

Michael Gordon's music merges subtle rhythmic invention with incredible power embodying, in the words of The New Yorker's Alex Ross, "the fury of punk rock, the nervous brilliance of free jazz, and the intransigence of classical modernism." Over the past 25 years, Gordon has produced a strikingly diverse body of work, ranging from large-scale pieces for high-energy ensembles to major orchestral commissions and works conceived specifically for the recording studio. Transcending categorization, his music represents the collision of mysterious introspection and brutal directness. The recipient of multiple awards and grants, Gordon has been honored by the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters.



Photo by Peter Seiring

Learn more about these operas at [www.musicsalesclassical.com](http://www.musicsalesclassical.com). Cover photo from *What to Wear* by Scott Groller, courtesy of REDCAT and CalArts.

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# Michael Gordon

## OPERA & THEATER WORKS

*What to Wear* (2005), *Van Gogh* (1994),  
*Chaos* (1991), *Acquanetta* (2005)



# What to Wear

 A chamber opera (2005)

Libretto in English by Richard Foreman

Duration: 1 hour 5 minutes

World Premiere: September 2006, RedCat Center, Los Angeles, CA

Cast & Orchestration: 2 Sopranos, Alto, Tenor, 6-Voice Female Chorus  
2 kbd, perc, egtr, 2vn, db

## composer note

I wrote *What to Wear* with the great American iconoclastic theater personality Richard Foreman, who wrote the libretto and directed the first production at the RedCat Theater in Los Angeles in 2005. *What to Wear* features a multitude of Madeline X's, who live in a sad, sad world and think about what to wear, and a gigantic Duck that plays golf. Like many of Foreman's scripts, the work is at once incomprehensible and deeply comprehensible.

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# Chaos

 A chamber opera (1994)

Libretto in English by Matthew Maguire

Duration: 1 hour 20 minutes

Cast & Orchestration: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, 2 Baritones, plus audio playback

## synopsis

Dr. Anna Fitzroy is a rogue physicist driven to research chaos. Dr. Lorenz Boleslaw is her partner whose own obsession with their experiment is nearly as great as their love for one another. Years of labor finally pay off when they penetrate to the heart of the Chaos Zone, where Marie and Pierre Curie appear as their navigators and reveal to them the secrets of chaos. Fitzroy and Boleslaw proudly report their results to their mentor, Dr. Aguabone, the head of the Institute of Science and a Nobel laureate in quantum physics.

Within the scientific world there has always been a battle between two forces: those fighting for and those against the evolution of science. Deeply threatened by chaos, Dr. Aguabone, while pretending to defend Fitzroy and Boleslaw, secretly arranges their arrest. They are promised "freedom" to work if they recant. Realizing Aguabone's true nature, the scientists struggle with a moral dilemma that threatens to divide them. They escape from jail and, with Marie and Pierre's help, fight insanity, open a passage to the Chaos Zone, trap Aguabone, and broadcast his meltdown in Chaos on TV. All rejoice.

# Van Gogh

 A chamber opera (1991)

Libretto in English by Michael Gordon, based on the letters of Vincent Van Gogh

Duration: 1 hour 5 minutes

Cast & Orchestration: Soprano, Tenor, Bass

cl(bcl), perc, egtr, pf(org), vn, va, vc, db

## composer note

I started writing *Van Gogh* because of my obsession with the letters Vincent Van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo. I assembled the texts myself, drawing from these letters, in many cases combining lines from different letters or from different places within the same letter. What attracted me so much to Van Gogh's writing was the pain, rawness and brutal honesty. I found it hard to believe that anyone could tell another person, even his brother, the raw emotions that Van Gogh experienced — so painful, lonely and humiliating. Early presentations of the piece were called *Van Gogh Video Opera*. These included video by Elliot Caplan and were performed in Vienna and in New York City in the early 1990s. In the fall of 2003, the Crash Ensemble performed it in Dublin and for that occasion I re-orchestrated the piece, adding three instruments (cello, bass, piano). The piece is divided into six parts and it follows the arch of Van Gogh's life chronologically.

\*Recordings available. *Van Gogh*. Alarm Will Sound. Alan Person, conductor. Cantaloupe 21044.

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# Acquanetta

 An opera in one act (2005)

Libretto in English by Deborah Artman | Duration: 1 hour 10 minutes

Cast & Orchestration: ACQUANETTA: *Mezzo-soprano/alto* APE: *Coloratura*

BRAINY WOMAN: *Soprano* DOCTOR: *Tenor*

SATB Chorus DIRECTOR: *Bass-baritone*

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## synopsis

In 1943, a former cheesecake model, known only as "Acquanetta," lit up the screen in the B-movie horror film and now cult classic, "Captive Wild Woman." Stunning and exotic, Acquanetta played the untameable and gorgeous creation resulting from a mad scientist's experiments on an ape. In *Acquanetta*, the mock serious, campy spirit of horror movies is turned inside out in a bravura, one-act deconstruction of the five minutes that changed Acquanetta's life forever. The mad scientist Doctor, the insistent Ape, the reluctant Brainy Woman, the visionary Director and the beautiful monster herself, Acquanetta, gather in this re-imagining of that fateful experiment. In soaring, sometimes comic and always indelible songs that perfectly capture the heightened drama of horror films, these vivid characters reveal their inner longings and emotional shadows in what is ultimately a haunting meditation on the meaning of identity, transformation, stereotypes and typecasting, set in the heyday of Hollywood gloss.