Summer Music Festivals
Where Place and Music Meet

#Metoo and Classical Music
Apps in the Concert Hall
Crowdsourcing a Symphony
Whether it’s on a mountaintop, next to a lake or river, or in an amphitheater, experiencing music outside can make you hear music in a completely different way.

It’s summertime, and you’re reclining on the grass, gazing at the towering Colorado Rockies, with a cool breeze wafting by, while listening to a symphony Dvořák wrote in 1889 at Vysoká u Příbramě, a summer resort in his native Bohemia. Or you could be on a hilltop next to a giant, Stonehenge-like sculpture in the wilderness of Montana’s Big Sky country, headed to hear Bach and Beethoven—in a barn. You might be on your way to hear Tchaikovsky’s 1812 Overture, carrying a picnic basket and walking across the famous lawn where Leonard Bernstein first studied as a young twentiesomething phenom conductor. You could be rocking gently on a steamboat, listening to a classical and jazz concert; or in the audience to hear a brand-new percussion piece, performed on the lush grounds of a former estate. You could even be right in the middle of a bustling metropolis, where the whoosh of city traffic provides an appropriate undercurrent to Gershwin’s Rhapsody in Blue.

The setting always plays a part in shaping the concert experience, but perhaps nowhere so dramatically as at a summer music festival, where the backdrop can be anything from a mountain, lake, or lawn to an outdoor park or sculpture center—and of course the interior of a concert hall. At the Tippet Rise festival in Fishtail, Mon-
tana, the dramatic Beartooth Mountains landscape combine with contemporary sculpture to provide a fresh perspective even to ears accustomed to hearing the chamber pieces on some of the concert programs there. At the Tanglewood Festival in the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts, summer home to the Boston Symphony Orchestra since 1940, “There’s something about the clarity of the air, the sky, the peacefulness of the landscape,” says Anthony Fogg, the BSO’s artistic administrator and Tanglewood director. Adding to Tanglewood’s appeal are the iconic lawns and special vibe of history: stories abound, like the time a fourteen-year-old Midori broke two E-strings while playing Bernstein’s Serenade after Plato’s Symposium, conducted by the composer. At the Grant Park Music Festival, the architecture of Chicago and stunning Pritzker Pavilion spark the music choices themselves. “Our programming really does reflect the energy of the city—it has that steely edge,” says Paul Winberg, Grant Park’s president and CEO. Whether it’s Gershwin in downtown Chicago or a quartet playing next to an earth-inspired outdoor sculpture in Montana, these moments make you hear the music and experience place in new ways.

TIPPET RISE: Sculpture, Vistas, Chamber Music Fishtail, Montana

In 2016, a new chamber music festival was launched in Montana’s Big Sky country. For co-founders Peter and Cathy Halstead, the rugged landscape of the Beartooth Mountains in Fishtail, Montana, presented a “clarity and sense of space,” says Peter Halstead. Inspired by Storm King, the center for outdoor sculpture 60 miles north of New York City, the couple bought a 10,260-acre ranch to create their own sculpture center, which would also include a summer music festival. Musicians play near outsized outdoor contemporary art sculptures like Mark di Suvero’s juking steel “Beethoven’s Quartet” and Ensemble Studio’s rock-like “Dono,” which looks like part of the set for Stanley Kubrick’s 2001, or perhaps a Doctor Who episode on a barren foreign planet. Having concerts next to these sculptures creates a close relationship between musicians and the audience, or as Peter Halstead describes the experience, “We are participating together in this extraordinary landscape.” The musicians enjoy the ranch setting of Tippet Rise, too. Pianist Lucas Debargue, who placed fourth in the International Tchaikovsky Competition in 2015, played at Tippet Rise in 2016 and told the Halsteads, “I want to play the land. I want to have that as part of what I’m saying.” Peter says that musicians have a sensibility that allows them to feel “not only the notes” but the space they are playing in as well. Tippet Rise also has a concert barn, its floor plan modelled on the Haydnsaal at Austria’s Esterhazy Palace, where Franz Josef Haydn was court musician in the 1700s.

This year, the festival will feature a commissioned world premiere: Aaron Jay Kernis’s String Quartet No. 4, performed by the Borromeo String Quartet. Other performers include the St. Luke’s Chamber Ensemble and the Calidore, Dover, and Escher string quartets. Chamber programs will feature music by Bach, Gershwin, Barber, Cage, Glass, Ned Rorem, Gabriel Kahane, and Timo Andres, and a special focus on Chopin and Robert and
Mass in B-flat ("Theresienmesse") and Walton’s Belshazzar’s Feast, Winberg says, “When you have that much energy coming off the stage, in this giant outdoor space, it’s pretty remarkable.”

**BOSTON LANDMARKS ORCHESTRA: Urban setting, community connection Boston, Massachusetts**

Since 2001, Wednesday evenings in July and August in Boston have meant free concerts by the Boston Landmarks Orchestra at the Hatch Shell along the Charles River Esplanade. Music Director Christopher Wilkins says the orchestra considers the city itself an inspiration for the orchestra’s programming: “The environment influences your experience of the music, and the music influences your experience of the environment.” In 2016, Boston Landmarks presented a bird-themed program in collaboration with the Massachusetts Audubon Society, featuring Ralph Vaughan Williams’s “The Wasps” Overture, Tan Dun’s **Passacaglia: Secret of Wind and Birds**, and Michael Gandolfi’s **The Garden of Cosmic Speculation Part I**. Boston Landmarks created an interactive video about endangered birds for audiences to watch on their phones as they listened to the music at the bird-themed concert. This year, the orchestra will premiere a commissioned piece by Stella Sung, **Onana**, about the sounds of the sea, focusing on animal sounds and human impact, in collaboration with the New England Aquarium.

The orchestra also partners with Camp Harbor View for at-risk children in Boston neighborhoods during the summer. “We hire local composers to write very simple pieces that these kids can learn, usually drumming pieces, and have them perform with us in a fully orchestrated version of what they learned,” says Arthur Rishi, Boston Landmarks’ artistic administrator. Last summer the orchestra performed Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9, Sibelius’s **Finlandia**, and Dvořák’s Symphony No. 8. Wilkins notes that he programs concerts with the outdoors in mind, and often opts for large-scale pieces, which work especially well when performing outdoors. “There’s no question that, in some ways, bigger is better,” says Wilkins.

**BRAVO! VAIL: Colorado Rockies, four resident orchestras Vail, Colorado**

When Artistic Director Anne-Marie McDermott first came to play at the Bravo! Vail festival, she says she had to pull off to the side of the road when the breathtaking size and beauty of the Colorado Rockies came into view. “You have all this sky and all these Aspen trees and the mountains that you’re looking at,” she says. “Hearing a Mahler Symphony outdoors in this environment really makes you hear the music in a whole different way.” In addition to other presentations, the festival typically features three or four orchestras in residence. For 2018, the New York Philharmonic, Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, and the U.K.-based Academy of St Martin in the Fields will appear. This year, the festival has commissioned Gabriella Smith to write a work for the Dover String Quartet and vocal ensemble Roomful of Teeth, which specializes in contemporary music and extended techniques. “The new score is all about extinction of certain animal species,” McDermott says. “It’s two years in a row now we’re getting commissioned works that are all about nature and the outdoors and wildlife.” Last year, David Ludwig wrote a piece for strings and piano titled **Pangea**, about tectonic plates and the changing planet. Executive Director Jennifer Teisinger says she sees the location of the amphitheater and the surrounding mountains, trees, and flowers as a big part of attending a Bravo! performance. “You’re going to feel the wind across your face, you might feel the sun on the back of your neck, you might hear birds chirping,” she says. Squirrels have been known to scamper across the stage during a performance. Musicians and audiences also take advantage of the area to go hiking, biking, golfing, and rafting. Teisinger says that for both musicians and audiences, “This is a summer playground.”

**STRINGS MUSIC FESTIVAL: Outdoor recreation destination, pavilion performances Steamboat Springs, Colorado**

In Steamboat Springs, Colorado, where skiing and outdoor recreation are king, place is a vital part of Strings Music Festival’s identity. “We’re a destination resort,” says Executive Director and CEO Elissa Greene. The festival orchestra plays in a 2008 purpose-built pavilion that seats 589 people and features glass walls that open out so musicians and audiences alike can hear the music while looking out at the trees and mountains. Greene says that when the pavilion was being designed, the festival wanted to remove the dividing barrier they feel a traditional wall represents: “We don’t want people to feel like they are going indoors on a beautiful summer day to enjoy beautiful music. They can kind of seamlessly go from one to the other.”