

John Kennedy long bio (800 words)

As a conductor, composer, and artistic leader, John Kennedy is a devoted agent of music as a living cultural force. With a legacy of artistic leadership fueled by creativity and experimentalism, Kennedy has led acclaimed performances worldwide of opera, orchestral, ballet, and new music.

Especially noted for his conducting of emotionally-charged interpretations of contemporary opera as well as his vast experience in the music of the past 100 years, Kennedy has played a visionary and significant role in the shifting musical landscape of the past three decades. With an unusual expertise in stylistically diverse music from traditional repertoire to the rigorously new, wide-ranging projects have brought him to the stages of the Lincoln Center Festival, New York City Ballet, the San Francisco Opera, Singapore International Festival of the Arts, Spoleto Festival USA, and many other organizations.

Anchored in his commitment to exploring the diversity and possibility of what opera can be, he conducted 11 World and U.S. premieres at Spoleto Festival USA from 2010 to 2022, including the World Premiere of Rhiannon Giddens' and Michael Abels' Pulitzer Prize-winning *Omar* in 2022, the 2018 U.S. Premiere of Liza Lim's *Tree of Codes*, and the 2015 World Premiere of Huang Ruo's *Paradise Interrupted*. He also led U.S. premieres of new operas by many of the leading composers of our time, including Dusapin, Francesconi, Glass, Hosokawa, Lachenmann, Nyman, Rihm, and Saariaho, in collaborations with directors including Phelim McDermott, Ong Keng Sen, Marianne Weems, and Chen Shi-Zheng.

During Kennedy's former tenure as Director of Orchestral Activities at Spoleto Festival USA, the Spoleto Festival Orchestra developed into the most competitive summer orchestra program in the United States. Conducting it in orchestral programs of wide scope and context, his recent programs included Zemlinsky's *Lyric Symphony* in a staged performance by Atom Egoyan, and U.S. premieres of works by Louis Andriessen, Philip Glass, Michael Gordon, Somei Satoh, Anna Thorvaldsdottir, Peteris Vasks, and many others. The festival's culture of presenting music as a living art form with social relevance ran deep, in part thanks to Kennedy's "Music in Time" series, which long placed the music of under-represented and young composers in the foreground, with carefully curated and contextualized programs centering musicians and audiences in hearing music experientially.

Recent appearances include the U.S. Premiere of Turnage's *Coraline* with West Edge Opera, to leading the South Korean premiere of Stravinsky's complete ballet *Pulcinella* in a staged version in Daejeon. Kennedy has conducted some of today's leading contemporary ensembles including Talea, Ensemble ACJW, sfSound, and Other Minds.

Early in his career, Kennedy worked closely with John Cage on one of his last tours and recording projects in 1991, as well as with Gian Carlo Menotti at the Spoleto Festival in

Italy. Kennedy's embrace of stylistic as well as cultural diversity has informed his approach to programming and audience development, initiating special projects, and championing neglected and challenging repertoire, such as his prominent role in resurrecting the music of Johanna Beyer.

Kennedy's musical life has included chapters in New York, Santa Fe, the Bay Area, and now Seattle. With a deep understanding of contemporary performance practice from Cage to Lachenmann and beyond, he founded two ensembles, Essential Music (New York), and Santa Fe New Music – organizations with which he premiered over 300 works. Essential Music toured worldwide and recorded extensively, performing everywhere in New York from The Kitchen to the 92nd Street Y to Lincoln Center (as a 112-musician orchestra). SFNM became a community pillar organization in Santa Fe, collaborating with many community organizations from the Santa Fe Opera to the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, and was awarded the Mayor's Award in the Arts in 2010.

As a composer, Kennedy's long-time focus has been on presenting and celebrating music as a form of environmental and social consciousness, positioning it in the Ecotone, or transitional biological spaces where evolution occurs. His music has been featured worldwide, from the Paris Festival d'Automne, to London's Wigmore Hall, the Kanagawa Arts Festival, Grand Teton Festival, Other Minds Festival, ISCM World New Music Days in Sydney, Sarasota Opera, and Santa Fe Opera. His monodrama opera *One Body* was recently presented at the Boston Court theater in Pasadena, sung by Timur. Numerous choreographers have worked with Mr. Kennedy's music, including Albert Evans in a solo ballet for Peter Boal, and Mr. Boal in a work for Pacific Northwest Ballet which was revived to open the 2020 PNB digital season.

Originally from Minnesota and a percussionist, he holds degrees from the Oberlin Conservatory and Northwestern University. He has conducted and taught at the Oberlin Conservatory and Santa Clara University. Kennedy served as artist/composer President of the American Music Center, from 2002-2005. His biographical entry in the New Grove Dictionary of Music/Oxford Music Online was established in 2011.

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