

The logo for Classical Domain New York City is set against a blurred background of a concert hall interior. The text "CLASSICAL DOMAIN" is in a large, white, sans-serif font, with "NEW YORK CITY" in a smaller, white, sans-serif font below it.

CLASSICAL DOMAIN

NEW YORK CITY

***TRACES* Envelops Audiences**

March 26 & 27th

Paul Haas created the sonic event called *REWIND* in 2006, to — as they say in the press — great critical acclaim. Now, after taking the concept on the road, Haas has returned to New York with *TRACES*. This redefinition of a classical concert will have its debut performance at the Angel Orensanz Center on March 26, followed by a second concert on the 27th.

TRACES will follow the template Haas created for *REWIND*, finding different avenues for exploring the connections between classical masterpieces written from early 1600s until now, and offering the audiences exciting new ways to look at musical relationships in non-stop, continuous, musical experience (one is allowed to applaud, as I remember). The concert repertoire ranges from commissioned and spontaneously-created acoustic and electronic pieces by composer Judd Greenstein and live electronica artist Paul Fowler to works by Gorecki, Pärt, Corelli and Copland, among others. *TRACES* features violinist Nurit Pacht, video installation artist Romain Erkiletlian, and the chamber orchestra SymphoNYC.

Haas' design will explore the concept of tracing the musical inspiration from each piece of music to its source — from spiritual ceremony to narrative tales, and from dance forms to folk music. Greenstein's newly-commissioned music will contain samples of the pre-existing pieces on the program, adding another layer of *TRACES* to the experience. The concert will have already started before the audience arrives, and will continue after the audience leaves. In addition, *TRACES* will use various “surround” techniques to envelop the audience in a three-dimensional sonic world. The plan is laid out in the *TRACES* program notes, written by Jayson Greene.

Classical Domain interviewed Paul Haas before 2006's *REWIND* concert, and we wanted to catch up with his plans now and spoke to the conductor via e-mail.

Classical Domain: I remember all the interest and the packed house for *REWIND* – now I know the reaction was big, but would you please tell me a bit about what the reaction was, and also about the subsequent concerts on the west coast?

Paul Haas: I'll never forget that first *REWIND* concert on June 8, 2006: a sold-out house with ticket line around the block, the unbelievable press and audience reactions, and that sense of inevitability. Something beautiful was happening, and I was thrilled to be at the center of the storm.

Since then, Sympho has taken *REWIND* to San Francisco and Des Moines, and it was surprising to me how it morphed into different artistic journeys each time. Of course, the repertoire was always the same, but we had different live electronica artists, different venues, different audiences, and different expectations. In San Francisco, we collaborated with the New Century Chamber Orchestra, as well as a local installation artist named Reuben Margolin, and the vibe was very intense. A very intimate atmosphere and a charged audience.

In Des Moines, the audience vastly outnumbered anything we had done before, simply because we performed it with the Des Moines Symphony in their regular concert hall, the Civic Center. I totally transformed the staging of the concert to take advantage of the larger space, and the effect was on a grand scale. One audience member came up to me afterwards and likened it to what it must have been like to have grown up listening to mono recordings and — all of a sudden — to be confronted with a full-throttle stereo recording.

CD: OK, I want to get this straight, since you have a growing organization now: SYMPHO is the organization and *REWIND* and now *TRACES* are the concerts/events?

PH: Yes, that's right. After *REWIND* premiered in June of 2006, we felt an overwhelming response from our audience — so much so that the birth of Sympho was inevitable. Sympho, as you mention, has developed two different programs: *REWIND*, and now *TRACES*. Our modus operandi is to create and produce these concept concerts in New York City, and — once we've tested them — we then share the concerts with orchestras and presenters across the country.

CD: Is *TRACES* a development since *REWIND* or are they different programs and so titled differently? Is there a conceptual difference with *TRACES*?

PH: *TRACES* is a totally different concert event from *REWIND*. Although some of the guiding principles remain the same (e.g., continuous music experience with no breaks, subtle lighting, placement of musicians throughout the hall, confounding expectations any way we can!), it's a completely different set of pieces, organized according to different parameters. The setup of musicians vis-à-vis audience members will be different from *REWIND*, and the overall atmosphere will be electric in an entirely unexpected way.

CD: You've been performing the concerts now for over two years – has your approach to the total immersion concept changed?

PH: Of course my approach to immersion has changed, although many of the ideas that engendered *REWIND* remain as stalwarts in my arsenal. In some ways, the approach has become leaner and even more music-centric, but I hesitate to elaborate too much on my programming style. It's an art, and it depends a lot on inspiration. For me, there are simply ideas that click, and there are others that don't. Needless to say, there's a lot of “clicking” in *TRACES*.

CD: The idea is not just a “party mix”: *TRACES* is not simply an event mixing different styles and periods – it’s about content and duration. Can you tell me how your “curated” the choices?

PH: This evening is a joyous collaboration between conductor/curator (me) and composer/curator (Judd Greenstein, Sympho's composer-in-residence). I selected the repertoire for this evening, and it was a very subconscious process. There is something akin to an alarm bell (a very mellifluous, sweet bell...) that goes off for me when I come across two pieces that absolutely must be heard together. It's definitely not a textbook — or even a very rational — progression. Putting this concert (and others like it) together is an intensely exhilarating affair, with one programmatic “*aha!*” moment after the next.

Once I had gathered this family of pieces together, Judd Greenstein and I worked together to come up with an order, guided by the idea that the whole evening should end up as one giant work of art, avoiding entirely the effect of a long row of successive pieces.

Movement I: slow, meditative, with a balance of the very new and the very old

Monteverdi/Marini/Pärt/Marini

Movement II: fast, crazy, mixture of orientalist and modern

Corelli/Hindemith/Gluck/Bartok/Nielsen/Martin

Movement III: Copland — stands on its own. A pillar.

Movement IV: winding down, tying together all the different strands from the evening — denouement, ending full circle back where we started

Gorecki/Haas

Of course, there are many layers in any Sympho performance, and I haven't even mentioned the outer skin of the *TRACES* onion: in this case, the idea that this concert should “trace” the connections between each piece and its origin or inspiration, not to mention those pieces or ideas the work influenced contemporaneously or at a later time.

CD: For some reason I am curious about the idea that you have a acoustic soloist contrasted with the orchestra (as all soloists traditionally are, the orchestra being an entity to itself), and an electronica artist who works autonomously with ambient sounds (not to mention video). Can you tell me about about how you see the idea of a soloist in your frame work?

PH: For this concert, the violin soloist (Nurit Pacht) acts as the glue tying the whole evening together. There is no multi-movement concerto in the offing, but she is involved in a very structural way. Judd Greenstein's works (*TRACES* 1, 2, 3, etc.) employ the violin solo to create an edifice of continuity, one with echoes upon echoes from and towards the pre-composed works in the *TRACES* program. This is probably as a good a place as any to mention that Greenstein's mastery of the art of compositional continuity made him my obvious choice as collaborator here. He and I think in very much the same way, and we all owe a huge debt of gratitude to him for making this colossal work of art come alive in the very real and unexpected way it has.

Paul Fowler, our live electronica artist, functions in tandem with Romain Erkiletlian's video installation to provide a different sort of continuity — the unbroken journey first from an outer place (urban street setting) to an inner place (the protected sanctuary of Orensanz) at the start of the concert, and then back again to the city streets at the end of the event. *TRACES* is an entirely continuous musical experience, with no breaks or pauses of any kind. We aim to show yet again that modern audiences do NOT have a short attention span, given an event that grabs them. And shakes them.

CD: The concert is meant to tweak our expectations and keep us motivated and listening in a different way. What are some examples in this concert?

PH: I'll give you one example of a moment in the *TRACES* concert, and you can just imagine the rest:

In the Monteverdi (“*Depositio potentes de sede*” from the *Vespers of the Virgin Mary*), we start with a string orchestra with two oboe soloists playing in front. All of a sudden one of the oboists is echoed by a player up in the balcony, behind the audience. Seconds later, a tenor chorus comes wafting in from outside the hall itself. Then two violin soloists take over from the oboists, with an echo violin up in the rafters, all accompanied by the distant chorus. This is a sound world you just will not find anywhere else, and you have to experience it to believe the kind of feeling it generates.

CD: To create a bit of jargon, on an aesthetic level you have what seems to be an “a-historical model” — connections-based relationships rather than a linear history of music — I think this tends to reflect the way most people listen to music and make choices, so

skipping centuries is no problem. Now if we are “boundary-less listeners”, we're ready to be pushed in new ways to new works. Where can this idea take us?

PH: I think it was Duke Ellington who said something like, “there are only 2 kinds of music — good and bad.” That genre-dissolving attitude resonates strongly with me, and I would argue against the purists who need to have a rational explanation of why one piece should be played on the same program juxtaposed with another. For me, it works or it doesn't. Period. I believe, as a listener, you are either swept along with the experience and out of the time-space continuum — or not. We talk a lot about “new audiences” in the classical music field, but — quite honestly — I don't believe there ever was an audience member who didn't want the same thing I'm after when I create a concert concept or go to listen to someone else's concert. We all want to be transported.

I think it's easy to look at *TRACES*, for instance and think, “Wow — there are tons of separate pieces from different style periods,” and leave it at that. The whole point of the concert, of course, is the connection between the old, the new, and everything in between. In fact, it's a “super-historical” model, not an “a-historical” model, if you want to call it that. The fun lies in exposing these influences, these “traces” between works across the centuries. They are sitting there waiting to be discovered, brought to light, and they allow a sense of wholeness to emerge — it's the exact opposite of what you might expect from a concert with 13 different pieces on it.

Sympho and I have made it our mission to revitalize the classical music concert experience for a modern audience. We do that by continually questioning what it means to be an audience member, as well as searching for new ways to define the role of the performer in relation to that audience member. In this concert, *TRACES*, we've put forward another idea of what a symphonic concert could be. It's obviously not the definitive answer, but it is AN answer, and an incredibly persuasive one. My hope is that we can continue to serve as a catalyst, prodding the classical industry into action, one overpowering concert at a time.