

Paola Prestini-A Vision Into Art

Tommaso Cartia (April 11, 2017)



Composer of music, producer, mentor, and impresario—Paola Prestini is a brilliant talent of Italian origin. Founder of VisionIntoArt, an interdisciplinary art company, Prestini is also the Creative Director of National Sawdust, a non-profit venue with the mission of being a platform for contemporary artists to see their visions shine through. This May 3rd, the National Sawdust organization will present its spring gala honoring Renée Fleming, Philip Glass, and artist Helga Davis, among prestigious guests like actress Julianne Moore. We had the chance to meet up with Paola and interview her about her career and her experiences with National Sawdust.

[Paola Prestini](#) [2] has lived a life full of different cultural contaminations and is always driven by both the desire to discover and the thrill of the journey. She was born in Trento in the region of [Trentino](#)



[Alto-Adige](#) [3], Northern Italy and then immigrated to the Arizona/Mexican border town of [Nogales](#) [4] at an early age. The richness of this diversified ethnic background blended together with a passion for music that Paola discovered at a young age. This passion was most likely passed down to her from her father and her father's family who were reed makers for generations and her mother's deep attention to her craft.

That particular alchemy between different cultures has been sonically modulated by Prestini's taste in music. Although classically trained, she was never afraid to experiment with different musical influences, mixing them together with a various range of sounds and atmospheres.

Paola's VisionIntoArt and National Sawdust

This union of opposites is not only a philosophy that she channels when she creates music, but it's the lifestyle with which Paola shapes both her professional and personal life. The composer is always very attent in creating union and in promoting sharing, communication, togetherness and artistic integrity. This is the philosophy behind [VisionIntoArt](#) [5], the non-profit art company that she found in 1999 while she was studying composition at Julliard.

Paola was then faced with an even bigger challenge: to establish a platform in New York where emerging artists can share their art visions and experiment in front of the public after their studies. [National Sawdust](#) [6] aims to be that platform, giving contemporary performers the chance to make their raw talent flourish into established carriers.

Prestini, Creative Director of the theater, was able to turn her vision into reality thanks to the unparalleled task force of talent behind National Sawdust. From Jean Pierre Chesse, President of the National Sawdust Board; Rick D'Avino, President Emeritus; and Kevin Dolan, Founder and Chair to some of the most exceptional contemporary artists that form the Artistic Advisory Board, like [Laurie Anderson](#) [7], [Philip Glass](#) [8], [Renée Fleming](#) [9], [Helena Christensen](#) [9], and [Susanne Vega](#) [10], to name a few.

We had the chance to sit down with Paola who told us about her tie with Italy, what inspires her to write music, and what we can expect from the [National Sawdust Gala](#) [11] this May 3rd at [Gotham Hall](#) [12].

How and when did you discover your passion for music?

I was born in Trento, Italy, and immigrated to the Arizona/Mexican border town Nogales at a young age. I still return every year to the Dolomites where my mother still resides part of the year. My father is a reed maker who is still based in Nogales. There, I was raised in a culture steeped in song. I came to composing early and now create music that takes the listener on a journey through different life experiences, creating an aural and visual map of the different countries and cultures that have inspired me. These travels sonically reflect the impact that collective identities have when they meet and dissolve in a person whose artistic roots are the collective sum of many parts.

Take us through your composing process. What inspires you?

When I write, after an initial process of often puzzling mechanical work, I am in a state of flow: I often cannot remember the details of writing. It is as if all the years of experience come together to transport me through the process of expressing the cumulative inspirational sources into the musical concept at hand.

My works are often inspired by literature or my different disciplines. My last work was *Aging Magician*, which opened at the New Victory Theater on Broadway. Another work, *The Hubble Cantata*, will go to the LA Opera and the Kennedy Center and is a collaboration with an astrophysicist. Another work, *The Colorado*, is a collaboration with a conservationist and a brilliant filmmaker and is touring to Stanford and the Kennedy Center.

Your music takes inspiration from different countries. In these terms, what is your specific tie with Italy?



One of my favorite works is an opera called Oceanic Verses, which began as a Carnegie Hall commission—a chamber work that painted a picture of Italy as it once was. By researching the Salento region, which maintains many ancient traditions and still speaks a nearly forgotten language, I created a work that illuminated the complex ethnic mosaic that has shaped my cultural heritage.

The story was derived from the text of the songs I chose and intermittent poems from a variety of Italian poets, such as Vittoria Colonna, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Dante Alighieri, and Aleardo Aleardi. Oceanic Verses is sung in various dialects including Griko, Byzantine Greek, Ladino, and Bourbon Spanish, which colors the work with the ethnic influences of the Salento region.

It's an opera exploring the complexity of my native land. The nexus of emigration and immigration has become a metaphor for a today's global struggle with the issue of borders, and how this issue collides with one woman's search for her internal geography.

Beyond composing and being an artist, how important it is for you to be a mentor for the future generation of artists?

My love in the artistic and executive process is bringing disparate voices together and allowing the synergy that emerges to grow. I have brought this inclusive vision to all of my curating with a focus on new music and interdisciplinary art. I am unswayed by trends and yet excited by all voices; I strive to stay ahead of the curve, and I am tremendously interested in nurturing new talent. As a composer, I believe the role of an artist in the 21st century should be that of creator, educator, performer, and entrepreneur.

Tell us about National Sawdust. What is its specific mission, and what type of performances we can experience there?

National Sawdust (NS), an unparalleled, artist-led, nonprofit venue, is a place for exploration and discovery. NS is a singular space founded with an expansive vision: to provide composers and musicians across genres a home in which they can flourish and then share their work. We also believe the future of new art lives in education. We define education broadly. To us, education is about giving young people and community members opportunities and tools to explore their potential for artistic and creative expression.

At NS, our advisory board and curators, including Philip Glass and Renée Fleming participate by giving us their discoveries according to their vast tastes and diverse disciplines. You can see FLEXN dancers one night, the punk rock activist group Pussy Riot on another, and opera on yet another!

What can we expect from the Gala scheduled for May 3rd?

Our spring gala, which is less than a month away on May 3 is chaired by [Ann Ziff](#) [13]. The gala will be held at Gotham Hall in Manhattan, in honor of Renée Fleming, Philip Glass, and our artist in residence, [Helga Davis](#) [14]. There will be an array of extraordinary performers, including the wonderful Met Opera countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo and Liv Redpath, in addition to the famed actress Julianne Moore! The gala is a critical part of our business plan in that it helps us reach new audiences and is also a substantial part of our revenue for the year, which directly supports our mission.

What are your future plans both artistically and as the creative director of NS?

My plans artistically are to continue writing opera—I have a new one with Robert Wilson and continue to refine my interdisciplinary language. For NS, I want to expand our brand through franchising eventually!

For more info and to contact Paola Prestini check out her website here [>>](#) [2]

To know more about the National Sawdust and the May 3rd Gala click here [>>](#) [6]



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