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Ten Years On, Tippet Rise Is Still a Wonder, Part 1

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With the appearance of yesterday's [NY Times Magazine](#) article, the secret of the heaven-on-earth paradise of Tippet Rise is out. But if a first-time visitor's account was self-revelatory, for those of us lucky enough to go for a second time—the weekend of August 15, the opening of the five-week 2026 summer concert season—Tippet Rise continues to evolve and astound. “It was organic,” responds cofounder Cathy Halstead to a remark about the expansion of this 12,500-acre “union of music, art, architecture, and landscape” located between Bozeman and Billings and surrounded by the Beartooth and Absaroka Mountains of Montana.



The Domo, one of several intriguing outdoor concert spaces at Tippet Rise Art Center

Launched in 2016 by combining three adjacent ranches, the Center has since grown by 2,500 acres, 14 structures/sculptures (there are over 20 artworks total), a spacious dining/community hall, state-of-the-art recording studio, housing units (33 bedrooms total, for artists and special guests only), several herds of sheep and Black Angus cattle, and 15 effervescent staff members for a total of 20 year-round, 36 in season, many of them local. (Note: Don't start packing yet. Attendance is limited and by lottery only, as much to preserve the land as the breathless serenity of the place.)

And while it's true that Cathy, a painter, and husband Peter, a pianist and poet (and avid story teller) have used their wealth and artistic sensibilities to create this paradise on earth, it is equally true that without their generosity of spirit, which knows no bounds, Tippet Rise would not be what it is today.

“Ten years ago we couldn't believe what we had done,” says Cathy, who points to upstate New York's Storm King Art Center as among their models. “So much of what has happened since is what our visitors, the land, the opportunities that have come to us.”

There are endless examples of artists who have written music or poetry or built structures specific to Tippet Rise. After the 2016 performance of his *Intuit* spread 50 noise makers (aka percussionists) across the vast natural bowl surrounding artist Stephen Talasnik's *Satellite No. 5: Pioneer*, John Luther Adams moved in for a year-and-a-half, reports Peter. "He asked if he could stay here and we found him a place...He wrote his Fifth String Quartet here." Titled *Lines Made by Walking* and recorded by the Jack Quartet in Tippet Rise's new studio, the piece, reports Peter, was inspired by Adams "walking all around the ranch for a year and a half—the music is a representation of the geology."



Musicians perform within the Domo; the audience is seated just outside it

At a chilly August morning concert at the *Domo*—one of a number of outdoor concert sites--composer Jessica Meyer introduced the premiere of her *Portal to the Prodigious Plains* (adding another to an impressively long list of Tippet Rise commissions over the last ten years). She reported it had been inspired by listening to birdsong at Tippet Rise and transcribing it. The piece—joined by new works by Caroline Shaw and Swedish composer Svante Henryson--was one of the three inserted into Beethoven's Septet in E flat by Tippet Rise Artistic Advisor Pedja Muzijevic to create the hour-long program. (The musicians performed under the dome for an audience of about 150 seated in folding chairs just at the rim.) *Portal's* unusual combination of violin, horn, bassoon, and bass help to balance the spotlighting of the instrumentalists needed for the Beethoven Septet.

"Pedja is so adventurous," notes Cathy, "and has a sense of music as one—new music, old music, jazz—to his way of thinking, they all speak to each other." Also a pianist and artistic director at New York's Baryshnikov Arts Center, Muzijevic puts together the summer concert season with both emerging (and mostly impressive) and established artists; most concerts take place in the 10-year-old Olivier Barn, acoustically and architecturally suited to chamber-sized concerts, and an increasingly in-demand recording space.

Domo is a thousand(s)-ton structure situated at about a thousand feet above the main gate of Tippet Rise.

Audiences either hike or are transported up the five-mile dirt road on school buses; our bus followed some stragglers from a herd of cattle who figured they had more right to the dirt road than any big yellow machine did. They were right of course, so the concert got a bit of a late start. It was a perfect example of the Tippet Rise sensibility: Nature first, always.

Part II will report on the bounty of recording, both music and film, that is being done at Tippet Rise, much of it available on the Center's [website](#).

See also first impressions from 2016:

[Tippet Rise Art Center Part I: A Special Kind of Presence](#)
[Part II](#)

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