

David Lang embodies the restless spirit of invention. Lang is at the same time deeply versed in the classical tradition and committed to music that resists categorization, constantly creating new forms. Many of his pieces resemble each other only in the fierce intelligence and clarity of vision that inform their structures. His catalogue is extensive, and his opera, orchestra, chamber, and solo works are by turns ominous, ethereal, urgent, hypnotic, unsettling, and very emotionally direct. Much of his work seeks to expand the definition of virtuosity in music — even the deceptively simple pieces can be fiendishly difficult to play and require incredible concentration by musicians and audiences alike.



Photo by Peter Sarling

Learn more about his operas at www.musicsalesclassical.com.

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David Lang

OPERAS

the loser (2016), *the difficulty of crossing a field* (1999),
the little match girl passion (2011), *modern painters* (1994),
anatomy theater (2006)



“Lang’s opera
is HIGH
ENTERTAINMENT.”

- *Los Angeles Times*

the loser

A chamber opera (2016)



BAM Photo by © Richard Termine

Libretto in English by David Lang
Adapted from the novel by Thomas Bernhard
Translated from German by Jack Dawson

Duration: 1 hour

Premiere: September 2016, Next Wave Festival, Brooklyn Academy of Music

Orchestration: perc, va, vc, db; off-stage piano

Cast List: The Loser - *Baritone*

“The score is a model of how music can animate words. The text is set with impressive clarity...”

- *The New York Times*

modern painters

An opera (1994)



Photo courtesy of Bridgeman Art Library

Libretto in English by Manuela Hoelterhoff

Duration: 1 hour 50 minutes

Premiere: July 1995, Santa Fe Opera
Francesca Zambello, director
Alison Chitty, designer,
George Manahan, conductor

Cast and Orchestration:

3S, Mz, 6T, 3Bar, 2B, 2 silent roles; Chorus
2(pic)2(ca)2(bcl)2/4220/2perc/pf(syn).hp/str

synopsis

Victorian art critic John Ruskin believes there are seven attributes in a perfect work of art: sacrifice, truth, power, beauty, life, memory and obedience. These concepts are the background for seven scenes from the critic's life illuminating his relationships with art, his mother, his wife, a young girl and his love of Venice and disgust with the Industrial Age. *Modern Painters* is the title of Ruskin's most famous work, a five-volume study of painting — spanning much of his life — that attempts to describe nature, people, ideas and relationships with intricate formulas.

the little match girl passion

A work for solo voices & up to 6 players (2011)



Text in English by David Lang, after Hans Christian Andersen, H.P. Paulli, Picander, & St. Matthew

Duration: 35 minutes

Premiere: July 2013, Theatre Cryptic, Glasgow, Scotland (staged version)

Winner of the 2008 Pulitzer Prize in Music

composer's note

The story of The Little Match Girl by the Danish author Hans Christian Andersen has that shocking combination of danger and morality that many famous children's stories do. A poor young girl, whose father beats her, tries unsuccessfully to sell matches on the street, is ignored, and freezes to death. Through it all she somehow retains her Christian purity of spirit, but it is not a pretty story. The Little Match Girl Passion sets Andersen's story in the format of Bach's Saint Matthew Passion, interspersing Andersen's narrative with my versions of the crowd and character responses from Bach's Passion. The word "passion" comes from the Latin word for suffering. There is no Bach in my piece and there is no Jesus — rather the suffering of the Little Match Girl has been substituted for Jesus's, elevating (I hope) her sorrow to a higher plane.

anatomy theater

A chamber opera (2006)



Photo courtesy of LA Opera

Libretto in English by Mark Dion

Duration: 1 hour 15 minutes

Premiere: June 2016, LA Opera, Los Angeles, CA. Staged by Ridge Theater; Bob McGrath, director; in conjunction with Beth Morrison Productions

Orchestration: fl(pic), cl(bcl), tpt, perc, pf(acn), vn, va, vc, db

cast list

SARAH OSBOURNE (convicted murderess, later corpse): *Mezzo-soprano*

JOSHUA CROUCH (caretaker of the dissection theater): *Baritone*

BARON PEEL (anatomist and moral lecturer): *Bass*

AMBROSE STRANG (the anatomist's young assistant): *Tenor*

"A powerful morality play that addressed itself to some of the abiding terrors of our own time."

- *Opera News*

the difficulty of crossing a field

A chamber opera (1999)



Photo courtesy of the Ridge Theatre

Libretto in English by Mac Wellman
Based on a story by Ambrose Bierce

Duration: 1 hour 15 minutes

Premiere: March 2006, Theater Artaud, San Francisco, CA
American Conservatory Theater, Kronos Quartet

Instrumentation: 2vn, va, vc

cast list

Ms. WILLIAMSON: *Mezzo-soprano*

Mr. WILLIAMSON / MAGISTRATE: *Spoken*

WILLIAMSON GIRL: *Soprano*

BOY SAM: *Tenor*

ARMOUR WREN/ANDREW: *Mezzo-tenor*

CHORUS of SLAVES (from which are drawn):

VIRGINIA CREEPER: *Soprano*

OLD WOMAN: *Contralto*

composer's notes

A slave owner in the pre-civil war American South walks across his field and disappears, in plain view of his family, his neighbors and his slaves, forever altering the relationships among them. Everyone around him has his or her own sharp view of what that disappearance means, of why it had to happen, and of what will happen now that there is a “hole” where a man used to be. Based on a one page story by the writer Ambrose Bierce, *The Difficulty of Crossing a Field* was commissioned by Carey Perloff and the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco. It was intended to cross between opera and theater worlds, mixing arias with spoken text, emotional melodies with intense drama. It is written for 5 principals and a chorus of 6 or more slaves, and the accompaniment is for string quartet on stage, both as the “orchestra” and as part of the set.

press

“[Field] weaves a bizarre tale of Mr. Williamson, an Alabama plantation owner, who walks across a field in 1854 only to vanish into thin air. Over the next 75 minutes or so, we hear from his family, neighbors and slaves, as they contemplate the strange disappearance — an “erasure” that is impossible to explain. Just as the story refuses to conform to any traditional structure, so does the music. Field is described as a contemporary opera/theater hybrid, incorporating compelling scenes of spoken drama within Lang’s haunting score. Richly repetitive and often discordant, rhythms and melodies unfold slowly, only to circle back upon themselves in an almost hypnotic fashion.”

- Amy Stumpfl, *The Tennessean*

“The Difficulty of Crossing a Field is a major contribution to American Musical Theater.... This astonishing work must not be allowed to vanish into thin air. I know I can’t get it out of my head.”

- Mark Swed, *Los Angeles Times*