

June: The 16 Best Concerts and Festivals in New York City

Variations on 'America the Beautiful,' the NY Phil in the parks, and Joy Guidry's hour of bassoon, electronics, and prayer.



OWEN MCTIGUE

JUN 02, 2026



12



1



2

Share

New York is having an unseasonably loud June. The Knicks are in the Finals for the first time since 1999, the World Cup is about to take over the region, and even your cozy neighborhood sports bar will struggle to contain its howling masses. If you find yourself seeking refuge from all the rambunctiousness, follow the classical music in the parks. The New York Phil makes its annual free run through the boroughs, fireworks and all, and the Met puts its rising stars on outdoor stages around the city. Let's call it counter-programming.

Inside the halls, the season isn't done just yet. Lise Davidsen, fresh off of her Met Isolde this spring, a voice powerful enough to ride over a full Wagner orchestra, makes her Carnegie recital debut on some of the most intimate music there is. Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducts the Met Orchestra in Bruckner's Eighth, ninety minutes of sound that bends your sense of time. At the Park Avenue Armory, Joy Guidry takes us through the meditation of prayer in a vulnerable hour for bassoon and electronics. And a free contemporary music festival, in its twelfth year, bets big on emerging composers. Here's what I recommend this month.

ODEA covers NYC's classical and experimental music scene—monthly concert picks researched and curated so you don't hear about them a week too late. Subscribe for free and stay ahead of the curve.

The Concerts

Top Picks

What I'd prioritize if you're only seeing one or two concerts this month.



Lise Davidsen. Photo credit: Fredrik Arff.

Lise Davidsen, Soprano, James Baillieu, Piano

Stern Auditorium, Carnegie Hall · Fri, Jun 5, 8pm

Lise Davidsen's voice hit territory my ear had no map for when I heard her sing in *Tristan und Isolde* at the Met this spring. A sound so controlled and so large I felt its density in my chest pinning me to my seat. Lise's is the biggest voice of her generation with an instrument built to sail over a hundred players in the pit. This is what makes

her Carnegie recital debut so fascinating. An all Schubert program that's some of the most intimate vocal music. Songs first sung for friends in living rooms. She takes us through the composer's darker side with songs on death, dread, and the supernatural, graciously sparing us with brief moments of calm.

Go if: you want to hear a voice built for Wagner sing Schubert up close.



The Met Orchestra, Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducting. ©Jennifer Taylor

The Met Orchestra: Bruckner's *Symphony No. 8*

Carnegie Hall, Midtown · Thu, Jun 11, 8pm

A towering symphony often called a cathedral of sound. The [NY Phil is doing Bruckner's Eighth the week before](#), but my money's on this one. The Met Orchestra

spent this spring building enormous Wagnerian climaxes in *Tristan Und Isolde* and turning out lush strings in *Eugene Onegin*, two things the Eighth asks for. With Yanr at the helm, it's the pairing I'd pay to see. Ninety minutes, no intermission, and at its center the longest slow movement in the symphonic repertoire, the one critics have called "sublime" for more than a century. Bruckner wrote like the church organist he was and the conductors who get the Eighth right are the ones who blend the brass into a single organ-like swell that resonates in the silences.

Go if: you want to get lost in the vastness of Bruckner's sound.

Solo and Chamber Music

Smaller forces, tightly curated programs.



Joy Guidry by Dennis Iarance.

Artists Studio: Joy Guidry

Veterans Room, Park Avenue Armory, Upper East Side · Wed, Jun 3–Thu, Jun 4, 7:30pm

Joy Guidry's latest project, [*Five Prayers*](#), feels like a window into her soul. Written during one of the hardest mental health stretches of her adult life, it became a process of finding peace through her traumas and offers five different perspectives. She fills the ornate, 19th-century Veterans Room at the Park Ave Armory with her bassoon and live electronics. Harp and warm low synths support Guidry's own wordless singing

layered on top. It's a vulnerable moment for an artist who's been open about her mental health struggles using music as a medium for healing.

Go if: you appreciate an artist's vulnerability and devotion to their craft.



Conrad Tao.

Conrad Tao, piano

Merkin Hall, Kaufman Music Center, Upper West Side · Fri, Jun 5, 8pm

Pianist Conrad Tao might call *Broken Lines* a project or experiment before calling it recital—fitting, in 250th year of the biggest experiment of them all. Five pieces of American piano music, each one confronting something the composer couldn't ignore. Rzewski's *Which Side Are You On?* is built on Florence Reece's 1931 song from the

Harlan County coal strikes. Copland's 1941 *Piano Sonata* was written as Europe collapsed into war. Julia Wolfe's *Compassion* came out of 9/11. Singleton's *In My Own Skin* let's us know exactly where the composer is most at home through two competing sonorities of chorale-like harmonies against running 16th note octaves that nod to Monk and Tristano. The quiet opener is David Lang's *cage*, written the day John Cage died in 1992. A spare, two note elegy that became the seed of a whole cycle of memorials.

Go if: you want to watch a pianist bring athletic force to music that demands it.

PRISM Quartet: PREMIERES

Christ & St. Stephen's Church · Sun, Jun 7, 4pm

Four world premieres in the hands of one of the best saxophone quartets out there makes for an intriguing new music night. PRISM Quartet takes on Henry Vidaver's *Vidaver's Appia*, which began as a school bike trip down the Appian Way in Rome. When news of Pope Francis's death broke while he sat in a park full of Easter picnickers, he witnessed celebration quickly turn into shock and grief. Also on the program is Don Byron's *Quartet for Saxophones* pulling from 50s and 60s film music and Grant Stewart's *Kind Mothers* that's named for the Buddhist idea that through birth, death and rebirth, everyone you've met was once your mother.

Go if: you've got a Sunday afternoon and an open ear.

The Metropolitan Opera Summer Recital Series

NYC parks · Jun 8, 10, 12 & 14, 7pm · Free

Every June the Met leaves Lincoln Center and makes its way to the parks. Free outdoor recitals with big opera voices for 17 years running. Instead of the usual Puccini and Verdi crowd pleasers, this year's program is all-American for the country's 250

—Barber, Copland, and Florence Price, all sung by rising Met artists accompanied by piano. Four nights, four boroughs, and bring that blanket in case the seats fill up.

Go if: operatic voices carrying across the grass sounds like the right way to spend a summer evening.





Isabel Leonard. Photo credit: Michael Thomas

An Evening with Isabel Leonard and Friends

Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall, Midtown · Tue, Jun 9, 7:30pm

Isabel Leonard has built her three-Grammy career mostly in Mozart and Rossini, but spent the last few weeks on a press blitz for her role as Frida Kahlo in the Met's [*El Último Sueño de Frida y Diego*](#). Her sound has a transportive quality. I heard it pour into Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* with the Met Orchestra this past February—was right there with her on that hot, languid Southern night, in no hurry to leave. She also sang Bernstein's "Somewhere" from *West Side Story*, her voice dreamy and hopeful. She's back at Carnegie with her own Perspectives series joined by flamenco singer Ismael Fernández and dancer Sonia Olla, reimagining her familiar opera roles through Spanish song and dance.

Go if: you want to hear an opera star trade Carmen and Rosina for cante jondo and Spanish song.

America/Beautiful: Min Kwon, Timo Andres & guests

St. Paul's German Lutheran Church, Chelsea · Mon Jun 22, 7pm

In 2020, pianist Min Kwon felt the country was "quite literally dying" and started cold emailing American composers asking for variations on "America the Beautiful." Over seventy pieces came back and this concert give you a taste of fifteen of them. The

contributors run from classical to rock to jazz, including Samuel Adler, Stewart Copeland (yes, of The Police), Timo Andres, Fred Hersch, Nico Muhly, Kenji Bunch, and Pierre Jalbert. The hope is that these variations can speak to the question “What is America: is it beautiful, was it ever, will it ever be?” because the years since have only made it harder to answer.

Go if: you’re looking for a one-of-a-kind piano program that reckons with America.

Toomai String Quintet: From Duke Ellington to La Lupe

Scorca Hall, National Opera Center, Chelsea · Sat, Jun 13, 7pm

Toomai String Quintet spends a Saturday night on jazz, mambo and bossa nova, running through Ellington, Machito, Tito Puente, Jobim, La Lupe, with Jennifer Jade Ledesna singing a few. The premise is the long, tangled relationship between American jazz and the music of the Latin American diaspora. You know “Caravan” as a Duke Ellington, but did you know the melody is actually Juan Tizol’s? A valve trombonist from Vega Baja, Puerto Rico, who joined Ellington’s band in 1929 and became the man who folded Latin music into it.

Go if: a string quintet playing Tito Puente on a Saturday night sound like an easy yet

Experimental/Immersive

Cross-genre work, unusual spaces, and concerts that upend expectations.

Felipe Lara / Talea Ensemble / Conrad Tao: Mazurkas and Portals

National Sawdust, Williamsburg · Wed, Jun 3, 7:30pm

Composer Felipe Lara arrived at Berklee from Brazil on a jazz guitar scholarship the went to a Boston Symphony concert one night, heard Messiaen's *Turangalila-Symphonie*, and walked out fixated on orchestration. He met a bass student named Esperanza Spalding around the same time. Twenty years later, the two of them and flutist Claire Chase premiered his Double Concerto at the LA Phil, the piece that made him a 2024 Pulitzer finalist.

Lara writes for people he's known forever. Tonight covers five works played by another set of longtime collaborators—Talea Ensemble and pianist Conrad Tao—including the New York premiere of Mosaic Maze and Metafagote, scored for solo amplified bassoon and six prerecorded ones.

Go if: you want a composer portrait built by the people he trusts to play him.

The Next Festival 2026 Featuring Tommy Mesa

National Sawdust, Williamsburg · Sat, Jun 6, 7:30pm

A relic of Covid times I still remember is the 7pm cacophony of pots banged out of windows for essential workers. [Andrea Casarrubios](#) wrote a piece about that sound *SEVEN*, for solo cello and it traveled to 36 countries and got a Grammy nomination. [Tommy Mesa](#), the cellist who commissioned it, is back at Sawdust to premiere Casarrubios's new concerto for cello, strings, and percussion, *The Book of Signatures* with the Next Festival Fellows. The rest of the night belongs to immigrant women composers from Serbia, Iran, China, Brazil, and Uzbekistan, most of the works newly arranged for the festival's string players.

Go if: you get excited by a festival that exists to launch the next generation of musicians and composers.

Wet Ink Ensemble: New Works by Kondo, Nealand, Mincek

Roulette, Boerum Hill · Wed, Jun 10, 8pm

If you're even a little drawn to brand new music by people who write as much of it as they perform, Wet Ink has you covered. The adventurous contemporary music collective brings a refreshing eagerness to this concert of three premieres. Jo Kondo, the Tokyo composer who has spent fifty years writing "linear music" note by note in the lineage of Morton Feldman, wrote them a trio for flute, percussion, and piano. Aurora Nealand, their current artist-in-residence, premieres an octet. She's a New Orleans saxophonist who studied musique concrète and works between Preservation Hall traditional jazz and her own experimental solo project, [Monocle](#). Founding member Alex Mincek's dectet gets its NYC premiere.

Go if: you're looking for the cutting edge of new music played by the people who compose it.



MISE-EN FESTIVAL

Six concerts, Jun 16–20 · MISE-EN_PLACE, Harlem, except Sat Jun 20 at Brooklyn College · Free

Every June, the assiduous Ensemble Mise-En throws an under-the-radar festival featuring six concerts interspersed with composer discussions that's one of the best free things in the city for anyone curious about new music. The festival has always cast a wide net with past editions featuring composer portraits to four hour concert and this year is no different. The festival's global open call for scores resulted in hundreds of submissions winnowed down to a handful. You won't recognize many of the names, which is kinda the point.

If you want one to start with, take Saturday afternoon at Brooklyn College, the festival's only stop outside Harlem. It includes Kari Watson's *VISTAS: WARP, WEFT*. Watson builds immersive electronic music on analog modular synthesizers, won the Kranichstein Prize at Darmstadt, and was named a New Artist of the Month by Mus America last year.

Go if: you'd rather roll the dice on music nobody's heard yet than play it safe.

Orchestral

Full symphony concerts, chamber orchestras, and large ensemble programs.

The New York Philharmonic — Concerts in the Parks

NYC Parks · Tue, Jun 9–Fri Jun 12, 8pm · Free

It's the kind of tradition that reaffirms why you put up with the exorbitant rents in the city. Right at the eve of summer, stake out a spot on the Great Lawn, assemble the charcuterie and make an evening of it with fireworks as the nightcap. [Newly appointed San Francisco Symphony music director, Eliahu Ingalhalpern](#), conducts a program built for everyone. Familiar pieces, fanfares to open, and Saint-Saëns's exhilarating single movement *Cello Concerto No. 1* as the evening's most beautiful moment, with the Phil's principal cellist Carter Brey. Be sure to get there early for a good view.

Go if: you're looking for a NYC bucket list kind of night.

Second Ending Ensemble: Mahler 1 + Bobby McFerrin

Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center · Sun, Jun 14, 3pm

Mahler's First Symphony might be his most welcoming. The strings hold a single note across seven octaves to open, evoking morning mist rising from a forest against birds chirping. Fifty minutes later, the journey ends in triumph with seven horns standing to drown out the rest of the orchestra. I still fondly remember my first time hearing it as an undergrad with The Cleveland Orchestra bringing it to life.

Second Ending Ensemble attracts some of the city's best players for this performance in one of my favorite halls. Conductor Ian Schaefer is back for the group's fourth annual concert pairing Mahler with a new piece from Bobby George: *The Play of Shine and Shade*.

Go if: you're looking to hear one of Mahler's best symphonies by a top notch orchestra.

The Knights at the Naumburg Bandshell

Naumburg Bandshell, Central Park · Jun 23, 7:30pm, free

Free orchestral music in Central Park, the way the Naumburg Bandshell has done it since 1905. On a mild June night, this could be the easiest good decision in the city. The Knights play Barber's *Adagio for Strings*, some Caroline Shaw, and a new violin concerto with Tessa Lark out front. The closer is Colin Jacobsen's arrangement of Leonard Cohen's "American Tune," the weary, gorgeous 1973 song about being worn down by this country and loving it anyway. Simon lifted the melody from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, but Bach hadn't written it either. It began as a secular love song Hans Leo Hassler published around 1600, became a Lutheran hymn ("O Sacred Head, Now Wounded"), and only then passed to Bach. One tune: German love song, church hymn, Bach Passion, American folk record.

Go if: you like your classical music outdoors.

You're probably looking for more than just another season brochure. That's what ODEA is for. We cover the concerts that don't always get the glossy previews: string quartets in crypts, operas in downtown theaters, new music in old churches. The ones you usually hear about a week too late.

If that sounds like your thing, subscribe, share with a friend, or check out something unexpected. Have a concert to share? Reach out at odea@substack.com.



12 Likes • 2 Restacks

[← Previous](#)

Discussion about this post

Comments Restacks



Write a comment...



Daria Herbert Jun 2

♥ Liked by Owen McTigue

obsessed with this newsletter

♥ LIKE (2) 💬 REPLY

