

Peabody Essex Museum bids farewell to Matthew Aucoin

By Keith Powers / Correspondent

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“It’s been a great experimental lab,” Matthew Aucoin says of his time as composer-in-residence at Peabody Essex Museum. “But as my activities have gotten wider ranging, and now that I’m based in L.A., it’s time to get other young composers in the mix.”

If you go...

WHAT: Composer/pianist Matthew Aucoin, with the Asia/America New Music Institute

WHERE: Peabody Essex Museum, East India Square, Salem

WHEN: Saturday, Nov. 11, 8 p.m.

TICKETS: \$10–\$20. Visit www.pem.org or call 978-745-9500.

It’s not often that 20-somethings retire.

Not that composer Matthew Aucoin is actually leaving music to putter around in the basement, start building birdhouses, or organize the garage. But he is leaving his position as composer-in-residence at the Peabody Essex Museum after this Saturday’s concert — a post he has held since 2012.

“I’ve been connected with PEM since I graduated from Harvard,” Aucoin says. “They’ve been so supportive. They’ve given me carte blanche to do whatever inspired me, and lots of my works have come out of that. It’s been a playground for my favorite projects.”

Those projects, and others, have taken the Medfield native far afield since he started curating programs at PEM. Like Chicago, where he spent two years as the Solti Conducting Apprentice at the Chicago Symphony. And to Cambridge's American Repertory Theater, where he debuted his operatic treatment of Walt Whitman, "Crossing," in 2015. And to Los Angeles, where he has been artist-in-residence at the Los Angeles Opera since 2016.

It's a lot of relationships for Aucoin, who is busier still with another opera — commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera — and a host of additional works.

But he has always made time for his Salem affiliation, bringing his own music, and introducing the composers and performers of the Asia/American New Music Initiative to PEM audiences as well. He's performed all over the museum: in the galleries, in the Atrium, in storied East India Marine Hall.

Bringing his collaborators from AAMNI to the museum has helped offset the busy schedule. "I wanted to spread the wealth," he says, "and to pass the baton to someone else. AAMNI was founded by a Harvard classmate, Chad Cannon. He's had a foot in both worlds — Asia and America — and he has this network of composers, from a number of Asian countries.

"I thought, 'Why not introduce North Shore audiences to this music,' and at the same time give some fellow composers a chance to perform in this beautiful place."

For this weekend's program "the concept is a broad one: basically, inviting dead ancestors," Aucoin says. "Each of the composers will bring a new piece, and pair it with an ancestor piece. One that haunts their music. It could be from 600 years ago, and it could be from another living composer.

"My ancestor is Messaien, his 'Louange' movement from the 'Quartet for the End of Time,' for violin and piano." The quartet is perhaps the French composer's best-known piece — certainly his best-known piece of chamber music. Composed while he was detained in a Nazi camp during World War II, the work has since been explored by many interpreters.

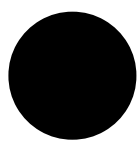
"It feels like a goodbye," Aucoin says of the movement, "but also something that goes on and on. There's something wistful about the violin, like a spirit breaking free. There is a sense of departure, but also a sense that the music continues. My own piece is a quartet arrangement of a piano etude I wrote, called 'Currents.'"

So this program, which features the shakuhachi player Kojiro Umezaki, four musicians from Hub New Music, and commissions by Umezaki, Cannon, Sun-Young Park, Sayo Kosugi, Carlos Simon, and Takuma Ito, in addition to Aucoin's, marks his farewell as composer-in-residence. He's open to returning in some fashion for future performances, but content that "we've given a good understanding to the folks at the museum of what it takes to put on a concert. It took a lot of time, and now it does run smoothly.

"It's been a great experimental lab," he says. "But as my activities have gotten wider ranging, and now that I'm based in L.A., it's time to get other young composers in the mix."

The Peabody Essex Museum hosts composer-in-residence Matthew Aucoin and members of the Asia/America New Music Institute, Hub New Music, and shakuhachi player Kojiro Umezaki on Sat., Nov. 11, in East India Marine Hall. For tickets (\$10-\$20) and information visit www.pem.org or call 978-745-9500.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR's ARTery. Follow [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith); email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com



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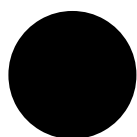
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