

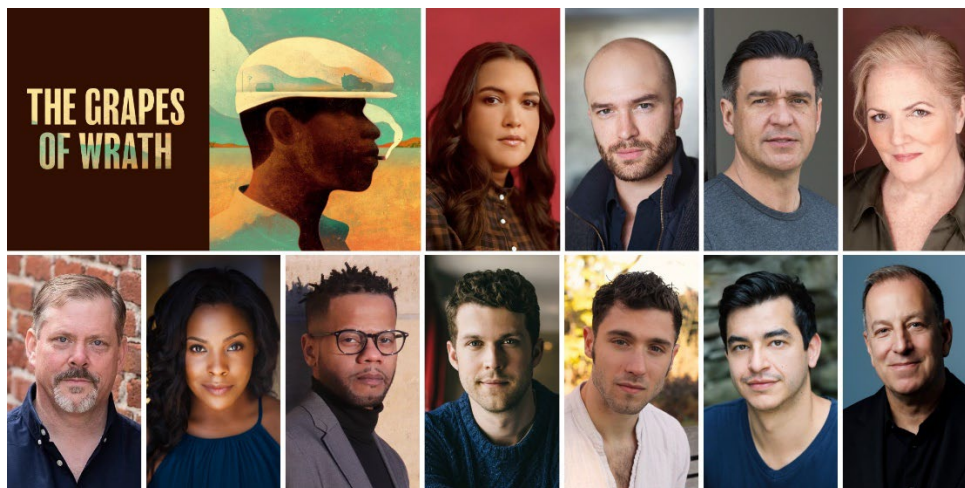


Press Release

**MASTEROICES PRESENTS REVISED CONCERT VERSION OF
RICKY IAN GORDON AND MICHAEL KORIE'S OPERA *THE GRAPES OF WRATH*
APRIL 17 AT CARNEGIE HALL**

Conducted and Directed by Ted Sperling, the Performance Stars Singers Mikaela Bennett, John Brancy, Nathan Gunn, Margaret Lattimore, Malcolm MacKenzie, Bryonha Marie, Kyle Oliver, Christian Pursell, Victor Starsky, and Schyler Vargas

MasterVoices Announces the Creation of *Three in Six*, a New Program Committed to Producing Three Contemporary American Operas in Six Years



New York, NY, March 4, 2024 – MasterVoices, the acclaimed chorus celebrating the power of the human voice to unite, inspire and connect since 1941, closes its 2023-24 season on **April 17** at Carnegie Hall with a revised concert version of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the “great American opera” (*Musical America*) by composer **Ricky Ian Gordon** and librettist **Michael Korie** based on the epic novel of the same name by Nobel Prize winner **John Steinbeck**. Set in the Great Depression of the 1930s, it tells the story of the Joad family, Oklahoma sharecroppers who, along with thousands of others, become refugees in their own country. As they migrate to find work in the would-be Promised Land of California, they face hardship, resentment, and violence.

The Grapes of Wrath was given its New York City premiere by MasterVoices in 2010 and was the first work Ted Sperling brought to the group. This revival, presented as part of Mr. Sperling’s tenth season anniversary as Artistic Director with MasterVoices, features new revisions and music exclusive to this performance, with a keen focus on choral elements.

Ted Sperling conducts the 120–member **MasterVoices** chorus, the **Orchestra of St. Luke's**, and an all-star cast including soprano **Mikaela Bennett**, last seen as Micaëla in MasterVoices' 2022 staging of *Carmen*; baritone **John Brancy**, praised in the *New York Times* for “his vibrant, resonant presence” as Escamillo in the same production; “one of America’s great modern-day baritones” (*OperaWire*), **Nathan Gunn**, who sang the role of Tom Joad in the 2010 MasterVoices Carnegie Hall concert version premiere and who returns as Pa Joad; Grammy-nominated mezzo-soprano **Margaret Lattimore**; baritone **Malcolm MacKenzie**, praised for his “rich, warm and dark tone” (*Opera News*); Broadway’s **Bryonha Marie** (“her silvery soprano was utterly spellbinding,” *The Boston Globe*); the “velvet-sounding” (*Woman Around Town*) baritone **Kyle Oliver**; bass-baritone **Christian Pursell** in his Carnegie Hall debut; tenor **Victor Starsky**, who sang Roméo in New York City Opera’s recent *Roméo et Juliette*; and “powerful baritone” (*Washington Post*) **Schyler Vargas**, who sang the role of Strephon in MasterVoices’ 2023 production of *Iolanthe*.

The sound design is by **Scott Lehrer**. **Tracy Christensen** is the costume designer, and the lighting design is by **Brian Tovar**. The performance features projections by **Wendall K. Harrington**, who created the projections for the Minnesota Opera premiere as well as the MasterVoices 2010 concert, and stage management by **Ira Mont**.

Aside from its standalone significance, MasterVoices’ *The Grapes of Wrath* production will also mark the **inauguration of the company’s *Three in Six* program**, an ambitious new series committed to producing three contemporary American operas over the next six years. *Three in Six* builds on the group’s signature style, recently characterized by *The New York Times* as “smart modest stagings with strong musical values,” and is driven by the desire to give New York audiences more opportunities to hear outstanding 20th and 21st-century operas in lush musical environments. “The major opera companies have so few slots available,” says Ted Sperling, “and while there are innovative groups doing wonderful chamber stagings, there is little in between. So many worthy works – by some of our country’s greatest contemporary composers – have yet to be produced in New York for precisely this reason, and we look forward to opening up those vistas.”

[The Grapes of Wrath](#)

Wednesday, April 17, 2024, 7:30 pm

Carnegie Hall, Stern Auditorium / Perelman Stage

Concert Opera Version in Two Acts

Music by Ricky Ian Gordon

Libretto by Michael Korie

Concert Narration by Kevin Doyle

Orchestrations by Ricky Ian Gordon and Bruce Coughlin

Based on the novel by John Steinbeck

Ted Sperling, Conductor and Director

MasterVoices Chorus

Orchestra of St. Luke's

Sound design by **Scott Lehrer**

Costume design by **Tracy Christensen**

Lighting design by **Brian Tovar**

Projections by **Wendall K. Harrington**

Stage Management by **Ira Mont**

CAST

TOM JOAD, a released prisoner, **Kyle Oliver**
MA JOAD, Tom's mother, **Margaret Lattimore**
MAE, a waitress, **Bryonha Marie**
ROSE OF SHARON, Tom's pregnant sister, **Mikaela Bennett**
JIM CASY, a lapsed preacher, **Victor Starsky**
PA JOAD, a tenant farmer, **Nathan Gunn**
UNCLE JOHN, Pa's brother, **Malcolm MacKenzie**
CONNIE RIVERS, Rose of Sharon's husband / RAGGED MAN / TRUCK DRIVER, **Schyler Vargas**
NOAH, Tom's slow-witted brother, **Christian Pursell**
AL, his younger brother, **John Brancy**

Tickets priced from \$30 - \$155, 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.

Details of MasterVoices' 2023-24 season can be found at mastervoices.org.

More about *The Grapes of Wrath*

Ricky Ian Gordon and **Michael Korie**'s opera *The Grapes of Wrath* premiered at Minnesota Opera in 2007. It was Gordon's first large-scale work, written in three acts and 33 scenes, with thirteen principal and 50 featured roles. The score was laced with banjo, guitar, harmonica, saxophone, and barroom piano. Writing in *Opera Today*, Wes Blomster placed *The Grapes of Wrath* in the company of Janáček and Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, 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."

In 2010 MasterVoices, then known as The Collegiate Chorale, premiered the concert version at Carnegie Hall with **Ted Sperling** conducting. It was directed by **Eric Simonson**, who had staged the opera's premiere. Narrated by Jane Fonda, the cast included Victoria Clark, Nathan Gunn, Christine Ebersole, Elizabeth Futral, Matthew Worth, Sean Panikkar, Stephen Powell, Steven Pasquale, Peter Halverson, Andrew Wilkowske, Madelyn Gunn, and Alex Schwartz. The projections were by Wendall K. Harrington and the lighting by Francis Aronson. 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...It must be said that *The Grapes of Wrath* certainly reached the audience on Monday night. The hall was packed and the ovation tumultuous." Said Eric Myers, *Opera Magazine*, "...a stirring, crowd-pleasing work that left the Carnegie Hall audience cheering on its feet...on the whole Gordon and his librettist Michael Korie have created a major new American opera, one that is likely to stand the test of time."

In writing a series of articles for the *San Francisco News*, Salinas, California native **John Steinbeck**, who had witnessed and chronicled labor riots and strikes in the Salinas Valley, visited the migrant camps and tent cities of the workers, seeing firsthand the horrible living conditions of the migrant families. He famously said, "I'm trying to write history while it is happening, and I don't want it to be wrong." His book *In Dubious Battle*, about the fruit pickers strike against the regions' big landowners, preceded *The Grapes of Wrath*, as did his break-out book, *Tortilla Flat*, and *Of Mice and Men*. Of *The Grapes of Wrath*, which was published in 1939, winning a Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award, he said, "It is a mean, nasty book and if I could make it nastier I would ... the book has a definite job to do ... I want to put a tag of shame on the greedy bastards

who are responsible for this.” In 1940 the book was made into a film directed by John Ford starring Henry Fonda as Tom Joad. It won two Academy Awards.

More about Ricky Ian Gordon

Prolific composer Ricky Ian Gordon esteemed for his “profound gift of modern art song composition” (*OperaWire*) first collaborated with MasterVoices in 2003 with his suite from *Only Heaven*. It was followed by the New York concert premiere of *The Grapes of Wrath* (2010); the New York premiere of his opera *27* (2016); and songs for the concerts “Night Songs and Love Waltzes” (2019) and “Songs for a Summer Night” (2022).

Recent productions of his work include *Intimate Apparel*, an opera created with librettist Lynn Nottage commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera and Lincoln Center Theater, which premiered in January 2022 at Lincoln Center Theater directed by Bartlett Sher and which aired on PBS in the fall of 2023. 2022 also saw the New York City Opera and National Yiddish Folksbiene-Theatre premiere of Gordon and Michael Korie’s collaboration, *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, an opera adapted from Giorgio Bassani’s 1962 novel about the Italian-Jewish community in Fascist Italy. Gordon’s *Marvin Gaye Songs*, commissioned by the Tucson Song Festival for baritone Justin Austin, using poems by Vievee Francis, will premiere in New York on March 5, and a new cycle *Huit Chansons des Fleurs* will be on a new release recording by soprano Erin Morley on Orchid Records, April 24 and premiere at the Kennedy Center May 13. Future commissions include *This House*, a new opera for Opera Theater of Saint Louis’ 50th anniversary season in 2025 with librettists Lynn Nottage and Ruby Gerber.

More about Michael Korie

Michael Korie received the Marc Blitzstein Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters for his work in both musical theater and opera. *Flying Over Sunset*, created with Tom Kitt and James Lapine, premiered at Lincoln Center Theater in 2021 with a Tony-nominated score. Korie wrote the lyrics to composer Scott Frankel’s music for the Broadway productions of *War Paint* and *Grey Gardens*, with books by Doug Wright, and the Off-Broadway productions of *Far From Heaven* with book by Richard Greenberg, and *Happiness* with book by John Weidman, directed by Susan Stroman. Korie and Frankel’s scores have been nominated for Tony and Drama Desk Awards, received The Outer Critics Circle Award, and have been produced on Broadway, Playwrights Horizons, Lincoln Center Theater as well as throughout the USA and abroad. The London premiere of *Grey Gardens* won the Offie Award for Best Musical of the year. Earlier this season *War Paint* was produced in a five-city tour of Japan. Korie and Gordon’s opera *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, adapted from Bassani’s novel, premiered at New York City Opera and National Yiddish Folksbiene-Theatre and was presented in concert in Italy. Korie’s original librettos to operas composed by Stewart Wallace include *Harvey Milk*, *Where’s Dick?*, *Kabbalah*, and *Hopper’s Wife*. A new production of *Harvey Milk* premiered to acclaim in 2022 at Opera Theater of Saint Louis and will be seen at Opera Parallèle in San Francisco.

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 of Adam Guettel's *Myths and Hymns*.

Known for its presentation of lesser-known artistic treasures, the group has received recent accolades for productions of rarely-heard works such as this season's acclaimed revival of Sondheim and Sheelove's *The Frogs*, last 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 Marcovici. 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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