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# The Shimmering Nebulae of Paola Prestini's 'Hubble Cantata'



'Paola Prestini: The Hubble Cantata'

( VIA Records )

May 15, 2017 · by [Daniel Stephen Johnson](#)

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Paola Prestini is more than a composer. Co-founder of the production company [VisionIntoArt](#) (VIA) and its recording offshoot VIA Records, her latest institutional triumph is [National Sawdust](#), the audiophile listening venue in Williamsburg that instantly became Brooklyn's not-just-classical hotspot.

And her new VIA Records release, *The Hubble Cantata*, is a more than a piece of music. It is a new kind of collaboration: a nexus of art and science.

On the scientific side, the piece features spoken narration by astrophysicist Mario Livio, exploring the place of Earth and its passengers among the stars and generally asking the Big Questions provoked by our view of the heavens. A stereo recording, unfortunately, cannot fully convey the 3D virtual reality sound – designed by [Arup](#), the same firm that created the acoustics of National Sawdust and, among other high-profile projects, New York's new Second Avenue Subway – that accompany live performances of the work, but vestiges of the experience remain in the atmospheric electronic elements of the score.

And the project's other collaborators are no less – and there is no other word for them – stellar. The libretto is by Royce Vavrek, the wordsmith behind the 21st-century's most acclaimed American operas (*Breaking the Waves*, *Dog Days*), and soprano Jessica Rivera's passionate solos transmute the scientific stuff of the text into pure theater. Baritone Nathan Gunn's voice reminds you why he is one of opera's biggest names, and Julian Wachner steers not only his own Washington Chorus and Novus NY but also the Brooklyn Youth Chorus and the Norwegian string ensemble 1B1 through Prestini's shimmering nebulae of sound.

For a piece that explicitly takes as its subject the seeming insignificance of mankind against the sublime and infinite expanses of outer space, *The Hubble Cantata's* focus is very much on the human. This studio recording is not awash in reverb but as raw and clear as a live recording, allowing us to hear the minutest details of these terrestrial voices as they lead us on a voyage through the stars.

***Paola Prestini: The Hubble Cantata***

[VIA Records](#) | Released May 19, 2017 | [Available on iTunes](#)

*This audio is no longer available.*

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### Jamie Klenetsky Fay

Truly beautiful!!

May 18, 2017, 12:24 PM

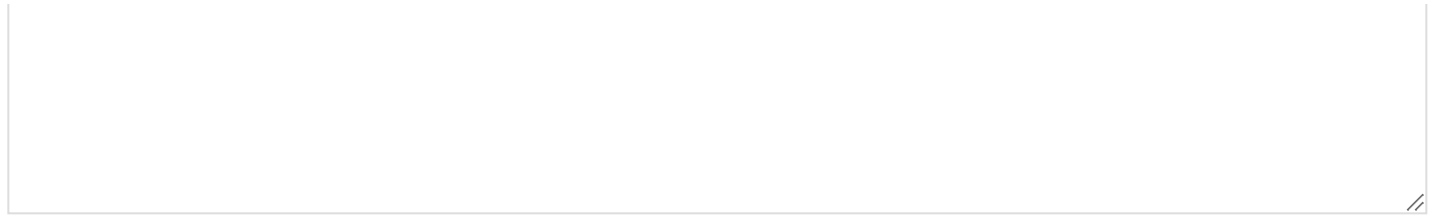
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