


*On an expanse of land near Fishtail,
an audacious dream takes shape: sharing
world-class art with anyone who wants it*

On the Rise

BY ALEXIS MARIE ADAMS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIK PETERSEN



Children use rubber mallets to experience *Beethoven's Quartet*, by Mark di Suvero, as the sun sets at Tippet Rise Art Center.

IN THE OLIVIER MUSIC BARN AT THE NEW Tippet Rise Art Center near Fishtail, notes from Matt Haimovitz's 300-year-old cello float through the air as he accompanies the Dover String Quartet in a performance of Schubert. Behind them, an expansive picture window reveals storm clouds rolling down from the Beartooth-Absaroka front. Eventually, the clouds descend on the concert hall, unleashing rain, wind and thunder, which rumbles around the building like pins in an immense bowling alley. Haimovitz and the Dover String Quartet carry on. The sounds of violin, viola, two cellos and thunderstorm intertwine.

Tippet Rise is dedicated to “creating connections between music, art and nature.” What that looks like, in this case, is nothing short of awe-inspiring. To begin with, there’s the Center’s property, all 11,500 acres of it. Vast and uncluttered, it rolls like grassy waves in all directions. And then there is the art: mammoth outdoor sculptures scattered across the ranch, exposed to rain, sun and snow and the rushing winds. So describing Tippet Rise, you could call it the world’s largest sculpture park, and you would be right, but then there is the music. Three performance spaces also occupy the land, including the Olivier Music Barn, a world-class concert hall that hosts some of today’s best classical musicians: performers like Haimovitz, whose tours normally take them to Paris, Moscow, London. Performers who’d never been to Montana before Tippet Rise.

Married 36 years and friends since they were 16, Peter and Cathy Halstead, the founders of Tippet Rise, were raised to be philanthropists. Cathy’s father, Sidney Frank, was forced to leave Brown University when he ran out of money at the end of his freshman year, but he went on to earn billions by developing and marketing liquor. Renowned for his successes, he was also known for the large sums of money he gave away. Peter Halstead comes from a long line of oil and banking executives; his family was also generous. Both Halsteads serve as trustees of the Sidney E. Frank Foundation, which

Above, from left, Caroline Goulding, Christopher O’Riley, Matt Haimovitz and John-Bruce Yeh perform in the Olivier Barn.

At right, Cathy and Peter Halstead are co-founders of Tippet Rise.



If you go

Tippet Rise Art Center is open to the public June through September from Fridays through Sundays, 10am to 4pm. Admission to tour the sculptures is free, but daily tours are capped at 100, so reservations should be made. Personal vehicles are not allowed beyond the parking area near the visitor center. Electric shuttles tour the sculptures on a regular schedule. Art Center tours take about two hours. Guests are welcome to cycle or walk the sculpture trail. Maps are available on the Tippet Rise website (www.tippetrise.org).

Although the Center will be closed from late September through May for sculpture tours, special events will occur at Tippet Rise during those months.

Tippet Rise Art Center is located outside of Fishtail, Montana, about an hour southwest of Billings. To make reservations for concerts, films, tours and other events, or to learn more about the center, visit www.tippetrise.org.

makes more than 90 grants annually to charities in the United States and England. They also serve on the Board of Directors of the Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors and created the Cathy and Peter Halstead Foundation. They've spent their lives giving. They've also spent their lives immersed in the arts. Cathy is an abstract painter who has shown around the world. Peter is a poet and a classical pianist who collects Steinway pianos.

This combination—a lifelong passion for the arts along with a sense of philanthropy that comes almost as naturally as breathing—has resulted in Tippet Rise's grand and almost unbelievable mission: to make world-class art and music accessible to everyone. And this is also why one cannot dismiss this shiny new art center—a miracle to those Montanans who hanker to witness, live, the classical music performances we hear broadcast on National Public Radio—as vainglorious, a place for the elite. Admission to tour the sculptures is free. Concert tickets cost \$10, unless you're under 18, in which case they're free. The between-concert barbecues also cost \$10. Again, for kids, food is free (never mind if your 16-year-old son is, like mine, one and a half times your size and eats twice as much).

Tippet Rise opened its doors to the public in June of this year. The center's inaugural season offers seven weeks of classical music performances as well as tours, by carbon-neutral electric van, of the nine monumental sculptures that dot the land, including the temporary installation of two major works by Alexander Calder on loan from the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C. Tickets for the season's concerts, available on the organization's website, sold out almost immediately.



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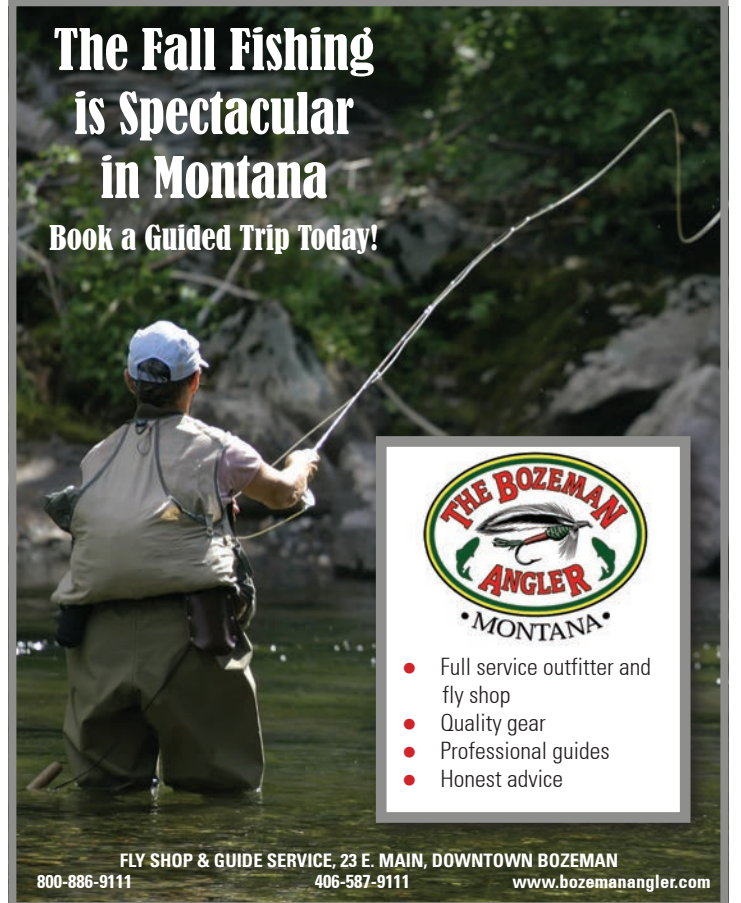
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“The moment we stepped on this land we knew it was the place. It was magnetic, irresistible.”

“We’ve been dreaming of Tippet Rise most of our lives,” Cathy tells me. Much of the inspiration for the Center, she says, came from the iconic museums and performance spaces she and Peter visited over many years, beginning with an “intense experience” at the Fondation Maeght, a museum and sculpture garden near Nice, France, when the two were teenagers. Since then, they’ve traveled the world looking at art, watching plays and listening to music. Places like England’s Snape Maltings, the Storm King Art Center in New York’s Hudson Valley, the Aspen Music Festival during its early days when the performers almost outnumbered the audience, and even Walden Pond helped to shape their aesthetics, values and appreciation. With time, a vision began to take shape. Thinking of their grandchildren’s generation, Cathy and Peter realized that they wanted to create a place that celebrated art and music on a grand scale and on a grand landscape. “We wanted to grow music out of the concert hall, to take great art out of the museums,” Peter tells me. “We wanted to create a place where the audience would feel close to the composer, close to the player, immersed in their worlds.”

They began to look for property. They looked in Colorado, Hawaii, up and down the east coast; they even went to New Zealand. And then a friend suggested the foothills of the Beartooths, between Red Lodge and the Stillwater Valley.

“The moment we stepped on this land,” Peter says, “we knew it was the place. It was magnetic, irresistible.” Peter, who used to climb in the Alps and the Himalaya, felt they’d found “the Switzerland of America. Gothic mountains that would inspire more great art,” he says.

“We fell in love,” adds Cathy.

The couple bought six ranches to create Tippet Rise. And then they hired staff to help bring shape to their vision—incredible staff, including Christopher O’Reilly, a renowned pianist and host of NPR’s *From the Top*. To lead the Center’s design, they hired Arup, a New York engineering firm that specializes in concert halls. Arup assigned acoustician Alban Bassuet to manage the project.

“One day a letter arrived at Arup, out of the blue,” Bassuet says, as he is showing me about the property. “‘We traveled the world,’ the letter said, ‘looking for the perfect place to build a world-class music venue and we’ve just

purchased 12,000 acres in rural Montana. Would you like to help us?’” He laughs, shaking his head. “To say we were intrigued is an understatement.”

Now in his 40s, Bassuet grew up in France where he trained as a classical pianist and then studied acoustic engineering. He’s designed concert halls and performance spaces around the world, working with the likes of rock star Lou Reed and artist Ai Weiwei to break the traditional mold for presenting the arts. Today he serves as director of Tippet Rise.

Iconic places and people from the past echo through this place, Bassuet tells me. The Olivier Music Barn, for example, was inspired in part by Joseph Haydn’s Music Room at Esterhazy Palace in Hungary—where Haydn served as a court musician for the wealthy Esterhazy family and where he composed much of his chamber music. Its acoustical design was inspired by the Snape Maltings concert hall in England. Like that hall, Bassuet says, the Music Barn’s pitched ceiling forges a particular sound signature; timber framing helps to diffuse the sound. An intimate space with room for an audience of just 150, the sound is clear and enveloping on the day I watch Haimovitz and the Dover String Quartet perform.

“I’d much rather be at Tippet Rise than anywhere else in the world,” Christopher O’Riley says over a beer when I meet him for a beer at the Grizzly Bar in Roscoe, just a short drive from the Art Center. Apparently he is echoing the sentiments of many of the artists who have performed at Tippet Rise. “Alessandro wants to move here and start a restaurant,” he says, laughing, about the Italian classical pianist Alessandro Deljavan, who performed at Tippet Rise in June.

“In all seriousness, though, as artists, we have everything we need here: the best pianos on earth, a world-class concert hall, great food, extraordinarily beautiful surroundings, appreciative audiences. No one can believe it when they arrive. It’s a wonderful artistic environment. My jaw drops daily.”

And then there’s the intimacy, O’Riley says, and—that word again—the accessibility. “For the price of a couple of Starbucks, you can see the best performers in the world.” Anywhere else, he tells me, the same concert will cost you upward of a hundred dollars. And that price often gets you

A tour group is led toward *Beartooth Portal*, a sculpture by Ensemble Studio.



the nosebleed seats. “We don’t care to have audiences of 2,000. We want to create the best and most intimate musical and artistic experiences possible.”

As Tippet Rise’s music director, O’Riley takes great pleasure in the creative license afforded him. This summer, concerts ranged from Deljavan performing Chopin’s complete *Études* to a Tippet Rise-commissioned vocal work by prominent Spanish composer Antón García Abril, originally scheduled to take place at the *Domo*, one of three sculptural structures designed by the cutting-edge Spanish architecture firm Ensemble Studio, which is led by the composer’s son. (Wind and rain caused the concert to be moved to the Olivier Music Barn.) At 16 feet high and 98 feet wide, *Domo* was cast on site with reinforced concrete in an impressive feat of engineering. To some, *Domo* looks like an inverted mountain range floating just above the land. Its series of three caverns were designed to host many of the Center’s concerts—if the weather cooperates.

When you walk this land, the Beartooth-Absaroka range abutting the southern edge of it, you can’t help but wonder what its earlier stewards would think about what has happened here. The fact that it remains a working ranch—3,000 ewes and several hundred cows still graze this grass—could please them all, or so you’d imagine. One person in particular might appreciate—and understand—Tippet Rise’s artistic vision. Much of this land

was owned and ranched by the modernist painter Isabelle Johnson and her two sisters. The Halsteads didn’t know this when they decided to purchase the property, but when they learned about Johnson, Cathy says, it made perfect sense. So much so that last November they underwrote the largest-ever exhibition of Johnson’s work, at the Yellowstone Art Museum in Billings.

After Haimovitz and the Dover String Quartet finish their performance, the storm has passed and we are all milling about in the sun on the patio outside the Olivier Music Barn where we’ve gathered to eat an early dinner. Inspired by the performance, we are a lively bunch—a mix of audience and musicians, Tippet Rise staff and volunteers, and the lines between us blur as we eat, drink and socialize. Halfway through the barbecue, I sidle up to Haimovitz and ask him what he thinks about this place.

“It’s surreal, it’s so beautiful,” he tells me. “It’s so inspirational. And there’s no dumbing down—there are very few places where I am asked to play Schubert and Messiaen in the same day. There are very few places you can go and play so intimately—and to an audience that’s so appreciative. And then go fishing!” He laughs and then excuses himself to join his wife and daughters at a picnic table next to a family from Red Lodge, people I’d sat next to during the recital, who’d watched him perform, slack-jawed, like the rest of us. ▀