



## PEMcast 001

### Music

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### Transcript:

[INTRO MUSIC WITH OPERA VOCALS]

**Chip Van Dyke, Host:** Welcome to the PEMcast, the official podcast of the Peabody Essex Museum. My name is Chip Van Dyke. I am the media production manager here at the museum, and with me is--

**Dinah Cardin, Host:** Dinah Cardin, special projects writer and press officer at the Peabody Essex Museum.

**Chip:** Dinah, what are we listening to right now?

[OPERA MUSIC CONTINUES]

**Dinah:** This is Anthony Roth Costanzo. He is a rising star in the opera world who comes to us from the Met. He's a counter-tenor. He will be coming to the Peabody Essex Museum this June. We're so excited to have this counter-tenor come perform for us.

**Chip:** I found out what a counter-tenor is, because I don't know much about the opera world, but, um, a counter-tenor is a classification of a male vocalist. It's also known as an alto. And if you think of, uh, musical instruments, um, and particularly like saxophones, you've got, like, an alto saxophone, a tenor saxophone. The alto's the higher, the tenor's the lower, and then there's the bass. So if he were a woman, he might be classified as a contralto or a soprano, but, uh, our friend Anthony Roth Costanzo is in fact a counter-tenor.

**Dinah:** We are so excited to have him here because we're excited right now at the museum about music. Our Composer-in-Residence, Matthew Aucoin, has been here two other times, and now he's coming back for his third concert, all about the myth of Orpheus.

**Chip:** Right.

**Dinah:** On June 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, and he'll be bringing Anthony with him as Orpheus.

**Chip:** Matt Aucoin did a great piece on our blog, uh, sort of describing what he's going to do. It's really fascinating stuff. He'll be conducting a piece by Christoph Willibald Gluck, an opera entitled *Orfeo ed Euridice*, and, uh, he'll also be performing his own piece, *The Orphic Moment*, and that, uh, I had to look into that because I'm not as familiar, even though I remember Orpheus from high school and, you know, learning about Orpheus, I was really vague on the specifics of what the Orphic moment might mean, and so—

**Dinah:** It's our Orphic moment here, Chip—

**Chip:** Right.

**Dinah:** --We've all been, you know, looking at those paintings, watching all these films, it is the Orphic moment right now at PEM. [Laughs]

**Chip:** Well, right. We had a painting in our "[Golden](#)" show called [Orpheus Charming the Animals](#). You might have seen it in that show. Um. And essentially, Orpheus is the, uh, father of songs. He's known as the father of songs. He was a musician, a poet, a prophet of ancient Greek religion and myth. Uh, he was born of a king and a muse. He was this, uh, virtuoso and he was an inspiration to musicians. What was that thing that, uh, that Aucoin included in his blog post? Something about, uh—

**Dinah:** He said it was—

**Chip:** --bedtime stories?

**Dinah:** --Yeah, he said that, uh, the Orpheus story is the number one favorite bedtime story of all musicians. Um. And he had a really interesting thing to say about Orpheus's, as you like to say, Chip, the one thing he was asked to do and couldn't get right. [Laughs] What is that story?

**Chip:** Yeah, so, right. Orpheus, um, was married to Euridice. You don't need to know who she is, but you do need to know that, uh, Euridice is Orpheus's wife, and she dies, and she goes down to the underworld, and Orpheus, of course, is distraught by this and he's, you know, working out his anger and sadness through his music. And he decides to, uh, go down to the underworld and get her back. So he goes to the underworld and actually succeeds in making Hades, the God of the underworld, cry, and gets him to agree to release Euridice back to the world of the living.

**Dinah:** Because Orpheus can charm anyone with his beautiful music.

**Chip:** That's right.

**Dinah:** He charmed animals. He charmed, I read somewhere, it might have been Wikipedia, he can charm a stone.

**Chip:** Yes. So, he charms the stone-hearted Hades and he, uh, and Hades gives him back his wife on one condition. And that is that he's not allowed to look back on the way back to the world of the living.

**Dinah:** It sounds easy, doesn't it?

**Chip:** Uh. Sounds like a very simple project. Uh, a very simple request. And, uh, and what does Orpheus do?

**Dinah:** He looks back.

[BOTH LAUGHING]

**Chip:** The one thing he was asked to do. So—

**Dinah:** She's so beautiful. I mean, he just can't, he's missed her. She's been in the underworld. He just wants to make sure she's okay.

- Chip:** I mean, I think, maybe like anyone else, when I read this, I was aghast. I mean, like, this sets up Orpheus and probably one of the stupidest characters in Greek myth. He came down to the underworld with a specific purpose of returning, of bringing his wife back with him, and he just fails miserably at doing this. And, uh, in the worst kind of way. In the worst kind of, uh, in the worst kind of way. So, uh, you know, what Matt Aucoin proposes here, he poses the question in his blog post, that, you know, maybe it wasn't a goof. Maybe it wasn't, uh, a slip up. Maybe he intentionally, uh, wanted to not have Euridice back. Which is sort of, uh, an interesting thing. You know, there are a lot of interpretations, there are a lot of different versions of the Orpheus tale, and in this one in particular, uh, you know, we see him not succeed in bringing Euridice back. Sometimes Euridice does return back to the world of the living with him.
- Dinah:** The reason he doesn't want her back, according to Matt, right, is so, is so that he can continue to make this beautiful, weeping music for the rest of eternity, as he's weeping for his lost wife. So, essentially he's just a selfish artist.
- Chip:** Right. And I think Aucoin maybe, uh, proposes that maybe if Euridice came back with him, that maybe he wouldn't be the musician that is celebrated today, and, uh, and so that's sort of, uh, an inspiration for the piece that we'll be hearing in June.
- Dinah:** And so, as we've been exploring all these things, uh, we've been looking at these funky films made in the sixties. In this instance, Orpheus is Orphée, the cool poet on the left bank in Paris, and uh, tell us what you were watching, I think last night, on this.
- Chip:** So it's part of Jean Cocteau's "Orphic Trilogy." Uh, he, it's a three part series. So first is *The Blood of the Poet*, I think. And then there's *Orpheus*, and then there's *The Testament of Orpheus*. And, uh, they're just these really strange interpretations of the tale of Orpheus. Um, at one point, um, Jean Cocteau even includes himself in the film. Uh, he's, uh, speared by – you know, in the third film – he's speared by this Minotaur centurion. And I showed that to Dinah the other day, she loved that.
- Dinah:** [Laughs] That was really disgusting and gross.
- Chip:** Yeah.
- Dinah:** Pretty amazing, simple special effects.
- Chip:** But Dinah, I think, yeah, you might have a more delicate constitution than most about this kind of stuff—
- Dinah:** I admit. Admittedly.
- Chip:** It was actually, it was very good special effects for the time. And there's this great lightning bolt strike and crash of symbols when the spear actually plunges through his chest—from his back through his chest—so, kind of amazing, probably, for the time. It was made in, that one was made in 1960. Uh, the *Orpheus*, the second film, was made in 1950, I believe. And, uh, actually *The Testament of Orpheus*, there's an interesting story to that. The third film, um, Pablo Picasso is, uh, makes a cameo in this film. [Dinah laughs] And, uh, he, and it's shot in one of the most strange places, I think. They use it as sort of a setting for Hades of the underworld, I believe. But, um, the place itself is a little, uh, actually very large, cavernous limestone caverns outside of Les Baux in France, which is very close to Aix-En-Provence. And I actually had a chance to visit these caves—
- Dinah:** Lucky!

**Chip:** --not knowing anything about *The Testament of Orpheus*. And, um, there's an installation there called [Carrières de Lumières](#). I'm going to play you a clip now from my experience there because I brought a microphone with me. Corbett, can you cue that track up for us?

[RECORDED MUSIC: AIRY, PIANO AND STRINGS]

**Dinah:** How many years ago were you there, Chip?

**Chip:** Um, it was maybe two years ago. So, what you're listening to, this terrible recording that you're listening to, is of, actually, I'm walking around in these massive caverns, and, uh, they've installed, um, something like 70 projectors, and all these speakers into these limestone caves that were essentially carved out by miners, uh, looking for bauxite. Oh, and you can see pictures of my experience there on the blog. We'll post some pictures so you guys can actually see these caverns, but I also encourage you to head over to [Carrières de Lumières](#), the website for this place, and check it out, too. It's an amazing place. The time I was there, they were projecting Gaugin and Van Gogh. And, uh, so they were showing back and forth the paintings of Gaugin and Van Gogh—

**Dinah:** Through projections.

**Chip:** Yup. And it was an exploration of color. It was very beautiful, and, you know, all the music was playing throughout the caverns. So it was, sort of, an interesting way to look at art. So this is playing in the majority of the space, the space where *The Testament of Orpheus* was filmed. And then around the corner, uh, sort of in a separate part of the caverns, they're actually playing the film, uh, Jean Cocteau's film, *The Testament of Orpheus*, so it was a very surreal experience to sit down and watch this film projected onto the cavern walls. So I think it's the first time I've ever watched a film, uh, in the setting of where the film was shot. It was very surreal, especially with this kind of space.

**Dinah:** And if we went there right now, the Orpheus film would be playing?

**Chip:** I think they just let that play out all the time.

**Dinah:** Wow. This, you know, this brings us to a topic that we've been talking quite a bit about lately, and that is music and sound in specific places. Um, back to Matt Aucoin. His two other concerts were held in the Atrium here at the museum, but this one is actually going to be in East India Marine Hall.

**Chip:** Yeah, let's, let's listen to... We've got, I brought some clips with me of the previous Aucoin pieces just to sort of give us a sense of what he's already done for us here so far. He's performed twice already, the first piece we're going to listen to is his first performance here at the museum in the Atrium called *Tracing a Line*.

[ORCHESTRA MUSIC WITH TWO VOCALISTS PERFORMED IN GERMAN]

**Dinah:** You know, that was so exciting. I went to a lot of these rehearsals, and he brings these young musicians and singers from all over, and the energy was just incredible.

**Chip:** Yeah. This was done in the round. Maybe you can't really call it the round if it's a concert, but they were playing centrally located in the Atrium, and the seating radiated out from the center of the room, and so they were all over the place with, you know, musicians on the balconies and, you know, this wonderful sort of morphing and changing group of musicians in the center area. It was very interesting, and there was a lot, um, a lot of good, um, programming, uh, sort of text to go

along with this so you could sort of get into the headspace of what Aucoin is really working with here. Um, and, you know, that's a point I want to make about Matt Aucoin is that when he comes here he's really exploring an idea thoroughly. He's not just bringing Mozart to the Atrium. He's exploring an idea and a theme and really pushing the limits of experimentation, and I think you'll really be able to tell that from the second piece that we have of his, which is from his second performance here at the museum called *Words and Music*.

[VOILIN AND PIANO MUSIC]

**Dinah:** What's great about this, it was so avant-garde. It gets really cool when it starts in with the German spoken word. You know, Matt Aucoin is a 2012 graduate of Harvard, so this guy is young and he works with young rising stars.

**Chip:** So the thing I got from this, and you know, this is all very, very experimental stuff. The thing I kind of got from this is he was very much exploring the relationship—well, obviously, the title of the piece is called *Words and Music*, so he's really exploring that relationship between the two and, uh, you can almost hear the sentence structure in what he's working on right here. This is only one section of a ninety minute piece, and it explores various things. He goes into Mozart at the end of it. There's spoken word poetry and projection and paintings. Um, words on the wall. And, you know, so you can tell that every time Matt Aucoin comes here, he's going to be doing something unexpected. And, uh, with this third piece in the East India Marine Hall this time, we're, uh, we're really curious about how Orpheus and opera and these things sort of blend together for Matt.

**Dinah:** And the great thing, you know, it's going to be set in this beautiful room with some of our oldest pieces from our collection and with the figureheads from the ships looking down on us.

**Chip:** Yeah, this isn't the first time we've had music playing in East India Marine Hall. We've had a lot of great concerts here, a lot of great lectures. But the piece that comes to mind for me is one of our FreePort series, uh, [FreePort \[No. 003\]](#), with Susan Philipsz, called *If I with you would go*. Oddly enough, it was, you know, she chose a story that had multiple interpretations, much like Orpheus has, and uh...

**Dinah:** Another myth, yeah.

**Chip:** It's called the Ship Carpenter's, or the House Carpenter's Wife. And uh, and so she chose of the many different varieties, uh, the many different versions of this tale, she chose eight of them to record herself singing each of these pieces and then playing out in sort of, uh, Greek chorus into the East India Marine Hall itself. And I think I grabbed one piece in particular, just so you could get a sense of what at least one of those tracks sounds like. It's not recorded in East India Marine Hall, this is just the recording itself.

[RECORDED VOCALS, Susan Philipsz: "He's given her a pair of shoes to hold her from the cold. The one side of them velvaret, and the other beaten gold. Up she has ta'en her little wee son, and given kisses three. Says fare ye well, my little wee son. I'm gone to sail the sea."]

**Dinah:** So, Susan's a Turner Prize winner, this lovely Scottish lady.

**Chip:** Yeah, I don't think she would ever, uh, claim to be a fantastic singer, you know, she purposefully chose her own voice, she uses her voice in a lot of her work. And to me it sort of sounds like a woman maybe strolling along the ocean, singing to herself. She's not a professional singer, you know, in a studio. She's a woman with a song in her heart, and she's just, you know, walking along

and singing this tune, and so it's got some imperfection in it because, you know, Susan is not a singer like our, like our friend, um—

**Dinah:** Anthony.

**Chip:** --Anthony Roth Costanzo, but, you know, she definitely, uh, she pulls this whole piece together and it's just, it was a wonderful piece that sort of had this great atmosphere in the space.

**Dinah:** And of course that space being a maritime-themed kind of space, and this is the myth of a woman following this gorgeous, handsome devil out to his ship on the ocean, and her turns out indeed to be the devil. Man, it's tough.

**Chip:** So many connections! [Dinah laughs] So many connections back to Orpheus, I think. So, since we're talking about music today, I thought I'd bring a few clips with me to share, and , uh, Dinah, I'm gonna play one for you, now, and, uh, maybe you can guess where it was recorded.

[RECORDED MUSIC: POLYPHONIC WIND INSTRUMENT PLAYING CHINESE MUSIC]

**Dinah:** Uh.

**Chip:** Could you even tell me what the instrument is?

**Dinah:** No, I cannot. But I can guess perhaps that this was recorded in our Chinese house?

**Chip:** Ah, very good! This is Hsu Shan Bing recorded live in the Chinese house, Yin Yu Tang, at Lunar New Year, I believe it was 2009. Um, and he is playing the [sheng](#), spelled s-h-e-n-g.

**Dinah:** And the Chinese house, of course, here at PEM is the house that was brought over from China and reconstructed here, that is magnificent.

**Chip:** By the way, we have a sheng in our collection. So, I'm not sure it's on view right now, but it has been on view in the past. Sort of a, it looks like sort of a miniature organ, like a church organ, in a pipe. [laughs] So, uh...

**Dinah:** So, we leave you now with a local artist from Salem, Forrest James, who worked for many years here at PEM and will now be performing at our monthly party series. This one is called, uh—

**Chip:** Free Wheeling!

**Dinah:** Free Wheeling.

**Chip:** Bike Night.

**Dinah:** Bike Night. Bike Night is actually free to everyone, and it's on Thursday, May 15<sup>th</sup>. It's BYOB, Bring Your Own Bike. We've got plenty of bike racks outside the museum, and we've got all kinds of groups coming. Bikes Not Bombs coming from Jamaica Plain. We've got Skull, a bike chopper gang based out of Somerville, bringing their sculpted cycle masterpieces. The Salem Bike Path Committee will be helping us make an interactive Bike Map for Salem. And we've got local bike shops doing workshops and demonstrating how to fix a flat.

[RECORDED MUSIC BEGINS: SYNTH, SLOW BEATS, AMBIENT VOCALS]

Chip: And, of course, Forrest James will be performing there. And uh, right now we're going to one of his tracks. One of his most recent posts on Soundcloud, you can find him at [Forrest James on Soundcloud](#), and, uh, this track is called "[Mockingbird](#)". Thank you for joining us.

Dinah: See you next time.

[SYNTH MUSIC CONTINUES FOR APPROX. 3 MINUTES]

[END]