

## Mile High Voltage Festival smashes boundaries between musical styles

Festival redefines classical music

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It's too soon to know whether it is a passing fad or a lasting transformation, but a mini-revolution is taking root in classical music.

Rather than merely trying to traverse genres, these artists — most in their 20s and 30s — are ignoring musical boundaries altogether, creating an innovative, interrelated musical language that has yet to be fully defined.



So Percussion. (Janette Beckman)

This new brand of genre-defying music will be front and center during the Mile High Voltage Festival, taking place at 7:30 p.m. today and Saturday at the Newman Center for the Performing Arts under the auspices of the Newman Center Presents series.

Organizers hope to draw the young crowds that frequent pop venues like the Fillmore Auditorium and Gothic Theatre, as well as regular attendees of the Friends of Chamber Music series.

The message they want to convey is clear, said Philadelphia-based festival moderator Tom Moon, author of "1,000 Recordings to Hear Before You Die."

"Be open to stuff and orient yourself to something you don't know that may actually rock your world, whether you're an indie-rock kid or you come straight out of (classical composer) John Adams being your reference point," Moon said.

One element ties all the participants together: Each has recorded at one time or another for the Cantaloupe label, which specializes in a wide variety of category-defying new music.

The company was formed in 2001 by the three founders of New York's Bang on a Can Festival — composers Michael Gordon, David Lang and Julia Wolfe.

"I felt the Cantaloupe label's brush stroke was broad enough to give people a tasting of all these different types of compositional styles," said festival curator Peter Robles, a New York-based agent who was guest curator in November for the 64th American Music Festival at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

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While new-music festivals have taken place here previously, an event devoted to this latest brand of classical-music fusion is a first for Denver and probably for the Rocky Mountain region.

Besides changing the face of classical music itself, these new artists are also challenging the ways it has traditionally been presented — fixed two-hour concerts where attendees are expected to sit in silence in formal concert halls.

Most of the performers appear in informal attire — untucked shirts and blue jeans — and they are used to performing in club settings, where alcohol is served and seating is informal or nonexistent.

The Newman Center is trying to create such a freewheeling environment by making seating general admission for the festival and by keeping the doors open and the lights on, so people can come and go as they please.

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In addition, it has established a special Cantaloupe Cafe in the atrium, where attendees can have a drink and converse with friends while still keeping up with the concert via television. Then, they can wonder back into the hall at their leisure.

Robles knows that some people think of contemporary music as a blast of atonalism akin to a root canal, but he is keen to make clear to potential audiences that this event is different both in the kinds of music on the lineup and the format.

"This is just not some bizarre, weird night of 'contemporary music,' as they generally think of it," he said. "I want them to understand that we're trying to create something for many tastes and give them the freedom to decide whether they want to hang out or not."

"And since the ticket prices are not that high, the risk factor is not that high."

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