

Christopher Rountree, conductor

Four women washing blood out of rags in a bathroom; Stravinsky in an abandoned warehouse; a violinist cutting himself out of duct tape with a razor; a lost John Adams suite at Walt Disney Concert Hall. Conductor and composer Christopher Rountree is standing at the intersection of classical music, new music, performance art and pop.

Rountree, 32, is the founder, conductor and creative director of the pathbreaking L.A. chamber orchestra wild Up. The group has been called “Searing. Penetrating. And Thrilling” by NPR’s Performance Today and named “Best Classical Music of 2012” by the Los Angeles Times. wild Up started in 2010 with no funding and no musicians, driven only by Rountree’s vision of a world-class orchestra that creates visceral, provocative experiences that are unmoored from classical traditions.

Whether he’s conducting, composing or curating a program, Rountree’s approach – with its “infectious enthusiasm” (L.A. Times) and “elegant clarity” (New York Times) – is united by extremely high energy and a deeply engaged relationship between a score, musicians and audience. “For most people, programming and conducting are about restraint, intellect. I want to get rid of restraint: I want to tear the thing’s guts out. I want to go all the way there,” Rountree says. “I want to empower musicians. I want to energize an audience. It’s not that I’m a ‘conduit for the score’ – everyone in the hall is a part of a circuit that connects the conductor, the musicians, the score and the listeners. A concert shouldn’t leave people when people leave the concert hall.”

If there is a dam separating establishment classical music from more adventurous forms, Rountree finds himself spilling over both sides – conducting Opera Omaha here, and writing experimental metal for the group gnarwhallaby there.

This year, Rountree makes his Chicago Symphony, LA Opera and Atlanta Opera debuts, returns to the Music Academy of the West and the San Francisco Symphony’s SoundBox series, conducts the Interlochen World Youth Orchestra on the New York Philharmonic’s 2016 Biennial, joins Jennifer Koh and Shai Wosner with wild Up at the Laguna Beach Music Festival, and conducts Diavolo’s new show “L’Espace du Temps: Glass, Adams, and Salonen.” As a composer, his recent premieres and commissions include a new piece for The Crossing at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, a re-orchestration of Esa-Pekka Salonen’s Foreign Bodies, a choral work for Bjork’s choir

Graduale Nobili in Reykjavik, Iceland, and a piece for Jennifer Koh on the New York Philharmonic's Biennial.

Last year, Rountree founded an education intensive with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, continued an education partnership at the Colburn School, and taught "Creativity and Consciousness" at Bard College's Longy School. He joined the production company Chromatic, conducted Opera Omaha performing John Adams' "A Flowering Tree," debuted on the San Francisco Symphony's SoundBox series, and started a three-year stint as guest conductor of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra.

With his eclectic style and resume, he's been tapped to curate and create events for contemporary art institutions including the Getty Museum, MCA Denver, the Philadelphia Museum of Art and UCLA's Hammer Museum, where a long-running wild Up residency brought the group to national prominence.

Through it all, Rountree is guided by his vision of a more engaging classical music culture that blows up the old boxes.

"I don't have enough tattoos to be the badboy provocateur of classical music," Rountree jokes. "But is the goal to nuke the artform and build something new? That is exactly what we're doing."