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BIG DEAL

A first-time festival from the Philharmonic offers new music from around the world.

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Julia Wolfe's "Anthracite Fields," featuring the Trinity Choir and the Bang on a Can All-Stars, is a highlight of the upcoming "NY Phil Biennial." Illustration by Daniel Zalkus.

The New York Philharmonic will soon launch its inaugural "NY Phil Biennial" (May 28-June 7), a glorious, eleven-day festival of new music from around the world. Alan Gilbert's keen interest in contemporary sounds has been a historic aspect of his term as music director: you have to go back to the days of Pierre Boulez and Leonard Bernstein to find a similar level of enthusiasm.

If any program defines a new American tradition, it's the one featuring New York premières by Julia Wolfe and Steven Mackey (May 30-31), two composers who have been as deeply influenced by rock and folk music as they have by Beethoven or Josquin. The Bang on a Can All-Stars and the Trinity Choir will gather to give the New York première of Wolfe's "Anthracite Fields," a flinty, big-boned, and appealing work, complete with video, that honors the generations of miners who toiled in the Pennsylvania coalfields; then the Philharmonic, Synergy Vocals, the actor and vocalist Rinde Eckert, and the Catch Electric Guitar Quartet will perform Mackey's "Dreamhouse," a post-9/11 meditation that's almost Whitmanesque in its brashly heterogeneous congress of sounds.

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