

**Act III** F. Scott Fitzgerald got it wrong when he said, “There are no second acts in American life.” In the case of **Monday Evening Concerts**, the venerable Los Angeles new music series, a long and lauded Act II has now given way to yet a *third* act.

It didn't always look as though the curtain would rise. Founded in 1939, Monday Evening Concerts had been in residence at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) since 1965. But in 2005, the series suffered a double blow: First LACMA announced that it was severing its ties, leaving the concerts without a venue or institutional sponsorship. Weeks later, Dorrance Stalvey, the composer who had led the series through most of the previous four decades, died of lung cancer.

It seemed as though Monday Evening Concerts would never recover from these setbacks. But just before Stalvey's death, he got LACMA to agree to one more season, which he proceeded to program. “He didn't live to see the concerts in '05 through '06, but at least he was doing the work he loved before he died,” says his widow, Valerie Bernstein Stalvey. Then, a few months after her husband's death, Valerie gathered together a group of the series' most ardent supporters. One person who attended was Justin Urcis, then artistic coordinator of the Philharmonic Society of Orange County. Urcis had previously been only an avid member of Monday Evening Concerts' audience, but soon he found himself (“I either volunteered or was nominated”) artistic director of the series.

Urcis's first priority: to mount a 2006–07 season, by hook or by crook. “We decided it was imperative not to stop—not to take a year off, then try to get things going again,” he says. “We had to have a season.” His resolve paid off this year in four concerts that took place at REDCAT in Walt Disney Concert Hall and Zipper Concert Hall, including evenings curated by Steven Stucky, Kent Nagano and Esa-Pekka Salonen, and opening with a tribute to Stalvey and premiering his last work, *Stream*.

The rallying of boldface names is impressive, but not unexpected. After all, even before its LACMA days, Monday Evening Concerts had presented the American debut of Pierre Boulez, served as a training ground for the young Michael Tilson Thomas and offered no fewer than 12 premieres by noted Angeleno Igor Stravinsky. Now, in its new, independent configuration, the series harkens back to its grass roots, when concerts were given on the roof of the home of the series' founder, Peter Yates.

“What happened with LACMA is a curse and a blessing,” says Urcis. “We lost our institutional support, but it's a liberation of sorts—now anything's possible! What's exciting is that we have an opportunity not just to have *x* amount of concerts on Mondays, but to be a force for contemporary and unusual music throughout the city.

“This isn't just any series,” says Urcis. “We're continuing an important legacy.”

[www.mondayeveningconcerts.org](http://www.mondayeveningconcerts.org)



MONDAY EVENING  
CONCERTS'  
JUSTIN URCIS