

**Press Release**

**MASTERVOICES OPENS ITS 2019-20 SEASON WITH THE GERSHWINS’ *LET ‘EM EAT CAKE***

**A MUSICAL TAKE ON A PRESIDENTIAL RE-ELECTION GONE HAYWIRE**

**NOVEMBER 21 AT CARNEGIE HALL**

**First Performance in New York in more than 30 years will feature Bryce Pinkham,** **Mikaela Bennett, Christopher Fitzgerald**, **Kevin Chamberlin, Fred Applegate, Chuck Cooper, and Lewis J. Stadlen**

***New York, NY, October 23, 2019*** – **MasterVoices** will beginits 2019-20 season on Thursday, November 21 at **Carnegie Hall** with the concert staging of **George and Ira Gershwins’ 1933 musical** ***Let ‘Em Eat Cake,*** with a book by **George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind**, a comic satire about a populist U.S. President who is voted out of office and stages a coup to regain power. Artistic Director **Ted Sperling** will direct and conduct MasterVoices, soloists and Orchestra of St. Luke’s in this timely musical which has not been heard in New York since 1987.

The cast comprises returning MasterVoices favorites, including Tony Award-nominee **Bryce Pinkham** as President Wintergreen, along with **Mikaela Bennett**, **Christopher Fitzgerald**, **Kevin Chamberlin**, **Fred Applegate**, **Chuck Cooper**,and **Lewis J. Stadlen**. The choreographer is **Andrew Palermo,** with sound design by **Scott Lehrer**, costumes by **Tracy Christensen** and lighting design by **Maarten Cornelis**. The concert script was adapted by **Laurence Maslon**.Celebrated fashion designer **Zac Posen**, who contributed to last spring’s MasterVoices production of *Lady in the Dark*, returns to provide gowns for the former First Lady’s fashion show at the end of Act II.

Following the success of their 1931 Pulitzer Prize winning hit *Of Thee I Sing*, the Gershwins re-teamed with Kaufman and Ryskind for a sequel, a dark comic political satire about a U.S. President who loses reelection, fires the Supreme Court, decides to stage a military coup, and even paints the White House blue. This rarely produced musical gem is filled with wonderful Gershwin songs, from the romantic “Mine” to the comic “Down With Everyone Who’s Up,” and features many of the actors who made MasterVoices’ 2017 production of *Of Thee I Sing*a hit.

Although not as commercially successful as *Of Thee I Sing*, *Let ‘Em Eat Cake* was even more musically ambitious. As he would in his next score, *Porgy and Bess*, George Gershwin aimed at a creation that used the language of Broadway but the formal complexity and structure of an opera. Music and dialogue were integrated, and the music carried the action. He drew on wide-ranging influences including Handel, Schubert, Gilbert and Sullivan, military marches, Yiddish music, and the blues. *Of Thee I Sing* had already featured an unusual amount of counterpoint, but *Let ’Em Eat Cake* took this much further. Gershwin said, “I’ve written most of the music for this show contrapuntally, and it is that very insistence on the sharpness of a form that gives my music the acid touch it has—which paints the words of the lyrics, and is in keeping with the satire of the piece.”

**[Click here](https://www.mastervoices.org/events/let-em-eat-cake/)** for further details on MasterVoices’ *Let ‘Em Eat Cake* event page

**Thursday, November 21, 2019, 7:00 pm**

Carnegie Hall, Stern Auditorium / Perelman Stage

[***Let ‘Em Eat Cake***](https://www.mastervoices.org/events/let-em-eat-cake/)

Music and Lyrics by George and Ira Gershwin

Book by George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind

Concert Script Adaptation by Laurence Maslon

**MasterVoices**

**Ted Sperling**,Artistic Director and Conductor

**Orchestra of St. Luke’s**

Choreography by **Andrew Palermo**

Sound design by **Scott Lehrer**

Costume Consultant, **Tracy Christensen**

Gowns provided by **Zac Posen**

Lighting design by **Maarten Cornelis**.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

**Bryce Pinkham** JOHN P. WINTERGREEN

**Mikaela Bennett** MARY WINTERGREEN

**Christopher Fitzgerald** KRUGER

**Kevin Chamberlin** ALEXANDER THROTTLEBOTTOM

**Fred Applegate** FRANCIS X. GILHOOLEY

**Chuck Cooper** MATTHEW FULTON

**Lewis J. Stadlen** LOUIS LIPPMAN

**Tickets**: Priced from $15 to $155, may be purchased online at [carnegiehall.org](https://www.carnegiehall.org/), by calling CarnegieCharge at 212.247.7800, or in person at Carnegie Hall’s box office at 57th and Seventh Avenue.

**More About *Let ‘Em Eat Cake***

In 1933 the U.S. was in the depths of the Great Depression. Against this dark background, the creators of the 1931 Pulitzer prize-winning musical *Of Thee I Sing*—George Gershwin, music; Ira Gershwin, lyrics; and George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, book—decided to write a sequel. The original show had satirized the American political system, telling the story of John P. Wintergreen, who runs for president of the United States—and wins—on a platform of Love, promising to marry the winner of a national beauty contest.

*Let ’Em Eat Cake*, mirroring the year of its birth, would prove to be much darker. Like its predecessor, it satirized politics and the Supreme Court. To this it added commentary on the army, the Union League Club (a conservative organization promoting clean government, which had helped to bring down the Tweed Ring), Fascists, radicals, the League of Nations, businessmen, fashion, and even baseball. *Let ’Em Eat Cake* featured many elements that were familiar to audiences from the earlier musical. It reprised “Wintergreen for President,” “Of Thee I Sing,” and the theme song of the Supreme Court. And many characters returned—President and Mrs. Wintergreen, the Supreme Court, and especially Alexander Throttlebottom, the hapless vice president whom no one ever recognized.

Wintergreen and his confederates are voted out of office in favor of John P. Tweedledee. With the help of the army (who has been bribed by being offered the war debt), Wintergreen seizes President Tweedledee and declares a dictatorship of the proletariat. He is in turn deposed by the radical rabble-rouser Kruger. Before the end of the evening, the Supreme Court is in chains, most of the main characters are condemned to be executed, and the military is threatening to take control of the country.

Reviewers didn’t quite know what to make of the music. “For all I know,” said the critic John Anderson, the music “may be great stuff, but you can’t wet a whistle with it, or take it out for dancing in the streets.” The *Catholic World* suggested that the musical would be more appropriately reviewed by a music critic rather than someone from the drama desk.

After 90 Broadway performances, *Let ’Em Eat Cake* closed, and it was never revived. Only one piece, the love song “Mine,” derived from an exercise Gershwin had written when he was taking lessons in counterpoint, earned a place outside the show; it was recorded by Judy Garland and Bing Crosby. For years much of the music and book were believed to be lost, although there were a few attempts at reconstruction, but in 1978 the composer’s handwritten notes were discovered in the Library of Congress. From this, the Broadway scholar John McGlinn reconstructed a detailed vocal score, which was then orchestrated by Russell Warner, drawing on the memories of people who had been involved in the original production.

Details of MasterVoices’ 2019-20 season can be found at [mastervoices.org](https://www.mastervoices.org/).

**About MasterVoices**

MasterVoices (formerly The Collegiate Chorale) was founded in 1941 by legendary American choral conductor Robert Shaw and has been under the artistic direction of Tony Award-winner Ted Sperling since 2013. Known for its versatility, the group’s repertoire ranges from choral masterpieces and operas in concert to operettas and musical theater; it is also known for highly theatrical performances of rarely-heard works such as last season’s *Lady in the Dark* by Kurt Weill and Ira Gershwin, Victor Herbert’s *Babes in Toyland*, Scott Joplin’s *Treemonisha,* Tchaikovsky’s *Maid of Orleans*, and Rossini’s *Moïse et Pharaon*. The group regularly commissions and premieres new works; recent seasons included works by Ricky Ian Gordon and Randall Eng.

As the country’s first interracial and interfaith chorus, the group performed at the opening of the United Nations and has sung and recorded under the batons of esteemed conductors including Serge Koussevitzky, Arturo Toscanini, Leonard Bernstein, Zubin Mehta, Riccardo Muti, and Alan Gilbert. It has been engaged by top-tier orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic and the Israel Philharmonic, and has appeared at the Verbier and Salzburg Festivals.

Concerts regularly feature an inclusive roster of world-class soloists from across the musical spectrum, including Bryn Terfel, Stephanie Blythe, Deborah Voigt, Eric Owens, Nmon Ford, John Holiday, Kelli O’Hara, Paulo Szot, Bebe Neuwirth, and Victoria Clark, along with cross–disciplinary collaborations with such diverse creative minds as *Vogue* Editor-at-Large Hamish Bowles, Silk Road visual artist Kevork Mourad, and acclaimed choreographer Doug Varone. Roger Rees was the group’s Artistic Associate from 2003–2015.

For more information, visit [mastervoices.org](http://www.mastervoices.org/). Connect with MasterVoices on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/MasterVoicesNY), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/MasterVoicesNY) and [Instagram](https://instagram.com/mastervoicesny/) (@mastervoicesny).

**About Ted Sperling**

One of today’s leading musical artists, Tony Award-winning Maestro Ted Sperling is a classically trained musician whose 30-year career has spanned from the concert hall and the opera house to the Broadway stage. Presently Artistic Director of MasterVoices, he has led such symphony orchestras as the New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, Dallas Symphony, the Iceland Symphony, Czech National Symphony and BBC Concert Orchestra, as well as New York City Opera and Houston Grand Opera. Formerly Principal Conductor of the Westchester Philharmonic, Mr. Sperling is a multi-faceted artist also known for his work as orchestrator, singer, pianist, violinist, violist, director, and music director.

With MasterVoices, projects have included acclaimed productions of rarely-heard gems such as Kurt Weill’s *The Firebrand of Florence, Knickerbocker Holiday,* *The Road of Promise* (based on *The Eternal Road* and subsequently recorded on Navona Records), and last season’s sold–out three–performance run of *Lady in the Dark* at New York City Center*.* Other notable productions with the group include the NYC premieres of David Lang’s *battle hymns* at the Intrepid Museum and Ricky Ian Gordon’s operas *The Grapes of Wrath* at Carnegie Hall and *27* at City Center.

Outside of MasterVoices, 2019 projects include bringing *The King and I* to Japan, and several programs with the San Diego Symphony. Notable 2018 concerts included a Bernstein recital with soprano Isabel Leonard at the Kimmel Center and the Park Avenue Armory, an opera program with the RTE National Symphony Orchestra in Dublin, a benefit concert staging of *Camelot* starring Lin-Manuel Miranda, and two film programs with San Francisco Symphony. He served as Music Director and conductor for the revival of *My Fair Lady*, at Lincoln Center Theater, and serves as Artistic Director of NYU’s newly launched Broadway Orchestra Initiative. He made his Broadway stage debut as Wallace Hartley in *Titanic* and appeared as Steve Allen in the finale of Season Two of “The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel.”

Sperling has conducted multiple concerts for PBS’s *Live From Lincoln Center*, the American Songbook Series at Lincoln Center, and the *Lyrics and Lyricists* series at the 92nd Street Y. He conducted Audra McDonald in a double bill of *La Voix Humaine* and the world premiere of *Send: Who Are You? I Love You?* at the Houston Grand Opera*.* He won the 2005 Tony and Drama Desk Awards for his orchestrations of Adam Guettel’s *The Light in the Piazza*, for which he was also Music Director.

In addition to his directing work with MasterVoices, Mr. Sperling’s work as a stage director includes the world premieres of four critically acclaimed original musicals Off-Broadway—including *The Other Josh Cohen* and *See What I Wanna See*—and a noted production of *Lady in the Dark* at the Prince Theater in Philadelphia, starring Andrea Marcovicci. He graduated *summa cum laude* from Yale University, and received the Faculty Prize at the Juilliard School.

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