of the media under scrutiny.

The libretto is by the young Los Angeles-based director Yuval Sharon, who three years ago masterminded the astounding multi-composer opera "Hopscotch," in which audience members were ferried around L.A. in limousines. "War of the Worlds" was less logistically elaborate, but it did involve simultaneous performances in various locations. The main audience was seated at Disney Hall, where the orchestra was ostensibly performing a new suite, by Gosfield, modelled on Holst's "The Planets." The actress Sigourney Weaver, who has a history with aliens, assumed the pose of an unctuous gala host. Halfway through the "Mercury" movement, she broke in with the first of many news bulletins. As the concert faltered—we never got past "Earth"—Weaver elicited live reports from three nearby parking lots, each of which had its own performers and audience. The auxiliary sites were placed near antiquated air-raid sirens that still stand throughout the city; they hummed with extraterrestrial transmissions. Scientists jabbered technicalities; a TV reporter interviewed eyewitnesses; a military honcho tried to impose order. Eric Garcetti, the mayor of Los Angeles, had a cameo, appearing onstage at Disney with a reassuring message: "Please don't attempt to leave this building. Just outside these walls is utter chaos." A climactic ray-gun assault on Disney was repelled by the metal shield that Frank Gehry had presciently installed on the exterior. Weaver exclaimed, "The power of music has redeemed humanity once again!"

This "War of the Worlds" is, in other words, a comedy from the outset. Wisely, it makes no attempt to duplicate the original 1938 scare, although a few passersby at the outdoor sites were momentarily bewildered by the racket. (One bystander asked, "What's going on, dude?" When someone answered, "Aliens have landed," he nodded and walked away.) The libretto is well stocked with in-jokes. There are obligatory references to L.A. traffic, which apparently gets even worse during Martian invasions. Weaver incited extended laughter when she reported computer anomalies and "gas outbursts" in such locales as "Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania." Gosfield's "Planets" deftly parodies composerly clichés: the "Venus" movement contains textbook examples of how not to double voices with instrumental lines. Like "Hopscotch," "War of the Worlds" changed shape depending on where you were watching. No one had a privileged view. Indeed, the siren stations, where tickets were free, were probably the most fun: to the delight of kids in attendance, puppet aliens encroached upon the

Classical Voice America: <http://classicalvoiceamerica.org/2017/11/13/sharons-war-of-the-worlds-takes-off-at-disney-hall/>

Spaced-Out Opera Lifts Off With Martian Help

By Rick Schultz / November 13, 2017



Narrator Sigourney Weaver (left) and soprano Hila Plitmann (right) as a Martian visitor flank Los Angeles mayor Eric Garcetti, making a surprise appearance as the Mayor, in 'War of the Worlds.' (Craig T. Mathew/Mathew Imaging)

LOS ANGELES — By turns silly, sophisticated, and just plain fun, [Yuval Sharon's](#) sci-fi opera *War of the Worlds* premiered Nov. 12 with [Christopher Rountree](#) leading the [Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group](#) before an enthusiastic audience in a sold-out [Walt Disney Concert Hall](#).

Fast becoming one of the hottest tickets in town, *War of the Worlds* features the combined attractions of [Annie Gosfield's](#) riveting score, coloratura soprano [Hila Plitmann's](#) tour-de-force portrayal of a Martian, and actress [Sigourney Weaver](#) of the *Alien* film franchise as narrator. Two additional performances kicking off the Philharmonic's marathon "[Noon to Midnight](#)" new music festival on Nov. 18 are nearly sold out.

Sharon, a 2017 MacArthur Fellow who is artistic director of [The Industry](#), an experimental L.A. opera company, based his libretto on [Howard Koch's 1938 adaptation](#) for Orson Welles' Mercury Theatre radio series of H.G. Wells' classic 1898 sci-fi novel about a Martian invasion of Earth.



Too late to build that wall. Aliens control the streets. (Greg Grudt/Mathew Imaging)

Gosfield devised an intriguing score for the radio program that audiences watch in Disney Hall, but the LA Phil New Music Group doesn't get much continuity trying to perform her original centenary tribute to Gustav Holst's *The Planets*. The work's pulsating rhythms and overall strangeness make us want to hear more. Alas, news flashes of odd happenings reported from three "siren sites" outside Disney Hall continually interrupt the music as Weaver becomes an increasingly unnerved host.

Like Sharon's 2015 opera [Hopscotch](#), which kept passengers in a fleet of limousines in thrall to multiple storylines while traveling in and around Los Angeles, *War of the Worlds* must have created another nightmare scenario in terms of its logistics and tech requirements. There's a small audience seated at each of the "siren sites" (curious bystanders were also welcome to stand), along with singers, a few instrumentalists, and "alien dancers."



Hila Plitmann as the Martian, with percussionist Matthew Howard. (Craig T. Mathew)

and increasingly dire reports of the Martian invasion, spoken and sung, are transmitted into Disney Hall, while the audience at the sites could likewise hear, but not see, the show there.

As Professor Pierson (actor [Hugh Armstrong](#)) reports space debris crashing onto the streets of Los Angeles,

Weaver tells us to remain calm. We're safe in the hall; there's no need to consult our cell phones. And so it goes. We return to the metallic sheen of Gosfield's score, only to hear from Mrs. Martinez (mezzo-soprano [Suzanna Guzmán](#), full-voiced even when heard remotely) and baritone [Hadleigh Adams](#) (clearly having a good time as General Lansing). Adams got a big laugh from the audience as he became hysterical. At one point, the panic in his voice almost sounded like yodeling.

Throughout, Sharon's libretto (he also directs) is mostly goofy fun, studded with a few surprises along the way. But there's also a serious side to the production. After all, the day after Welles' Mercury broadcast, the headline in the *New York Daily News* read, "[FAKE RADIO 'WAR' STIRS TERROR THROUGH U.S.](#)" No wonder Sharon thought Welles' controversial radio show might still speak to our era of social media and "fake news."

Though the 65-minute production becomes a bit talky and arch towards the end (mild spoiler alert: the power of music and Disney Hall's tough exterior ultimately repel the aliens' heat ray and save humankind), it's never heavy going. Sharon wisely cut the Mercury Theatre radio broadcast's long coda where Welles' character recounts his wanderings amid the wreckage left by the Martians.

But Sharon's *War of the Worlds* ultimately soars on the wings of Gosfield's score and Plitmann's stunning coloratura.

"The air was full of sound, a deafening and confusing conflict of noises," Wells wrote in his novel. But except for the arrival of the aliens, a great rumbling that shook Disney Hall, Gosfield's score is surprisingly eloquent, especially as rendered by Rountree and the LA Phil New Music Group, demonstrating a singular alchemy — her ability to transform noise into something not only highly rhythmic but also, in its way, refined.



Death and destruction reign outside Disney Hall. (Greg Grudt)

To be sure, she uses an arsenal of percussion and a sometimes threatening brass section, anchored by [David Rejano's](#) trombone. For "Earth," she gave the Disney Hall organ a visceral workout. Static radio noise, which is important to her work generally, acts as sonic transition from concert hall to siren site, where Gosfield deploys 1938-era jammed radio signals. As she notes in the program, these shifting signals and timbres are "like a radio drifting between stations, evoking terrestrial broadcasts mixed with a faraway Martian atmosphere."



Christopher Rountree conducted. (Craig T. Mathew)

Plitmann, who sings a wordless vocalise as the Martian, appears behind a glass enclosure above the Disney Hall stage with the "La Sirena" Ensemble: [Joanne Pearce Martin](#) on theremin, celesta, and sampler, and [Matthew Howard](#) on a variety of percussion instruments. Plitmann's melismas maintained an attractive (she is a siren, after all) and otherworldly melodic contour. At times, using subtle motions of her neck and shoulders, Plitmann's alien being seemed to be attempting some kind of gestural communication.

Indeed, from my Orchestra East seat in Disney Hall, Plitmann, with her sinister-looking red Mohawk haircut, looked like an alien [Travis Bickle](#). Ornate tattoos also decorated thick grey skin, her body draped in a tight off-the-shoulder red dress. But when she took her bows to roars from the audience, I realized that she was actually wearing a narrow military-like red cap on her bald head. It took a while to get her unnerving appearance and the eerily appealing sound of her disembodied voice out of my mind.



Outside Disney Hall, Gen. Lansing (Hadleigh Adams), Mrs. Martinez (Suzanna Guzmán), and a lab assistant (Clayton Farris) monitor alarming events. (Greg Grudt)

San Francisco Classical Voice: <https://www.sfcv.org/reviews/los-angeles-philharmonic/walt-disney-hall-under-alien-attack-in-war-of-the-worlds>

Walt Disney Hall Under Alien Attack in *War of the Worlds*

By Jim Farber / November 14, 2017



Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group in Annie Gosfield's *War of the Worlds* | Credit: Craig T. Matthew/Matthew Imaging

A truly remarkable event took place ...

We interrupt this review to bring you an important announcement. There has been an invasion of interplanetary proportions! We have reports that the world premiere of a major composition by [Annie Gosfield](#) at the Walt Disney Concert Hall Sunday conceived to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Gustav Holst's *The Planets* (commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the cutting-edge opera company, The Industry) was disrupted by an invading force from the planet Mars.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I hate to interrupt your enjoyment of this wonderful music, but the L.A. Phil wanted you to be aware of some breaking news.” This announcement was made by the concert’s narrator, Sigourney Weaver, approximately 15 minutes after the concert commenced.

Note: The following information may prove unsuitable for younger audiences.

Weaver, who was in communication with scientific and military authorities at three downtown air-raid siren locations, reported in a voice filled with tension, “It seems that several unexplained explosions were observed in the sky just over Los Angeles!” And it has been confirmed that a sizable sonic disturbance did indeed cause considerable trembling in the hall.

In an attempt to complete Gosfield’s premiere, Weaver re-introduced conductor Christopher Rountree and the work’s second movement, evoking the planet Venus. Gosfield’s previous portrait, of the planet Mercury, had fused volcanic tonal effects with the syncopations of a 1930s dance band. But just as bass James Hayden was intoning the section of Yuval Sharon’s libretto that delves into a report in *The Star Magazine* exposing Elvis Presley’s bisexuality, the hall was rocked by another seismic vibration. Clearly flustered, Weaver returned to the stage and urged the audience to this time, “Truly take note of your nearest exit. There is a possibility we may have to evacuate!”

As reports from three air-raid siren locations were broadcast into the hall, the eyewitness accounts from Professor Richard Pierson, KCRW meteorologist, Dr. Melissa Morse, General Lansing (heading up the military response), and a Mrs. Martinez (owner of La Luna Azul restaurant) made it apparent that the Martian invasion was going to take precedence over Gosfield’s musical portrait of the planets.

Instead, her music became a boldly evocative mirror of the growing anxiety produced by this “war of the worlds.” There were explosive effects from a vast battery of percussion instruments interspersed with ethereal glimmers, blaring brass outbursts, thundering chords from the organ, radio jamming static, and the otherworldly sounds of a [Theremin](#), the quavering voice of “Red Planet Mars.”



Sigorney Weaver delivers bad news in War of the Worlds | Credit: Craig T. Matthew/Matthew Imaging



In a desperate attempt to avoid panic, Weaver introduced Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti who came onstage and made a plea for everyone to remain calm. He pointed out the safety features of the hall designed by Frank Gehry (who was in attendance) as opposed to the chaos and mayhem that now reigned outside the hall.

Then, despite the most rigid security measures, the Queen of the Martians, La Sirena, (bearing a strange resemblance to Lady Gaga) appeared. Her message, however, of high fluttering leaps and trills, guttural growls and amazing vocal inflections proved totally unintelligible. It appeared that all was lost. The Martians were truly going to Beat L.A!

It was the polished surfaces of the Walt Disney Concert Hall that reflected the Martian heat ray back on itself and saved the city from destruction. Thank you, Frank Gehry!

This brilliantly produced fake news and musical commentary (which will be repeated at noon and 2 p.m. next Saturday) was created by director/librettist Yuval Sharon; composer Annie Gosfield; “Alien” hunter supreme Sigourney Weaver; conductor Christopher Rountree; and the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group. The onsite commentators were: Hugo Anderson as Professor Pierson, Suzanna Guzmán as Mrs. Martinez, and Hadleigh Adams as General Lansing. The otherworldly figure and interstellar voice of La Sirena was sung by Hila Plitmann. The role of Mayor Garcetti was played by Mayor Eric Garcetti.



Alien singer Hila Plitmann with the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group in Annie Gosfield's War of the Worlds | Credit: Craig T. Matthew/Matthew Imaging

In 2016, when the Los Angeles Philharmonic began its three-year collaboration with Yuval Sharon (recipient of a 2017 MacArthur Foundation fellowship), it was in order to create performances like *War of the Worlds* that stretch the performance envelope by re-examining the dynamics between theater, opera, technology, and symphonic presentation.



One of the off-site locations for *War of the Worlds* | Credit: Craig T. Matthew/Matthew Imaging

In the case of *War of the Worlds*, the audience in the hall never sees the action or the musical performances that are simultaneously taking place at the three off-site locations. They are “radioed” into the hall in much the same way Orson Welles’s “reporters” from the Mercury Theatre called in their reports from Grover’s Mill on Oct. 30, 1938.

The Industry and the Philharmonic sweated the details, from the questionable verisimilitude of the program notes by Alistair Featherbottom to the live video news feed that greeted patrons as they “evacuated” the hall.

The complex sound design was managed by Jonathan Deans, with David Bullard at Disney Hall, and Jody Elf at the siren locations. The alien costume design was by Jaymee Ngerwichit. The lighting design was by Pablo Santiago.

Tickets are available for two more performances of *War of the Worlds* at noon and 2 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 18. Admission is free to the three siren locations: Siren 1: 135 S. Olive St.; Siren 2: 416 S. Main St; and Siren 3: 719 S. Hill St. If you attend one of the siren locations you will hear the concert from Disney Hall through the sirens I assume, since I was reporting from the hall.



Jewish Journal: <http://jewishjournal.com/culture/arts/227424/composer-annie-gosfield-and-yuval-sharons-war-of-the-worlds/>

Composer Annie Gosfield and Yuval Sharon's 'War of the Worlds'

By Rick Schultz / November 14, 2017

Annie Gosfield made her name by composing percussive and highly rhythmic contemporary music often employing sounds such as industrial noises and radio static. So she was a natural choice to create the score for Yuval Sharon's experimental opera "War of the Worlds," a musical adaptation of Orson Welles' controversial 1938 "fake news" radio broadcast, based on the H.G. Wells classic about an alien invasion.

The opera received its world premiere at Walt Disney Concert Hall on Nov. 12 and will return for two more performances on Nov. 18.

"The genesis of the project was doing something involving public art and World War II air-raid sirens," Gosfield said in a telephone interview. "When I lived in Los Angeles in the 1980s, I was completely fascinated by them and how they would go unnoticed."

For Gosfield, 57, part of the challenge of "War of the Worlds" was building an arsenal of otherworldly sounds: "There's also quite a bit of static, the sound of the radio going a bit haywire, and jammed radio signals," she said. "Taking something that is not considered music and lending it a high degree of refinement — tuning it, even though it might not be traditionally tuned, changing the level and getting the pitch where I want — is important to me."

The Grammy-winning, Israeli-born soprano Hila Plitmann plays the alien, singing an eerie and sinister wordless role.

It was Gosfield's idea to have Sigourney Weaver of the "Alien" film franchise emcee the concert inside the hall, which is performed by the L.A. Philharmonic New Music Group led by Christopher Rountree. Reports of the unfolding invasion gradually emerge from three outdoor "siren sites" — complete with refurbished World War II air-raid sirens — where speakers will broadcast "news" of the invasion.

"We have the sense of people on the street being the eyes and ears of the people in the concert hall," Gosfield said. "We're playing with pitches high and low, but we actually had to be careful not to make the air-raid sirens sound exactly like [real] air-raid sirens. We had to evoke them, so people wouldn't think there's a real emergency."

Gosfield also wanted to convey the spirit of a ballroom dance orchestra as heard on a radio broadcast from the period.

“The project has been in the planning stages for quite a while, before Trump and fake news became part of the culture,” Gosfield said.

But while Welles’ radio play brought panic to thousands of listeners, she isn’t worried that Sharon’s take on the story will generate a similar reaction. “Do you think somebody coming upon three percussionists onstage and somebody portraying a general will think it’s terrorism?” she said. “I certainly hope not.”

Sharon, who is also the opera’s director, praised Gosfield’s “complex but engaging music, [which] goes far beyond setting the tone of the drama. ... She immediately saw the opportunities in the disembodied voices concept, and spun a truly unique and unpredictable score.”

Gosfield also gave the word “unpredictable” an admiring spin when asked about working with Sharon, who is a 2017 MacArthur Fellow and artist collaborator with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. “You don’t know exactly how different elements are going to come together,” she said. “That makes it especially exciting for me, because the classical music world can be a little staid. But with Yuval, it’s this sense of flying by the seat of your pants.”

Gosfield, whose grandparents were left-leaning Eastern European immigrants, grew up Jewish in Philadelphia. “My parents were incredibly supportive, not musicians but great music lovers,” she said. “They emphasized creativity.”

One of Gosfield’s more groundbreaking projects, “EWA7,” featured on her 2001 disc, “Flying Sparks and Heavy Machinery,” was inspired by her site-specific residency in industrial environments in Nuremberg, Germany. There, she explored how machine sounds and ambient noise were perceived and developed in a factory. The piece was performed in working factory EWA7 with her band and some help from factory workers.

“I was living in a house that was once the ministry of finance for the Third Reich,” Gosfield recalled. “It was the 70th anniversary of the Wannsee Conference, where senior Nazi officials discussed the Final Solution. In many ways, it felt great to say, as a Jew, ‘Here I am, an honored guest.’ How much have things changed? It was pretty incredible.”

“War of the Worlds” will be performed twice on Nov. 18. For tickets and more information, visit laphil.com.

Art Now LA: <http://artnowla.com/2017/11/20/war-worlds-redux/>

“War of the Worlds” Redux On Location At 7th & Hill

By: Victoria Looseleaf / November 20, 2017



War of the Worlds

Siren Site 3

Photos by Phantom Street Artist

November 18, 2017



It's just another ordinary November day in **Los Angeles**: sunny, partly cloudy with a hint of danger in the air. How else to explain the presence of **General Lansing (Hadleigh Adams)** in this empty parking lot at 7th and Hill? **OY!**



Ross Steeves is telling everybody to calm down. He also asks who wants a **Starbucks?** Make ours a pumpkin spice latte, please.



Ngernwichit, alien choreographer **Lara Helena** and production designer **Calder Greenwood**.)



The hell with Starbucks. There's trouble on the horizon and Lansing thinks he sees something on top of the cylinder. Who knew that these **WWII** sirens – some 276 of them to be precise – have been scattered throughout our burg all these years...just waiting to be re-activated.



OMFG!

Is it a bird, a plane or what? We hear that 700 armed men are closing in on the old metal tube. And the cylinder is rising. It's standing on legs...actually rearing up on a sort of metal framework.

"Fasten your seat belts, it's going to be a bumpy night!" Oh, wrong movie. Apologies to **Bette Davis**.



Wow! Even the soldiers are freaking out. That doesn't bode well for us civilians, who just came out on this humdrum day to listen to some **Annie Gosfield** music with a libretto by **Yuval Sharon**.



Whee! They're coming. And much as we hate to admit it, this strange looking creature seems a bit benign – and a **Louise Bourgeois** sculpture it ain't. We love how it's being powered, in any case, by silver-clad *terpsichoreans*. Our kind of aliens.



It's good to see that the soldiers, including **Cheryl Umana**, roused themselves and are back to giving orders.



EEK! On closer inspection, we notice that these beings (pictured here: **Jessica Kittredge**), only have one eye. How very **Cyclopesque!** (Thanks to costume designer **Jaymee Ngerwichit**, alien choreographer **Lara Helena** and production designer **Calder Greenwood**.)



Sanity and peace prevail! The invasion has been halted, and we understand that the titanium of **Frank Gehry's Walt Disney Concert Hall** repelled the aliens' heat rays. Take a bow, soldiers and alien movers – **Myles Brewer**, **Jen Haley** and **Ottavio Taddei** – and let us all rejoice in the power of music, especially as performed by the stellar musicians of the **Los Angeles Philharmonic**. Yes!

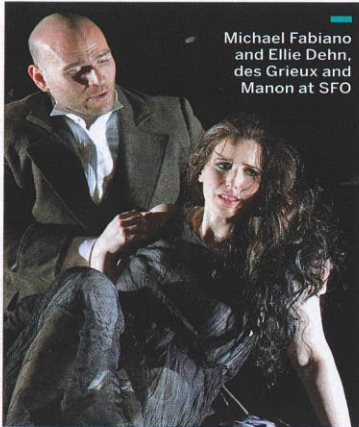
audience, and they conspicuously resembled the titular robot in “*WALL-E*.” Underneath the silliness was a sharp critique of the idea of art as refuge, consolation, or distraction. We are meant to roll our eyes when Weaver gushes, “Every time we gather in this magnificent building, we ascend to a higher plane where peace and compassion reign supreme.” Gosfield’s score alternates adroitly between campy pastiche and authentic sci-fi eeriness. Her interpolation of radio-jamming signals, distorted transmissions, and other electronic fuzz adds layers of sonic unease. In the coda, a darkly radiant mass of sound, incorporating voices and instruments from all four sites, evokes Earth under the gaze of what is described as “a great intelligence, vast, cool, and unsympathetic.”

“*War of the Worlds*” was a collaboration between the L.A. Phil and the Industry, Sharon’s experimental opera company. A tight-knit troupe of singers and actors matched the verve of Welles’s Mercury Theatre on the Air. The baritone Hadleigh Adams delivered a comic tour de force as General Lansing, who becomes unhinged as he extolls a Trumpian “wall of defense” that is supposed to keep aliens at bay. Gosfield gives him a full-on mad scene, with deranged atonal coloratura. The actor Gabriel Romero supplied a lifelike sketch of a harried and addled TV reporter. The soprano Hila Plitmann arrestingly portrayed a Martian spokesperson, her voice oscillating like a sine wave. The Philharmonic musicians, under the incisive direction of Christopher Rountree, gamely tackled unusual assignments. David Garrett, Jin-Shin Dai, and Jory Herman deserve particular praise for executing string solos in parking lots under a hot sun.

Two of the three performances of “*War of the Worlds*” were folded into the L.A. Phil’s annual new-music marathon, Noon to Midnight. Several thousand curiosity-seekers took in a vast range of contemporary idioms, including sounds at the far end of the experimental spectrum. The *SASSAS* collective—the Society for the Activation of Social Space Through Art and Sound—unleashed improvisatory anarchy in an amphitheatre behind Disney Hall. In a reception area inside Disney, Michael Pisaro oversaw a rendition of his piece “*Ricefall*,” which involves grains of rice being poured on metallic, ceramic, and plastic surfaces. The percussion ensemble red fish blue fish occupied Disney’s garden with another extraterrestrial composition: Gérard Grisey’s “*Le Noir de l’Étoile*,” which incorporates deep-space radio waves emitted by pulsars. Meanwhile, food trucks on Grand Avenue supplied pizza and pad thai.

The impression in both San Francisco and Los Angeles was of a vital, engaged new-music cohort, one unafraid of risk. This incaution is a counterweight to a classical-music culture that, for the most part, cowers in the face of modern life. On the same weekend as the L.A. Phil marathon, Andris Nelsons, the music director of the Boston Symphony, told a public-radio host that sexual harassment was not a problem in the classical world, and that if people listened to more music “they would become better human beings.” This is precisely the kind of head-in-the-sand idealism targeted in “*War of the Worlds*.” Nelsons later amended his remarks, but a sense of obliviousness remained. A few days later, the conductor Mariss Jansons was quoted as saying that women on the podium weren’t his “cup of tea.” He, too, attempted a clarification, yet his original words sounded more sincere. Perhaps such disgraceful episodes will hasten the end of the age of the maestro. These days, composers have a great deal more to say about the tumultuous, terrifying, not yet hopeless world in which we live. ♦

In Review



Michael Fabiano and Ellie Dehn, des Grieux and Manon at SFO

mant les yeux," the tenor gave a finely etched performance of "Ah! Fuyez, douce image" that seemed the essence of Romanticism.

In the title role, soprano Ellie Dehn made a hazier impression. Dehn—who replaced soprano Nadine Sierra, the originally announced Manon, before rehearsals began—has the top notes for Massenet's heroine, but she projected weakly in her middle register, particularly in the opera's early scenes, when her singing ranged from inexact to inaudible. Dehn gained in stature as the performance progressed, delivering a touching "N'est-ce plus ma main." Still, it was hard to avoid the sense that this was an incomplete assumption: despite her wayward actions, Manon must project a core of fragility and pathos that was scarcely in evidence here.

In the supporting roles, bass James Creswell's handsomely sung des Grieux père made the strongest impression. David Pershall's energetic Lescart, Timothy Mix's robust Brétigny and Robert Brubaker's leering Guillot made apt contributions, and Monica Dewey (Poussette), Laura Krumm (Javotte) and Renée Rapier (Rosette) minced convincingly as the trio of actresses. The chorus sang lustily.

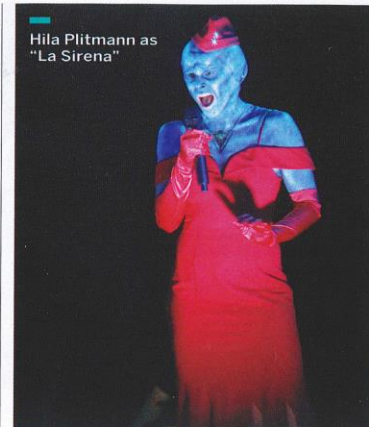
But this was Fabiano's night—and Fournillier's. The conductor drew vibrant sound from the orchestra, shaping Massenet's insinuating motifs and deftly layered orchestral textures with precision and clarity. —Georgia Rowe

The War of the Worlds

Los Angeles

IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE to reproduce the public panic that was generated on October 30, 1938, when CBS Radio broadcast Orson Welles's *Mercury Theatre on the Air* adaptation of H. G. Wells's *War of the Worlds*; many people thought they were listening to reports of an actual invasion from Mars. Nevertheless, in the present age of "fake news," there is immense potential in revisiting this celebrated occasion in order to examine the manipulation of mass media.

The 2017 *War of the Worlds* (seen Nov. 12), a presentation of the LA Phil New Music Group with The Industry and NOW Art, was staged in the Disney Hall and at three open-air sites in downtown Los Angeles, all centered on decommissioned but still extant air-raid sirens from World War II. It was the brainchild of Yuval Sharon, the operatic *Wunderkind* who is the founder of The Industry. The basic conceit was that we were present at a concert which was to feature a new orchestral cycle by Annie Gosfield, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the first performance of Holst's *Planets*. Each orchestral piece would describe a planet, with the sequence of pieces arranged as a progression away from the sun. The event was introduced by an elegantly clad Narrator, played with wit and aplomb by Sigourney Weaver. In the middle of the first piece, "Mercury," she announced that there had been an alien invasion from Mars and, in live communication with actors, singers, dancers and audience members at the three open-air sites, a tale unfolded of the total destruction of Los Angeles—and potentially of the nation. Landings had taken place, we were told, particularly in Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania. In the middle of the mayhem, we were visited in person by the current mayor of Los Angeles, Eric Garcetti, who assured us that all would be well if we just stayed in place. At the end we faced the prospect of a world in which every human action would be subject to unceasing



Hila Plitmann as "La Sirena"

scrutiny by the Martian invaders.

Despite the somewhat downbeat ending, the entire event acquired the invigorating atmosphere of a barnyard festival; I have never encountered such raucous entertainment in a concert hall before. We heard only three episodes of Gosfield's orchestral cycle before the mayhem began. They were very tantalizing: "Mercury" was a volatile mix of sharp, quicksilver melodies and fragmented jazz, making an alarmist impact on our ears; "Venus" was laden with lush, heavy, languorous brass with little hint of sexual vitality; and "Earth" was characterized by hideously oppressive chords. After this, the function of the music changed from lyrical description to dramatic accompaniment, as the Martian attack, indicated by ear-splitting rumbles on the speakers and wild flashes of lights in the auditorium, got underway. The musical highlight belonged to the fantastically versatile Hila Plitmann, who, as "La Sirena," an embodiment of the Martian invasion, sang an erratic melisma of notes ranging from the stratospherically high to the depths of her register, where she quacked like a duck and squealed like a scalded cat. At the start, the Narrator told us we had come to the hall to be elevated by music "to a higher plane where peace and compassion reign supreme"; as the event ended with wistful notes extending into silence and nothingness, we doubted whether

peace and compassion could ever again be part of the human landscape.

Christopher Rountree conducted the chamber orchestra of twenty-five instrumentalists with flexibility, panache and no little acting skill, which heightened the humor of the performance. As I drove out of the Disney Hall parking garage after the show, I could not help breathing a slight sigh of relief to see that life in L.A. was going on normally—or at least, it seemed to be. —Simon Williams

Nabucco

Los Angeles

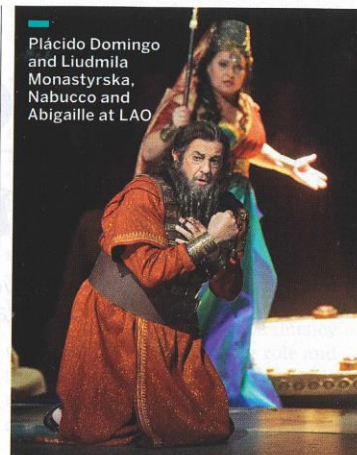
LA OPERA'S REVIVAL of *Nabucco* (seen Nov. 11) convinced us of the thrilling musical power of Verdi's first masterpiece. James Conlon's conducting of the overture was a model of control, balancing gigantic dramatic statements with pleasingly fluid lyricism; later, the great ensembles, which comprise much of the action, unfolded with stately grandeur. Grant Gershon's chorus sang with such unified, focused intensity that cataclysm always seemed imminent.

Plácido Domingo's interpretation of Nabucco was revelatory. The role is frequently sung by bass-baritones, who tend to make the Babylonian king into a predatory monster. Domingo did not shirk the despotic aspects of the character, but the exceptional clarity and characteristic brightness of his singing made his Nabucco a compelling human being; this was a portrait of a dictator who discovers how vulnerable he is to the world he had previously oppressed.

In her LA Opera debut, Ukrainian spinto soprano Liudmyla Monastyrska sang Abigaille, confirming with impressive force her reputation for producing eardrum-bursting volume. Less expected, but equally splendid, was her notably plangent lament for lost happiness in the Act II *cantabile* "Anch'io dischiuso un giorno," shaped with sufficient intimacy to establish Abigaille as a sympathetic character. This allowed us to follow her subsequent descent into tyranny with some interest and even

justified her odd conversion to religion at the very end of the opera. The third magnificent voice in the cast belonged to the Zaccaria, Morris Robinson, whose immense bass truly conveyed the stability and durability of Judaism. The roles of Fenena and Ismaele were little developed by Verdi and his librettist, Temistocle Solera, but Nancy Fabiola Herrera and Mario Chang sang them with conviction.

Thaddeus Strassberger, who made his LA Opera debut in 2012 with another early Verdi work, *I Due Foscari*, had the unenviable task of putting *Nabucco's* unwieldy dramaturgy on stage. Strassberger, who served as his own scenic designer for *Nabucco*, set the action behind a proscenium arch representing the Teatro alla Scala in 1842; in the onstage boxes were seated members of the Austrian aristocracy who were the governing power in Milan at the time of *Nabucco's* world premiere. If this scheme was intended to give a political slant to the action, it was unsuccessful on that score, but it did provide an ingenious solution to some of the staging problems: the sets both reflected the grandeur of the music and easily accommodated the large chorus and masses of extras. Nevertheless, the action remained static, and toward the end, when Verdi's inspiration was clearly lagging,



Plácido Domingo and Liudmyla Monastyrska, Nabucco and Abigaille at LAO

there were passages of careless staging that lost all specificity and allowed the last half hour to drag.

Nabucco's old-fashioned melodrama is likely to reduce contemporary audiences to giggles, while the intense religiosity of the opera's ending has an uncomfortable ring in the secular domain of the opera house. But despite these obstacles, *Nabucco* is worth hearing: the opera overwhelms us with its mighty walls of sound, which are the manifestation of the twenty-eight-year-old Verdi's own discovery of his profound melodic gift. —Simon Williams

This month on OPERANEWS.COM

REVIEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

INTERNATIONAL

Mahagonny in Zurich • Verdi's *Masnadieri* at Volksoper Wien • Anna Netrebko and Piotr Beczala in Vienna's *Adriana* • Bayerische Staatsoper's *Nozze di Figaro* • *Die Lustige Witwe* at Munich's Gärtnerplatz • Calixto Bieito stages Nuremberg's *Troyens*.

NORTH AMERICA

The Met revives *Madama Butterfly* and *The Magic Flute* • New York City Opera salutes Dominick Argento • *The Mother of Us All* in Hudson, NY • world premiere of *Mr. Burke and Mr. Hare* in Boston • Odyssey Opera's *Siege of Calais* • *Figaro* in Pittsburgh and Detroit • DiChiera's *Cyrano* in Charlotte • Offenbach's *Orphée aux Enfers* in New Orleans • *Tosca* in Omaha • Opera Colorado's *Bohème* • San Diego hears *The Pirates of Penzance* and *As One*.

CONCERTS AND RECITALS

The Met dedicates the Verdi Requiem to Dmitri Hvorostovsky • *La Damnation de Faust* from the BSO • *Layla and Majnun* in concert in Manhattan • NYFOS sings Leonard Bernstein • Bolcom's *From the Diary of Sally Hemmings* • The Swedish Radio Choir and Jordi Savall at the White Light Festival • Barbara Hannigan in recital • *La Straniera* in D.C.

New York Times
The Week in Classical Music
That Decisive Moment

June 1, 2018

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/01/arts/music/classical-music-soundcloud-youtube.html>

There aren't many contemporary composers who as consistently inventive and entertaining as Annie Gosfield, who this season wrote a [winning operatic adaptation](#) of "The War of the Worlds" for the Los Angeles Philharmonic. And she'll enjoy a [wide-ranging residency](#) at the Stone in late July. A concert on Wednesday at National Sawdust, part of John Zorn's commissioning series there, offered a quick tour through some of her recent chamber music. The pianist Kathleen Supové and the violinist Jennifer Choi collaborated on a new piece, "Falling Stars and Cosmic Noise," and each played a solo. Well, not quite solo; both works also involved electronic accompaniment. In the case of the violin piece, "Long Waves and Random Pulses," Ms. Gosfield's sources included radio-jamming sounds used during World War II as well as callbacks to [Bach's Chaconne in D Minor](#). Ms. Choi played the complex acoustic part with notable intensity, moving dexterously between motifs full of sumptuous feeling and more striated textures, requiring extended techniques. Another excellent performance of the work, featuring the violinist Pauline Kim Harris, can be heard on Ms. Gosfield's Soundcloud account (which also [houses some choice excerpts](#) from that "War of the Worlds" opera). SETH COLTER WALLS

New Yorker: <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/2017-in-review/notable-performances-and-recordings-of-2017>

Notable Performances and Recordings of 2017

By: Alex Ross / December 11, 2017

The loveliest experience of my listening year took place on a balmy September night at the Hollywood Bowl. Yo-Yo Ma came to the great amphitheatre in the Hollywood Hills to play the six solo cello suites of Bach. I had doubts about the enterprise going in. Could Ma's instrument be amplified effectively in such a wide open space? Could such intimate music speak to a crowd of thousands? People prize the Bowl for its casual conviviality. Patrons dine, drink, and, sometimes, chatter among themselves. A lighter repertory works best: Holst's "Planets" is a blast. Bach's itineraries of the world spirit are another matter.

I sat with a friend well to the back, several hundred feet from the stage. Ma was a mere dot in the middle distance. Video screens on either side of the shell provided closeups of his playing and of his famous grin, but, for the most part, I looked out at the sandy-brown landscape, at the glimmer of far lights, and, most of all, at the crowd, which filled all but a few of the Bowl's more than seventeen thousand seats. Almost no one made a sound. Almost no one moved. When a large audience is listening intently, it creates an atmosphere that cannot be measured or recorded, only remembered. Here, it was as if music had stilled the world.

Ma applied his customary virtuosity and warmth. At times, he seemed to lose the narrative thread as he savored every twist and turn of Bach's endless melody. Several of the sarabandes slowed to a contemplative crawl. Thomas Demenga's new recording of the suites, for the ECM label (see below), has more straight-ahead song and dance in it. But you never doubted the sincerity of Ma's approach: he was following his natural musical rhythms, to the point that it felt less like a performance than like an interior monologue. Little was lost in the amplification: the cello sound remained full, nuanced, and unforced.

Since the death of Luciano Pavarotti, Ma has been the most popularly celebrated of classical musicians. Very few other soloists could have sold out the Bowl. If Ma enticed thousands to the space, it was Bach who held them rapt, for nearly three hours. The enthusiasm of large crowds is always a bit unsettling: no matter how innocent the occasion, you can imagine the energy of the collective being channelled to less wholesome ends. The huge, serene company at the Bowl was another matter: it was under the spell of a solitary searcher in the dark. One of the only sounds I heard around me was someone quietly sobbing.

Ten Notable Performances of 2017

"Ipsa Dixit" at Dixon Place, February 4th

The composer, singer, and theatre artist Kate Soper is one of the great originals of her generation—a maker of erudite entertainments that inhabit a self-invented realm halfway

between opera and philosophy. “Ipsa Dixit,” her most recent large-scale work, was seen in the intimate confines of Dixon Place; she deserves a much bigger stage. [Read more.](#)

“Infinite Now” at the Flemish Opera, April 23rd

Chaya Czernowin’s opera “Infinite Now” tells two harrowing stories in alternation: one, of the chaos and gore of the First World War; the other, of a Chinese woman trapped in a claustrophobic male realm. The merging of the stories has an epiphanic effect, as if a mystery of human misery has been solved. [Read more.](#)

Mozart at the Pierre Boulez Saal, April 30th

At the age of seventy-five, the conductor, pianist, and intellectual politician Daniel Barenboim is at the height of his powers. This year, he presided over the inauguration of the Pierre Boulez Saal, in Berlin—another concert-hall masterpiece by Frank Gehry and Yasuhisa Toyota. Barenboim’s account of the last three Mozart symphonies with the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra exploded with detail. [Read more.](#)

The Dream Unfinished at Cooper Union, June 11th

[The Dream Unfinished](#) is a visionary chamber orchestra dedicated to discovering and reviving minority composers. The group’s concerts combine music-making with activism: their event in June featured works by William Grant Still, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Margaret Bonds, and others, alongside presentations about the school-to-prison pipeline—the criminalization of minority children in the education system. The most riveting voice was that of Truth Templeton, a thirteen-year-old Brooklynite who held forth precociously on the topic of protest music. You may see his name again.

Roomful of Teeth at the Tank, June 21st

The Tank, a converted water tank in the high-desert town of Rangely, Colorado, has long been a secret gathering place for improvising musicians who prize its hyper-reverberant acoustics. It is now open to the public, and the vocal ensemble Roomful of Teeth celebrated midsummer there with sounds that welled up out of the earth. [Read more.](#)

“La Clemenza di Tito” in Salzburg, July 30th

Peter Sellars instigated two major new productions this year. “[Girls of the Golden West,](#)” Sellars’s latest collaboration with John Adams, felt like a work in progress, though a major

opera should emerge from it. Mozart’s “Clemenza,” which was seen at the Salzburg Festival, was one of Sellars’s finest, most finished creations—a study in power, betrayal, and compassion, with singers of color dominating the cast. [Read more.](#)

Bach at the Hollywood Bowl, September 12th

Read about Yo-Yo Ma’s performance in the introduction above.

“The Force of Things” at Montclair State, October 8th



Photograph by Marina Levatskaya / Peak Performances at Montclair State University

Ashley Fure’s experimental opera “[The Force of Things](#),” which Peak Performances brought to Montclair, New Jersey, rivalled Czernowin’s “Infinite Now” as the most purely visceral music-theatre outing of the year. Fure, who studied with Czernowin, aims to capture the “mounting hum of ecological anxiety around us,” and, unnervingly, succeeds. [Read more.](#)

Monteverdi at Lincoln Center, October 18th–21st

John Eliot Gardiner and a brilliant company of collaborators enchanted New York audiences this fall with deft, vivid productions of the three surviving operas of Claudio Monteverdi, on the occasion of the composer’s four-hundred-and-fiftieth birthday. The obvious was again confirmed: the first great opera composer remains the master of the game. [Read more.](#)

“War of the Worlds” at the L.A. Phil, November 18th

The Los Angeles Philharmonic is so far ahead of other American orchestras that it is in competition mainly with its own past achievements. This fall, it offered Annie Gosfield's site-specific opera "War of the Worlds," created in tandem with the director Yuval Sharon. Musicians positioned in parking lots around downtown Los Angeles helped to replicate Orson Welles's famous radio hoax. Two performances took place in the context of the Noon to Midnight marathon, an every-which-way survey of Southern California's vibrant new-music scene. The L.A. Phil has a new leader in Simon Woods, but no change of direction is needed. [Read more.](#)

Ten Notable Recordings

Tyshawn Sorey, "Verisimilitude"

Sorey, Cory Smythe, Chris Tordini (Pi)

"Divine Theatre," works of Giaches de Wert

Stile Antico (Harmonia Mundi)

Bach, Solo Cello Suites

Thomas Demenga (ECM)

Jürg Frey, "Collection Gustave Roud"

Frey, Stefan Thut, Dante Boon, Andrew McIntosh, Regula Konrad, Stephen Altoft, Lee Ferguson (Another Timbre)

Scott Wollschleger, "Soft Aberration"

Longleash, Anne Lanzilotti, Karl Larson, Andy Kozar, Corrine Byrne, John Popham, Mivos Quartet (New Focus)

Linda Catlin Smith, "Drifter"

Apartment House, Bozzini Quartet (Another Timbre)

Björk, "Utopia"

(One Little Indian)

Du Yun, “Angel’s Bone”

Abigail Fischer, Jennifer Charles, Kyle Bielfield, Kyle Pfortmiller, Julian Wachner conducting the Choir of Trinity Wall Street and Novus NY (VIA Artists)

Kurtág, Complete Works for Ensemble and Choir

Reinbert de Leeuw conducting Asko / Schönberg and the Netherlands Radio Choir (ECM)

Berlioz, “Les Troyens”

Joyce DiDonato, Michael Spyres, Marie-Nicole Lemieux, Stéphane Degout, Nicolas Courjal, Marianne Crebassa, Hanna Hipp, Cyrille Dubois, Stanislas de Barbeyrac, Philippe Sly, John Nelson conducting the orchestra and chorus of the Philharmonique de Strasbourg, Choeur de l’Opéra du Rhin, Badischer Staatsoperchor (Erato)

Ten More

James Weeks, “Mala Punica”

Exaudi (Winter & Winter)

Daniel Lentz, “River of 1000 Streams”

Vicki Ray (Cold Blue)

George Benjamin, “Into the Little Hill,” “Dream of the Song,” “Flight”

Hila Plitmann, Susan Bickley, Bejun Mehta, Michael Cox, Benjamin conducting the London Sinfonietta, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and the Netherlands Chamber Choir (Nimbus)

Gregory Spears, “Fellow Travelers”

Aaron Blake, Joseph Lattanzi, Devon Guthrie, Alexandra Schoeny, Mark Gibson conducting the Cincinnati Symphony (Fanfare Cincinnati)

“Sabine Devieille: Mirages”

Alexandre Tharaud, François-Xavier Roth conducting Les Siècles (Warner)

Weinberg, Chamber Symphonies Nos. 1-4, Piano Quintet (arr. Pushkarev and Kremer)

Gidon Kremer, Kremerata Baltica (ECM)

Chaya Czernowin, “HIDDEN”

JACK Quartet, Inbal Hever (Wergo)

Sibelius, “In the Stream of Life”

Gerald Finley, Edward Gardner conducting the Bergen Philharmonic (Chandos)

George Lewis, “Assemblage”

Ensemble Dal Niente (New World)

Wagner, “Parsifal”

Andreas Schager, Anja Kampe, Wolfgang Koch, René Pape, Daniel Barenboim conducting the Staatskapelle Berlin and Staatsoperchor, Dmitri Tcherniakov directing (BelAir DVD)

Music Book of the Year

Tim Rutherford-Johnson, “[Music After the Fall: Modern Composition and Culture Since 1989](#)”
(University of California Press)

Musical America

MUSIC IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA IN 2017 – THE LA PHIL SETS THE TONE

By Richard S. Ginell / Dec. 13, 2017

LOS ANGELES: Some commentators on the East Coast finally conceded this year that Southern California is the place to be as far as “important” progressive musical activity is concerned. As usual, the Los Angeles Philharmonic positioned itself at the center of a lot of it.

In April, the Phil hosted a Reykjavik Festival, devoting a big chunk of programming to contemporary Icelandic composers and musicians whose music spilled over several genre boundaries yet maintained a striking uniformity of sound that reflected a distant land. The main concerts – partially led by the Phil’s conductor laureate Esa-Pekka Salonen – all sold out months in advance, which would be considered startling but for the fact that the popular Icelandic rock band Sigur Ros was sharing the bill. Yet the most arresting piece of all was the sole historical item, a spectacularly rowdy Organ Concerto by Jón Leifs from 1930.

In October, the LA Phil came right back with another unlikely (for a symphony orchestra) event – the CDMX Festival of music from Mexico City that also blithely jumped around from genre to genre. This time, the Phil’s music and artistic director Gustavo Dudamel participated, leading colorful, percussive orchestral showpieces to the manner born and backing Mexican pop music acts.

Semi-staged opera tailored to the dimensions of Walt Disney Concert Hall continued to offer an alternative to the full productions at LA Opera across the street. The LA Phil’s fresh new take on John Adams’ once-controversial *Nixon In China* Mar. 3, using home movies from Richard Nixon’s actual 1972 visit as backdrops, placed the opera in a more realistic – and more compelling – context.

With his new affiliation as artist-collaborator with the LA Phil in gear, the maverick director Yuval Sharon struck with a number of productions. He was able to make coherent sense of Lou Harrison’s star-crossed magnum opus *Young Caesar* June 13 with judicious editing and the restoration of original elements such as puppetry and a mix of conventional and exotic instruments. As a result, Harrison’s piece never had it so good.

On Nov. 12 and 18, Sharon delivered his most successful – and most fun – brainstorm yet, a contemporary rewrite of the 1938 Orson Welles broadcast of *War of the Worlds*. Sharon came up with a crazy multi-platform staging indoors at Disney Hall and outdoors alongside three ancient air raid sirens, and got an imaginative, at times weirdly-orchestrated score from Annie Gosfield. The “cast” included a laughably lurching mechanical spider from Mars and a surprise cameo from L.A. Mayor Eric Garcetti.

Yet one of the most significant events for the LA Phil did not occur on a stage. LA Phil president Deborah Borda, who presided over its move into Disney Hall and an adventurous expansion of its repertoire and mission while making it the most-solidly-financed orchestra in the country, suddenly skipped town in the spring to take over the New York Philharmonic. She left plans in place for the Phil's centennial season blowout in 2018-19, but what will happen after that was the big question. One hint is that her successor Simon Woods used to be a record producer for EMI Classics and helped launch an enterprising in-house record label during his most recent job as CEO of the Seattle Symphony. Perhaps he could rev up the LA Phil's recording activities, which had tapered off during the Borda regime.

There was also a changing of the guard at the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra where Jeffrey Kahane capped his 20 years as music director with a "Lift Every Voice" festival in January that centered upon the music of his distant relative, Kurt Weill. As it happened, the festival occurred around the time of the inauguration of Donald Trump – and Kahane took the opportunity to address the political turmoil both in his words and in powerful performances of Weill's *The Seven Deadly Sins* and *Lost in the Stars*. As of this writing, his successor has not been chosen.

Meanwhile to the south, the mavericks at Long Beach Opera ventured where others in the entertainment capital dared not go Mar. 12 by staging the U.S. premiere of *The Perfect American*, Philip Glass' absorbing if controversial opera that painted an unflattering picture of the last days of Walt Disney.

To the north, the new Valley Performing Arts Center in Northridge loomed larger in importance, scoring with a three-concert observance of John Adams' 70th birthday in January and February that made use of the resources of Jacaranda, the St. Lawrence String Quartet and Chris Rountree's raucous new music band, wild Up.

Further out of town, the Ojai Festival turned to jazz pianist/composer Vijay Iyer as its music director-*du-jour* in June and received an agenda unlike any other in its history – loaded with avant-garde classical, jazz, and world music, improvised and not, that pushed the limits of what an audience can absorb.

And what of the standard repertoire? Yes, there was still a lot of that to be found in Southern California, with performances to savor like the La Scala-framed production of Verdi's *Nabucco* at LA Opera with the ageless Plácido Domingo shining in the title role Oct. 14, or Grant Gershon's perfectly-paced Orff *Carmina Burana* with the LA Master Chorale Sep. 24. But mainly, it was the new and the unusual that occupied the spotlight this year.