

Jack Perla

Composer & Pianist

Composer and pianist Jack Perla is active in opera, jazz, chamber and orchestra music. His music is widely performed, and he has played in the U.S., Europe, India and Japan. Beginning over twenty five years ago in New York with his group Music Without Walls and continuing after moving to San Francisco, Jack has steadily forged a reputation for his unique cross-fertilization of jazz, improvisation and classical music. He's been commissioned by the Los Angeles Opera, Opera Theatre St. Louis, Houston Grand Opera, Seattle Opera, The Paul Dresher Ensemble, TwoSense, MATA, and many other performers and organizations.

Jack's latest opera ***Shalimar the Clown***, a two-act, full length work based on the novel by Salman Rushdie, received its world premiere in June 2016 at Opera Theater St. Louis. Rajiv Joseph, nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*, created the libretto, and James Robinson, one of America's most sought-after stage directors, directed the production. Jayce Ogren conducted and Sean Pannikar created the title role, supported by Andriana Chuchman, Aubrey Allicock, Gregory Dahl, and Katharine Goeldner. Opera Theater St. Louis is widely-loved for its spring festival of inventive productions featuring the finest American singers accompanied by members of the St. Louis Symphony. ***Shalimar the Clown*** was overwhelmingly praised in the national press. The Wall Street Journal said: "*Jack Perla's haunting "Shalimar the Clown" succeeds at being topical, literary and theatrical.*" The New York Times described its "...*genuinely out-of-the-box composing, like the sharply drawn duel of wits between Boonyi (Andriana Chuchman) and the cunning, blackmailing schoolteacher (Geoffrey Agpalo).*" The Chicago Tribune said: "*His score incorporates the local color of Indian ragas, played on the sitar and tabla, conspiring with Joseph's taut libretto to invest Rushdie's heartbreaking lament with the dramatic resonance of modern Shakespearean tragedy.*" And in Opera News: "*Perla compensated, letting the music fill in the blank spaces, integrating reflective arias into the propulsive plot with the finesse of Puccini.*" In October 2015 ***Shalimar the Clown*** was awarded a development residency with Opera Fusion, a collaborative program of Cincinnati Opera and the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (CCM) Opera program, funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

An American Dream, a one-act opera with libretto by writer Jessica Murphy-Moo (The Atlantic, The New Yorker), received its world-premiere with Seattle Opera at McCaw Hall in August 2015. Only the second commission in Seattle Opera's thirty-year history, ***An American Dream*** began with personal narratives drawn from interviews exploring how precious possessions confer a connection to community and culture. Jack worked closely with Ms. Murphy-Moo to create a darkly nuanced morality play on the conflict between a U.S. soldier and a Japanese family during the internment and incarceration of Japanese-American citizens on U.S. soil in the final years of WW II. Peter Kazaras directed the premiere, Judith Yan conducted, and the cast featured Morgan Smith, D'Ana Lombard, Hae Ji Chang, Adam Lau, and Nina Yoshida-Nelsen. In addition to its sold-out performances, ***An American Dream*** garnered wide critical praise. The Seattle

Times called it a “...*gripping piece of musical theater*” and City Arts Magazine described it thus: “*It’s a triumph. It’s riveting. It’s unsettling and uncomfortable. It’s strong. For many it will be emotional. The whole was a tour de force, which must return, soon.*”

Jonah and the Whale, commissioned by the Los Angeles Opera, received its world premiere in March 2014 at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Angels with the Los Angeles Opera, James Conlon conducting. Based on the Old Testament story, this one act opera was a collaboration with librettist Velina Hasu Houston, recipient of commissions from the Manhattan Theatre Club, Asia Society, Lila Wallace-Readers Digest Foundation, Mark Taper Forum, and the Goodman Theatre. In reviewing the premiere, The Los Angeles Daily News wrote: “*The production was charming and the singing glorious. Matthew O’Neill as Jonah projected in strong tones the proper reluctance to leave Israel, where he was quite comfortable, to become a prophet in Assyria, an enemy nation. Composer Jack Perla and librettist Velina Hasu Houston delivered a gorgeous work that included songs to be sung by the congregation based in part on old American folk tunes.*” ***Jonah and the Whale*** will be reprised at LA Opera in 2017.

River of Light, with librettist Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (*The Mistress of Spices, Daughter of My Heart*), received its premiere at the Asia Society Texas Center in March 2014. Jack’s second commission from Houston Grand Opera, it was the final opera in the company’s *East + West* series celebrating cultural intersections in Houston. ***River of Light*** received its West Coast premier in 2015 with Festival Opera, Oakland, CA. The production earned wide critical praise, including the following from Joshua Kosman in the San Francisco Chronicle: “*Perla’s score, for a quintet of Indian and Western instruments, is a subtly cross-pollinated marvel, blending long, arching melodies with bursts of coloratura in ways that never seem forced. Meera’s anguished central aria about feeling marooned in a land far from her family and traditions took wing on the strength of Perla’s tender writing and Kherani’s stirring performance.*”

Also in 2014, Opera Memphis commissioned and premiered ***Mich and the Moon*** as part ***The Ghosts of Crosstown***, a site-specific project comprising five short operas on the notion of ghosts inhabiting industrial-era structures abandoned to changing economies, and ***Betty Box Office***, with librettist Ken Gass, founding director of Toronto’s Factory Theater, was produced as a short by BravoFACT, a Canadian fund supporting independent film.

Love/Hate, Jack’s chamber opera with librettist Rob Bailis, received its world premiere in April 2012 in a co-production with the Opera Center of San Francisco Opera and ODC Theater, which co-commissioned the work with American Opera Projects. The cast featured singers from the Opera Center’s Adler Program, directed by Sheri Greenawald. In September 2010 Center City Opera presented scenes from ***Love/Hate*** as part of the Philadelphia Fringe Festival of the Arts, and in March 2009 ***Love/Hate*** was presented by the Manhattan School of Music Opera Program at MSM and the Galapagos Artspace. ***Love/Hate*** was most recently performed at Maryland Opera Theater in March

2014. Prior to this, Jack's first Houston Grand Opera commission was for **Courtside**. Created with librettist Eugenie Chan, resident playwright at New Dramatists and playwright emerita at the Cutting Ball Theater, **Courtside** had its world premiere in 2011 and was reprised at the 2012 Houston International Festival.

Jack remains active composing, performing and recording jazz, chamber and symphonic music. **Enormous Changes**, Jack's third jazz recording, was released on Seattle-based Origin Records label in June 2015. Jack wrote lyrics and music for this collection of fourteen songs featuring San Francisco and New York indie and jazz musicians. The recording was co-produced with Ben Yonas, mixed by Adam Munoz at Fantasy Studios, and mastered by Alan Silverman. Chris Spector, in Midwest Record, wrote the following: "A very personal album from a cat that has had his share of enormous changes over the last few years, Perla takes a break from his opera world commissions and heads back to late 60s jazz rock for a mental and spiritual cleansing that finds him right in the pocket of pre-fusion where the seeds were being sown." And KUCI Irvine's Hobart Taylor reviewed the album thus: "Jazz songs, originals, with the wit and charm of Joni Mitchell and the pop precision of Sting."

Recent chamber & symphonic music activity includes **Persistence of the Blues**, commissioned by the Barlow Endowment for Music Composition and composed for **TwoSense** (Lisa Moore, piano & Ashley Bathgate, cello), which received its premiere at the University of South Carolina in October 2013. **The Rhyme is Reason**, commissioned by East Bay Performing Arts with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, received its premiere in June 2013 with the Oakland Youth Orchestra.

Jack's music can also be heard on a new recording on Pentatone records, produced by Job Maarse, featuring composers Norman Dello Joio, John Corigliano, David Gardner and Gordon Getty, soprano Lisa Delan and cellist Matt Haimovitz. And **Pretty Boy**, a new recording of chamber & vocal music released in Spring 2016, features performances by The Paul Drescher Ensemble and Jack's group Music Without Walls. The title track is based on the final moments in the life of bank robber and folk hero Pretty Boy Floyd. Commissioned by the Paul Drescher Ensemble and the Northern California Composers Commissioning Project, **Pretty Boy** was premiered at Z-space San Francisco in December 2012. The second composition on the recording, **On a Train Heading South**, was commissioned by ODC Dance with support from the National Endowment for the Arts. A collaboration with choreographer Brenda Way and designer Alex V. Nichols, it was written for the company's 2005 season, with performances at Jacob's Pillow, the Yerba Buena Center for Performing Arts and the Joyce Theater.

Following the premiere of **On a Train Heading South**, Jack was named Artist-in-Residence at ODC Theater from 2006 to 2009. During the same time period he was invited to participate in American Opera Projects' *Composers and the Voice* and Tapestry New Opera's *LibLab* program, two influential residencies that in many ways began his journey into composing for the stage. Other recent jazz and chamber music performances include the Blaine Jazz Festival in Northern Washington (June 2011), the

Noe Valley Chamber Music Series (May 2010) in San Francisco, and the White Pines Festival in Minnesota (June 2010) with Jorja Fleezanis, Charles Lazarus and the Miro Quartet.

The James Irvine Foundation commissioned Jack in 2002 for ***Pixels at an Exhibition***, premiered in 2003 with Patrick Summers conducting the Oakland East Bay Symphony, which also commissioned and premiered ***Trane of Thought*** in 1999. In addition, his music has been performed and/or presented by the Louisiana and Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestras, Oakland East Bay Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Absolute Ensemble (New York City), New Music Chicago, Music at the Anthology (New York), Yerba Buena Arts Center (San Francisco), Merkin Concert Hall (New York) and the British Music Information Center (London). Jack is also the recipient of awards from the the American Composers Forum (Subito 2013 & 2011), the Barlow Endowment for Music Composition (2011), USA Songwriters Competition (2011), the Argosy Foundation Contemporary Music Fund (2006), the American Music Center (2005), Meet the Composer (2003), James Irvine Foundation (1999) and the Civic Orchestra of Chicago (1990). He has been a resident at the Yaddo, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts and the MacDowell colony, most recently in 2014.

In 1997 Jack received the Thelonious Monk Institute Jazz Composers Award, designated by Terrance Blanchard, Pat Metheny and Michael Brecker. Subsequently Jack performed at the Texaco New York Jazz Festival, The Knitting Factory (NY), the Tampere Jazz Festival (Finland), the Big Sur, Monterey and Pacifica Jazz Festivals, and the Millennium Festival (England). He has performed with Seamus Blake, Rodney Whitaker, Gene Jackson, Kenny Davis, Kermit Driscoll, Craig Handy, Scott Wendholt, Steve Smith, Kai Eckhardt, Paul Hanson and many others. In 1998, he toured Japan and was featured on the Tokyo television program LP Jazz Time. Jack's debut CD, ***Swimming Lessons for the Dead***, features Roman Candles, the piece that won the Monk award. The recording garnered wide critical praise, including Downbeat Magazine and Jazz Times. Jack's second Jazz CD, ***The Visit***, features Will Kennedy, Paul McCandless, Karl Perazzo, Darol Anger and Mike Marshall. Jack has also performed and recorded with Zakir Hussain, Aashish Khan, Krishna Bhatt and Ronu Majumdar, and is featured on "Night Spinner", George Brook's 1998 recording produced by Zakir Hussain, with Hussain, Sultan Khan and Aashish Khan.

Jack grew up in Brooklyn and lived in New York City while attending NYU and the Manhattan School of Music. After MSM he formed Music Without Walls, featuring violinist Mark Feldman, woodwind virtuosos Rob DeBellis and Marty Ehrlich, cellist Erik Friedlander, percussionist Kory Grossman and bassist John Goldsby. Perla led the group through several seasons of New York area concerts before heading west to the Bay Area in 1996, where he established the West Coast edition of the group. He earned his DMA in composition from the Yale School of Music, where he studied with Jacob Druckman, Martin Bresnick and Lukas Foss. He earned his BM and MM from the Manhattan School of Music, where he studied with John Corigliano, and his BA from New York University. He currently lives and works in San Francisco.