

Can music change minds? Can an orchestral score grapple with issues like social justice? Increasingly, orchestras and composers are addressing the fierce urgency of now in the music they play, the programs they present, either directly through explicit programmatic content or more abstractly, with an evocative title or dedication. Context is all. Beethoven originally dedicated his Third Symphony to Napoleon Bonaparte, in tribute to Bonaparte's *soi-disant* democratic idealism. When Bonaparte declared himself emperor, Beethoven scratched out the inscription and re-dedicated the work to a more generic hero. Same notes, different message. When composer Julia Wolfe started work on her *Fire in my mouth* for the New York Philharmonic a few years back, no one could have imagined that an oratorio about the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire would be stunningly relevant. But as debates about immigration, foreign workers, and labor seized national headlines this January, suddenly a multimedia score about a workplace tragedy in which more than a hundred workers perished—most of them young, female, and recent immigrants—felt ripped from the latest Facebook feed.

This issue of *Symphony* looks at the recent proliferation of musical works and activities by orchestras that bring forward the often overlooked narratives, identities, and communities that make up America today. As a long-lead publication, many stories in *Symphony* experience a considerable gestation; articles don't just happen overnight. Rest assured, no one is looking to ignore tradition and abolish the canon. Rather, orchestras and composers are thinking about the music they love, the legacy they revere, in new and different ways, building on a passionate reverence for the music as a point of departure for multiple dialogues.

Robert Sandla

***"The music has never sounded so rich,
so detailed, so warm..."***

**Thom Mariner about rejuvenated Cincinnati Music Hall
Mover & Makers Cincinnati
October 8, 2017**

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about the cover

The New York Philharmonic and Music Director Jaap van Zweden in the January 2019 world premiere of Julia Wolfe's multimedia oratorio *Fire in my mouth*, about the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire. In addition to archival footage, the work featured a chorus of 146 women and girls—the number of workers who died in the fire—from the chamber choir The Crossing and the Young People's Chorus of New York City. *Fire in my mouth* was part of Philharmonic events exploring the city's role as a beacon for immigrants. Photo by Chris Lee. See page 34 for coverage of how orchestras are addressing some of today's most pressing concerns.