

CLASSICAL MUSIC

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## Dust Bowl

*Musicians get their hands dirty at Brooklyn's National Sawdust.*

BY RUSSELL PLATT



ILLUSTRATION BY GOLDEN COSMOS

Before the turn of the century, there were two basic models for classical-music venues in New York: the concert hall (read Carnegie's Stern Auditorium, or its little brother, Weill Recital Hall) and the alternative space (such as the Kitchen, the kind of place that offered opportunities to musicians that venues like Carnegie had little use for). Then Carnegie, in 2003, opened up Zankel Hall, a flexible mid-sized venue with a relatively relaxed ambience, and the traditional duopoly suddenly seemed outdated.

Enter the kids. (Le) Poisson Rouge, which opened in 2008, found success presenting all

sorts of music in a club-style space on a for-profit basis. Then in 2013 came SubCulture, also run as a business, which has struggled financially despite besting its older competitor in its warm acoustics and living-room-style intimacy. Now a new Brooklyn space, National Sawdust, gets into the game, opening in Williamsburg on Oct. 1. Unlike its recent predecessors, it will operate proudly as a nonprofit, which will allow the creative process to come first.

“What kind of financial seed of support would I have needed in my twenties?” asks Paola Prestini, the dynamic composer and entrepreneur who is National Sawdust’s creative and executive director. The thirteen-thousand-square-foot space, a century-old former sawdust factory that has been radically reimaged by the Brooklyn-based architects of Bureau V, will serve simultaneously as concert hall, rehearsal room, record studio, and arts incubator, giving young musicians commissioning support and mentoring opportunities. What makes this all possible is a new financial model instigated by the venue’s founder, Kevin Dolan; he’s put together a team of “philanthropic investors,” who will co-own the building and benefit as it appreciates in value—essentially investing and donating at the same time. It’s also a great “insurance policy,” as Prestini calls it, for an initial month of concerts of breathtaking ambition and range. After an all-star opening night that features such influential musicians as Nico Muhly, Chris Thile, and Nadia Sirota, the venue will present festivals devoted to the music of John Zorn and Terry Riley, concerts by such acclaimed soloists as the pianist Alessio Bax and the violinist Johnny Gandelsman, an evening with the Inuit throat singer Tanya Tagaq, and the world première of Keeril Makan’s “Persona,” an operatic adaptation of the Ingmar Bergman film.

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