

# The Sound of Politics

MUSIC INSPIRED BY POLITICS AND WAR TAKES THE MUSIC THRONE IN EUGENE

By Brett Campbell

Before human-caused climate change was humanity's weapon of choice for destroying life, nuclear weapons were the go-to. The man most responsible for turning them into potential planet killers was the anguished central figure in Pulitzer Prize-winning American composer John Adams' 2005 opera *Dr. Atomic*: American physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, who supervised the Manhattan Project, which created the nuclear bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Based on Richard Rhodes' book *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, the story of a great scientist's Faustian bargain seemed a perfect subject for contemporary opera by one of the best known modern composers.

I attended the world premiere in San Francisco just before flying to New York for a conference that included *New Yorker* writer Alex Ross, who'd just written an admiring profile of Adams as he prepared for the premiere. When Ross asked how it went, I had to tell him the overlong original production failed to ignite onstage, even when choreographer Lucinda Childs sent dancers sprinting across the stage for no apparent reason in a desperate attempt to inject some action to dispel the dramatic inertia.

What did work was Adams's tense, urgent music, inspired by everything from minimalism to the science fiction movie sounds of the 1950s. He later assembled his best music into a symphony, which you'll hear at the Eugene Symphony's concert Thursday, March 21, at the Hult Center's Silva Hall, along with Robert Schumann's *Manfred Overture* and another Romantic classic, Brahms's passionate violin concerto, starring rising prodigy Julian Rhee.

While Adams took on a political and moral crisis from the last century, Grammy-winning composer/drummer Antonio Sánchez, who performs Friday, March 22, at The Shedd, addresses one of today's most pressing concerns: immigration.

Sánchez studied classical piano at his native Mexico's National University, then matriculated at two of the finest U.S. music education institutions: Berklee College of Music and New England Conservatory. Since his move to New York in 1999, he's become a major figure on the jazz scene, collaborating with some of today's top jazz artists like Pat Metheny, Chick Corea and Joshua Redman, with a side career in film scoring (including *Birdman*) and an electronica-and-drums project.

As an immigrant (he named his band Migration years before the current crisis), Sánchez has been passionate about Republicans' recent political attacks on refugees.

"Becoming an American citizen was a very proud moment for me," Sánchez says on his website's bio. "I've been in this country for almost 25 years, and I truly believe it's a unique country of immigrants of different races, backgrounds and religions that can ultimately coexist. Donald Trump has agitated a false, misguided sense of nationalism that has slammed minorities' backs against the wall. His constant conspiracy theories about voter fraud are nothing but a plan to implement widespread voter suppression."

At The Shedd, Sánchez and Migration will play music from his acclaimed new album *Lines in the Sand*. While you can hear the darkness and anger bubbling beneath, much of the new album shimmers with the ethereal beauty of the Pat Metheny bands he's anchored for 17 years, including singer Thana Alexa's soaring wordless vocals.

"This project is about the immigrant who has been forced to flee home out of fear, persecution, war and famine," he wrote. "This is about the kind of immigrant who is constantly being demonized, ostracized and politicized by a powerful few in the name of a misguided nationalism that is quickly eroding a fundamental quality in human beings: the capacity for feeling love for people that look different than we do and empathy for people that are less fortunate than we are. This album is about them and their journey."

After all that politically charged, explosive music, you can find a more intimate musical experience Sunday afternoon, March 24, at Church of the Resurrection, 3925 Hilyard Street, when musicians from the Oregon Bach Collegium play some of J. S. Bach's smaller-scale sounds. Michael Sand plays one of Bach's intricate solo violin partitas, then joins harpsichordist Margret Gries for a sonata. UO early music specialist Marc Vanscheeuwijk and his rare five-string cello join Gries in another Bach sonata for viola da gamba, and then the trio converge in still another. Even at the Oregon Bach Festival, we rarely get to hear this side of Bach, played by musicians who know it so well.

For a more traditional jazz show, check out another long time Shedd regular, silky clarinetist Ken Peplowski, this time at the Jazz Station on Saturday, March 23, with Oregon jazz stalwarts drummer Gary Hobbs, bassist Dave Captein and guitarist Dan Faehnle. ■

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