

3 THEATER REVIEW

An intimate mix of rock concert and memoir.

BY LAURA COLLINS-HUGHES



3 DANCE REVIEW

Pushing the possibilities of modern ballet.

BY GIA KOURLAS



11 ALBUM REVIEW

Jorja Smith puts a beat behind mixed emotions.

BY JON PARELES



NEWS | CRITICISM

Weekend Arts

The New York Times

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2023

YINKA ELUJOBA | ART REVIEW



Venerating Black Lives

Barkley L. Hendricks is the first artist of color to have a solo show at the Frick, and the exhibition should solidify his place in the canon of portraiture.

ONE DAY, in the late 1970s, while walking the streets of Pigalle in Paris, the American painter Barkley L. Hendricks noticed several well-dressed Black men and women. As Hendricks later explained, he was particularly struck by the fashion sense of two African men. He spent time photographing them in different postures and situations, as was his habit with models he painted, laying the foundation for work that would end up

Barkley L. Hendricks: Portraits at the Frick
Frick Madison

on his canvas. The resultant painting — “APBs (African-Parisian-Brothers)” — is eternally modern even in our time, relentlessly cool, and luxuriously vibrant, qualities that radiate through his ongoing exhibition of portraits at the Frick, where he is the first artist of

color to have a solo show in the museum’s 88 years of existence. It is a posthumous glory: Hendricks died in 2017, at age 72. In 1966 — the year he turned 21 — Hendricks spent time in Europe funded by the Cresson scholarship at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, touring the continent’s cities, looking at and falling in love with the works of European masters like Van Dyck and Rembrandt. Back in the United States, he consistently visited the Frick, reportedly his favorite museum, studying the collection, which also included classic paintings by Bronzino and Moroni. Both at home and abroad he

At the Frick Madison, “Lawdy Mama” (1969), left, by Barkley L. Hendricks, next to “Madame His,” an 18th-century bust by Jean-Antoine Houdon.

noticed the continuous absence of Black people in the portraits (the Frick, until now, has never displayed the portrait of a Black figure in its collection). The few he saw dealt with dehumanizing representations, mostly of enslavement or servitude. He decided to fill what he saw as a gaping hole, CONTINUED ON PAGE C3

nytimes#HD897012027



A ‘Lost’ Work Finds a New Audience

The free-flowing ‘City Park’ will be performed for the first time in five decades.

By JOSHUA BARONE

Arthur Russell — former Midwesterner, avant-gardist in the making — moved to New York from San Francisco in the early 1970s to study at the Manhattan School of Music, where his teachers included the composer Charles Wuorinen. It wasn’t a happy relationship. Call it a clash of uptown and downtown, when such a dichotomy existed: Wuorinen, a prickly modernist of the academy, versus

Russell, a post-Cagean thinker from Allen Ginsberg’s circle who was into Indian classical music. Neither was likely to be a fan of the other, and things came to a head over Russell’s “City Park,” created and first performed in 1973.

The piece blends texts from Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein with a nonlinear, modular score of repetitive phrases and Fluxus-inspired directions. Russell is said to have explained to Wuorinen that the structure allows listeners to “plug out and then plug back in again without losing anything essential.”

Wuorinen, famously cranky, shot back, “That’s the most unattractive thing I’ve

The composer Arthur Russell, around 1985. His “City Park” will be performed at an AIDS memorial on Saturday.

CONTINUED ON PAGE C4

FRANCOIS BATTISTE TRACIE BENNETT BOBBY CANNAVALE MICAELA DIAMOND AMBER GRAY JIN HA RACHEL BAY JONES DENIS O'HARE STEVEN PASQUALE DAVID HYDE PIERCE JEREMY SHAMOS

NOW STARRING IN THE WORLD PREMIERE AT THE SHED WWW.HEREWEAREMUSICAL.COM

pressreader



Nick Hallett, center, rehearsing "City Park," about New York City, at Wesleyan University, with Parsa Ferdowsi, left, and Lea Bertucci.

'Lost' Work Finds a New Audience

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1
ever heard."

Russell quickly drifted away from Wuorinen, seeking guidance from different composers, Christian Wolff, and getting more into electronics. His career developed, ever-changing and exploratory — gathering support from peers like Philip Glass and David Byrne, freely floating among the worlds of classical music, disco and songwriting — and "City Park" faded into distant memory. Russell died in 1992 at 40, a victim of the AIDS epidemic, and the piece lived on mostly as an amusing anecdote about a lost work.

Now, though, it has been reconstructed and will be performed for the first time in five decades at the New York City AIDS Memorial on Saturday, presented by the memorial outdoors for free and featuring an ensemble that includes Russell's close collaborators. The musician Nick Hallett, who is responsible for the reconstruction, said that the piece was "about New York City" and more important, "tells the story of Arthur's New York City."

Russell is a particular case among composers lost to AIDS. Most around his age died without publishers or estates; their music languishes in archives like those at the New York Public Library. Russell may have been poor and perpetually underground, despite high-profile friends and collaborators like Talking Heads, but at least he had the infrastructure of an estate to maintain his legacy.

More of a problem was his output. Russell, who was often seen around town with his Walkman, obsessing over mixing and production, recorded prolifically but released little. His attitude inspired some: David Van Tieghem, the composer and percussionist, who met Russell at the Manhattan School of Music and performed in the premiere of "City Park," respected his friend's belief that "if you're going to do it, do it as best you can."

Another collaborator, though, the trombonist Peter Zummo, said Russell could be obstinate about not making more of a living off his art. "One time he came to me, and he said, 'The ideal record would be one, a press of one,'" Zummo recalled. "Which would make it a work of art. He had standards, but there was also a subterranean."

Russell has long been known for bits of his catalog, including the album "24-24 Music" (for which he enlisted friends like Zummo, Julius Eastman and Peter Gordon) and the disco song "Is It All Over My Face." But his music, with its wide stylistic range, has taken on new life in the decades after his death as the recordings he left behind



"City Park" created and first performed in 1973, features recorded material, scratch loops and instructions for a turntablist.

have been released this century. "I love seeing how people really latch onto it," Van Tieghem said. "I have students at the New School who are huge fans. People have only recently come across his stuff and just love it."

Among Russell's longtime admirers is Hallett, 49, who came of age in clubs and looked to him as an artist who "bridged the gap between disco, experimental and songs." Hallett eventually met people from Russell's circle, including Van Tieghem and Zummo, as well as younger musicians who were interested in preserving Russell's legacy.

Over the years, "City Park" lingered in Hallett's mind like "a faint question mark," he said. "Every new description of it intrigued me in a new way," so, when the opportunity arose to reconstruct and revive the piece, he seized it. Hallett started with several sheets of material — which was all that Russell's estate was aware had survived. There were two pages of notes, and two more of instructions on manuscript paper. Those only introduced more questions. "I saw so many potential roads to travel down," Hallett said. "We see references to 'scratch pulse.' We see instructions for a turntablist. We see instructions for electronic tape."

He next turned to archivists at the New York Public Library, who tracked down two recordings. When Hallett listened to them, he was surprised. "From the score instructions, I anticipated a disco masterpiece," he said. "This was different. And it fascinated me."

Unable to hear the turntable, he sought help from those who had performed in the premiere to figure out why. No one seemed to remember anything of use until, after what Hallett called some "memory jogging," it emerged that the D.J. score is meant to be inaudible to everyone but the drummer.

"Arthur uses the turntable not as we'd imagine a hip-hop D.J., but more in the way that John Cage was using the turntable in 1959, in the first 'Imaginary Landscape,'" Hallett said. "The D.J. is the inaudible brain of the work; the drummer responds only to the scratch loops."

Not only is the influence of Cage here, but also that of artists he knew intimately, including Ginsberg and Jackson Mac Low. Among noted instructions are Fluxus-esque ones: "Play like the clouds always" and "Give a signal to someone, another player, without explaining what it's for." Elsewhere, musicians are told, "ask the drummer (when he's not playing) what section he is, and play something from that section."

"The score is a map," Hallett said, "one that is not intended to be followed literally but one that puts agency in the performer and allows them to make choices." Van Tieghem said that, as far as he could remember, there wasn't any rehearsal before "City Park" premiered. There is, Hallett said, a "great amount of planning" that goes into this piece, but it can't be prepared in a traditional way. Saturday's players got together at Wesleyan University last week, accustomed to Russell's idiom and performance practice, are not repeatedly running through it.

"You shouldn't over-rehearse a piece like this," Hallett said. "It's meant to be interpreted in the moment." "That doesn't mean it's easy, though," Zummo said that, like Terry Riley's classic "In C," "City Park" can't be picked up by any musician. Looking at the score recently, he was reminded of the questions he used to ask Russell before playing a new piece of his.

"I would say something like, 'Where do you want me to start?' and he said, 'Anywhere,'" Zummo recalled. "At one point I asked a similar question, and he said, 'It's a sound field.' It's another way to describe the open form, I guess, and 'City Park' brings that to mind. In a way, it's not going anywhere."

Classical Albums To Listen to Now

'Songs for Our Times'

Sphinx Virtuosi (Deutsche Grammophon)
This album, the Sphinx Virtuosi's debut on the Deutsche Grammophon label, is most valuable as a promotion for the ensemble's parent, the Sphinx Organization, which is devoted to increasing racial diversity in classical music — and turned 25 last year. Sphinx offers competitions, conferences, training programs, grants and audition support, alongside advocacy for young soloists and arts administrators, for more diverse rosters and repertory.



And now major-label recordings, too. The Virtuosi, Sphinx's premier touring group, is a chamber string orchestra made up of young Black and Latino musicians. This hourlong program features spirited (if sometimes slightly hard-edged) playing on live (of sometimes slightly faceless) pieces by Michael Abels, Aldemaro Romero, Valerie Coleman and Jessie Montgomery.

The violinist Amaryn Olmeda is nimble-fingered through the fiddling virtuosity of Carlos Simón's solo "Between Worlds." Highlights are a richly aching arrangement of a slow movement from a Florence Price quartet; the propulsive yet dreamlike, even surreal, swirl of Ricardo Herz's "Sinfía na Cidade Grande" ("Sisyphus in the Big City"); and a breathless rendition of the finale of Beethoven's "Kreutzer" Sonata, arranged for the group in honor of the work's original dedicatee, the Black violinist George Bridgwater. ZACHARY WOOLFE

George Walker:

Five Sinfonias
National Symphony Orchestra; Gianandrea Noseda, conductor (National Symphony Orchestra)

It has become common to refer to George Walker as a composer of firsts — in particular, the distinction being the first Black composer to win the Pulitzer Prize for music. But, as he told an interviewer in 2012, "I've always thought in universal terms, not what is Black, or what is American, but simply what has quality." That characteristic is everywhere in his five Sinfonias: in their exacting construction, vibrant and un sentimental musical language, and command of orchestration.



The National Symphony Orchestra's compelling recordings, which followed performances organized around Walker's centennial in 2022, should widen the awareness that this composer is a major American voice. All five of the Sinfonias, composed between 1954 and 2015, are compact, lasting between 10 and 15 minutes. There is a corresponding urgency of expression and a density of rapidly changing material. Walker's syntax is pointed, with a propensity for angular melodies, blocks of consonance and shifting moods.

He did not mellow with age, either. The fifth Sinfonia ("Visions") is in some ways the most severe, an outburst of lament and anger after the mass shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C. Five voices intone a series of spoken texts. Their message is elusive, but the music's heaviness reflects an artist's sad disbelief that so little had changed over his lifetime, however many "firsts" he entailed. DAVID WEININGER

Monteverdi: 'Vespri della Beata Vergine'
Pygmalion; Raphaël Pichon, conductor (Harmonia Mundi)
When I interviewed the terrific French conductor Raphaël Pichon toward the end of last year, he commented that "all the most extraordinary pieces of music are firsts for the listener to share. Listen to this truly excellent account of Monteverdi's 'Vespers,' and you can certainly believe it. There is a sense of religious devotion to be heard here, as of course there should be, but what is so powerful is the expressive urgency that Pichon, his soloists and his Pygmalion ensemble so fervently bring to the music. If period performance still aims, as it always has, to restore the shock of the old for the ears of today, then this is

period performance at close to its very best.

That is particularly true of the choral singing, which the vocalists of Pygmalion deliver with an intensity and detailing that is reminiscent of John Eliot Gardiner's Monteverdi Choir, even if Pichon less more of a spirit of freedom shine through. Listen to the overwhelming effusion of their joy as they come to the "Gloria" at the end of "Laetatus sum," for example, or the first bars of "Laudate Pueri," which are fastidiously precise in every way, yet not at all fussy. The last verse of that ancient hymn, "Ave Maria Stella," might seem oddly simple and all of Monteverdi's virtuosic invention in this work; Pygmalion make it utterly transporting. DAVID ALLEY

'Stillpoint'

Awadagin Pratt; A Far Cry; Roomful of Teeth (New Amsterdam)

Most recordings of contemporary music that manage to cast a spell achieve that by focusing on a single composer's voice. But grab bags of living artists and blends of different ensembles can be hit or miss. So give the commissioning pianist Awadagin Pratt points for good taste: The half-dozen voices featured on this album all earn their time.

Crucially, each composer's work here stretches beyond 10 minutes in length, providing listeners with significant immersion in, say, Jessie Montgomery's sound world by way of "Rounds." That piece can bring to mind the "Spring Rounds" section of Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring," but also post-minimalist string writing and a lush cadenza for Pratt (who is also invited to improvise at points).

And both of the groups he plays with — the chamber orchestra A Far Cry and the vocal octet Roomful of Teeth — bring their respective A-games to Paola Prestini's "Code," which toggles between seething passages and beatific staves. Jud Greenstein's concluding "Still Point" brings chattering, Steve Reich-like vibes into productive dialogue with sweeping, sparkling piano writing that Greenstein describes in liner notes as a memorial to the jazz great McCoy Tyner, who died in 2020. Elsewhere, the veteran composer Alvin Singleton is heard in fine form, courtesy of his "Time Past, Time Future."

On Yskawa Sorey's "United Composition for Piano and Eight Voices," the composer's deft way of moving between stark chromaticism and traditional harmonic beauty and back makes for an event-packed ride. And "Castillo Interior" by Petrus Vaska, is a valuable forum for Pratt's solo pianism. SETH COLTER WALLS

Ravel: L'Oeuvre

Pour Piano
Philippe Bianconi (La Dolce Voita)

"I don't have a personality that pushes me toward extravagance," the French pianist Philippe Bianconi says in the liner notes for this new album.

Well, then he's playing the right composer. As with Chopin and Debussy, there's something magical, even transfiguring, in Ravel's writing for piano, but he did it in his own exquisitely crafted way. His pieces admit impressionistic effects without drowning in them; the fountain splashes of "Jeux d'eau" become liquid glitter in Bianconi's hands. The lonesome images of "Miroirs," the ferocity of "Gaspard de la Nuit," the slender waltzes of "Valses Nobles et Sentimentales," the fairy-tale lullaby of "Ma Mère l'Oye" (with the pianist Clément LeFebvre) — these all invite expressively and recede at schmalz, and Bianconi stylishly obliges.

Bianconi, who traces his pedagogical lineage back to Ravel's circle, compels the listener to share his focus. He constructs hard, polished surfaces with glimmers of solitude, such as in "Une Barque sur l'océan" and "Sonatine." The shimmer of rapid oscillations gets a pointillistic crispness. If you want runs that sound like Champagne bubbles, look elsewhere, like Jean-Yves Thibaudet. Even when forced to play "Twister" with his fingers, Bianconi gently articulates the voicings — the chilly tolling of bells in "Le Gibet" or the airily seductive siren song of "Ordine." For him, elegant restraint means committing to specific choices. Call it radical clarity. OUSSAMA ZAHIR



THEATER DIRECTORY
Your daily guide to theater

BROADWAY

SIX
"ALL HAIL"
"Vogue"
BROADWAY'S "CULTURAL CELEBRATION!"
WINNER OF 23 AWARDS
2022 TONY AWARD FOR BEST ORIGINAL SCORE
The New York Times Critics' Pick

THE NOTEBOOK
"ABSOLUTELY GORGEOUS
"NOT TO BE MISSED"
Chris Jones, Chicago Tribune
BROADWAY PREVIEW BEGINS
FEBRUARY 10

THE NOTEBOOK
THE MUSICAL
Music & Lyrics by Jergal McManhon
Book by Brian Koppelman
Directed by Nicholas Sparks
Directed by Nicholas Sparks
Michael Grecco
Telecharge.com 212.239.6200
NewYorkMusical.com
Grouped Seating 1.800.SIXMUSIC12
Schaubert Theatre (L), 256 W. 45th St.

SIX
When the 2022 Tony Award Winners
"SIX" HAIL TO THE MUSIC!
Today at 8. Sun at 2. Sat 7. Sun 2 & 8
SixOnBroadway.com
Grouped Seating 1.800.SIXMUSIC12
Luna Luna Theatre (L), 256 W. 45th St.

JEOPARDY!
CLUE OF THE DAY
Make sense of the news, every day, with David Leonhardt and Times journalists.

U.S. SENATE HISTORY
IN 1805, AFTER 4 YEARS PRESIDING OVER THE SENATE, HE LEFT "A SANCTUARY, A CITADEL OF LAW, OF ORDER"

The Morning
A Newsletter
Sign up to get it in your inbox seven days a week. nytimes.com/themorning

Yesterday's Response: WHAT IS THE NEW WORLD SYMPOHY??
Watch JEOPARDY!
7 p.m. on Channel 7

pressreader
© 2023 The New York Times Company. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited.