

The Sonic Fury of the Ojai Music Festival

After wildfires ravaged an idyllic valley where outdoor concerts are presented each June, a dark program spoke with eerie aptness to a place that had faced an apocalypse.

By Alex Ross, July 2, 2018 issue



The wildfires that consumed large tracts of Southern California last December came close to ravaging the rustic-bohemian town of Ojai, which has long been the seat of the Ojai Music Festival, America's most vibrant new-music gathering. Advancing from the north, the east, and the south, the fires got within a few miles of the town before a determined firefighting effort and a lucky shift in the wind held them back. Today, if you survey the Ojai Valley from an overlook you will see charred mountainsides looming over an island of green. Not surprisingly, the 2018 festival, which took place over four days in early June, felt different from past editions, which have unleashed wild sounds in idyllic surroundings. The idyll remained, but it seemed more fragile this time. The sounds could be heard as flashbacks or as forebodings.

The Moldovan-born violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja, this year's music director, had selected her programs long before December, but they spoke with eerie aptness to a town that had faced an apocalypse. The central composer

was the twentieth-century Russian ascetic Galina Ustvolskaya, who wrote spiritual music of flagellating force. A world première by the Baltimore-based composer Michael Hersch harrowingly evoked the spread of cancer in a body. Works by György Ligeti and György Kurtág mixed bleakness with black humor. The concerts were heavy going at times, but Kopatchinskaja invested them with vital purpose.

Kopatchinskaja, who is forty-one, is a fascinating musician with a fascinating mind. She is the child of two Moldovan folk-music specialists, both of whom joined their daughter at Ojai to play traditional tunes and dances. In 1989, the family emigrated from Moldova to Austria, where Kopatchinskaja studied violin and composition. She has become known for her free-spirited performing style—she sways about, roams the stage, and sometimes goes barefoot—and for her provocative takes on the classics. Her account of the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto follows the score but has the feel of an improvisation. She has developed semi-theatrical concert programs that weave together works of many periods, and she aggressively campaigns on behalf of her favorite contemporary composers, who seldom fall into the easy-listening category. She is sometimes solemn, sometimes whimsical, sometimes both. She opened the festival with Luigi Nono's 1989 score "La Lontananza Nostalgica Utopica Futura," an avant-garde tour de force for violin and electronics, and she played a section of it while standing atop a picnic table in Ojai's town park.

Not all of Kopatchinskaja's ideas cohered. On the first night of the festival, she presented a program entitled "Bye Bye Beethoven," which protested classical music's excessive dependence on the past—the sense of being "strangled by tradition," as she has said. The Mahler Chamber Orchestra, a versatile Berlin-based group that was on hand throughout the festival, accompanied Kopatchinskaja in a most unusual performance of the Beethoven Violin Concerto, in which the soloist was ceremonially swaddled in yards of fabric before she played. (Her arms were not constrained, fortunately.) Toward the end, the musicians enacted a rebellion against routine, throwing down their music stands and stalking offstage while a chaotic electronic collage of Beethoven excerpts swelled on the sound system. Kopatchinskaja battled on alone and then collapsed in defeat, as the back wall parted to reveal replicas of various composers' tombstones.

The theatrics were arresting, but the message felt less than fresh. Just a few weeks earlier, I'd heard Beethoven's "Fidelio" blown up in similar fashion, in an adventurous production by the Heartbeat Opera. As several Ojai regulars pointed out, an anti-canonical message is superfluous at Ojai, which has celebrated the new since Igor Stravinsky and Pierre Boulez were honored guests. What did impress me, though, was Kopatchinskaja's commitment to her role. She conveyed the agony of a creative artist who is torn between her devotion to new work and the prevailing pressure to stick with familiar fare.

A concert entitled "Dies Irae" was more convincing, albeit mildly terrifying. The old medieval chant, which begins "Day of wrath, that day turns the world to ash," was framed as a warning of political and environmental catastrophe. The program began with an ingenious intermingling of movements from Heinrich Biber's 1673 piece "Battalia," an evocation of the Thirty Years' War, and George Crumb's 1970 "Black Angels," a white-hot response to Vietnam. Portents of doom thundered from a septet of improvising trombones. The centerpiece of the program was Ustvolskaya's Composition No. 2, "Dies Irae" (1973), which features eight grinding double basses, a hyper-dissonant piano, and a wooden cube being thwacked with two hammers. The percussionist Fiona Digney, pummeling a conspicuously coffin-like apparatus, made a sound to wake the dead. At the conclusion came a portion of Ligeti's "Poème Symphonique for 100 Metronomes," in which the instruments expire one by one. At Ojai, musicians held the metronomes while standing in the aisles. The final image was of two children staring out at the audience, one holding the last surviving metronome. The message landed with all the subtlety of Ustvolskaya's hammer, yet I'll not soon forget the image.

Hersch's new piece, a seventy-five-minute vocal cycle entitled "I Hope We Get a Chance to Visit Soon," caused dissent in the legendarily open-minded Ojai audience: some were deeply moved, others repulsed. Its main text is drawn from e-mails that Hersch received from his friend Mary O'Reilly as she was dying of cancer. One soprano declaims these words while another sings settings of poems by Rebecca Elson, who tells of a similar struggle, in more oblique terms. The unvarnished intimacy of O'Reilly's language—"I had a rather scary conversation with my oncologist"—made it difficult to find aesthetic distance, though this was perhaps the point: we were being shown the raw material for a work of art alongside its poetic elaboration. Hersch's music is harsh, relentless, and often deliberately lacking in contrast, but it is gripping in its dogged progress.

Skilled collaborators joined Kopatchinskaja's quest. Ah Young Hong and Kiera Duffy were transfixing soloists in the Hersch; Hong also gave a commanding performance of Kurtág's "Kafka Fragments." The avant-garde virtuosos of the JACK Quartet were bewitching not only in their usual diet of Morton Feldman and Horațiu Rădulescu but also in several of John Dowland's "Lachrimae," masterpieces of Renaissance melancholy. Most stupendous was the pianist Markus Hinterhäuser, who, in his spare time, runs the Salzburg Festival. On a blisteringly hot afternoon at the Libbey Bowl, Ojai's open-air arena, Hinterhäuser sat for an hour and played Ustvolskaya's six piano sonatas—as staggering a pianistic feat as I've seen in recent years. He brought out their violence: the cluster chords, the pounding of high and low registers, the

monomaniacal repetition. He also brought out their tenderness, their shards of song. He has traversed the cycle many times, and will do so again this summer, in Salzburg. Only in Ojai, one guesses, has an elderly audience member come up to him in tears, thanking him for the experience.

The new-music scene in Southern California is sufficiently active that there is no need to import Europeans to tackle demanding fare. At Ojai, members of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra offered a selection of Luciano Berio's *Sequenzas*—fourteen showpieces for solo performers. These were generally well done, but they lacked the specific fire of a *Sequenzas* concert that I saw last fall at the Los Angeles venue Monk Space, involving local musicians. The diabolically inventive trombonist-composer Matt Barbier, who played "Sequenza V" at that event, participated in the "Dies Irae" clamor in Ojai; Scott Worthington, a double bassist who creates spare, glimmering soundscapes, handled the electronics in the Nono. Ojai could make better use of local talent: Southern California has its own distinctive community of composers and allied artists, who sway between uproarious and meditative modes.

In the same period as Ojai, the fourteenth edition of a festival called the Dog Star Orchestra unfolded at venues in and around L.A. This is the brainchild of the veteran experimental composer Michael Pisaro, who teaches at CalArts, northwest of the city. Pisaro specializes in quiet, spacious music that frequently samples or mimics natural sounds. In August, the Mostly Mozart Festival, at Lincoln Center, will present his work "a wave and waves," which summons an oceanic murmur from microscopic noises, such as seeds dropping on glass or paper being torn. A Dog Star event at the Coaxial Arts Foundation, in downtown L.A., featured Pisaro's "Beings, Heat and Cold," in which performers extract sounds from miscellaneous objects that they have retrieved from streets around the venue. On this occasion, the instrumentation included a traffic cone, a chunk of Styrofoam, a twig, a rock, and a discarded bassinet with a music box attached. Later, the performers elicited daubs of tone from conventional instruments, as if translating those found objects into spectral music.

Another Dog Star event took place in the Mueller Tunnel, a structure on a fire road in the San Gabriel Mountains, northeast of L.A. Several dozen people hiked a mile from the main road to witness a rendition of Heather Lockie's conceptual piece "Song to Be Performed in a Tunnel in Your Town," for seven female vocalists. Attired in white dresses, the singers proceeded in shifting formations from one end of the tunnel to the other, emitting ethereal timbres, playing chiming percussion, and scraping rocks against the walls. One vocalist sang Merle Travis's "Dark as a Dungeon," a coal miner's lament. In the final moments, the performers walked into the light at the far end of the tunnel and disappeared around the bend of a mountain path. This felt like an emanation from the California of the nineteen-twenties, when spiritual seekers settled in towns like Ojai and tried to start anew. The cynic in me found the vision hokey; the dreamer in me would have liked to disappear with them. ♦

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/07/02/the-sonic-fury-of-the-ojai-music-festival>

The New York Times

Oh! Oh! Ojai: The Week in Classical Music One of the world's most lovably idiosyncratic festivals yielded some of our highlights.

By Zachary Woolfe
June 15, 2018

Classical lovers! When the week began, I was still in hot-yet-ever-so-chill Ojai, Calif., for the tail end of the Ojai Music Festival, one of music's most lovably idiosyncratic, sunnily relaxed yet rigorous events.

The revelation of this year's festival, a single long weekend presided over by the fierce violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja, was the music of Galina Ustvolskaya (1919-2006), who in virtual isolation built a style of grim extremity. Her six piano sonatas were played on a roasting afternoon by Markus Hinterhäuser, the brilliant artist who runs the Salzburg Festival. It's an unbroken hour of focus and force, but Mr. Hinterhäuser's touch is warm, human.

And while you should by all means take in the following video's dreamy set by the pianist and composer Michael Hersch and the saxophonist Gary Louie, I'd first skip ahead to 23:38, when the JACK Quartet — the festival's star this year — shimmers in Horatio Radulescu's "Before the Universe Was Born."

Sorry, but more JACK! An astonishing couple of videos: First, John Luther Adams's "Everything That Rises," played as a tribute to [the wildfires that threatened the Ojai Valley](#) in December. That performance ended around midnight; at 8 a.m., the quartet played Morton Feldman's "Piano and String Quartet," for a stretched-out juxtaposition that suited these achingly stretched-out works.

As you can see, Ojai is wonderful at posting many of its performances, after streaming them live. **Check out its YouTube channel** for more from this most memorable of festivals.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/15/arts/music/oh-oh-ojai-the-week-in-classical-music.html>

Los Angeles Times

Beethoven rolls over at the Ojai Music Festival

Mark Swed, Music Critic
June 8, 2018



Patricia Kopatchinskaja performs Luigi Nono's "La lontananza nostalgica utopia futura" on top of a picnic table during a community concert as part of the Ojai Music Festival at Libbey Park. (Genaro Molina / Los Angeles Times)

Ever obstinate nearly two centuries after his death, Beethoven still won't roll over. Despite the occasional efforts to knock him off his pedestal, Beethoven remains more present than ever, influencing leading composers and keeping the classical music establishment in business.

John Adams has been late-Beethoven-besotted in recent years, and Thomas Adès conducts Beethoven at the Hollywood Bowl this summer. But now comes Patricia Kopatchinskaja, this year's irrepressible Ojai Music Festival music director.

For her opening festival evening Thursday, the Moldovan violinist began an elaborate process — adoring and adorable one minute, downright disturbing the next — of waving bye-bye to Beethoven in Libbey Park.

She surrounded herself with tombstones or wrecked pedestals with the names Schubert, Mozart, Beethoven, Mahler and Brahms, as if an antsy anarchist had bombed a Vienna cemetery, ready to start World War III.

Yet it was also a happy site, next to a picnic area and a playground with squealing children riding swings — a perfect place to enjoy an Ojai signature “pink moment,” as the sun set.

Into all this, amid stations of music stands and surround-sound loudspeaker installations, wandered an impishly oracular Kopatchinskaja. It was an evening that began with a utopian vision of a future meant to feel both distant and nostalgic, an otherworldly late piece by the 20th-century Italian avant-gardist Luigi Nono.

Three hours later in Libbey Bowl, a glorious, life-affirming performance of Beethoven’s Violin Concerto by Kopatchinskaja and the superb Mahler Chamber Orchestra came to its shocking end. Just before it was over, one by one, the orchestra members threw their music stands violently to the floor and stormed offstage. Kopatchinskaja soldiered on, best she could, but it was all too much. She ended up alone, supine and lifeless as the backdrop was dismantled revealing those fragmented composer monuments from the park.

Meanwhile a recording of a turntablist had taken over, scratching away at Beethoven’s Ninth and whatnot. Beethoven rolled over.

Would he have wanted it that way? Who’s to say? But Ojai, where new growth is beginning to appear after the devastating fires late last year, and where musical questing is a tradition, is a very good place to ponder the meaning of renewal.

Like nature, Kopatchinskaja takes no prisoners, and she tread an astonishing path from Nono to no no, Beethoven. The piece in the park, a free community event of the festival, was Nono’s 1989 “La Lontananza Nostalgica Utopica Futura” (Nostalgic Distant Utopian Future), for solo violin and eight-channel electronic soundscape. The violinist wanders from music stand to music stand, pausing at the dummy ones. The electronics, controlled by Scott Worthington, included recordings of improvisations by Gidon Kremer heard straight and electronically altered along with background studio noises.

Played outdoors, there were other ambient sounds and we all became wanderers following the soloist from station to station. Nono toyed with every violin effect under the sun, and Kopatchinskaja toyed with her listeners, stopping to make a scratchy or an eerie sound, and to give a bemused look to someone in the crowd.

At the end, Kopatchinskaja wandered into Libbey Bowl playing a high-pitched G drone and then went off into the distance. That G hung in the air for 45 minutes as the audience took its seats,

driving some to distraction (pleas to turn it off were refused), but creating a mysteriously tingling sensation of expectation, leading directly to Ives' "Unanswered Question."

Thus begun Kopatchinskaja's "Bye Bye Beethoven," her scandalous concert program she created with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra and stage director Maria Ussprung. There have been three previous performances of it in Europe. Most presenters won't touch it. Even proudly adventurous Ojai patrons said in a talk-back with the violinist and Mahler members after the performance that they were taken aback by such Beethovenian antics.

Ives' never-answered question was followed by the last movement of Haydn's "Farewell" Symphony played backward. Then came a movement for vocal quartet (chanted and whistled by Kopatchinskaja and three orchestra musicians) from John Cage's "Living Room Music," with a text by Gertrude Stein ("Once upon a time the world was round and you could go around it"). Then Bach's "Es ist Genug" (It is enough). Then György Kurtág's "The Answered Unanswered Question," music on the edge of obliquity that answers nothing.

Leading up to the Beethoven concerto, a large swatch of gauzy fabric was brought onstage, and Kopatchinskaja was ritualistically wrapped in it. Dressed now like an abbess, she then conducted the Mahlerians without conducting. Rather she persuasively leaned her head into the music and made expressions that indicated exactly how she felt each ever-changing minute. It was exactly the look a sitarist might give his tabla player in a raga.

This was a performance like no other, fabulously virtuosic with soloist and orchestra uncannily on the same wavelength. Kopatchinskaja played passages at the edge of audibility (which Beethoven actually asks for but never gets) and she threw herself into bravura instances like a folk musician with a political cause that can't wait. Tenderness and ferocity came out of nowhere.

The first movement cadenza, which Kopatchinskaja patterned after one Beethoven wrote for a piano transcription of the concerto, had her in riotous dialogue with the timpanist and other members of the ensemble.

The last movement was the most joyous I'd ever heard it, which made the vandalism of the ending all the more stunning.

It had to be Beethoven, greatest of them all and her idol, the violinist said in the talk-back. He was a revolutionary who has become commercialized and no longer shocks. He once moved music into the future and now stands in the way of it moving into the future.

But ironically, in all the bye-byes, Beethoven almost seemed to be in the room, his every wish in the concerto magnified and made to sound utterly alive. And, that of course, is what gave the train wreck the power to shock.

<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-bye-bye-beethoven-ojai-review-20180608-story.html>

The New York Times

A Quirky Violinist and a Festival to Match

By Zachary Woolfe
June 11, 2018



Patricia Kopatchinskaja was the music director, and a lead performer, of this year's Ojai Music Festival in California. (Michal Czerwonka for The New York Times)

OJAI, Calif. — Her face and manner unguarded, her talk earnestly self-searching, the violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja doesn't dodge questions. There was just one thing she wouldn't talk about over coffee here last weekend during the Ojai Music Festival, which she programmed.

"I don't say a word about this," she said quickly when I asked about the tiny thing that has become her trademark. She is at pains not — I repeat, not — to be just The Violinist Who Plays Barefoot.

But anyone who views this idiosyncratically earthy habit of hers as hippie unseriousness or mere affectation should have come to Ojai. Over hours and hours of playing, from Luigi Nono's meditative "La Lontananza Nostalgica Utopica Futura" on Thursday to Gyorgy Ligeti's riotous Violin Concerto on Sunday, nothing Ms. Kopatchinskaja did was insincere, flighty or unserious.

She is a player of rare expressive energy and disarming informality, of whimsy and theatrical ambition. (Listen to her Tchaikovsky concerto recording, now!) In all these qualities, she was a perfect choice for Ojai, which each year invites a different artist — a performer, director, composer, conductor or choreographer — to plan the four-day festival as a concentrated shot of his or her enthusiasms. (2019 brings the ferociously virtuosic soprano and conductor Barbara Hannigan.)

There's nothing quite like Ojai. The festival is to the music world what the town is to the rest of Southern California: a lovably eccentric jewel, a tiny explosion of beauty, weirdness and overkill. The art is rigorous, but the vibe is relaxed, smiling and uncrowded — part weekend getaway, part laboratory.

Most concerts take place in and around bustling Libbey Park, with the chirps of birds making even the most recondite repertory seem almost sylvan, like the creaks, whispers and frenzies of Luciano Berio's daunting solo-instrument *Sequenzas*, scattered throughout the weekend as pop-up events in a gazebo.

Since 1947, the festival has cultivated a loyal audience open to just about anything. And lots of it: Under the leadership of Thomas W. Morris, who as the artistic director chooses each season's music director, the schedule has gotten ever more maximalist, the performances stretching from dawn to midnight.

This year's festival breathed with Ms. Kopatchinskaja's taste for modernist brooding and her darkly absurdist streak: The tone was set with a screening of a raucous film version of Kurt Schwitters's Dada poem "Ursonate" that she (wearing a pink wig) and some friends made earlier this year.

Performed outdoors, Nono's usually prickly "La Lontananza" — in which the violinist moves around the playing space, with prerecorded electronics manipulated in real time — became an unexpectedly charming pied-piper spectacle. Ms. Kopatchinskaja and the soprano Ah Young Hong caught the rueful humor in Gyorgy Kurtag's bleak "Kafka Fragments."

But the stars of the weekend were the members of the JACK Quartet, known quantities for their casual mastery of difficult scores. They somehow actualized Horatiu Radulescu's "Before the Universe Was Born," its score a heady mixture of strange icons and mystical texts, as fairy-dust ethereality and squelching harshness, slippery shivers of sound.

They followed John Luther Adams's reverently ascending "Everything That Rises" — performed late Friday as a tribute to the massive wildfire that threatened the Ojai Valley in December — with Morton Feldman's "Piano and String Quartet" early the following morning: a perfect diptych of unhurried radiance.

Georg Friedrich Haas's String Quartet No. 9, one of that composer's works intended to be performed in complete darkness, was more seething, but the playing was still unruffled. I hope Chad Smith, who takes over the artistic direction from Mr. Morris after next year's festival, asks the JACK back as curators.

Not everything worked so well, including the weekend's main premiere, Michael Hersch's music-theater piece "I hope we get a chance to visit soon." Mr. Hersch's works can shudder with vividly raw gloom, but this oratorio-like reflection on a friend's death from cancer felt overlong and dreary.

Juxtaposing excerpts from the friend's emails with the cancer-theme poetry of Rebecca Elson, the piece makes little distinction between prose and poetic texts, which are set in the same half-speaking, half-floating style. The instrumental music whips endlessly from a vaporous, stormy fog of sound to harsh crashes.

Two of Ms. Kopatchinskaja's forays into staged grab-bag programs were also less than fully persuasive. In "Bye Bye Beethoven," on Thursday, short musical essays in decay by Haydn, Cage, Ives, Bach and Kurtág preceded an exaggeratedly fierce rendition of Beethoven's Violin Concerto that ended in a swirl of electronic noise and a scene change that revealed cemetery-style monuments to masters like Mozart and Schubert.

The undergraduate-ish thesis, that we need to break our reliance on the classics, felt tone-deaf at Ojai, which abandoned the canon long ago. Ms. Kopatchinskaja's desire to upend stale concert formats is admirable. But her rebellions can feel as hoary as the traditions she's resisting, and she needs design and direction partners with more visual flair.

I was more into "Dies Irae," on Saturday, a bevy of ominousness said to be about various threats to our world. Alternating sections of Biber's 17th-century "Battalia" and George Crumb's Vietnam-era "Black Angels" made an effectively haunting reflection on the persistence of war.

The meaning was less explicit — though clearly apocalyptic — in Mr. Hersch's furious Violin Concerto; a blaring brass improvisation on a Byzantine chant; and Galina Ustvolskaya's grandly depressing 1973 "Dies Irae" for piano, a growling group of double basses and a player who hacks mercilessly with hammers on a coffinlike box. Ligeti's "Poème Symphonique," for out-of-sync metronomes, was a chaotic countdown finish.

Best, in terms of interplay of old and new, was the program that led into "Dies Irae." Mournful Dowland melodies, arranged for the JACK and Ms. Kopatchinskaya, were interspersed with Tigran Mansurian's Four Serious Songs for Violin and Strings and Pauline Oliveros's "Horse Sings From Cloud," in a version created for an iPhone app. It transformed an entire amphitheater into an airy forest of sound, playful and solemn at once.

There was a slight overuse of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, a solid but not revelatory ensemble that was in residence this year. This is tied to the larger issue of overstuffing that dogs Ojai, and will be Mr. Smith's responsibility to solve: While there's joy in the festival's too-muchness, the music would be better served by judicious pruning.

On occasion Ms. Kopatchinskaja seemed to favor extremity for its own sake: super-quiets, for example, that drew attention merely to how quiet they were. But there was no such self-consciousness on Saturday afternoon, when she was joined by the pianist Markus Hinterhäuser (taking a weekend off as the artistic director of the Salzburg Festival), in two duos by Ustvolskaya, a Shostakovich pupil who went on to develop a stony style in virtual isolation.

This is music of constant forced transformation: A grinding march suddenly lightens into a lullaby; after that melody, in turn, seems to wander into lethargy, it suddenly snaps back to attention. Then Mr. Hinterhäuser was simply astonishing in an unbroken hour of Ustvolskaya's six piano sonatas, from the gentle loneliness of the first to the thunderous full-forearm cluster chords of the last. (Ms. Kopatchinskaja was his page turner.)

I won't soon forget his account of the Fourth Sonata, with a dark undertow that begins inexorably dragging the softly winding melody under. Ustvolskaya was, in this playing, unfailingly grim but never icy or smug. This was human music, to the last — full of intense dignity.

Human music was what the weekend was about; it is what Ms. Kopatchinskaja does, whether the repertory is the most abstruse modernism, or the Moldovan folk tunes she played on Sunday in lively collaboration with her father, a cimbalom player, and her mother, a fiddler.

That barnstorm preceded another, the festival-closer and one of her specialties: Ligeti's dazzling concerto, a party that ended — in this version of the final cadenza — with the whole orchestra joining Ms. Kopatchinskaja in song. It danced, as the whole festival did: on the edge of the volcano.

Barefoot, of course.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/11/arts/music/ojai-festival-patricia-kopatchinskaja.html>

Los Angeles Times

This year's Ojai Music Festival was bright, and dark, and very very hot

Mark Swed, Music Critic
June 12, 2018



Violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja concludes the Ojai Music Festival as soloist in Ligeti's Violin Concerto with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra at the Libbey Bowl on Sunday afternoon. (Genaro Molina / Los Angeles Times)

“Hi, I’m Pat,” a madcap violinist said Sunday morning to a group of boisterous children sitting on the ground before her.

At one point during the jubilantly innovative Ojai Music Festival kids concert, a curious toddler in a heavy metal T-shirt had wobbled up to the foot of the stage to get a closer look at Patricia Kopatchinskaja, this year’s festival music director. So she sat down next to the child and played to him directly. The sun blazed overhead, creating a kind of halo over the boy, who appeared transformed into a joyous spirit.

Under Kopatchinskaja, this year’s festival was one of the brightest and most fun-filled in the 71-year history, and also the most defiantly dark and sobering.

On Friday night, Michael Hersch's "I hope we get a chance to visit soon," a relentlessly grim musical immersion in a cancer ward, was the weekend's major world premiere. After enduring the 77-minute performance for two solo singers and instrumental ensemble without a trace of grace, one woman stood on the lawn repeatedly shouting, "I hated that so much I want to fight with someone," as we funereally filed out of the Libbey Bowl.

There is no convenient summing up the mercurial, unpredictable Kopatchinskaja. She is without guile. She can light up the stage the second she appears, and those appearances are rarely conventional — she might stroll on before a concerto playing something, or she might begin by playing hidden behind a backdrop.

She can be merciless. She can also inhabit a special place all her own, where dark and light enhance one another, heightening the senses.

One of the composers Kopatchinskaja featured was Galina Ustvolskaya, a reclusive Soviet-era Russian who, having written some of the angriest, most brutal music imaginable, is known as "the lady with a hammer." On Friday afternoon at the Libbey Bowl during the hottest part of the day, Kopatchinskaja and pianist Markus Hinterhäuser spent an hour playing Ustvolskaya's two works, a sonata and a duet, for violin and piano.

That was followed by another sweaty hour in which Hinterhäuser assayed all six of Ustvolskaya's piano sonatas, written between 1947 and 1988, with no break between them. Keys of the piano are meant to be struck with repeated, focused ferocity. Ustvolskaya demands not that effects be the usual *espressivo* but *espressivissimo*.

This is not outdoor music. It is not hot afternoon music in a venue with little shade. Christopher Hailey titled the program note "No Exit," and there wasn't any. The stage had become an oven and Hinterhäuser, who was making his Southern California debut and who happens to be artistic director of the Salzburg Festival, looked as if he were about to die.

Instead, he gave what might well be one of the most extraordinary performances of his career. This is music of extremes that requires extremes. Sun and sound became a hallucinatory single sensation. I experienced Ustvolskaya's magnificent chords and resonances as heat and light, while that shining orb overhead became a giant gong. When it was over, Hinterhäuser was as limp as a Tour de France rider winning a mountain stage and even more triumphant.

Kopatchinskaja also placed Ustvolskaya's "Dies Irae," for eight cellos and a wooden cube of the composer's own design that is hit with hammers, at the center of theatrical production Saturday night. Like "Bye Bye Beethoven," which opened the festival Thursday, it was directed by Maria Ursprung and featured the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, the ensemble in residence, as well as the JACK Quartet.

This was Kopatchinskaja's lament for our environmentally plagued planet. It began with the sound of jackboots marching. Projections of war-torn Syria flooded the stage. Movements from bizarre Baroque-era battle music by Heinrich Biber were intertwined with American composer George Crumb's 1970 haunting protest of the Vietnam War, "Black Angels."

The first movement from Michael Hersch's Violin Concerto, written for Kopatchinskaja, added its own harsh, hollow, crunching character. Trombones marched down the aisles, calling out the dead before Ustvol'skaya's unleashing of heaven's fury.

In an excerpt from György Ligeti's "Poème Symphonique," dozens of performers stood in the aisles holding metronomes, letting them die, and dropping to the ground to die with them. When she created this work for the Lucerne Festival last summer, Kopatchinskaja ended it there. But in an Ojai still recovering from its own Dies Irae inferno of last season's fires, she added two small children appearing out of the metronome cataclysm as signs of hope.

If anything could tie together a four-day festival — with some days beginning at 8 a.m. and going until almost midnight and Kopatchinskaja playing a variety of musics far too large to catalogue here — it was that hope. Her vision for a future came in the form of epic questions about the purpose of music.

Is art's job an unflinchingly brutal disclosure of reality or a beauty-bedecked disguise of that reality? Exit, or no exit?

For Kopatchinskaja, the highs needed the lows, and nothing was lower than Hersch's new piece, which uses the emails of a friend of the composer describing the horrors of her terminal cancer and its treatment. Sopranos Ah Young Hong and Kiera Duffy wept and wailed. Nine players from the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Tito Muñoz, interjected what you might expect the devastation of the flesh to sound like, with no recourse to sonic anesthesia.

The antidote was provided by a Saturday afternoon performance of György Kurtág's "Kafka Fragments," for violin and soprano. However death-obsessed Kafka might have been, these 40 forlorn excerpts from his diaries, all given understated musical settings, have a black humor and quirky aliveness. Hong had a tendency to overdramatize the text, but she sang it with exacting surety, while Kopatchinskaja proved entirely in her element, finding the unique Kafka-esque space between reality and thought.

Kopatchinskaja and her festival were all over the map. That geography included much from Eastern Europe — including spirited Moldovan folk music that she played with her parents (violinist Emilia Kopatchinskaja and cimbalom player Viktor Kopatchinsky), George Enescu's Romanian folk-inspired Third Violin Sonata and a focus on the Hungarians Ligeti and Kurtág.

The Mahler Chamber Orchestra, making its West Coast debut with musicians from all over Europe, was invariably impressive (several of its members played Berio's virtuosic solo Sequence in free pop-up concerts in the park). The magnificent JACK gave early-morning and late-night performances of hour-long quartets by John Luther Adams and Georg Friedrich Haas (played in pitch-black darkness) and Morton Feldman's ethereal Piano and String Quartet.

Australian pianist and harpsichordist Anthony Romaniuk dazzled in music from five centuries, but it was Kopatchinskaja who proved simply unfathomable. She played Ravel with gorgeous, dusky seduction. She played Baroque music as if she were a presence from the past. She played

Armenian composer Tigran Mansurian's "Four Serious Songs" for violin and strings with a wizened mysticism. She had no need for beauty when it came to the demands of Ustvolskaya.

Most of all, she played nothing, whether it was a children's concert or Ligeti's Violin concerto, which ended the festival, without putting everything into context. As an introduction to the concerto, she arranged the Kyrie from Michaut's 14th century Mass for two violins and two cellos, seamlessly segueing into the Ligeti, while one of the cellists, Philipp von Steinaecker, stood up and conducted. Here was the essence of her, from the eccentric to the sublime (but never ridiculous).

Kopatchinskaja is a great violinist on a great mission. The Ojai Festival has maybe been this good, but it has never been more inclusive. It has never crammed more ideas and ideals into four days. And, at its best, it has never been better.

<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-kopatchinskaja-ojai-festival-review-20180612-story.html>

Ojai Music Festival kicks off with a bit of whimsy, a lot of passion

Rita Moran, Music Critic

June 8, 2018



Patricia Kopatchinskaja plays the Luigi Nono piece, “La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura,” in Libbey Park on Thursday, the opening night of the Ojai Music Festival. Kopatchinskaja is the festival’s music director. (Richard Quinn)

To escape reality or to confront it.

The 2018 Ojai Music Festival music director, Patricia Kopatchinskaja, leaps full force into the latter, a message she conveyed in an introductory appearance Thursday afternoon and reinforced that evening with an intriguing community concert while strolling through Libbey Park’s leafy grounds.

That community concert, open to all, found violinist Kopatchinskaja and electronics expert Scott Worthington teamed to create an ongoing musical search through tombstones dedicated to past musical greats, with the soloist wandering through the park, and the electronics guru creatively adjusting violin and recorded sounds as she moved, and listeners followed the results through the park.

After her idiosyncratic park tour interpreting Luigi Nono's "La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura," the violinist continued onstage with the evening's featured U.S. premiere of "Bye Bye Beethoven," as conceptualized by the music director.

With the multi-talented Mahler Chamber Orchestra and stage director Maria Ursprung, Kopatchinskaja again took the lead, sometimes as director, with a wink and a nod to the very able Mahler ensemble, but most impressively as a soloist who sprinkles whimsy along with passion as she plays her distinctive violin, which often has a viola-like quality.

Roaming through a collage of relatively contemporary, and often quirky, works were Charles Ives' "Unanswered Question," John Cage's "Once Upon a Time" from "Living Room Music," and Gyorgy Kurtag's "The Answered Unanswered Question," spliced between the finale of Haydn's Farewell Symphony, Bach's "Es ist genug" ("It is enough") and Beethoven's vivid Violin Concerto in D Major.

The last is the revelation, given Kopatchinskaja's intimately reworked version drawn from her study of the composer's original intentions she derived from his seminal score. Most conspicuous is the timpani, boldly set front and nearly center, reflecting the composer's keyboard version of the work, which made room for the percussive accents.

But the concerto's performance was distinctive in other ways as well. The violinist and her co-conspirators backed onto the stage in the dark before settling down to perform it. Kopatchinskaja arrived in inconspicuous black but was soon costumed with strikingly simple vestments of a single pale shade, all slowly dropped from above and then quickly sashed in a style creating an appearance much like a potentate, or perhaps a musician, from a distant era.

The performance itself was distinguished by fresh insight, fascinating dynamics and the violinist's pixyish personality. The resounding finale was quickly followed by the musicians nonchalantly tossing their music stands to the ground, but as someone immediately observed, not their instruments.

All came forward for a very long standing ovation from an audience delighted by the innovation and passion they had witnessed.

Saturday's concerts include musicians of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra in works by Gyorgy Ligeti, Luciano Berio, Maurice Ravel and Russell Peck, plus festival director and violinist

Patricia Kopatchinskaja and cellist Jay Campbell from 1 to 2 p.m., and Gyorgy Kurtag's "Kafka Fragments" featuring soprano Ah Young Hong and Kopatchinskaja from 2:30 to 3:45 p.m..

Saturday evening concerts begin at 7:30 with the JACK Quartet in works by John Dowland, Tigran Mansurian and Pauline Oliveros, and continue at 9 p.m with the U.S. Premiere of "Dies Irae" conceptualized by Kopatchinskaja; the first movement of a violin concerto by Michael Hersch, and works by Antonio Lotti, Galina Ustvolskaya and Ligeti.

The festival concludes Sunday with concerts including Moldovan folk music at 2:30 p.m. and Stravinsky's "L'Histoire du Soldat" at the final 4:30 p.m. concert.

<https://www.vcstar.com/story/news/local/2018/06/08/ojai-music-festival-kicks-off-bit-whimsy-lot-passion/620588002/>

Modernism Revived at Ojai 2018

Jim Farber
June 12, 2018



Patricia Kopatchinskaja kicks off the Ojai Music Festival in front of Bach's metaphorical grave.
(David Bazemore)

Patricia Kopatchinskaja arrived in Ojai (by way of Moldova and Bern, Switzerland) with the energy of a zealot, the violin artistry of a virtuoso, and the political agenda of an agent provocateur. Her goal was to unsettle the 2018 Ojai Music Festival audience by dancing on the graves of the Viennese classics. Her spokespeople would be the European modernists such as Bartók, Berio, Kurtág, and Ligeti and their contemporary American avatar, Michael Hersch, all known for their embrace of a darker reality and the rejection of populism.

“I like to do wrong things,” Kopatchinskaja told a gathering prior to festival’s opening. “This is not a time for music for comfort. We need to face the dark side. We are at the point of no return. We need to hear these things even if they hurt. Real music is confrontation, not pacifying.” She promised the next three days would be, “a voyage of discovery.” And they were.

Ever since its founding in 1947, the Ojai Music Festival has provided a safe haven for musical provocateurs, most notably Pierre Boulez, who also called for demolition of the “old ways,” proclaiming the only real future for music lay in the shock of the new.

There was not going to be any classical-music comfort food on Kopatchinskaja’s watch, despite the fact that the violinist has a charming personality and could play you a Beethoven concerto that would knock your socks off. There would be the premiere of Michael Hersch’s *I hope we get a chance to visit soon*, describing, in emotionally wrenching atonality and clinically brutal language, the process of a friend dying of cancer.

A composition by the little-known Russian composer Galina Ustvolskaya, “The Lady with a Hammer,” would illustrate, in the most visceral music, the process of having your spirit crushed under the unrelenting weight of the Soviet Union’s arts policy.

And topping it all was the festival’s dramatic climax — the U.S. premiere of Kopatchinskaja’s fully staged tapestry of humanity’s rise and fall, *Dies Irae* (Day of Wrath).

It all began Thursday evening with a seamlessly connected two-part program cryptically titled, *Bye Bye Beethoven*. As the sun began to set over the bucolic beauty of Libbey Bowl, Kopatchinskaja made her entrance. violin in hand. casually walking among 100-year-old oak trees and the crumbling grave stones of classical music’s giants. Poor Haydn’s stone was broken in half and placed next to the trash bins.

Strolling from one strategically placed music stand and tombstone to another Kopatchinskaja performed Luigi Nono’s *La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura* (Nostalgia for a far-away, future utopia) for violin and electronics, its dense atonal clusters and electronic responses piped throughout the park. As she made her way, the crowd followed as if she was the Pied Piper. Little did they know Kopatchinskaja was skillfully setting the hook for what was to come.

As the final sustained note of Nono’s composition morphed into the first note of Charles Ives’s *The Unanswered Question*, the sky darkened, stars came out, and the musicians placed throughout the Libbey Bowl carried on Ives’s musical conversation.

Kopatchinskaja not only wants her audiences to question the relevance of too-often programmed classics, she wants them to reevaluate the entirety of what constitutes a performance. The program said that the members of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra would perform the final movement of Haydn’s “Farewell” Symphony (No. 49). But in Kopatchinskaja’s hall of mirrors the farewell became “The Welcome” as the players (note-for-note) performed the piece backwards!

Like a hip-hop DJ blending musical samples, the concert segued between John Cage’s word jazz, “Story,” from *Living Room Music*, to J.S. Bach’s *Es ist genug*, to Kurtág’s *The Answered Unanswered Question*, ending with a full performance of Beethoven’s *Violin Concerto in D Major*.

Playing superbly and letting the audience sink into their comfort zone, Kopatchinskaja delivered her knockout punch. As she began the final cadenza, the musicians revolted picked up their music stands, and threw them down as a clattering rebellion. In the background blared a tape collage of Beethoven's greatest hits and the walls parted to reveal the tombstones.

Behind this concert staging, and the next one (see below) is the aesthetic philosophy of the Frankfurt School of philosophers, particularly Theodor Adorno (1903–1969) who — to summarize far too briefly — believed that the classical concert had become a vitiated ritual, in which to show off familiar heirlooms, rather than to engage seriously with art. Adorno wanted art to confront this tendency and to deal with the darkness of real life and to resist the blandishments of the “culture industry.”

Many artists and critics are finding new relevance in Adorno's critique. And that means that some of the musical styles of high modernism are undergoing a reevaluation, as was happening in Kopatchinskaja's Ojai programming.

Between the Beethoven cadenza and the final cadenza of Ligeti's Violin Concerto that concluded the festival on Sunday, more than 50 works were performed. One of the most significant was Hersch's *I hope we get a chance to visit soon*. Sung by contrasting sopranos Ah Young Hong and Kiera Duffy, the libretto (set to a barrage of dense atonal orchestral textures) juxtaposes correspondence between Hersch (a recovering cancer victim) and his close friend, Mary Harris O'Reilly, who died from the disease. Exchanges like, “I came home from the hospital after nine days, most of the time with a tube down my nose and into my stomach” dovetailed with more poetic metaphors written by Christopher Middleton. In the end all that's left is anger, no sense of acceptance or transcendence. As Hersch admitted, he hasn't reached that point.

One of the revelations of the festival was the music written in Soviet solitude by Galina Ustvolskaya. Having given up on the early Soviet vision of artistic freedom, Ustvolskaya retreated into isolation where she produced music without the expectation of ever having it performed. Her six piano sonatas (performed sequentially in a marathon performance by Markus Hinterhäuser) offered a portrait displaying glimmers of hope and hints of Shostakovich-style modernism, leading to a percussive final sonata where tone clusters, played with the entire arm, ring out like hammer strokes.

The Ojai Festival has never witnessed anything like the fully staged conceptualization of Kopatchinskaja's *Dies Irae* (Day of Wrath). First staged two years ago in Lucerne, the performance was reconceived for Ojai by director Maria Ursprung. The first half established the work's eclecticism, interpolating the Renaissance modality of John Dowland with *Four Serious Songs* for Violin and Strings by Tigran Mansurian and Pauline Oliveros's *Horse Sings* from *Cloud*, her open-ended tone poem performed on cell phones tuned in to a common app.

As the audience took their seats for the *Dies Irae*, they were greeted by the stomping boots of an army on the march, a crescendo of impending violence. As before, passages of lyric beauty gave way to brutal intensity. Selections from Heinrich Biber's *Battalia* melded into 10 selections from George Crumb's *Black Angels*. God in the highest, taking the form of a solo cellist, was elevated and illuminated above the stage.

The abrasive first movement of Hersch's Violin Concerto gave way to the beauty of Antonio Lotti's *Crucifixus* for 10 singers. Then, projected black and white images of bombed-out European cities covered the stage, as a muscular blond, Fiona Digney, looking like she stepped out of a Soviet workers poster, performed the key role in Ustvolskaya's own *Dies Irae*. Raising a hammer in each hand, she brought them down in a series of percussive attacks on the resonating lid of a black wooden coffin.

It ended with the musicians walking corpse-like down the aisles, carrying metronomes, their faces illuminated from below. Set to Ligeti's *Poème Symphonique*, the message was clear than mankind's time is running out. A ray of hope was offered when two young children appeared, a symbolic recognition of Ojai's recovery from the recent, devastating fires.

In one of the festival's most demanding pieces, Haas's hour-long *Ninth String Quartet*, the members of Jack Quartet played this complex work of shifting patterns and rhythms in complete darkness. The loss of light may have intensified the sonic experience for some. I found the disorientation very challenging.

In contrast, the Jack's early morning performance (at the Zack Theater) of before the universe was born by Horatio Radulescu, with its fluttering harmonics and wisps of melody framed by oak trees and singing birds, was one of those perfect Ojai moments.

From its opening cadenza to its closing cadenza, this was an Ojai Festival that raised issues, had remarkable moments of musical illumination, and pushed buttons in the name of an art ideal that raises consciousness. Some found it provocative. Some were angry. Everyone was talking.

<https://www.sfcv.org/reviews/ojai-music-festival/modernism-revived-at-ojai-2018>

Ojai Music Festival kicks off with a bit of whimsy, a lot of passion

Rita Moran, Music Critic
June 12, 2018

From piquant to powerful, Ojai Music Festival 2018 music director Patricia Kopatchinskaja engaged audiences young and old, novices and longtime aficionados. With her ever-changing, ever-surprising choices for the 72nd celebration of wide-ranging classical music, the violinist and conceptualist found many ways to inject humor, power and meaning into her vision of Ojai's signature cultural event.

Kopatchinskaja, who whimsically signs herself PatKop, with a smiling violin sketch attached, proved a powerful leader with bold ideas and visual innovation that added to the humor, or tragedy, of the moment. As a dramatic violinist herself, she peppered the stage, and often expanses of Libbey Park itself, with visual and aural enhancements to the music emanating from instruments ranging from hand-held mobile devices to booming kettle drums.

Among the forces she brought to the June 7-10 musical mix were the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, whose members represent 20 countries and whose beguiling skills were interwoven throughout the festival, and JACK Quartet, featured early Saturday night with violinist Kopatchinskaja in works by John Dowland, Tigran Mansurian and Pauline Oliveros.

Later, JACK members Christopher Otto, Austin Wullman, John Pickford Richards and Jay Campbell joined with the festival leader in the U.S. premiere of her staged concert conceptualization of Galina Ustovolskaya's "Dies Irae," a shattering depiction of a world gone awry.

The piece is designed to be compelling, with even its repetitions part of the warning of a crumbling world. It drew widely different reactions from the audience, from a woman who sprang to her feet at the finale to enthusiastically announce that it was the best work she'd ever experienced at the Ojai Music Festival, to a few who grumbled even while the work was being performed.

Watching a woman pound a large casket-sized box with two heavy hammers — repeatedly and with assured rhythmic timing — is not for every music fan, but it definitely made its point, as did

the swirling scenes signifying impending disaster that flashed from the back of the entire stage and into the audience.

Other aspects of the presentation were fascinating in other ways, including performers slowly walking through the aisles carrying relentlessly ticking metronomes. When the devices finally stopped, the bearers quietly sat on the bowl floor.

Among other memorable moments: Composer and pianist Michael Hersch's world premiere meditation on two young women whose deaths came all too early, "I hope we get a chance to visit soon," compellingly sung by sopranos Ah Young Hong and Kiera Duffy, with members of the Mahler ensemble and pianist Amy Yang; just about anything played on piano or harpsichord by Anthony Romaniuk, a master at the keyboards, exuding good nature and striking skills; and Scott Worthington's electronics work on the festival's multiple programs that required it.

Another fascinating partnership in the festival was the teamwork by Kopatchinskaja's parents, violinist Emilia Kopatchinskaja and cimbalom player Viktor Kopatchinsky, both natives of Moldova, formerly part of the Soviet Union. With their daughter and double bass Maria Krykov they played two segments of Moldovan folk music, repetitions at the beginning of an afternoon concert and Ciocarlia at the end. In between, Patricia and her father teamed up for Gyorgy Kurtag's Eight Duos for violin and cimbalom, Op. 4, an amazing demonstration of their instrumental mastery and musical compatibility.

As the festival came to a close in Sunday's perfect early evening weather, the Mahler orchestra returned to the stage for zesty performances, including Stravinsky's delightfully free-spirited "L'Histoire du Soldat" suite, an intense Guillaume de Machaut "Kyrie" solo by Kopatchinskaja, all leading up to the final Gyorgy Ligeti Violin Concerto, with Kopatchinskaja as soloist and Philipp von Steinaecker conducting the Mahler Chamber Orchestra.

There was joy and exuberance in the playing and a happy release of orange, green and white balloons as the final notes brought to a close one of the most delightfully idiosyncratic Ojai Music Festivals in memory.

<https://www.vcstar.com/story/entertainment/arts/2018/06/12/review-2018-ojai-music-festival-delightfully-idiosyncratic/692764002/>

Sequenza 21/

The Contemporary Classical Music Community

At the 2018 Ojai Music Festival

Paul Muller
June 9, 2018



June 7, the opening day of the 2018 Ojai Music Festival, featured the usual welcome variety of lectures, interviews and pop-up concerts as well as performances of music by two notable mid-20th century Italian experimentalists. The first day of the festival was picture perfect and a large crowd milled about the outdoor venues, meeting and greeting. There was little evidence of the disastrous Thomas Fire of five months prior, and spirits were as sunny as the weather.

At 6:00 PM, Luciano Berio's challenging *Sequenza IXa* for Clarinet, played by Vincente Alberola, was heard from the Libbey Park gazebo, to good effect. The amplification and the open spaces were nicely matched and Alberola's precise articulations and dynamic nuances were clearly heard throughout the scattered crowd. This sensitive and virtuosic performance was received with enthusiastic applause.

At 7:30 PM somewhat larger crowd gathered for *La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura* by Luigi Nono featuring Festival Music Director Patricia Kopatchinskaja on violin and Los Angeles-based composer Scott Worthington at the controls of the electronics. The program notes proclaimed: "A dynamic duet between solo violin and spatial amplified sound transforms the Libbey Park into an all-encompassing and immersive aural environment." A seemingly tall order, but the array of large speakers positioned around the space and the formidable sound system panel looked promising. *La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura* consists of 8 recorded tracks and a solo violin, and these were seamlessly integrated into the speaker system so that good hearing in the open spaces of the park was not an issue.

The piece began with the speakers filling the space with the soft sounds of what seemed to be string players warming up or tuning. A few odd words were heard, then some thumps and squeaks before a series of rapidly complex runs in the violin established an air of suspense and uncertainty. The recorded sounds often came from single speakers in opposite corners of the

space, and this added spatial perception to the overall experience. The crisp precision of the live violin phrases was helpfully distinct from the recording. There is little form or structure evident in this work – at times the sounds were fast and intense while at other times slower and softly atmospheric. The violinist moved randomly about to a series of music stands located throughout the area, and this served to increase the sense of mystery. The crowd followed Ms Kopatchinskaja in a great mass, cell cameras in hand, but this did not disturb the performer whose furtive movements added to the drama of the moment.

This is complex, nuanced music, with stretches of quiet tension mixed with sharply phrased passages brimming with anxiety. I first heard *La Lontananza* performed indoors, in a converted warehouse and the atmosphere there gave the piece a sense of tension that was distinctly urban. Outdoors in Libbey Park the music lost none of its power, but rather emerged as more rustic and primal. In Ojai, even the ambient noise from the streets and some quiet talking among the crowd fit right in with the recordings, and actually added to the performance. As the afternoon light faded, Ms Kopatchinskaja became a spirit-like presence moving among the darkened trees. A long, looped final violin note signaled the conclusion of the piece and the crowd slowly dissipated, as if released from a magical spell.

The Ojai Music Festival runs through Sunday, June 10.

Photos courtesy of Bonnie Wright. Used with permission.

<http://www.sequenza21.com/2018/06/at-the-2018-ojai-music-festival/>

Ojai Music Festival 2018 Review

Leonne Lewis
June 12, 2018



(David Bazemore)

This year's Ojai Music Festival ran from June 7-10 and offered a magical mystery tour through repertoire that was either au courant, centuries old or premiere ready – which has been their raison d'être since 1946. Music Director Patricia Kopatchinskaja was a force of inspiration for the dynamic energy she brought to performance, collaboration, and staging conceptualization of brilliantly conceived programming that crossed a spectrum of historically important composers - including Dowland, Ligeti, Ustvolskaya, Hersch, Tigran Mansurian (his velvety beautiful Four Serious Songs for Violin and Strings) and Abrahamsen.

Ojai Music Festival's mixture of aesthetics with nature gives off mellow vibes, especially at Libbey Bowl, the primary venue where concerts are held in a park surrounded by oak trees. Just

go with the flow: sit or crumple in a blanket on the grass, where discreet monitors with speakers were positioned.

Kopatchinskaja, who enjoys performing barefoot, was indispensable to the Festival's creativity, but there were other top notch artists as well such as – the Berlin-based Mahler Chamber Orchestra (MCO) in their US debut, Jack Quartet, soprano Ah Young Hong, conductor Tito Munoz (Music Director of the Phoenix Symphony) and Viktor Kopatchinsky, Patricia's father and cimbalom virtuoso.

If the repertoire had an overriding theme, it seemed to promote music that contains metaphysical exploration, darkness, joie de vivre and utter despair. Many concerts were conceived in what Wagner referred to as music drama, a total merging of the visual and performing arts, which produced spellbinding and provocative results.

While I did not attend the opening night's Bye Bye Beethoven extravaganza, I was there for the three following days of concerts. What follows are highlights and impressions. Kudos also to the pre-concert lectures which featured artists in conversation at the park's tennis courts.

Let's begin the music drama analogy with two Saturday evening concerts, which had the look of a dream sequence, with collaboration from the MCO under Munoz, Kopatchinskaja and the Jack Quartet. The various scenes within scenes staging was enhanced by lighting gradations, on stage collage-like projections and musicians playing, pausing or walking around the audience in darkness while holding illuminated and fully charged iPads. The music, which featured three Lachrimae of Dowland, encapsulated the otherworldly ambience.

The other evening concert offered selections from Crumb's Black Angels, Ligeti's Poeme Symphonique, Lotti's Crucifixus a 10, where a shining white cross was projected onto the stage, and Ustvolskaya's Dies Irae, in its US premiere. There is a transcendental quality to these concept performances, especially in Dies irae.

St. Petersburg-born Galina Ustvolskaya studied with Shostakovich but then developed her own unique harmonic and rhythmic formula. An example of this could be heard at Friday afternoon's concert that featured her Sonata for Violin and Piano, Duet for Violin and Piano and six sonatas for piano, played by Kopatchinskaja and Markus Hinterhaeuser (Artistic Director of the Salzburg Festival). Kopatchinskaja turned pages.

Without a doubt, the accounts given these works had all the ingredients for success: vitality, metric acuity and conviction. The question is whether it was enough to give them lasting power. Ustvolskaya's writing is linear, intervallic, clustered, dissonant light, repetitious but not in a minimalist sense, and pattern based. It also contains an appealing intangible element that seems to evoke a primal soundscape, as in Dies irae.

If you strip down to a hollow shell the sophisticated rhythmic twists and spicy orchestration of Stravinsky's Le Sacre du printemps, you sometimes get a no frills hint at what kind of effect Ustvolskaya was after. The score calls for pounding on a long wooden cube while being accompanied by waved of sparsely embellished sonority. The build up of intensity submerged

Dies irae down to the core of Middle Earth, as conceived by Tolkien in his writings. The intense reading included the MCO, Kopatchinskaja and keyboardist Anthony Romaniuk.

On Friday night, a world premiere of I hope we get a chance to visit soon by Michael Hersch was brought into the musical scene by sopranos Ah Young Hong, Kiera Duffy, Gary Louie (alto saxophone), Amy Yang (piano) and members of the MCO under Munoz. This is not a work that goes down easy because of its content in which the composer puts together a musical tribute to honor the life of Mary O'Reilly, a friend whom he lost to cancer in 2009. Perhaps the work also serves as a catharsis for him.

What followed was a riveting, shocking mixture of writings from O'Reilly and others about her suffering and the ordeal of same, described mostly in graphic detail and projected onto two stage right, stage left screens – while the thick, murky score was screaming in sequential agony. This is not to say that Hersch's new age opera seria approach did not impress for its unique use of bold orchestration and an exotic palette of vocal tricks such as Sprechstimme nuances, made more effective from Hong's pin point pitch and poignant facial gestures.

Bottom line: kudos to Ojai Music Festival for presenting this work which may not have pleased every listener but certainly got their attention and engagement – as was the case with Kurtag's Kafka Fragments, which was offered on Saturday afternoon with Kopatchinskaja and Ah Young Hong. Kurtag is a composer whose time has come, in fact, is long over due especially in this country. This work contains 40 snippets of verse from Kafka's writings, of which some pieces are only a few measures in length.

Violin and voice often share an obtuse dialogue of pitches that mimic the timbre of each instrument, enhancing the surreal quality that makes Kurtag's music so esoteric – and this interpretation was very fine. Bravo to Saturday afternoon performances of Ravel's Sonata for Violin and Cello, with Kopatchinskaja and Jay Campbell (of the Jack Quartet) and Berio's Sequenza X for trumpet in C and piano resonance.

In this work, Matthew Sadler (of the MCO) occasionally blows the instrument into the grand's soundboard, while a nameless pianist sits without playing a note – but makes pretend hand gestures that simulate page turns. Sort of reminds me of 4'33" by Cage.

And a special kudo to Anthony Romaniuk for his improvisational wizardry on harpsichord and piano, on Friday afternoon. His florid account of Bach's Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue BWV 903 and his own arrangement of Purcell's Fairest Isle from King Arthur showed why the harpsichord had such a good run – that is until the piano came along.

Sunday afternoon's farewell concerts were filled with delights, which began with Hans Abrahamsen's Schnee (Snow). In fact, his opera, The Snow Queen will receive a world premiere in 2019 at the Royal Danish Opera. This work is based on ten canons for nine instruments and was performed by members of the MCO under Munoz with Amy Yang and Romaniuk on piano.

The inherent soundworld creates an impressionistic tonality that crystallizes every note and motive into a continuum of patterns, which often evoke chimes blowing in the wind at a different

velocity. The effects produced from this diatonic free fall are mesmerizing and pristine, as for example in the opening and closing duet of high register pitches between strings and piano. Totally cool.

The following concert was all about dance or song selections of folk music from countries found in the eastern side of Europe – Moldova, Romania and Hungary featuring Kopatchinskaja, her father and violinist mother, Emilia. What a treat it was to hear Kurtág's Eight Duos for violin and cimbalom, Op. 4 with Viktor Kopatchinsky's astonishing pyrotechnical display of reflexes in using the beaters, which fluttered in dizzying rapidity. The Ciocarlia with supportive double bass strumming from Maria Krykov (of the MCO) sounded like Moldovan Bluegrass. Come on down.

Also included was Enescu's Sonata No. 3 for violin and piano, Op. 25, which received an interpretation from Kopatchinskaja and Amy Yang that sizzled with stylistic integrity. An historic performance of this piece, sourced from the title "dans le caractere populaire roumain" can be heard on YouTube with Enescu and Dinu Lipatti.

Of the Festival's closing concert, the initial works seemed mainstream after all the cutting edge repertoire that was performed. The MCO's reading of Bartók's Divertimento for Strings and Suite from Stravinsky's L'Histoire du Soldat came off a bit lackluster, but all was in order with Ligeti's Violin Concerto under Philipp von Steinaecker.

Ligeti's music has plenty of harmonic intrigue, and Kopatchinskaja not only personalized the interpretation of this concerto but also devoured its athletic intricacies and sonic mysteries. Her playing was fast, furious, effervescent, sharp, soulful and above all recklessly flawless.

When it was all over, a breathlessness lingered in the air and with it great anticipation for next year's Ojai Music Festival with Music Director Barbara Hannigan.

<http://miroirsca.com/critiques/http://miroirsca.com/2017/8/29/new-post-title-3-tmdh9-x2w2h-j2w33-6jfe4>



OJAI FESTIVAL 2018 IS, IN A WORD, DARK

By Richard S. Ginell

Musical America.com, June 13 and 14, 2018

OJAI, CA – Violinist-provocateur Patricia Kopatchinskaja came to the 2018 Ojai Festival with a mission. She wanted to bust up the “classic concert routine” which she finds to be “irrelevant” to present-day life, to engage with pressing issues and not do the same old classics in what she considers to be the same old ways. Bully for her.

But for most of this thematically unified Ojai festival, one word succinctly summed up Kopatchinskaja’s vision of what concert life should be – dark. As dark as the walk-in closet of Johnny “The Man in Black” Cash, who once lived in Casitas Springs just down the road from Ojai.

Right from the start, early on a Thursday evening, we knew where Kopatchinskaja and this compulsively progressive-minded festival stood. Scattered around the park outside the festival’s outdoor Libbey Bowl were styrofoam replicas of tombstones of the great totems of concert life – J.S. Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Mahler – some with their tops sawed off. A crowd gathered in the park, and Kopatchinskaja came strolling slowly down a path from the town’s main street., staring down and silently maneuvering around bewildered onlookers.

She took out her violin and wandered among the tombstones, performing Luigi Nono’s atonal, fragmentary, dauntingly difficult “La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura” for violin and electronic tape, with Scott Worthington manipulating a digitized version of the original tape on a laptop. The speakers combined Kopatchinskaja’s violin with densely-harmonized violin sounds and musique concrète effects. The effect was both chilling – picking at the desiccated bones of Western music – and uplifting, experiencing the birth pangs of a new music as the crowd followed Kopatchinskaja as she moved from music stand to music stand around the park.

Having made the most astounding entrance to an Ojai festival that I’ve ever seen, Kopatchinskaja continued on the path alone, playing a high pitched note, all the way into the Bowl where, half-an-hour later, she resumed that note as she made her way onto a dark stage. Thus began her first semi-staged concert, “Bye-Bye Beethoven” (a U.S. premiere), her manifesto “against a pervasive lack of curiosity about the present and the future.”

First in a run-on prologue of things was Ives’ “The Unanswered Question” – performed entirely

in the dark (not an unusual practice at all). Then came the finale of Haydn's Farewell Symphony played in reverse, with the brave musicians of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra (in their first U.S. residence) gradually filling the stage instead of leaving it, some Cage, some Bach and György Kurtág's quietly discordant "The Answered Unanswered Question."

All of this led up to one of the ubiquitous warhorses in concert life, the Beethoven Violin Concerto, and Kopatchinskaja would have no truck with a ubiquitously conventional interpretation. Playing beautifully, she stretched some passages out to and beyond the breaking point, with exaggerated pauses and a propulsive cadenza of her own where she dueled with her cello section, concertmaster and timpanist. Creative as it was, eventually the distended performance became rather tiring, as tiring in its way as any routine rendering would be. "Get on with it," I thought to myself.

And then suddenly midway through the finale, all hell broke loose. The musicians gradually and violently smashed down their music stands and departed, leaving Kopatchinskaja alone fiddling away on a dark stage to a terrifying electronic mashup of Beethoven on the speakers. Finally, all that was left was a beeping sound. I was reminded of Achim Freyer's perverse act of blowing up the stage at the very end of Los Angeles Opera's alienating "Ring" cycle in 2010, a similarly morbid, all-is-kaput vision where (pardon the cliché) the baby is destroyed along with the bathwater and we are left in hopeless darkness. It was disturbing, and it was meant to be disturbing.

The darkness would continue on a paradoxically bright, hot Friday afternoon with a comprehensive survey of the music of Galina Ustvolskaya, a protégé of Shostakovich who carved out a stark, increasingly harsh and downcast language of her own. Indeed, Shostakovich thought that she influenced him more than he influenced her – and he was right, for as Ustvolskaya's cycle of six piano sonatas illustrates, her music from as early as the 1940s presaged Shostakovich's spare, severely-pessimistic works of the late 1960s and '70s. Markus Hinterhäuser took time out from directing the Salzburg Festival to play the six sonatas without a break, sometimes seeming to lose concentration (blame the heat) but mostly with an intensity that grew more ferocious with the last obsessively pounding sonata. Kopatchinskaja displayed equal tension and repose in the Sonata for Violin and Piano and the later, more radical Duet for Violin and Piano – and even volunteered to turn the pages for Hinterhäuser in the sonatas.

The festival plunged us even deeper into despair Friday night with the world premiere of "I hope we get a chance to visit soon" by Michael Hersch, a composer who made his reputation with quasi-Germanic symphonic angst and would double down on it for Ojai and the co-commissioning Cal Performances, Aldeburgh Festival and PN Review. The subject matter couldn't have been more harrowing – a text consisting of letters chronicling the cancer of a friend of his, Mary Harris O'Reilly, more by another cancer victim, poet Rebecca Elson, and colored by the composer's and his wife's own battles with cancer. To this, Hersch composed a scorching atonal 76-minute score for two singers and eight instrumentalists, employing Schoenbergian sprechstimme, dynamics up to a quintuple forte, directions to the players asking for "brutality," and other delights. The Mahler Chamber Orchestra, led by Tito Munoz of the Phoenix Symphony, handled the ferociously difficult score with stoic bravery; ditto the sopranos Ah Young Hong and Kiera Duffy who sang and sometimes spoke the dual texts flashing on

either side of the stage.

Again, there was a preparatory collage consisting of scraps of this and that where even with a scorecard, you couldn't tell for sure which piece was being played. Anthony Romaniuk held forth on harpsichord in a collection of pieces by Purcell, Byrd, and J.S. Bach – not without some wit in the latter's Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue – and on piano in Shostakovich, Bartók, Crumb and Ligeti, with the JACK Quartet and Kopatchinskaja helping out in Purcell and C.P.E. Bach respectively.

As a cathartic baring of the soul and making an audience feel his pain and that of his friends, Hersch's piece succeeded without a doubt. But it was too painful for me to ever want to hear it again, and I hope that future developments in medicine will render it obsolete someday.

Kopatchinskaja's journey through the darkness resumed Saturday night with the desolate mourning and quiet eloquence of "Four Serious Songs" by Tigran Mansurian, the leading Armenian composer of our day. At times, her violin sounded startlingly tearful and the MCO played with full-blooded vigor and thrust. Pauline Oliveros' electronic "Horse Sings from Cloud" wafted gently through the Bowl as a vision of peace as Kopatchinskaja and company controlled the sound by waving mobile phones and a tablet. Three John Dowland Lachrimae served as chorale-like frames to the above, played in period-performance fashion by Kopatchinskaja and the JACK Quartet.

Of course, this was another prelude to a Kopatchinskaja special project (also a U.S. premiere), one that used Ustvolskaya's brutal "Dies Irae" as the centerpiece for a dramatically powerful statement about war and the threat of global warming. It was set up by five excerpts from Heinrich Biber's war-like "Battalia" alternating with five more from George Crumb's anti-war "Black Angels," followed by more ear-scorching violence from the first movement of Hersch's Violin Concerto and Kopatchinskaja improvising over four coarse-sounding trombones as projection of war were shown on the Bowl's shell. Ustvolskaya's piece employed a huge black wooden box that was struck hard with two hammers from a hardware store by a percussionist. One immediately thought of the finale of Mahler's Sixth Symphony whose hammer blows carry the same message – Fate, the death of hope.

Finally, a recording of the actual medieval chant "Dies Irae" ("Day of wrath, doom impending ... Heaven and earth in ashes ending ...") was played over the sound system through the darkened Bowl as lines of musicians positioned themselves in the aisles bearing metronomes ticking away at Ligeti's "Poème symphonique for 100 metronomes." This piece was done previously at Ojai in 2007 as a wacky stunt, but Kopatchinskaja's intent was dead serious – time is running out on all of us. However there was a touch of hope at the very end as two small children representing the future were left alone onstage.

That little touch marked a turning point in the festival, for on Sunday afternoon, Kopatchinskaja shifted her attention to her roots, perhaps seeking refuge and strength in family and in her native region. As Christopher Hailey's excellent program notes concluded, "To move ahead you sometimes have to discover how near you are to what lies behind."

She brought her family out – her father, Viktor Kopachinsky, is a virtuoso cimbalom player, her mother Emilia Kopatchinskaja, is a folk violinist – for some lively races through folk music and dances from their native Moldova. Father and daughter explored the spare wispieness and agitation of Kurtág's Eight Duos for violin and cimbalom, and with pianist Amy Yang, Patricia made molto appassionato work of Enescu's Violin Sonata No. 3. Also the unexpected addition of a hi-hat cymbal set player to Romaniuk's rendition of Ligeti's "Hungarian Rock" on the harpsichord made it really swing.

The final concert late Sunday afternoon was the only one on the festival that came close to conventional programming, but with a refreshing 20th century slant. The Mahler Chamber Orchestra – minus a conductor and not needing one – gave a fine, sharply-accented rendering of Bartók's Divertimento for Strings while not slighting the strangeness of the music. Stravinsky's "L'Histoire du Soldat" suite followed – a little tentative and rhythmically stilted in spots, but always welcome as a splash of bracing ice water on a hot day.

Then Kopatchinskaja went back to work playing a Guillaume de Machaut "Kyrie" period-performance-style as an oddball prelude to a superb performance of Ligeti's weird, glittering Violin Concerto, with its ocarinas and slide whistles warping the aural landscape with microtones. This time, the MCO used a conductor, Philipp von Steinaecker, and Kopatchinskaja had one final surprise up her sleeve – a fifth movement cadenza of her own that concluded with an orchestral freakout and festive colored balloons letting fly on the last notes.

There were several other satellite events at Ojai 2018 that I didn't get to, but the above were the main ones that spelled out the Kopatchinskaja agenda. And the last concert may have sent an unintentional message, that Kopatchinskaja's irrelevant "classic concert routine" still has some life in it if you dig hard and program neglected works by great 20th century masters instead of the usual warhorses.

Portions of the 2018 Ojai Music Festival will be reprised at Cal Performances in Berkeley, CA June 14- 16.

2018 Ojai Music Festival

Music Director Patricia Kopatchinskaja's Wildly Inventive Weekend

By Charles Donelan
June 14, 2018

The indefatigable violinist and musical provocateur Patricia Kopatchinskaja triumphed in her role as music director of the 2018 Ojai Music Festival. In an extraordinary series of concert events, the young musician delivered surprise after surprise. From a moveable wall and crashing music stands in the finale of Thursday's *Bye Bye Beethoven* to iPhones, metronomes, trombones, and musicians prone in and around Galina Ustvolskaya's *Dies irae* on Saturday night, Kopatchinskaja and her collaborators created unforgettable combinations of sound and action, all while hewing closely to a well-informed and musically exacting agenda.

The opening-night concert, which featured Kopatchinskaja's inspired take on Beethoven's *Violin Concerto in D*, began in the park, where loudspeakers and a series of prop monuments inscribed as though they were the headstones of famous composers dotted the landscape. Listeners milled around, either searching for a focal point or relaxing on blankets on the grass. Luigi Nono's piece began with Kopatchinskaja's violin in dialogue with a variety of electronics coordinated by bassist Scott Worthington. After an hour of ambient sonics, the piece settled into a high-pitched drone that lasted until the next concert segment began. At that point, Kopatchinskaja entered the Libbey Bowl through the aisle, playing a version of the tone we had been hearing on her violin. Multiple shifts in lighting and perspective later, and she had been joined onstage by the Mahler Chamber Orchestra (MCO), who walked backwards when taking its place to the strains of Franz Joseph Haydn's *Symphony No. 45*, "Farewell." After an uproarious vocal quartet of spoken-word mayhem by John Cage, the group traveled through excerpts from Bach and Kurtág until they reached the evening's volatile center, a chamber-music-style rendition of the Beethoven concerto. As the orchestra played, a moving wall behind the standing musicians moved closer, eventually pivoting to reveal the monuments that we had seen earlier in the park.

While there were plenty of skeptics to begin with, by the end of the Beethoven the entire audience appeared to have been converted. The high degree of musicianship and evident passion with which Kopatchinskaja and the MCO performed drove out all doubts about the eccentric staging, even when the members of the orchestra stepped forward, one by one, and knocked over their music stands at the front of the stage. The scattered stands could be read as a kind of

gauntlet thrown at the start of the festival, a challenge to hear and see this music as though for the first time.

Although I was not able to attend every concert, the Ojai Festival's dependably informative live streaming service made it possible for me to watch and listen to far more of what was offered than ever before. This is how I encountered Friday evening's presentation, which featured an outstanding set from pianist Anthony Romaniuk, followed by the world premiere of a kind of chamber opera, *I hope we get a chance to visit soon*, by composer Michael Hersch. Romaniuk's reputation rests largely on his distinctive sound as a harpsichordist, and after demonstrating that both alone and with Kopatchinskaja as his partner, he dazzled with a sequence of performances on piano, of Shostakovich, Crumb, and Ligeti. The finale of this portion of the evening came when Romaniuk was joined by the JACK Quartet for Henry Purcell's *Fantasia No. 10 in C Minor*, a brilliant and moving preview of the blend of eras that would characterize Saturday evening's early program as well.

Back in person on Saturday night, I witnessed one of the most memorable concerts I have seen at Ojai, or anywhere, as Kopatchinskaja and her stage director, Maria Ursprung, once again built a vivid and meaningful mise-en-scène for the music. Over the course of three hours, a world was created and destroyed as music from four centuries told the metaphorical story of an environmental judgment day. At the end, as musicians stood in the aisles holding metronomes, the feeling was, paradoxically, one of joy. This world may be in a terrible fix, but music and performance like this can seem, for a moment, to make it whole.

<https://www.independent.com/news/2018/jun/14/2018-ojai-music-festival/>



Ojai Explores Dark And Daring Worlds At 2018 Festival

By Rick Schultz
June 15, 2018

OJAI, Calif. — Mortality was the ambitious theme of this year's Ojai Music Festival, both our own individual mortality and the collectively threatened existence of human beings on a deteriorating planet.

Patricia Kopatchinskaja, music director of the four-day festival that began June 7 — a different artist is chosen each year by Thomas W. Morris, Ojai's artistic director — is a Vienna-trained violinist born in the Moldovan capital, Chişinău, in 1977. Kopatchinskaja's art gives delight, but she also pushes boundaries, using it to represent and discuss serious issues.

The wildfires that encircled Ojai in December certainly prepared listeners for her various messages. At the festival, some people spoke about how close the flames came to their homes. Others, driving to Ojai, mentioned seeing and smelling scorched trees.

The first concert in Ojai's Libbey Bowl on June 7 set an anything-goes tone with the droll grotesquerie of "Bye Bye Beethoven," a mixed bag of classical and contemporary pieces conceptualized by Kopatchinskaja, aptly opening with Ives' *The Unanswered Question*.

Throughout her brief but crammed stewardship, Kopatchinskaja offered a number of unanswered questions, most of them centering on our aforementioned individual and global fragility. It was not all gloom, however. If the Ojai Festival's long tradition of programming old and new works undermined the intended rebelliousness of "Bye Bye Beethoven," the production, which featured the finale of Haydn's *Symphony No. 45* ("Farewell"), played backwards by Kopatchinskaja and the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, still offered a quaint personal charm. The finale of "Bye Bye," Kopatchinskaja's slow deconstruction of Beethoven's *Violin Concerto*, while intentionally frustrating, was given a darkly comic lift by her costume. Shrouded like Madeline Usher risen from the dead in a slightly dirty-looking dress with a paper bag texture, Kopatchinskaja's account of the concerto ended with the musicians grumbling while throwing down their music stands and walking off stage. A misty cemetery barely visible at the back of the stage showed tombstones of Mozart, Beethoven, et al., weathered by time.

More sober and intense was Kopatchinskaja's afternoon traversal June 8 of two duos by Galina Ustvolskaya with the adventurous pianist Markus Hinterhäuser, who is also the artistic director

of the Salzburg Festival. Shostakovich admired Ustvolskaya's ferocious talent (she had been his pupil), and one can hear her originality emerging during the course of her six piano sonatas, composed between 1947 and 1988. Remarkably, Hinterhäuser performed her tumultuous sonatas without a break, taking just over an hour.

Someone wittily suggested that Ustvolskaja's sonatas were meant to be performed indoors in a cramped venue "surrounded by sweaty Russians." Hearing them in the sunny outdoors with birds chirping may have softened the growing fierceness of her conceptions, but by the fourth, fifth, and sixth sonatas, Hinterhäuser's powerful handling of the composer's torturous left-hand chords and, in the Sixth Sonata, full-forearm cluster chords, riveted everyone's attention.

The painful heart of the festival came the night of June 8 with the premiere of Michael Hersch's elegy, I hope we get a chance to visit soon. Hersch, who chairs the composition department at the Peabody Institute, lost a close friend, historian Mary O'Reilly, to cancer in 2009 and, while being there for her, suddenly found himself dealing with his own cancer, diagnosed in 2007. While completing his cantata-like score, performed here by sopranos Ah Young Hong and Kiera Duffy and nine musicians of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Hersch's wife was diagnosed with breast cancer. Both Hersches are currently cancer-free, but the death of the composer's friend still haunts him. The libretto's primary text consists of their correspondence between 2003 and 2009. It also includes poetic lines from another friend, the astronomer and writer Rebecca Elson, who died in 1999, at 39, and the poet Christopher Middleton.

Older listeners seemed more open to Hersch's bleak, uncompromising elegy, parrying the personal fallout with comments like "I need a scotch" and "I didn't hate it." But Hersch's refined art, which displays exquisitely concise musical line settings of the poetry and O'Reilly's emails, is still in service to a narrative about a primitive medical establishment, with its surgeries, radiation treatments, hopes, and dashed hopes.

Conductor Tito Muñoz seemed a bit lost trying to find the right pace for the demanding score. One problem is that at approximately 75 minutes, the work feels too long, its special moments of vital light and grace sometimes buried by Hersch's German-Expressionistic dissonances and angst.

That said, sopranos Hong and Duffy effortlessly handled the often high-ranging parts, which call for speaking and singing of near heroic restraint, as well as disciplined, pure-pitch accuracy, devoid of vibrato.

Refreshingly, there are no easy bromides or reductive clichés like "closure" in Hersch's work, but T.S. Eliot's observation that "Human kind cannot bear very much reality" was confirmed by the Ojai audience's stunned bewilderment. The piece is certainly not for everyone, even though it potentially concerns everyone. The piece moves to Cal Performances' Ojai at Berkeley on June 15 and to Great Britain's Aldeburgh Festival on June 21.

On the afternoon of June 9, musicians of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra brought welcome relief in Ligeti's Six Bagatelles for wind quintet, and Kopatchinskaja and JACK Quartet cellist Jay Campbell offered a warm account of Ravel's spare Sonata for Violin and Cello.

Quirky, mordant humor buoyed György Kurtág's astonishing but demanding Kafka Fragments, sensitively rendered by soprano Hong with Kopatchinskaja on violin. One of the 40 excerpts from Kafka's diaries included in the Fragments — "In the struggle between yourself and the world, side with the world" — brought uneasy laughter from the Ojai audience.

That evening there were three mournful pieces by John Dowland performed by Kopatchinskaja and the JACK Quartet, and Tigran Mansurian's poignant and lovely Four Serious Songs for Violin and Strings, again featuring Kopatchinskaja and musicians of the Mahler ensemble. Pauline Oliveros' Horse Sings from Cloud, in a version created for an iPhone app, proved a major delight. Like Oliveros, Kopatchinskaja might well have been asking, "Why can't sounds be visible?" In the darkness of Libbey Bowl, iPhones and an iPad became a resonating chamber, holding tones long enough to create the illusion of visible sound.

After a short break, Kopatchinskaja, the Mahler ensemble, and JACK Quartet gave the U.S. premiere of *Dies Irae*, another production conceptualized by Kopatchinskaja. This time the compilation featured Baroque-era martial music by Heinrich Biber, George Crumb's 1970 Vietnam War protest music, the first movement of Hersch's Violin Concerto, along with pieces by Antonio Lotti, Ustvolskaja, and Ligeti. Projections, including a bird's-eye view of war-torn Syria, turned the entire Bowl stage into a screen.

Full of passionate energy and spectacle, *Dies Irae* opened with crunching sounds of goose-stepping marchers. There were trombonists playing in the aisles. An array of musicians held clicking metronomes (presumably signifying our world winding down), while walking the aisles during an excerpt from Ligeti's *Poème symphonique*. One by one, when the metronomes stopped, the musicians dropped.

While matters of war, refugees, and climate change are indeed serious business, one wonders if simplicity might be more effective in leading people who are outside the more open-minded confines of the Ojai Festival to reason and effective action. "How much longer do we have?" Kopatchinskaja asks in a program note. That remains an unanswered question.

The penultimate piece (before Ligeti's *Poème*), was Ustvolskaya's raging *Dies irae* for eight cellos — a "Dies irae" within Kopatchinskaja's *Dies Irae*, as it were. It also featured percussionist [Fiona Digney](#) wailing away on a coffin-like box with two large hammers. Digney stepped in for Kopatchinskaja, who was suffering from tendonitis with several concerts still to perform.

At the tumultuous conclusion of *Dies Irae*, a young boy and girl walked onstage. One held a still-clicking metronome; the other, an olive branch. Similarly, a gesture of hope came at Sunday's final concert when brightly colored balloons dropped from each side of the stage at the end of Ligeti's Violin Concerto, performed by the Mahler ensemble. Soloist Kopatchinskaja dispatched the dazzling, thorny concerto with tendonitis-defying virtuosity.

<https://classicalvoiceamerica.org/2018/06/13/ojai-explores-dark-messages-at-2018-festival/>

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

Beethoven Takes a Holiday: Violinist and musical innovator Patricia Kopatchinskaja took charge of the world renowned Ojai Music Festival and worked challenging wonders

By Josef Woodard, News-Press Correspondent
June 15, 2018

How to convey the varied, challenging, action and abstraction-packed weekend that was, at last week's 72nd Ojai Music Festival? No single moment or concert of easily-defined concept can capture the complex whole of the fest, designed by violin virtuoso and innate adventuress Patricia Kopatchinskaja.

Still, many of us will remember the critical moment when it all came crashing down. Music stands, that is. Capping off Thursday night's staged production concert called "Bye Bye Beethoven," Ms. Kopatchinskaja led a ravishing, deeply felt and uncommonly empathic take on Beethoven's legendary Violin Concerto. Suddenly, members of the astonishingly fine and Berlin-based Mahler Chamber Orchestra seemed to wage mutiny, storming offstage and knocking down music stands as they went. The violinist descended into manic, anarchic fiddling, with the sound of a heart monitor slowing, then flatlining. A mid-stage wall peeled away to find the orchestra musicians in a mock-graveyard, with monuments to the greats - Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart, et al.

Thus, the point of her concert (and her festival creation) was made, none too subtly but with a delicious audacity. We must respect our elders and classical icons and values, but always make way for the new, sometimes via friendly radical acts. Old met new and newer (with various types of premieres over the weekend) in this, one of the best and most Ojai legacy-worthy festivals in years. Tom Morris' long tenure as artistic director (with a different music director each year), which ends after the Barbara Hannigan-led 2019 edition, has seen some experiments gone at least slightly awry, as with years led by choreographer Mark Morris, stage director Peter Sellars and last year's jazz-colored fest with Vijay Iyer in the hot seat. Count the Kopatchinskaja year as a point when Ojai order and tradition is restored by her healthy respect for maverick reinvention.

Though a global cultural citizen with wide open ears and links to the international music world, Ms. Kopatchinskaja was born in Moldova. She played some fascinating Moldavan folk music

with her parents on Sunday afternoon, along with Eastern Euro-folk-inspired classical music by Kurtag, Enescu and Romanian Horatio Radulescu. She is a fast-rising figure on the international music scene, an organically inspired virtuoso and naturally rebellious innovator, keen to shake things up on many levels, including that of festival director.

Friday afternoon's concert was devoted to an equal time spotlight on Shostakovich pupil (and, he said, teacher) Galina Ustvolskaya (1919-2006), a woman composer with a voice and vocabulary all her own. By turns ethereal, experimental and salty-sweet, this concert's music (for violin and piano in the first half, six piano sonatas (1847 to 1988), played masterfully by Markus Hinterhäuser) made some fans, present company included, eager to further explore this under-sung composer.

As an artist of wit, still-flowering wisdom, a taste of absurdity and a passion for integrating foundational traditions with wild new notions, Ms. Kopatchinskaja is naturally drawn to the similarly-inclined Hungarian composer Gyorgy Kurtag (who was in Ojai in the past, physically and programming-wise). A clear festival highlight was Saturday afternoon's performance, by the violinist and soprano Ah Young Hong, of Kurt g's "Kafka Fragments"-fragments, indeed, with 40 stretched over four parts and 90 minutes.

This festival was stocked with serious and dark-leaning business, as experienced with Friday night's world premiere of Michael Hersch's "I hope to get a chance to visit soon," a gritty and coldly harrowing musical depiction of the ravages of cancer. The composer has taken his texts (sometimes from actual texts and emails) from two cancer victims who died, one of whom (friend Mary Elliot) has reportedly haunted much of the composer's writing since her passing in 2009. The victims were sung, and spoken, by sopranos Ah Young Hong and Kiera Duffy, flanking the Mahler Chamber Orchestra. The subject is loaded, of course, and one which touches nearly everyone.

Controversy, a weirdly tepid crowd response and even open anger buzzed over the work in Ojai. Some decried its seeming lack of a spiritual, redemptive or hopeful dimension amidst the torment. From another perspective, though, the composer has opted to follow a colder account of cancer's sinister, unjust evil, using the harshness of his dense, dissonant musical language (if about 20 minutes too long, in its current 80-minute state), to convey the story in a unique way, necessarily divorced from traditional, rational narrative. Cancer makes its own rules. So might art on the subject.

For Saturday night's main attraction, we got another hearty taste of the violinist conceptualist's grand designs (as heard on "Bye Bye Beethoven") with the US Premiere of her latest staged production, "Dies Irae" (Day of Wrath), roughly regarding life during global warming and the end of days. Just another Saturday night special in Ojai.

As with the Beethoven reboot show, this new project shamelessly and inventively broke concert rules and put disparate ingredients in a mash-up blender. Seventeenth century music by Heinrich Biber interspersed with pieces from George Crumb's classic '70s Vietnam war protest piece "Black Angels," with a cellist perched in an upper area behind the Libbey Bowl stage (a first?). A dense, intense movement from Mr. Hersch's Violin Concerto melded, with

some surprise lighting treatments (can you say leopard skin lighting?), into the prerecorded Medieval choral chant of Antonio Lotti's "Crucifixus 10," and the modern ways of Ms. Ustvolskaya's "Dies irae" and Ligeti's "Poeme Symphonique," with low strings, trombones, piano and the hammer-pounded "wooden box" in the soloist spotlight. The whirl of sonic and theatrical activity closed peaceably, with the Orchestra members in the aisles cradling metronomes and faux candles to the tune of further Medieval meditations on humanity's fragility. Two children came onstage bearing olive branches - a romantic flourish and ode to a hopeful future - to finish.

Contemporary specialist JACK Quartet, who Santa Barbarans have come to know and love through Music Academy of the West appearances, were put to good use over the weekend. Often, they were dealing with music of a mystical, minimal nature (but not idiomatically minimalist, a genre thankfully mostly absent from Ojai's agenda). Late on Friday night, as part of a concert dedicated to Ojai's post-Thomas fire renewal, they took on Ojai frequenter John Luther Adams' "Everything That Rises," an hour-long meditation built from rising, overtone series-steeped lines, to effectively contemplative ends.

Just eight hours later, JACK was in the Ojai Center for the Arts for a Saturday morning Music Dawns concert to play Morton Feldman's "Piano and String Quartet," written in 1985, two years before the late, great composer's death. They were joined by superlative pianist Anthony Romaniuk (whose versatility was featured in a Friday concert swerving from William Byrd, Purcell and the Bachs to Shostakovich, Crumb, Ligeti and back to Purcell, on piano and the newly repopularized harpsichord). There's still nothing quite like Feldman, whose music has a softly radiant, slowly-evolving stillness and an inner stretch and harmonic tension. Sounds, gestures, querulous chords and breathing-like rhythms late in the score, float in and out of being, and our consciousness, but leave a lingering after impression.

Entrancingly in a different way, for Sunday's Music Dawns concert, the JACK performed the American premiere of George Frederick Haas' String Quartet No. 9, in a completely dark Zalk Theater. The experience involves a brand of selective sensory audience deprivation, with the deprived visuals denying us watching the musicians' moves, and heightening the appreciation of the sonic fruits, a series of drones, microtonal chord swarms, and effects we couldn't account for. Under these special circumstances, the four instrumentalists cohered into the identity of one mega-instrument, among other disembodied alchemical wonders achieved in that early morning hour.

Ms. Kopatchinskaja's fast and festive roots tracing Sunday afternoon set was opened by Hans Abrahamsen's ingenious, deceptively tidy and evocative "Schnee (10 Canons for 9 instruments)," again following the fest theme of long-ish works made up of small, moving parts.

The finale concert proved to be a beautiful and accessible summation plate of a program, with Ligeti's Violin Concerto as raucous closer, Bartok's Divertimento for Strings, a bit of 14th century Machaut music, and Stravinsky's "L'Histoire du Soldat" in its instrumental suite form, sans narrative or staging. Aptly, this is the 100th anniversary of Stravinsky's compact classic, roughly a 100-year period which the Ojai Festival proudly showcases. Past versions of the piece on this stage include the infamous 1993 version, directed by Peter Sellars just after the Rodney

King-fueled uprising, staged on a flatbed truck, in rap-speak.

As for the climactic Ligeti Concerto this multi-styled, microtonal and era-leaping wild ride strikes the modern ear as more revolutionary than the Beethoven Concerto which opened the festival three nights earlier. For the Ligeti, though, Ms. Kopatchinskaja and the Mahler Chamber Orchestra needed only to artfully heed the score to unlock its mad, cathartic glory. No music stands were harmed in this performance.

Fueled by the crowd's hearty ovations, Ms. Kopatchinskaja conjured up a quick, impromptu encore of another ruddy Moldovan folk song, with the orchestra gamely gathered around a single score. She's that kind of a festival director, imbued with careful planning but also subject to change and inspiration on moment's notice.