

## **Montana's Tippet Rise might be the coolest outdoor concert space you've never heard of**

By Aubrey Eyre

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SALT LAKE CITY — Nestled near the foothills of the Beartooth Mountains in Montana is a place where nature, music and art blend together in a way that is best-described as “mystical.”

With more than 10,000 acres of land, the Tippet Rise Art Center is almost completely secluded from civilization. Surrounded by nearly 5 million acres of wilderness area, Tippet Rise isn't on any flight paths, which means not even the sight or hum of a plane will detract visitors from the sense of solitude. And according to the center's founders, that's precisely the point.

“We live in a very populated world,” said Peter Halstead, who, with his wife Cathy Halstead, are the driving force behind Tippet Rise. “But (in) this quarter of the world, it isn't. It was just so perfect and so untouched, and the sense of silence and darkness there is something you really don't experience much anymore in the world because we have most of the world lit up at night.”



*Erik Petersen, Tippet Rise Art Center  
View of the Beartooth Mountains from Tippet Rise.*

### **Into the mystic**

Peter and Cathy Halstead said they spent years looking for the perfect place to build the arts center of their dreams. Then they spent six more years transforming it into the sprawling sculpture park and performing arts center it is today.

Inspired by landscape architecture books — especially those from Princeton Architectural Press — and outdoor art centers around Europe, the Halsteads looked for potential locations everywhere from France to Hawaii. But it wasn't until they came across some old cattle ranches north of Yellowstone — a roughly nine-hour drive from Salt Lake City — that they finally felt they had found what they were looking for.



*Andre Constantini, Tippet Rise Art Center*

*Proverb by Mark di Suvero under a starry night at Tippet Rise.*

"This land is so much more mystical, I think, than anything else we looked at," Cathy Halstead said.

It is the mystical nature of the land that the Halsteads credit with really bringing their vision to life for the artists and musicians who have contributed their time and talents to the center.

Since its opening in 2016, Tippet Rise has hosted some of the world's finest musicians. And once they experience all that Tippet Rise has to offer, some of them just can't stay away.

"Everything is merged perfectly for the best artistic experience you can imagine," said Jenny Chen, a piano virtuoso who has returned to perform at Tippet Rise each year since it's opening. "Combining these elements into a new artistic experience ... feels like a homecoming. It's heartwarming to go there."

Chen, a concert pianist who was educated at the Curtis Institute of Music, Yale School of Music and the Eastman School of Music, has performed at some of the best concert halls around the world, but she is always excited to return to Tippet Rise.



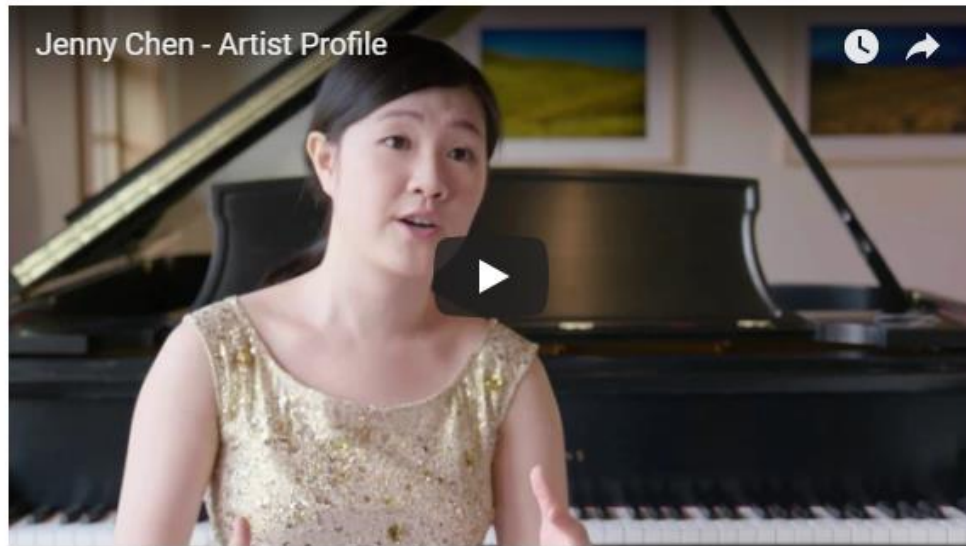
*Erik Petersen, Tippet Rise Art Center  
Domo by Ensemble Studio from a distance.*

### **Natural sound**

Describing her first time touring the center in 2016, Chen said, “I was so surprised when they told me you can perform under or with the sculptures. I was just so amazed because there’s nothing (there) except the sculpture and nature.”

Raised in Taiwan and having spent much of her young adult years on the East Coast between Philadelphia and New York, Chen's previous outdoor performances hadn't occurred in sight of something as grand as the Beartooth Mountains. But when she first played at Tippet Rise, it was the acoustics of the sculptures, designed with performances in mind, that really left an impression on Chen.

“My first video was a video shooting under the Domo sculpture, by the Ensemble Studio,” Chen said. “And it was so surprising to me that you don’t even need microphones. You know, with outdoor performances, usually they have microphones so that the sound doesn’t go away, but in some magical way, the Domo has the ability to help project the sound ... to a really faraway place.”



While at Tippet Rise for the first time, Chen worked with sound engineers to see how far the sound of her piano would carry across Montana's rolling hills away from the Domo sculpture.

"It was all about the experience in this environment," Chen said. "It's quite special, so there's nothing I can describe in words to do it justice. But I can tell you that these elements together bring the performance into an even better experience than usual."

#### **Land and art**

Although the Montana weather doesn't permit artists to perform outside year-round, the center's Olivier Barn, which was specially designed to match the acoustics of some of Europe's best concert halls, provides a warm and inviting concert environment that doesn't disturb the views outside. "(The barn) has a very particular roof angle. ... It makes for a beautiful sound that floats above you and then just kind of descends gently upon the audience in an unusual way," Cathy Halstead said.



*Erik Petersen, Tippet Rise Art Center*

*Under the starry wilderness sky, the sculpture Pioneer by Stephen Talasnik shows the beauty of Tippet Rise.*

The barn, like the center's sculptures, was created with great care for the surrounding area, the Halsteads explained. Part of their purpose in choosing such a vast expanse of land was to preserve and protect it while still making the land accessible for people to enjoy in collaboration with art and music.

"I think we were very cautious of what the land innately wants to express and we didn't do anything that would clash with that," Cathy Halstead said. "The idea that the land will remain open and beautiful, and not developed, means so much to people in the area."

In order to protect the land, and to ensure the best experience for the concert series, Tippet Rise functions on a lottery system for their ticketing each season.

"We wish we had room for everyone, but this way, I think everyone has kind of a very even and fair chance," Cathy Halstead said.

### **Beyond the music**

For those who can't attend the concerts, there are other ways to explore and enjoy Tippet Rise, according to the Halsteads.

In June, Princeton Architectural Press — the same press that produced the books that the Halsteads looked to for inspiration for Tippet Rise — released an oversized and poetic photo book of the art center.

"It's another wonderful way for us to be able to share Tippet Rise with a wider audience," Cathy Halstead said.



*Erik Petersen, Tippet Rise Art Center*

*The sculpture Inverted Portal by Ensemble Studio sometimes serves as an outdoor concert venue for solo performances at Tippet Rise.*

With captivating photos of the landscapes, the sculptures and the musicians who have performed there, accompanied by poetry and descriptions by the Halsteads, the book offers a new way to experience Tippet Rise.

“We did the writing to try to convey the strange, Stonehenge-like nature of the place,” Peter Halstead said. “Even from the pictures, I think you can (see) the strange northern light which really changes your mindset entirely when you’re on the ranch.”

Additionally, concert and non-concertgoers can explore Tippet Rise by booking [van tours](#), or by hiking or biking through the 12 miles of trails established throughout the center. All visits to the center do require reservations.

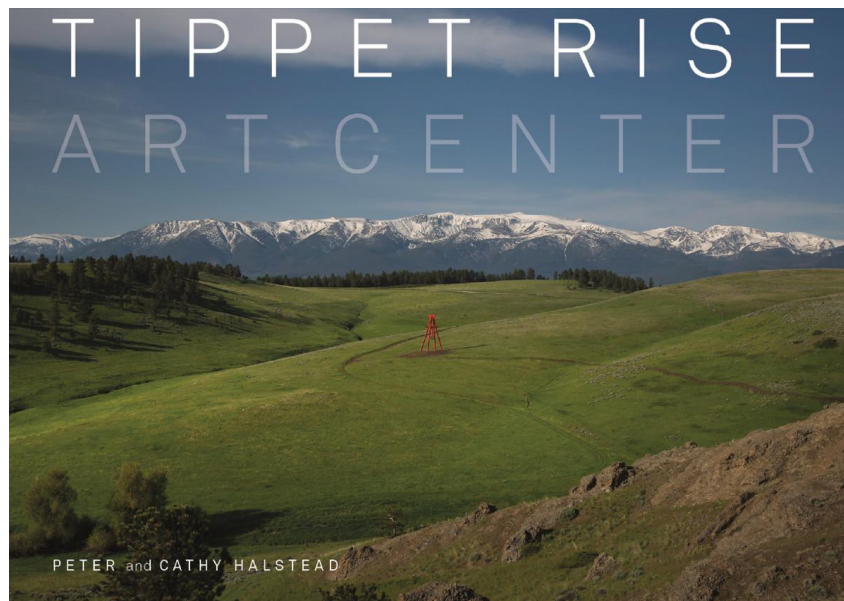
“We’d like to encourage more people to see the ranch that way,” Peter Halstead said, explaining that they set up the center in a sprawling manner for that very purpose.

“If you go hiking or biking there, and you put your bike down and you just walk up to a sculpture and you commune with it for an hour, or a half hour or even 10 minutes ... we wanted it to feel that this was some extraordinary adventure where you were sort of becoming one with the land.”





*Erik Petersen, Tippet Rise Art Center  
The Inverted Portal by Ensemble Studio in the winter at Tippet Rise.*



*Cover of the "Tippet Rise Art Center" book, released earlier this year by Princeton Architectural Press.*



*The sculpture Two Discs by Alexander Calder on display at the Tippet Rise Art Center.*



*The small building sculpture Daydreams by Patrick Dougherty was designed specifically for Tippet Rise.*





*The sculpture Pioneer by Stephen Talasnik under the vast Montana sky.*



*Under the starry wilderness sky, the sculpture Pioneer by Stephen Talasnik shows the beauty of Tippet Rise.*



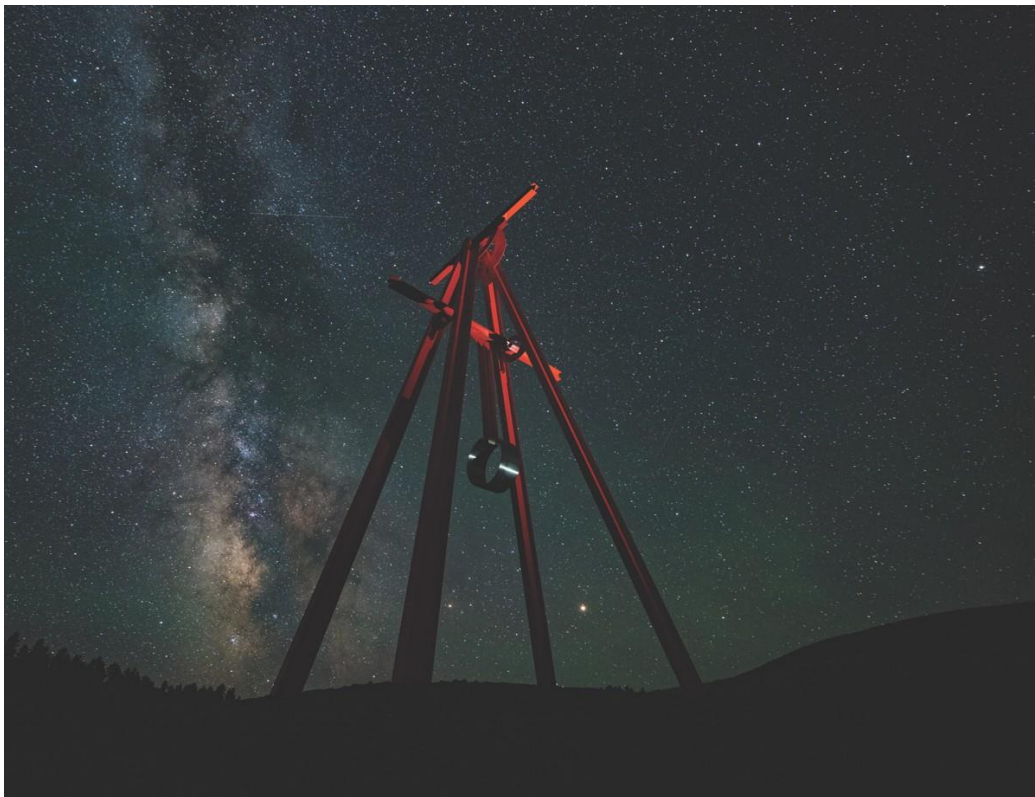
*The sculpture Inverted Portal by Ensemble Studio sometimes serves as an outdoor concert venue for solo performances at Tippet Rise.*



*The Domo sculpture by Ensemble Studio was specifically designed to enhance the acoustics of outdoor concerts at Tippet Rise.*



*Domo by Ensemble Studio from a distance.*



*Proverb by Mark di Suvero under a starry night at Tippet Rise.*





*View of the Beartooth Mountains from Tippet Rise.*





*The sculpture Inverted Portal by Ensemble Studio sometimes serves as an outdoor concert venue for solo performances at Tippet Rise.*

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