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Albany Symphony's American Music Festival expands this year

Multi-location event built around eco-conscious theme

By Amy Biancolli Published 5:50 am, Thursday, June 2, 2016

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**IMAGE 1 OF 5**

Composer Clarice Assad at the top of a wind turbine (photo courtesy Albany Symphony Orchestra)

Since its inception in 1999, the **Albany Symphony Orchestra's** American Music Festival has been a forward-reaching, outward-looking, boundary-pushing enterprise, emphasizing the newest of the new in the ASO's commitment to homegrown music. It ventures into untrod territory as a matter of course.

This year, though, it's wandering even farther afield with a five-day bash crammed with double the usual number of events – most of them sporting an international flavor, an eco-conscious theme and an adventurous mindset that even sent a composer up a wind turbine. At the same time, it covers Troy from downtown and uptown, from Tiffany windows to the bulbous heights of EMPAC.

"It's really kind of bursting at the seams. ... It's an incredible burgeoning of events, blossoming of events," said conductor and music director **David Alan Miller**, who called the chockablock schedule "multi-dimensional and multi-tiered."

Running from Wednesday, June 8, through Sunday, June 12, AMF kicks off at 5 p.m. Wednesday with a free master class – with members of the composing collective **Sleeping Giant** – and concludes, at 11:30 a.m. Sunday, with a walk in the woods with the Mohawk-Hudson Land Conservancy.

In between, the lineup includes a Thursday afternoon "Tiffany Tour" of local churches; on Thursday night, a reading of new works and a "Living **Poets Musical Theatre**"; a Friday night concert by the ASO's rock-classical offshoot, Dogs of Desire; and a post-concert performance by Off the Cliff, the four-piece avant-jazz outfit featuring Brazilian-American singer-composer **Clarice Assad**.

More Information

If you go

American Music Festival

Where: Locations throughout Troy

When: Wednesday, June 8, through Sunday, June 12

Tickets: Prices for individual events vary; festival pass is \$99

Info: 694-3300;
www.albanysymphony.com/americanmusicfestival

Saturday's schedule is similarly packed, with a midmorning recital by duo pianists **Stephen Gosling** and **Blair McMillan**; a late-morning recital by the art-rock percussion ensemble TIGUE; an afternoon performance of 13 art songs by young Yale composers; a Saturday night ASO concert inspired by **Rachel Carson's** "Silent Spring"; and a post-concert recital of electro-acoustic chamber music by Sleeping Giant composers.

The Earth itself is "this sort of gentle through-theme" for the festival, Miller said, noting "Songs of the Rolling Earth," the Saturday night subscription concert featuring **Steven Stucky's** "Silent Spring," **Aaron Jay Kernis'** "Simple Songs" and two world premieres by Jessie

Montgomery and **Loren Loiacono**. Soprano **Talise Trevigne** will perform with the ASO.

At the Dogs concert the evening before, the new works being performed include Assad's "Windland," a piece commissioned by GE Renewable Energy. In preparation, she climbed a wind turbine on Cape Cod.

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"It was really beautiful to be up there," said Assad, who wore a helmet, anti-fog goggles and steel-

toed boots on her ascent. The GE workers accompanying her "were very nice, and they were very confused why I was going up there. They didn't really understand. 'You're a composer?' And they said, 'What is a composer climbing up a turbine for?' "

The answer: Looking for inspiration. "It was great – because I had been writing the piece already in my head for a while, but it's different when you actually get to see that. ... How they harness the energy, and the wind – you get to see more and learn about the process. And you get more inspired."

The resultant 10-minute work, "Windland," aims to evoke the wind, the birds and the "metal clanking sounds" she heard inside the turbine, she said. "The piece is quite fanciful and brilliant," Miller said.

According to Miller, the boost in AMF offerings is due in part to additional funding from New Music USA, which promotes living American composers such as the Sleeping Giant consortium. The move to expand the festival began with last year's, when the ASO brought up consultant **Christopher Stager** to visit and offer his insights.

He came away impressed by the festival and smitten with Troy, convinced that the series and the city would appeal to "anyone within driving, training and even flying distance," said Stager.

"There's nothing like it around," he said. The AMF "is a festival that is about the orchestra's values, and no other orchestra in America has that."

Regarding the festival's future, Miller sees an even broader scope with an even more international flavor – given the world-music inclinations of young American composers. "At some point, even calling it the American Music Festival may be a misnomer. It is definitely going to trend in a very global way."

Otherwise, he's aiming high. "We want this to be the Sundance festival of new music, of new concert music," Miller said. "So hopefully, people will come from everywhere ... to see what's brand-new in the world."

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