



Sunday, June 12, 2022 | 4:00pm

Libbey Park Gazebo

Free Community Event

Julia Bullock *soprano* | **Paul Appleby** *tenor* | **Davóne Tines** *bass-baritone* | **Emi Ferguson** *flute*
Keir GoGwilt *violin* | **Jonny Allen** *percussion* | **Matthew Aucoin** *piano*

Ruckus: **Coleman Itzkoff** *cello* | **Doug Balliett** *double bass* | **Clay Zeller-Townson** *bassoon*
Joshua Stauffer *lute* | **Stephen Stubbs** *theorbo* | **Elliot Figg** *harpsichord*

Ojai Festival Children's Choir, **Emily Redman Hall** *choir conductor*

Doug BALLIETT

Rome Is Falling World Premiere and AMOC* Commission
libretto also by the composer

The 3rd-Century Crisis

Monks in the Desert

The Goths Cross the Border

Alaric vs. Honorius

Monks Behaving Badly

Vandals, Huns, and The Fall

This concert is made possible by
the generous support of
E.J. Harrison and Sons
and **Rotary Club of Ojai**

There is no intermission
during the concert.

Special thanks to
Laura Walter and **Julija Zonic**
for their help in
putting all this together.

Doug BALLIETT (b. 1982)
Rome Is Falling (2022)

Rome was one of the great civilizations of the world, yet, like all empires, it fell. Why, and how? The story is one of the most interesting in human history. It involves love, betrayal, politics, immigration, religion, climate, pandemic, xenophobia, and luck — in short, everything human, and everything we face today. This high-energy piece presents scenes from late Roman history through story, song, and interaction, and features singers and instrumentalists from AMOC*, as well as a choir of local young people.

—DOUG BALLIETT

Free Fallin’

Every day a new crisis in the headlines. Fear-mongering politicians who will stop at nothing to gain power, sowing suspicion and division — all while the real crises with the climate and healthcare go ignored. Rumors of civil war. With his brand-new opera *Rome Is Falling*, AMOC* composer and performer Doug Balliett tells an exciting story that sounds strangely familiar. What exactly happened to the vast Roman Empire is still debated among scholars, but the various scenarios that led to its ultimate fate involve the same kinds of ambition, intriguing (and horrifying) personalities, outrageous behavior, and bad-luck timing that keep us glued to series like *Game of Thrones* or *Ozark*.

The most famous attempt to make sense of this story came from the 18th-century historian Sir Edward Gibbon, whose epic *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* took a dozen years to publish in full. Balliett launches his opera — for which he wrote both words and music — with the crisis of leadership in the third century of the common era, following the peak of the Roman Empire

that Gibbon famously described at the beginning of his history.

When asked to create a community event that could be performed outside on an Ojai afternoon, Balliett recalls settling on the topic of ancient Rome first and foremost because “it’s such an interesting story to tell. There are so many fascinating little corners to it. I’d been reading Roman history from many different angles and chose the scenes that interest me the most, constantly asking, ‘Was this the moment that Rome fell? What really led to that outcome?’ So the story extends over centuries.”

Balliett zeroed in on six turning points or episodes in this complicated saga that he found especially suitable to set to music. “If you know the history of the fall of Rome, then you’ll really love the story portion of it,” he says. “But that’s not necessary to enjoy the piece.”

AMOC* is especially drawn to innovative ways of musical storytelling and theatrical presentation. Sometimes that means

finding inspiration from the early years of opera itself, when the art was first trying to figure out what it could do. The company’s singers and instrumentalists are joined by Ruckus, an associated early music ensemble that usually plays period instruments (Balliett and several of his colleagues are members of both), as well as the Ojai Festival Children’s Choir.

Balliett has experimented with musical narrative in many different formats, such as *Gawain and the Green Knight* (2019), based on one of the most famous tales from the court of King Arthur. His approach is to invite the audience to feel they are participating in the story. In the case of *Rome Is Falling*, that feeling becomes all the stronger thanks to the relevance of the story to today. “It’s got everything: excess and hope and love and death — everything you would want in an opera, as well as a lot of food for thought.”

—THOMAS MAY

This concert is approximately 45 minutes.