



Thursday, June 9, 2022 | 3:00pm
Ojai Presbyterian Church

Ojai Talks

PART I

About AMOC*

Ara Guzelimian and AMOC* co-founders
Matthew Aucoin and Zack Winokur

BREAK

PART II

2022 Composers

WNYC/New Sounds Host John Schaefer and
2022 Festival composers in residence

Ojai Talks is made possible
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Kathy and Jim Drummy

OJAI PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
304 FOOTHILL ROAD

Ojai, Then and Now

In exploring through the rich archives of the Ojai Music Festival, I recently came upon a remarkably pertinent and prescient essay by Lawrence Morton, written in 1949 — long before he took over the Festival in 1954. He was writing as an astute musical observer for a long-forgotten publication called *Opera and Concert* magazine. His observations remarkably document that the artistic values of the Ojai Festival were there from the very beginning, as you can read in some excerpts.

Lawrence was to become Stravinsky's great champion during the composer's many years living in Los Angeles, producing regular performances of his music at both Ojai and Monday Evening Concerts and presenting multiple premieres of the smaller scale works in the 1950. He himself is the dedicatee of Stravinsky's *Eight Instrumental Miniatures*, which he wittily called "my passport to immortality." Lawrence programmed an adventurous range of music new and old, from Gesualdo to Webern, which was to influence a flowering of different styles in Stravinsky's music of those years.

That, in turn, set the template for the centrality of composers and new work at the Ojai Festival, a legacy that included visits from Ingolf Dahl, Pierre Boulez, Aaron Copland, Lukas Foss, and Elliott Carter in his own time to such figures as Olivier Messiaen, György Kurtág, Frederic Rzewski, George Crumb, George Lewis, Kaija Saariaho, and Vijay Iyer in more recent days.

Lawrence anticipated that even in his 1949 article with a passage about a then still-controversial work:

Ojai has remembered that good things come in small packages. The direction

*of its effort was plainly indicated during the 1948 season, when it presented as its stage attraction Stravinsky's *Story of a Soldier*. This is an epochal work, although its requirements are modest . . . Yet these tiny forces move one to ponder no less basic and profound than the struggle between good and evil; they bring to one's ears music of the most extraordinary freshness and variety; and they present to the eye dramatic action of unusual power, charm and humor . . . It is not part of Ojai's plan to storm Parnassus thus by the weight of its numbers, but rather by the integrity of its performances . . . Audiences although they were divided in their reaction to problematic works like the Stravinsky, still agreed that the festival was stimulating*

Leaping forward more than 70 years to our current Festival, I note that we present multi-disciplinary works of dramatic that appeal to both the eye and ear, written and imagined by a new generation of exceptionally adventurous artists. Lawrence Morton must be smiling.

—ARA GUZELIMIAN

Excerpts from *Opera and Concert* magazine, 1949

by Lawrence Morton

The geography, the setting, and the climate of the place generate its special feeling. Ojai has a tone, a timbre, a quality of its own. For years artists, musicians and theatrical folk have been attracted to the valley, some to make their permanent homes here, others to stay only so long as they needed for seclusion, meditation, or self-discovery. Ojai has been kind to the creative imagination, has been prodigal of inspiration. It is home to Beatrice Wood,

the ceramist; to Esther Bruton, who works such fascinating abstract designs in terrazzo; to the sculptress Eugenia Everett; and to the distinguished painter Guy Ignon. But long before these artists came to Ojai, the Indians had been sensitive to its unique atmosphere. Legend says that the tribes fought their battles anywhere and everywhere in Southern California, but never in this valley. This, they recognized, was sacred ground, and they came here to smoke their peace pipes . . .

It is no paradox that Ojai's insistence on the integrity of the classics should be complemented by serious attention to the moderns. To cross the bridge from the familiar to the new is only apparently difficult; and it is actually easy for those who recognize that modernism has found its roots in a tradition that had only been forgotten. . . . It is part of Ojai's policy to encourage new talents and thus to demonstrate its belief that music is a living and continuous art.

There is nothing revolutionary, nothing iconoclastic, about the Ojai policy. It does not consider the intimate approach a virtue merely because splendor has become a vice. It has observed and correctly diagnosed some of the causes of decay in contemporary concert life. It has seen where artistic probity and commercial success have parted company. It has become sensitive to the temper of our own period. It is vanguard, certainly. One might even say that its direction is that of intellectualism, and that it is sensitive to the fashions prevailing in the creative regions of the world of art. But those fashions, be it noted, are being set by the best minds of today. Ojai finds it good to be in the company of such minds.