

# MORE THAN A VOICE



Countertenor **Anthony Roth Costanzo** is expanding the definition of the classical singer to include impresario, activist, connector. He's a big name in opera—he made headlines in title role of Philip Glass's *Akhmaten* at the Metropolitan Opera—and he's increasingly familiar at orchestras. Offstage, Costanzo is launching projects that address the present through music. He curated and performed in the New York Philharmonic's recent Bandwagon series: Philharmonic musicians and Costanzo made music—free for all—from a pickup truck on NYC streets. Then Bandwagon helped local artists and communities to stage their own shows. Costanzo's "Authentic Selves" artist residency at the Philharmonic features collaborations with diverse arts groups, concerts by Costanzo with the Philharmonic, and a celebration of queer artistry with Costanzo and singer and trans activist Justin Vivian Bond. Here, Costanzo shares his vision of a modern artist residency.

**C**urating the Bandwagon concerts, I had the opportunity to work with every department at the Philharmonic, producing and curating the project: making spreadsheets, scouting locations, working with Local 1 stagehands. I got to know almost every musician in the orchestra on a first-name basis. Though some people within the institution were initially skeptical, when they saw that audiences had such positive reactions, it was so moving for all of us. After the success of the two versions of Bandwagon, I was thrilled when CEO Deborah Borda asked me to be the orchestra's artist in residence, to program a major pillar of the 2021-22 season and two different weeks of programming—which was a dream.

Our collaboration with National Black Theater included a panel discussion and a performance, and we created a collaboration with Alliance Française exploring different French cultural traditions. I'm going to Casita Maria in the Bronx to talk with students about self-expression and authenticity in music and introduce them to opera. I am working with Lincoln Center on a concept and concert by

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Davóné Tines, the wonderful bass-baritone, and with the PUBLIQuartet. We're collaborating with El Puente and Flushing Town Hall, fantastic organizations that serve communities in Brooklyn and Queens, on performances at Lincoln Center's Atrium.

Our art is greatly influenced and changed by connecting with other artists, other audiences, and working to create community. When I was thinking about "Authentic Selves" at the Philharmonic, I realized that nobody wants to see an "opera singer" onstage, people want to see a human being. In an orchestra concert, there are no costumes and no characters. It's just you. That is what moves people about music: the human part. Without



Justin Vivian Bond and Anthony Roth Costanzo in performance with the New York Philharmonic and Music Director Jaap van Zweden as part of Costanzo's residency with the orchestra this season.

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that, just singing standard repertoire doesn't have the same charge, the same excitement.

With collaborators like the National Black Theater, I was clear that never were we going to say, "This is what we'd like you to do." Rather, we wanted National Black Theater to tell us what they were interested in creating and how they wanted to partner. It's a slow and considered process, a relationship that develops over time. It can't just be about checking boxes; it's about seeking meaningful collaborations. Communities see very clearly when that happens, and when it doesn't, they don't feel compelled to return.

The music that the Philharmonic and other orchestras play can stand on its own, and we want to have all of this beautiful music. But I always think about how can these works be illuminated and amplified, what other stories can we tell? Classical music always benefits from being in beautiful relief with other genres, other works, other idioms, whether through interdisciplinary collaborations, expressions of personality, playing music from a pickup truck, with a class, a collaboration, and beyond. I'm always searching for new paths to the future. **S**