

Paying It Forward

For composer **Andrew Norman**, it has been a banner year: he received the 2017 Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition for his orchestral work *Play*, and he was named Musical America's Composer of the Year. In his acceptance speech at the Musical America awards ceremony in December, Norman, 36, spoke eloquently about the importance of taking risks, and said the orchestral field should commission music from a more diverse group of composers.

I have been blessed with way more than my fair share of opportunities in this field, way more chances than I deserve to cultivate my voice, to grow as a musician, and to learn from great artists and mentors. I've also, and perhaps most importantly, been given the opportunity to fail, to fail repeatedly, and to fail in public, and I'm so grateful for that. I want to thank all of you for allowing me to fail, for allowing me to take risks, for allowing me to push myself and for supporting me throughout the process. This means the world to me.

And I can't help but feel that this gift of failure also puts me in an incredibly privileged position. I think about all the composers who have not been granted the same good fortune that I have, composers who don't get the chance to fail because they don't get the chance at all, and I wonder what we as a community can do about it.

We all in this room have the power to shape what classical music is and will be for future generations. We are not just the inheritors and interpreters of a tradition, we are also the definers of that tradition, and we have a responsibility to pass on an art form that is broader, more inclusive, and more socially engaged than the one we inherited.

So to those of you in this room, particularly those of you involved in the highest levels of the symphony orchestra world:



Andrew Norman speaks to the New York Philharmonic audience about *Split*, his 25-minute fantasy for piano and orchestra. James Gaffigan conducted the Philharmonic's world premiere of *Split*, with pianist Jeffrey Kahane, on December 10, 2015.

the next time you program another symphony or concerto or overture from the standard repertoire, consider what you are giving up by doing so. You are giving up the chance to say something meaningful, important, thought-provoking, necessary, and specific about our own time. You are giving up the chance to give voice to a person, an experience, a point of view that



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we don't already have in the concert hall. You are giving up the chance to make the canon we will pass on less white, less male, less Eurocentrically homogeneous, and more representative of the diverse, multifaceted world in which we live.

The music of the past is undoubtedly transformative, powerful, and amazing; it is one of the great legacies of Western

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civilization, and it deserves and demands to be heard for generations to come. But I wonder sometimes if we aren't sacrificing this art form's future in order to preserve its storied past.

I believe that the most amazing masterpieces of classical music the world has ever known have yet to be written. I believe there are Mozarts and Beethovens born every day, and it is our foremost responsibility as musical citizens to find them, to cultivate them, to give them plenty of opportunities to succeed and to fail, and ultimately to let them take the art form to places we cannot yet imagine. **S**

ANDREW NORMAN's works have been performed by the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Minnesota Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, and Seattle Symphony, among others. He is on the faculty at the USC Thornton School of Music and is director of the Composer Fellowship Program at the Los Angeles Philharmonic.