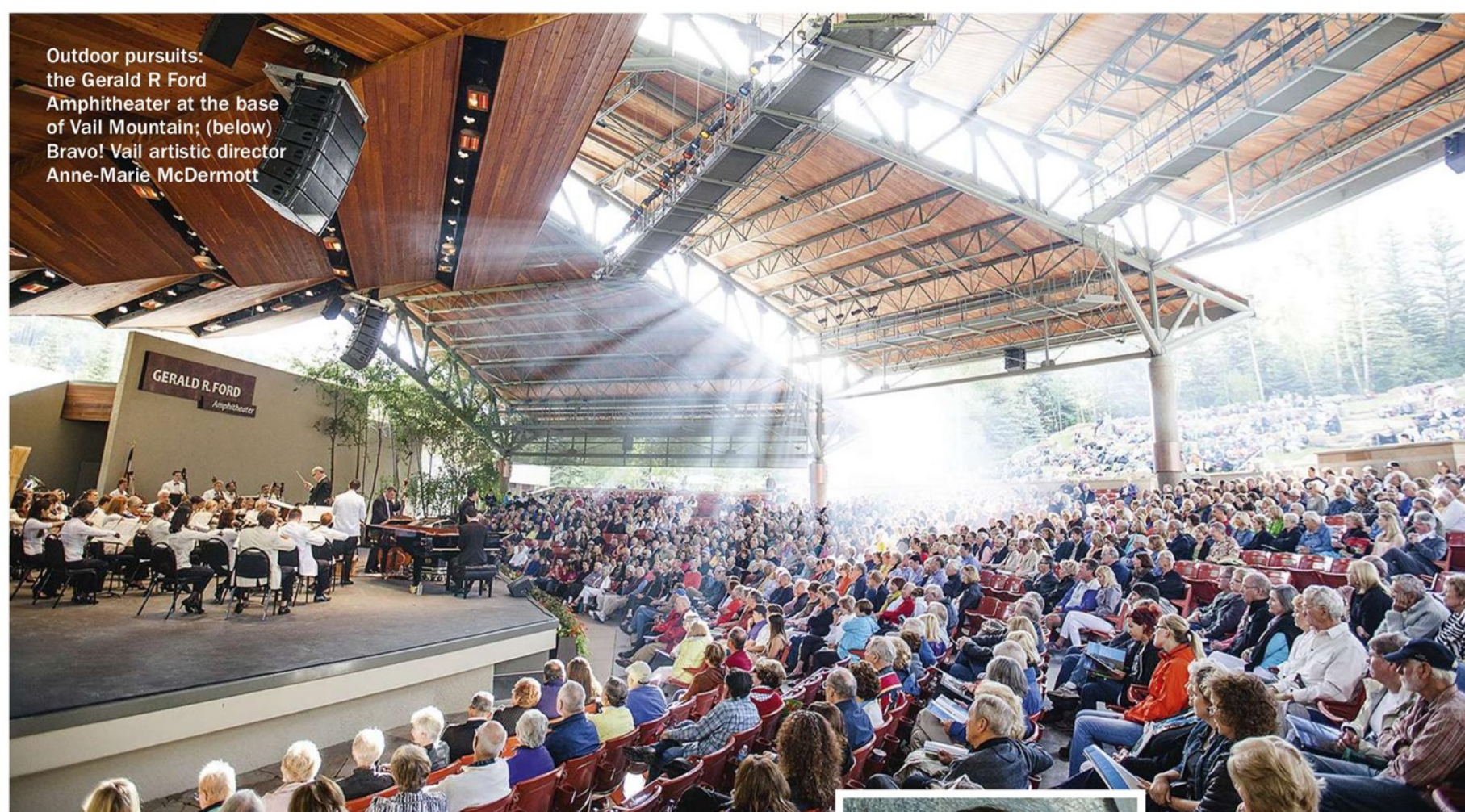


MUSICAL DESTINATIONS

Vail United States

Geoffrey John Davies climbs to the high altitudes to enjoy the diverse range of music on offer at Colorado's Bravo! Vail Music Festival



Outdoor pursuits:
the Gerald R Ford
Amphitheater at the base
of Vail Mountain; (below)
Bravo! Vail artistic director
Anne-Marie McDermott

Each summer, a small town nestled in the Colorado Rockies familiar to most Americans as a ski resort plays host to a major international music festival. Over the past 30 years, the Bravo! Vail Music Festival has grown from a small three-concert chamber series into a huge event which now features no fewer than four resident orchestras each year, a growing education programme run for the benefit of tourists and residents alike – and plenty of chamber music.

Colorado attracts active people who want to take full advantage of the state's gorgeous natural landscape – that the drive from Denver International Airport to

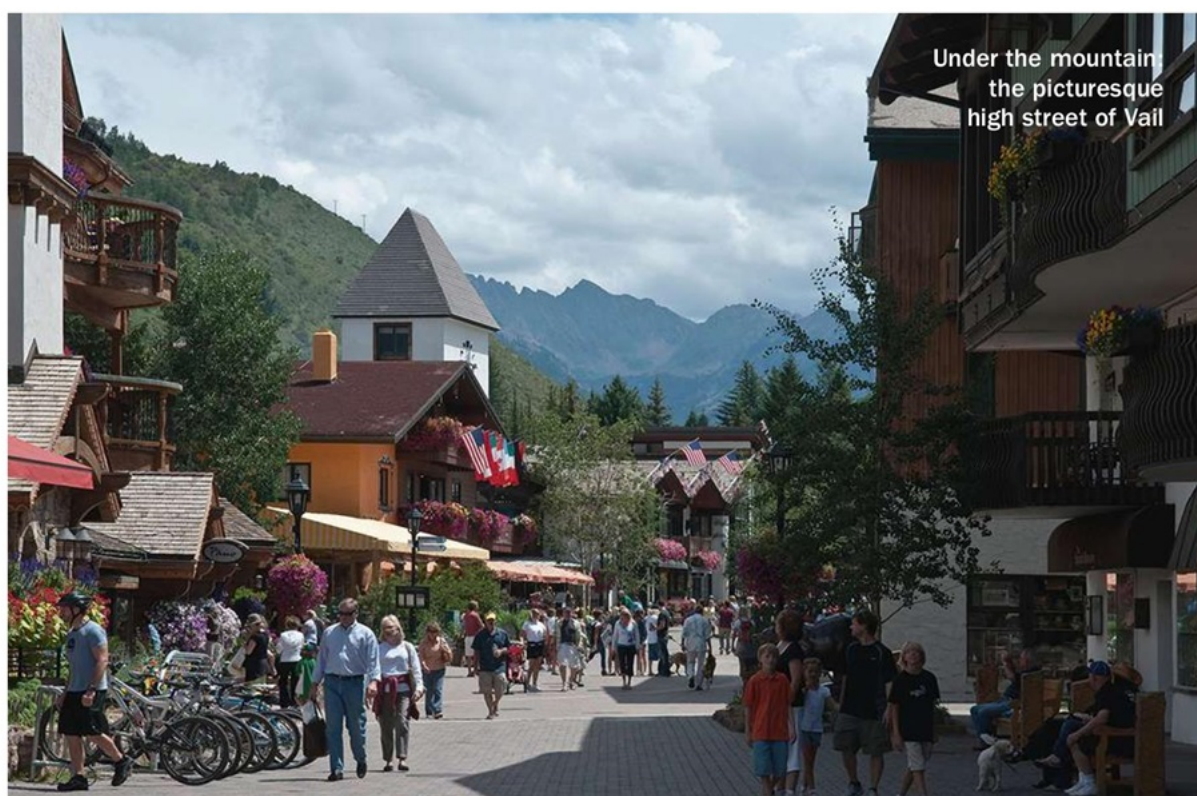
Vail takes the breath away is not just due to change in altitude. The town itself was founded in the 1960s and, during President Ford's administration in the 1970s, the area was referred to as the 'Western White House'; Ford used the town as an escape from the frenetic pace of Washington and many local landmarks still bear his name.

Since Vail's economy relies on tourism, a host of organisations draw visitors to the town during the summer months, when the snow has melted but the mountains



still beguile. Bravo! Vail, which runs from late June to early August, was one of the first, founded in 1987 by John Giovando with violinist Ida Kavafian. The locally based National Repertory and Colorado Springs Philharmonic were the festival's first

orchestras-in-residence, but Bravo! soon began to attract ensembles from further afield. The Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra brought national attention to the festival when it began the first of 19 successive residencies in 1989, while the



roster of today's residential orchestras include the Dallas Symphony, the Philadelphia, the New York Philharmonic and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, the first to come from overseas.

The monumental natural beauty of the Rockies provides a stunning backdrop for orchestral concerts, held outdoors at the Gerald R Ford Amphitheater. The venue, which seats 1,260 in covered seating, and an additional 1,300 on the grassy hillside, opened in 1987 and was built at the base of Vail Mountain, with a view of the Gore Range to the east. When the Amphitheater first opened there were doubts as to whether people would make the trip to a remote venue on the edge of town to see performances, but it is now home to a wide range of events: as well as the Bravo! Vail Festival it hosts the Vail International Dance Festival, summer pop concerts and local choral and theatre productions.

The festival's orchestral programming, meanwhile, spans ever-popular works from the European classical canon and all-American legends through to film screenings with live orchestral accompaniment (past offerings include *ET* and *Fantasia*). 'Bravo! Vail is a musical hotbed because of the variety of performers – over 400 every summer – and the works we programme,' enthuses pianist Anne-Marie McDermott, who has been the festival's artistic director since 2011. 'Striking a balance between the core classical canon and cutting-edge new works, as well as popular music, is my primary challenge and joy.'

ALAMY, ZACH MAHONEY

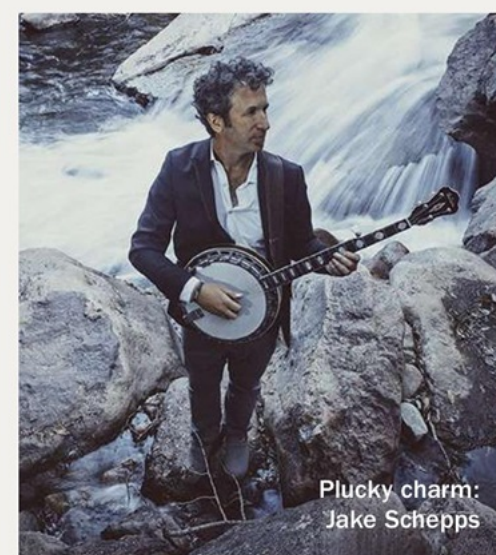
Under McDermott's guidance, the festival today places its emphasis on where it all began – chamber music. Bravo! runs several different chamber series each summer all around town, from free midday concerts to intimate performances in private homes, plus informal performances in bars and breweries that unite Vail's musical legacy with Colorado's craft beer scene.

The festival has consolidated its commitment to contemporary music,

'My aim is to strike a balance between the core classical canon and new works'

meanwhile, with a new flagship venture, the New Works Fund. To celebrate the launch of this initiative, the 2017 edition of Bravo! featured five new commissions – one for each resident orchestra plus one chamber work, with pieces by Roberto Sierra, Guillaume de Connesson, Julia Adolphe, David Ludwig and Edgar Meyer.

McDermott has a theory on why Bravo! Vail's festival format is perennially popular: 'To be in dialogue with world-class artists about realising their musical dreams is a privilege beyond words. The layers of music-making – whether orchestral, chamber music, commissioned works, or solo repertoire – among a



Classical and beyond Colorado crossover

Colorado has been a launchpad for classical crossover musicians, including banjo-players Jake Schepps and Jayme Stone and fiddler Enion Pelta-Tiller. Schepps worked to find common ground between Bartók and forms of American acoustic music on his disc *An Evening in the Village*, which then inspired him to commission four US composers – Marc Mellits, Matt McBane, Gyan Riley and Matt Flinner – to write for his quintet. Banjo-player Jayme Stone has also championed contemporary composers, recording Andrew Downing's *This County is My Home*, while classically trained violinist Enion Pelta-Tiller performs in the string band Taarka, merging Western and Eastern traditions.

diverse array of artists at every stage of their life has the power to reach people in the most meaningful ways.'

In addition to the concerts, one really has to try some open-air activities, such as hiking up Lionshead Mountain or biking the 12-mile paved trail from Vail Pass through Cooper Mountain Resort, or perhaps a brief foray into the local fitness trend *du jour*: goat yoga. Several days at Bravo! Vail leaves one feeling refreshed and relaxed, plus reassured about classical music's ability to draw large crowds and bring people together. The festival provides another compelling reason to head to the Rockies besides the impressive skiing. Just remember to keep yourself hydrated in that thin mountain air. ☺

Further information:

Bravo! Vail Festival www.bravovail.org