The Critic’s Notebook

by The Editors

This week: On Tim Prentice, Chausson’s *Le roi Arthus*, Baroque set design & more.


Art:
“Tim Prentice: After the Mobile” at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut (through October 4): “After the Mobile” is an apt subtitle for Tim Prentice’s exhibition at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, Connecticut. Organized by Richard Klein, The Aldrich’s exhibitions director, the two-part solo show reveals the architect-sculptor’s lifelong homage to the work of Alexander Calder, whose kinetic art Marcel Duchamp first described as “mobile” (while Jean Arp likewise called Calder’s static sculpture “stabile”). Prentice both follows Calder’s example and examines what comes next. With intricate, handmade work of lexan and wire, Prentice and his longtime collaborator David Colbert draw in space, allowing their sculpture’s environment to complete the picture. The effects of movement are intimately felt as these works ripple and weave in mesmerizing mobility. —JP

Music:
“Dedicated to Dante” at the 2021 Ravenna Festival (through July 31): “Ungrateful Florence,” as Byron put it, will forever be known as the home of Dante Alighieri, but it was in the comparatively sleepy Italian town of Ravenna where the poet lived out his final days in unhappy exile. This year’s Ravenna Festival falls on the seven-hundredth anniversary of Dante’s death. Headed by the conductor Riccardo Muti, it has a characteristically eclectic program in place to commemorate the occasion. Much of the proceedings, which began on June 2 and run to July 31, are available to stream for free, both during and after the fact. Already available are two concerts of music from Dante’s time performed by the ensemble La Fonte Musica. While browsing, you’ll also see the fruit of this year’s collaboration with Armenian musicians—a tribute to the city’s ancient Armenian community—and a dusk-to-dawn reading of the thirty-three cantos of the *Paradiso*. One couldn’t be more spoiled for a setting, either: venues include the stark interior of the medieval Basilica di San Francesco, where Dante’s funeral was held, and the inimitable Basilica di Sant’Apollinare in Classe, one of the jewels of Ravenna’s mosaic-adorned churches, this one decorated by Byzantine artisans in the sixth century. —IS
Le roi Arthus, by Ernest Chausson, at the Fisher Center at Bard, Annandale-on-Hudson (July 25, 28, 30, and August 1): Each summer, the Bard SummerScape festival revives an unfairly neglected opera. This year will see the first fully staged American production of Le roi Arthus by the French late-Romantic composer Ernest Chausson (1855–99), known mainly for his Poème for violin and orchestra. A student of Cézar Franck and Jules Massenet, he was also heavily influenced by Wagner, whose works he heard on several trips to Munich and Bayreuth. Le roi Arthus was Chausson’s third opera but the only one to be staged, premiering in Brussels in 1903 after his untimely death in a cycling accident. The work invites comparison with Tristan und Isolde, but rather than side with the lovers, as Wagner does, Chausson (who wrote the libretto as well as the music) emphasizes the nobility of the betrayed King Arthur, sung by the baritone Norman Garrett, who debuted at the Metropolitan Opera in Porgy and Bess just before the pandemic. The SummerScape founder Leon Botstein, who conducted the BBC Symphony Orchestra in a 2005 Telarc recording of the opera, leads the American Symphony Orchestra and the Bard Festival Chorale in four shows at the Fisher Center. The performances on July 25 and 28 will also be livestreamed. —JC

Architecture:
“Architecture, Theater, and Fantasy: Bibiena Drawings from the Jules Fisher Collection,” at the Morgan Library (through September 12): How easy it is to forget that the association of architecture and theater during the Baroque era—and even earlier; think Inigo Jones and his masque designs—is not just a scholarly metaphor but a fact: architects were stage designers and vice versa. No family was more desired in this line than the Bibiena, who for three generations set out from their native Italy to build theaters and sets around continental Europe, including Bayreuth’s Margravial Opera House. At the Morgan through September 12 are twenty-five original Bibiena drawings from the collection of the Tony Award–winning lighting designer Jules Fisher, all of which are promised to the museum and will join the Morgan’s already impressive collection of Bibiena originals. —BR

From the archive:

“Figures in the carpet,” by Laura Jacobs (September 1996). On the state of the arabesque in recent dance.

Podcasts:

“Music for a While #48: Bach and Bach-ish.” Jay Nordlinger, The New Criterion’s music critic, talks music—but, more important, plays music.

Dispatch:

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