

Inside Hadrian's Walls

BY MANUELA MESCO

WITH ITS OPULENT fountains, theater and large thermal baths, Hadrian's villa in Tivoli, Italy, was a fitting setting for the second-century Roman emperor to welcome guests, host parties and commemorate battle victories.

Centuries later, it's the mundane—not the magnificent—details of the 300-acre complex causing a stir, as Columbia University researchers and students digging on the Unesco World Heritage site uncover new sections of the villa that offer a rare glimpse of ordinary life in ancient Rome.

"There's a social layer that has always been completely inaccessible," says Francesco de Angelis, leader of the excavation project and an associate professor at Columbia, where he directs the Advanced Program of Ancient History and Art. "We are opening a window on an unknown world."

Since it was rediscovered in the 15th century, Hadrian's villa has been explored and studied by a steady stream of archaeologists and researchers as well as architects such as Le Corbusier and artists including Michelangelo and Raphael. Today, several digs are taking place around the villa and more research projects, including one from the British Museum, have recently started.

Over the past three summers, Mr. de Angelis and Marco Maiuro, an adjunct history professor and associate fellow at Columbia's Italian academy, have brought a team of researchers and students to Tivoli for monthlong digs. Their excavations have unearthed fresh findings at the Lararium, a shrine to the household gods known as *Lares*, and a new building that they believe could have housed high-ranking Romans.

"The skeleton of the Hadrian Villa was already known," says Mr. de Angelis. "We're now recovering the veins, arteries and muscles—the connective tissue that made this site a living organism."

While bigger discoveries at digs can steal the spotlight, small details bring the everyday to life. For instance, in Pompeii, archaeologists found shapes of burned bread that remained intact—if inedible—over the centuries, says Alfredo Carannante, a Neapolitan anthropologist who has studied Roman eating habits. In the early 2000s, in Herculaneum, a town near Naples that was destroyed by the same vol-



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: DE AGOSTINI/GETTY IMAGES; AP/WIDE WORLD



BIG DIG A team of researchers and students from Columbia University, far left, have been working at Hadrian's Villa, above, uncovering everyday objects like this ceiling fragment, left.

high-standard, middle-class apartment. This shows how well the middle class lived here."

Researchers believe that villa personnel attended festivities together and worshiped gods in the same spaces, no matter their social class. Being in the complex's microcity, with better access to the emperor and other high-ranking individuals, meant that slaves and others from the lower classes had greater hope of progressing socially. Life at the villa was also likely easier than in the city, researchers say, with better living conditions.

Mr. de Angelis says the findings, though still preliminary, throw new light on a fundamental issue for the Roman world: the dynamics of a center of power.

"We are still at the beginning, so the picture is necessarily fragmented," he says. But "we are redefining the landscape of the villa through the discovery of new buildings and by looking at those that were already known in a new light."

canic eruption that wiped out Pompeii in 79 AD, researchers found remains from the city's drainage system. The volcanic material protected the items in the pipes, leaving them almost intact. These included fish bones, which revealed that first-century residents consumed the same varieties Neapolitans still eat today.

In Tivoli, the Columbia team's findings

have brought greater insight into the community that sprang up to serve Hadrian when the emperor moved here to escape the chaos of Rome.

One excavation site featured mosaics and fine flooring that suggest it was once the luxury home of an upper-class Roman. "This is too humble a building for the emperor," says Mr. de Angelis, "but still a

MUSIC

Violin Chases the Blues Away

BY JIM FUSILLI

KAORU ISHIBASHI, best known as Kishi Bashi, has fashioned a successful career playing jubilant chamber pop with an infusion of electronic music. A multi-instrumentalist whose primary vehicles are voice and violin, his music blooms with technical proficiency and infectious exuberance. Feeling down? Listen to any of his five full-length albums, including his latest, "Sonderlust" (Joyful Noise), and soon the blues flee.

On his two most recent recordings, Mr. Bashi alters his form of aural communication without diminishing its impact. Late last year, he issued "String Quartet Live!" in which he discarded the multilayered pop electronics of his studio recordings in favor of a small ensemble. As he explored songs culled mostly from his first two solo studio discs—"151a" (2012) and "Lighght" (2014)—his voice soared above the strings, which were joined on some tunes by banjo and percussion. That new environment confirmed the integrity of Mr. Ishibashi's compositions and validated the frequent comparisons to Andrew Bird and Owen Pallett, classically trained violinists who move readily between musical styles.

On "Sonderlust," the 40-year-old neither returns to his familiar pop sound nor brings the string ensemble into the studio. The new work is a retro-minded hybrid. Produced by Chris Taylor of Grizzly Bear, the album gets its power and scope from the tandem of drummer Matt Chamberlain and bassist Bram Inscore. With that powerful rhythm section at his back, Mr. Ishibashi tries his hand at many styles, and all are deliv-

ered with a careful balance of discipline and abandon. Though drawn from rock and pop's past, some of these musical styles are new territory for him and thus "Sonderlust" is full of surprises.

"Say Yeah" taps into lush '70s dance music with sweeping strings, a fat synth bass, jangling rhythm guitars and a deft flute solo by Zachary Colwell who, with Mr. Ishibashi, founded Jupiter One, the now-defunct indie band whose

nance in the kind of quiet, subtle music heard on his 2015 live album. But when it was time to make a new studio disc, he thought nonorchestral pop made sense, especially since he was out of ideas for a string ensemble. "As an artist, I'm required to evolve," he said. "I don't want to fall back on my strengths."

For "Sonderlust," he let his imagination gambol. In "Flame on Flame (a Slow Dirge)," the shimmering keyboards sound like they were culled from a soundtrack to a '60s spy film, but the rhythm track is all 21st century. "Can't Let Go, Juno" calls to mind Anthony Gonzalez's M83—another contemporary act that appreciates '70s rock and pop—but Mr. Ishibashi's song prospers from jabbing notes that serve as counterpoint to the synth strings. "Ode to My Next Life" opens with hastening strings and Mr. Ishibashi improvising at the top of his falsetto, but the track explodes into a marriage of disco and prog rock. Mr. Chamberlain's cymbal work and a popcorn synth are the center of its supple midrange.

Mr. Ishibashi will take "Sonderlust" on the road, beginning Sept. 27 in his hometown of Athens, Ga. The in-concert version of Kishi Bashi will be "a hybrid party band with cello," he said, adding that the group will explore some of his new compositions in an acoustic setting. Thus, his quest for new means of expression continues. In the meanwhile, arresting, whimsical and beautifully played, "Sonderlust" is special as is.

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Kishi Bashi's new album is 'Sonderlust.'

SHERVIN LAINEZ

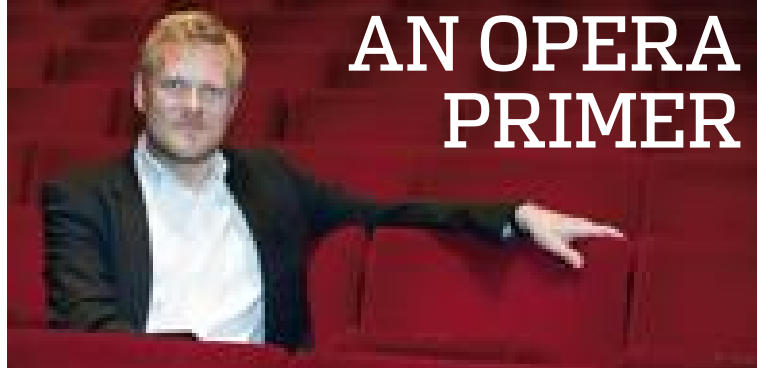
music foreshadowed some of the sounds on "Sonderlust." "Who'd You Kill" is an homage to Pink Floyd and its grand, spacey ballads, while "Why Don't You Answer Me" is vintage '70s rockin' pop with an unexpected, rich orchestral interlude before the song gallops to its end.

In a phone conversation last week, Mr. Ishibashi said he thought the 1970s were "the golden age of recording." He cited albums released in the decade by CTI Records, founded by jazz producer Creed Taylor, as among his favorites. "I love that label—the funky bass, the dry drums." He and Chris Taylor pushed bass and drums to the fore on the new disc. "Once I get a great performance, I'll turn it up," he said.

Calling a string quartet "an evolved perfect form," Mr. Ishibashi spoke of the emotional reso-

THE ESSENTIALS

AN OPERA PRIMER



BY ANNA RUSSELL

AS DIRECTOR OF LONDON'S Royal Opera House, Kasper Holten often faces a common question: Why do the players sing? "Why do they sing, 'I love you, I love you, I love you' and it takes five minutes?" he says. "Or they say, 'I'm dying, I'm dying, I'm dying' and it takes seven minutes."

His answer is always the same: "They sing because they are trying to express something larger than life."

Here, Mr. Holten offers a primer on five essential moments for budding fans. Don't forget your gloves.

'La Bohème' Act IV

Giacomo Puccini (1896)
Opera is an emotional fitness center. You go there to train your love muscle, your hate muscle. Do this by listening to one of the incredibly strong love stories. I'd suggest the last act of Puccini's "La Bohème." There's this chord when Rodolfo realizes his beloved Mimi has died of tuberculosis that strikes something much deeper, much more—that you can't explain and that can make you cry.

'Tosca' Act I

Giacomo Puccini (1900)
Stay with Puccini for one more and go watch "Tosca" live. At the end of the first act, there's a big scene where the police commissioner, Scarpia, is singing his plans to win over Tosca while the chorus is singing a mass. There's a whole chorus of maybe 80 people, and an orchestra of a similar number, assailing the room with sound. A good Scarpia, his voice would carry over all of that with no help, just the sheer naked power of the human voice.

'Don Giovanni' Finale

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1787)
The commander that's killed in the

first act comes back to haunt Don Giovanni as a ghost. It's a striking example of combining drama with emotion. Everything Don Giovanni has done in his life comes back to haunt him and won't let him go. Here's this incredibly charming seducer whose conscience, at the end, won't let him get away with it. It's a powerful scene that many will recognize. Watching that, you see how opera deals the supernatural: death, fear of death, facing up to yourself at the end—all the big moral questions.

Act II, 'Eugene Onegin'

Peter Tchaikovsky (1879)
There's a scene where a young man called Lensky, a poet, is going to have a duel with his best friend. He fears he might be dead when tomorrow comes. Even if you don't understand the Russian words, the combination of the singer and the orchestra tell you things that go beyond words. It tells you what it feels like to be afraid. It puts you in touch with emotions that otherwise might be hard to share. In the midst of this terrible feeling of fear, there's an incredible beauty.

'Ring of the Nibelung'

Richard Wagner (1876)
When people ask how to start with opera, your instinct is to tell them to go for the more sentimental stories, like "Bohème." But some people love to be challenged philosophically. If you have a taste for that, Wagner's "Ring Cycle" is absolutely astonishing. It's a massive, mammoth opera, so normally people think I'm crazy for recommending it for beginners. But I know several people who have been converted through seeing it. Sit there for five hours, turn off your electronics, and either you're going to be bored to death or you're going to be converted for life.

SIM CANETT/CLARKE/ROH