



MASTEROICES ANNOUNCES DETAILS OF ITS 2023-24 SEASON
NOVEMBER 4, 2023 – APRIL 17, 2024

Season Opens with Stephen Sondheim and Burt Shevelove’s Musical *The Frogs*, Inspired by Aristophanes’ Play as Rewritten by Nathan Lane

New York City Premiere of *To My Arms / Restore*, a Co-Presentation with Doug Varone and Dancers Performed to Composer Nico Bentley’s *Handel Remixed*

Revisited Concert Version of Ricky Ian Gordon and Michael Korie’s Opera *The Grapes of Wrath* Based on John Steinbeck’s Novel

New York, NY, May 11, 2023 — **Ted Sperling**, Artistic Director of **MasterVoices**, announced details of the celebrated chorus’ 82nd season, celebrating the power of the human voice to unite, inspire and connect since 1941. The 2023-24 season, which is **Ted Sperling’s tenth as MasterVoices Artistic Director**, opens on November 4 and features rare revivals of **Stephen Sondheim and Burt Shevelove’s** satiric musical ***The Frogs***, last heard in New York City in 2004; and **Ricky Ian Gordon and Michael Korie’s** “great American opera” (*Musical America*) ***The Grapes of Wrath***, last performed in New York City by MasterVoices in 2010; and the **New York City Premiere** of **Doug Varone’s *To My Arms / Restore***, a co-presentation performed to music by Handel including a remix by composer Nico Bentley.

The Frogs at Rose Theater at Jazz at Lincoln Center

On **November 4, 2023 at 2pm and 7:30pm** at the **Rose Theater at Jazz at Lincoln Center**, Ted Sperling leads the 120–member **MasterVoices** chorus and guest soloists in two performances of a concert staging of **Stephen Sondheim and Burt Shevelove’s *The Frogs***, inspired by the ancient Aristophanes play of the same name, and as rewritten by **Nathan Lane** for its 2004 staging at Lincoln Center Theater. This boisterously hilarious yet poignant musical follows Dionysos, Greek god of wine and drama, and his servant Xanthias as they journey to Hades to identify and bring back “the best playwright,” to help inspire and save mankind.

To My Arms / Restore at NYU Skirball Center

MasterVoices reunites with its frequent artistic collaborator, choreographer **Doug Varone**, and his company, **Doug Varone and Dancers**, for the **New York City Premiere** of Varone’s ***To My Arms / Restore***, on **March 22-23** at the **Skirball Center** in New York City. This co-presentation with Doug Varone and Dancers is a two-part work set to a suite of exquisite operatic arias by Handel and his choral work *Dixit Dominus*. Eleven dances will be performed in Part 1: *To My Arms* to Handel arias sung by five soloists, accompanied by musicians from the **New York Baroque Incorporated** orchestra, conducted by MasterVoices leader, Ted Sperling. For Part 2: *Restore*, composer **Nico Bentley** and the MasterVoices Chorus will join the dancers, orchestra and

soloists in performing *Handel Remixed*, the choral masterwork *Dixit Dominus* layered with Bentley's electronic DJ'ing.

The Grapes of Wrath at Carnegie Hall

The season ends on **April 17** at Carnegie Hall with a new look at the first work Ted Sperling brought to MasterVoices, in 2010. **Ricky Ian Gordon** and **Michael Korie's** "great American opera" (*Musical America*), ***The Grapes of Wrath***, is based on the haunting American classic novel of the same name by Nobel Prize winner **John Steinbeck**, about the Great Depression. This concert version of the story of the greatest migration in American history, when 2.5 million people left their homes in the Great Plains states, feels even more relevant in today's world. The MasterVoices performance of this work will feature music exclusive to this version, with a keen focus on choral elements. This production will once again feature projections by **Wendall K. Harrington**.

Said Mr. Sperling, "As we celebrate my tenth anniversary with MasterVoices, I'm delighted to revisit the very first project I brought to the group, the magnificent American opera, *The Grapes of Wrath*. And following up on the rare Sondheim gem we presented last season (*Anyone Can Whistle*), I'm excited to bring *The Frogs* to a new audience. The show is wildly funny, with a sophisticated and sometimes haunting score by the late master. With our cherished collaborator, Doug Varone, we are honored to collaborate on his latest work, set to the soaring melodies of Handel remixed by composer Nico Bentley."

Details of MasterVoices' 2023-24 season can be found at mastervoices.org and casting will be announced at a later date.

The Frogs

A play written in 405 B.C. by Aristophanes

Freely adapted by Burt Shevelove

Even more freely adapted by Nathan Lane

Music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

Saturday, November 4, 2023, 2:00 pm

Saturday, November 4, 2023, 7:30 pm

Rose Theater at Jazz at Lincoln Center

MasterVoices Chorus

MasterVoices Orchestra

Ted Sperling, Director and Conductor

Tickets, priced from \$30, are on sale on August 28, 2023, and may be purchased online at jazz.org, at the Jazz at Lincoln Center box office, Broadway at 60th Street, or by calling 212-721-6500.

Burt Shevelove's first adaptation of Aristophanes' 2400-year-old comedy *The Frogs*, set in a troubled war-plagued society that is bereft of moral and cultural leadership, with frogs embodying the complacency that keeps the world from moving forward, was performed at Yale University while Shevelove was a student there in the early 1940s. In 1974, it was restaged in and around the Yale swimming pool with Christopher Durang, Meryl Streep and Sigourney Weaver as members of the chorus in a new version with music by composer **Stephen Sondheim** and book and lyrics by Shevelove. Sondheim and Shevelove had worked together earlier on *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, also inspired by the ancient Greeks.

Fast forward to the early 21st century when *The Frogs* was presented in concert at the Library of Congress and given its first recording. In 2004, Nathan Lane, who had starred in this recording, joined Mr. Sondheim in expanding and rewriting the show for a production at Lincoln Center Theater, starring Mr. Lane as Dionysos and Roger Bart as Xanthias. Like Sondheim's rarely heard *Anyone Can Whistle*, which was performed by MasterVoices last season, *The Frogs* has a rich and varied score with a substantial role for the chorus and includes one of Sondheim's most beautiful love songs, "Ariadne." As Nathan Lane wrote in 2004, "There's something in this piece right now - where the country is and for me in particular - there's something idealistic about the notion of believing that the arts can make a difference. You can affect a change. And in *The Frogs*, that is Dionysos' dream - to go down to Hades and bring back this great writer. The belief that that could actually have an effect on the world is noble and touching and crazy - all at the same time."

To My Arms / Restore

Friday, March 22, 2024, 7:30 pm

Saturday, March 23, 2024, 7:30 pm

NYU Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Place, New York

MasterVoices Chorus

Ted Sperling, conductor

[Doug Varone and Dancers](#)

[New York Baroque Incorporated](#)

Nico Bentley, composer

Doug Varone: To My Arms / Restore (NYC Premiere)

Featuring arias from Handel's Alexander Balus, Atalanta, Giulio Cesare, Orlando, Samson, Scipione, Semele, Serse, Teseo, and Handel's choral work Dixit Dominus.

To My Arms / Restore embodies **Doug Varone's** decades-long choreographic fascination with the deeply emotional and the immensely physical, two aspects that are on full display and resonate in the rich dances crafted by Varone for this two-part work. Set to excerpts of operatic arias and duets by Handel and featuring five vocal soloists and a chamber ensemble, *To My Arms* (Part 1) builds a rich and distinct landscape of love and loss within a suite of eleven dances, evoking a strange otherworld of intimacy. In stark contrast, *Restore* (Part 2) is a visceral, tactile, and unsparing movement that explodes across the stage, revealing a new and wide-open terrain of physicality. It is driven by the 21st century sound of composer **Nico Bentley's Handel Remixed**, a score that fuses the fundamentals of Handel's 18th century choral work *Dixit Dominus* with beats more commonly heard in clubs around the globe; the result of which is a marriage between a score and a dance that is unabashedly glorious.

Award-winning choreographer and director **Doug Varone** works in all genres of the performing arts, including film, as well as in fashion. His New York City-based Doug Varone and Dancers company has been commissioned and presented to critical acclaim by leading national and international venues for three decades, and his dances have been staged for more than 75 college and university programs in U.S.A. For MasterVoices, Varone has created choreographies for its stagings of Kurt Weill, Ira Gershwin and Moss Hart's *Lady in the Dark*, and Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. His Metropolitan Opera credits are *Salome*, with its Dance of the Seven Veils for singer Karita Mattila; the world premiere of Tobias Picker's *An American Tragedy*; Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*, designed by David Hockney; and Berlioz's *Les Troyens*. He directed multiple premieres for American opera companies and his numerous theatre credits include choreography for Broadway, Off-Broadway and theaters across the country.

Tickets will be on sale online at nyuskirball.org, at the NYU Skirball box office, 566 LaGuardia Place, New York, or by calling (888) 611-8183. Details regarding on-sale date and ticket pricing will be announced later.

The Grapes of Wrath

Music by Ricky Ian Gordon, libretto by Michael Korie, orchestrations by Ricky Ian Gordon and Bruce Coughlin

Wednesday, April 17, 2024 at 7:30 pm

Carnegie Hall, Stern Auditorium / Perelman Stage

MasterVoices Chorus

Orchestra of St. Luke's

Ted Sperling, director and conductor

Wendall K. Harrington, projections

Ricky Ian Gordon and Michael Korie's opera *The Grapes of Wrath* premiered at Minnesota Opera in 2007. Based on John Steinbeck's prize-winning historic 600-page narrative depicting the exodus of impoverished Oklahomans to California during the Great Depression, it was Gordon's first large-scale work, written in three acts and 33 scenes with no recitatives, and with thirteen principal and 50 featured roles. Writing in *Opera Today* Wes Blomster placed *The Grapes of Wrath* in the company of Janáček and Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth*, continuing, "almost a century after Mahler's quintessential score, Gordon and Korie have created a new - and American - song of the earth." In the *Los Angeles Times*, critic Mark Swed wrote that: "...the greatest glory of the opera is Gordon's ability to musically flesh out the entire 11-member Joad clan...Gordon's other great achievement is to merge Broadway and opera... greatly enhanced by his firm control over ensembles and his sheer love for the operatic voice." Gordon and Korie's *Grapes of Wrath* has been revised in subsequent years and has been performed as a two-act concert version. In 2010 **MasterVoices**, then known as The Collegiate Chorale, premiered the concert version in Carnegie Hall, directed by Eric Simonson, who had staged the opera's premiere, with **Ted Sperling** conducting. The cast included a rare mingling of theater and opera singers, and featured narrator Jane Fonda, whose father Henry Fonda had memorably played Tom Joad in John Ford's film of *The Grapes of Wrath* in 1940. Reviewing the concert version with its trimmed score, Anthony Tommasini wrote in *The New York Times*, "Mr. Gordon's music combines his deep sympathy for musical theater with his devotion to American song."

Tickets, priced from \$30, are on sale on January 17, 2024, and may be purchased online at carnegiehall.org, by calling CarnegieCharge at 212.247.7800 or in person at Carnegie Hall's box office at 57th and Seventh Avenue.

About MasterVoices

MasterVoices (formerly The Collegiate Chorale) was founded in 1941 by legendary American choral conductor Robert Shaw. Under the artistic direction of Tony Award winner Ted Sperling since 2013, the group is known for its versatility and a repertoire that ranges from choral masterpieces and operas in concert to operettas and musical theater. Season concerts feature a volunteer chorus of 100+ members from all walks of life, alongside a diverse roster of world-class soloists from across the musical spectrum, including Julia Bullock, Dove Cameron, Anthony Roth Costanzo, Renée Fleming, John Holiday, Jennifer Holliday, Norm Lewis, Victoria Clark, and Kelli O'Hara. Under Sperling's direction the group has created cross-disciplinary collaborations with such diverse creative minds as legendary lyricist Sheldon Harnick, *Vogue* Editor-at-Large Hamish Bowles, fashion designer Zac Posen, Silk Road visual artist Kevork Mourad, illustrator Manik Choksi, stage designer Doug Fitch, and choreographers Doug Varone and Andrew Palermo. Roger Rees was the group's Artistic Associate from 2003–2015, and in 2021 the group received a New York Emmy Award

nomination and a Drama League Award nomination for its multi-genre digital concert production, *Myths and Hymns*.

Known for its presentation of lesser-known artistic treasures such as Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha*, and Tchaikovsky's *Maid of Orleans*, the group has received recent accolades for productions of rarely-heard works such as this season's New York City premiere of Sheldon Harnick's full English translation of Bizet's *Carmen*, *Lady in the Dark* by Kurt Weill and Ira Gershwin, Victor Herbert's *Babes in Toyland*, the Gershwins' *Let 'Em Eat Cake*, Stephen Sondheim and Arthur Laurents's *Anyone Can Whistle*, and Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*. They also commission and premiere new works; recent examples include choral works by Ricky Ian Gordon, Marisa Michelson, Tariq Al-Sabir, and Randall Eng.

As one of the country's first interracial and interfaith choruses, MasterVoices (as The Collegiate Chorale) performed at the opening of the United Nations and has sung and recorded under the batons of esteemed conductors including Serge Koussevitzky, Arturo Toscanini, and Leonard Bernstein, among others. 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.

For more information, visit mastervoices.org. Connect with MasterVoices on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) (@mastervoicesny).

About Ted Sperling

One of today's leading musical artists, Tony Award-winning Maestro Ted Sperling is a classically trained musician whose 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, Boston Pops, San Diego 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, Maestro Sperling has led acclaimed productions of rarely-heard gems as both director and conductor. These include 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 the sold-out three-performance run of *Lady in the Dark* at New York City Center. Other notable productions with the group include Carnegie Hall performances of Stephen Sondheim's *Anyone Can Whistle*, George and Ira Gershwin's satirical musicals *Of Thee I Sing* and *Let 'Em Eat Cake*, a reconstruction of Victor Herbert's *Babes in Toyland*, and *Song of Norway*; the New York City premieres of David Lang's *battle hymns* at the Intrepid Sea, Air and Space Museum; and Ricky Ian Gordon's operas *The Grapes of Wrath* at Carnegie Hall and *27* at New York City Center.

During the 2020-2021 season, Maestro Sperling spearheaded a filmed production of Adam Guettel's *Myths and Hymns* for MasterVoices, producing and music directing 24 short musical films and directing roughly half of them. This project was nominated for a Drama League Award, and featured over 100 artists collaborating remotely, including Renée Fleming, Take 6, Jennifer Holliday and Julia Bullock. Now that live performances are back, Maestro Sperling is supervising national and international productions of *My Fair Lady*, *The King and I*, and *Fiddler on the Roof*. He has symphonic engagements in the U.S. and Europe and continues to

teach at NYU, conducting three different orchestras and training the next generation of Broadway musicians and conductors.

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. 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."

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