



The Oratorio Society
of New York

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**ORATORIO SOCIETY OF NEW YORK & MUSIC DIRECTOR KENT TRITLE, WITH
SUSANNA PHILLIPS AND JOHN CHEST, OPEN OSNY'S 145TH SEASON ON
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 6, AT CARNEGIE HALL**

**An All-Brahms Program of Choral Masterworks, *Ein deutsches Requiem* (A
German Requiem) and *Schicksalslied* (Song of Destiny), Launches a Season that
Includes *Messiah* and Two World Premieres**

OSNY Performed the U.S. Premiere of *Ein deutsches Requiem* in 1877



Susanna Phillips ([photo](#) by Zachary Maxwell Stertz) and John Chest ([photo](#) by Andrey Stoycher)



Oratorio Society of New York's performance of *Messiah* at Carnegie Hall, Dec. 21, 2016 ([photo](#) by Claudia Huter)

Star soprano Susanna Phillips and rising star baritone John Chest join the Oratorio Society of New York (OSNY) and its music director, Kent Tritle, for a program of two masterpieces of choral music by Brahms to launch OSNY's 2017-18 season on Monday, November 6, 2017, at Carnegie Hall. *Schicksalslied (Song of Destiny)* is followed by the towering *Ein deutsches Requiem (A German Requiem)*, which the *New York Times* [recently described](#) as "something of an anthem for our time, with grand social and political reverberations." OSNY performed the U.S. premiere of *Ein deutsches Requiem* in 1877.

This is the 145th season of the 200-voice Oratorio Society, New York's standard for grand choral performance, which has been performing at Carnegie Hall since the hall opened in 1891. The season also includes OSNY's annual performances of Handel's *Messiah*, a tradition unbroken since 1874, and the world premieres of Pulitzer Prize winner Paul Moravec's *Sanctuary Road*, commissioned by OSNY and drawn from accounts of the Underground Railroad, and Behzad Ranjbaran's *We Are One*, which presents texts from different time periods, cultures, and languages that reflect on the human desire for mutual respect and peace.

OSNY premieres Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem* in the U.S. in 1877 – to mixed critical response

"In its final form, *Ein deutsches Requiem* premiered in Cologne on February 16, 1869," writes Marie Gangemi in the program's notes. "Eight years later, the Oratorio Society of New York presented the first U.S. performance in Steinway Hall on March 15, 1877. It is a tribute to the creative genius to the Society's founder, Leopold Damrosch, that the Society undertook this premiere—its first—during its fourth season. Damrosch was an inner-circle advocate of New German Music—Liszt and Wagner both served as godfathers to Damrosch children—and considered it his mission to introduce this music in the United States. . . . Damrosch gambled on this controversial new work, hedging his bet by pairing it with a Bach cantata and an excerpt from Gluck's *Orfeo*. The controversies ranged from its lack of an obvious Christian message to its presumption, in a newly unified Germany, of German nationalism without homage to New German Music. The *New York Times* review stated, 'it is exceedingly scholarly, but its length and monotonousness are such that it is scarcely likely to impress any but students.' But Damrosch was right and Brahms's critics were wrong."

Brahms called it a "human requiem"

Ein deutsches Requiem was inspired by the deaths of Robert Schumann and Brahms's own mother. Rather than using the Latin Mass for the Dead, Brahms, who referred to this as a "human requiem," drew his libretto from Luther's translation of the Bible and the Apocrypha. It offers consolation for the living rather than prayers for the dead—the work opens and closes with the words, "Selig sind" ("Blessed are they"), and the work's musical and emotional core is the uplifting choral anthem "Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen" ("How Lovely Is Thy Dwelling Place"). After several partial performances, Brahms completed the work in 1868, and it was premiered in early 1869.

Soon after finishing the Requiem, Brahms was introduced to the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin. Drawing from classical antiquity, Hölderlin's "Hyperions Schicksalslied" contrasts the peace of

spirit world with the despair of people on earth, weighed down by destiny. While attracted to the text, Brahms was disturbed by its somber, despondent ending, so in his setting he added an orchestra postlude to offer hope for the living. The work was premiered in 1871.

The soloists for the Requiem are soprano **Susanna Phillips** and baritone **John Chest**. Ms. Phillips is a favorite OSNY guest artist; in recent years she has been featured in works of Moravec, Haydn, Filas, and Britten. She will return to the Metropolitan Opera in February for her tenth consecutive season, singing Musetta in *La bohème*. With this concert Mr. Chest makes his OSNY debut. The American baritone, a 2017 Richard Tucker Career Grant winner, opens the season at the Bavarian State Opera in Munich singing Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte*, and in October gives an all-Brahms recital at the Festival d'Aix en Provence.

This concert is made possible in part by a grant from the Casement Fund.

OSNY Carnegie Hall Season Continues

- **Handel's *Messiah*—December 18, 2017:** OSNY continues its annual holiday tradition of presenting Handel's beloved oratorio. The Oratorio Society has the distinction of performing *Messiah* every Christmas season since 1874, and at Carnegie Hall every year it has been open, offering New Yorkers *Messiah* on a grand choral scale. The 2017 soloists are soprano **Kathryn Lewek**, mezzo-soprano **Sara Murphy**, tenor **Lawrence Jones**, and bass-baritone **Dashon Burton**.
- **Moravec & Ranjbaran World Premieres—May 7, 2018:** OSNY presents two world premieres that speak to humanity's struggle in its quest for freedom and peace. Commissioned by OSNY, *Sanctuary Road* is an oratorio by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer **Paul Moravec**, with a libretto by **Mark Campbell**. The work is based on African-American abolitionist William Still's accounts as a conductor on the Underground Railroad. **Behzad Ranjbaran's *We Are One*** for chorus and orchestra was commissioned by the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra (which will give the west coast premiere) in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It is an expansion of the composer's 2008 *a cappella* song *We Are One*, a five-minute setting of poetry by the medieval Persian poet Sa'di, into a much longer work that supplements the Sa'di poem (sung in Farsi) with four additional texts (sung in Spanish, Hebrew, Arabic, and English). Each is a call for peace—including the civil rights anthem "We Shall Overcome"—and whenever the word "peace" occurs, it is sung in more than a dozen different languages.

The commission of *Sanctuary Road* was made possible by a gift from Joanne Spellun.

Also in 2017-18

Lyndon Woodside Oratorio-Solo Competition Finals—April 14, 2018: OSNY's annual Lyndon Woodside Oratorio-Solo Competition, which remains the only major competition to focus exclusively on oratorio singing, holds its final round as a public event in Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. The Competition receives applications from around the world. "Through the Competition we've been able to shine a bright spotlight on this repertoire and encourage

singers, who would otherwise just prepare for opera, to consider the richness of oratorio music,” says Kent Tritle.

The Artists

Alabama-born soprano **Susanna Phillips**, recipient of the Metropolitan Opera’s 2010 Beverly Sills Artist Award, continues to establish herself as one of today’s most sought-after singing actors and recitalists. During 2017-18, Ms. Phillips will return to the Metropolitan Opera for a tenth consecutive season to sing her acclaimed Musetta in Puccini’s *La bohème*, which will be broadcast through the Met’s “Live in HD” series. She will also make her role debut as Birdie in Blitzstein’s *Regina* in her debut with the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, sharing the stage with Susan Graham and James Morris. www.susannaphillips.com

U.S. baritone **John Chest** is the winner of the prestigious 2010 Stella Maris International Vocal Competition and was a finalist in the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition in 2017. He is a recipient of a 2017 Richard Tucker Music Foundation Career Grant. Until last year a member of Deutsche Oper Berlin, he received praise there for his performance of the title role of *Billy Budd*. Highlights of his 2017-18 season include Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte* (Bayerische Staatsoper), Dr. Falke in *Die Fledermaus* (Deutsche Oper Berlin), and his house debut at Glyndebourne Festival as Pelléas in *Pelléas et Mélisande*. www.rayfieldallied.com/artists/john-chest

OSNY Music Director since the 2005-06 season, **Kent Tritle** is also Music Director of the professional chorus Musica Sacra, and Director of Cathedral Music and Organist at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine where he directs the concert series *Great Music in a Great Space*, which he reinstated in 2011. Mr. Tritle is Director of Choral Activities and Chair of the Organ Department at the Manhattan School of Music and a member of the graduate faculty of the Juilliard School. An acclaimed organ virtuoso, he is the organist of the New York Philharmonic and the American Symphony Orchestra. www.kenttritle.com

Since its founding in 1873, the **Oratorio Society of New York**, New York’s 200-voice avocational chorus, has become the city’s standard for grand choral performance, having performed world, U.S., and New York premieres of works as diverse as Brahms’s *Ein deutsches Requiem* (1877), Berlioz’s *Roméo et Juliette* (1882), a full-concert production of Wagner’s *Parsifal* at the Metropolitan Opera House (1886), Britten’s *The World of the Spirit* (1998), Filas’s *Song of Solomon* (2012), and Moravec’s *Blizzard Voices* (2013). On its 100th anniversary the Oratorio Society received the Handel Medallion, New York City’s highest cultural award, in recognition of its contributions. www.oratoriosocietyofny.org

[Monday, November 6, 2017, at 8:00 pm](#)

Stern Auditorium / Perelman Stage, Carnegie Hall

[ORATORIO SOCIETY OF NEW YORK](#)

Kent Tritle, conductor

Susanna Phillips, soprano

John Chest, baritone

Orchestra of the Society

BRAHMS *Schicksalslied (Song of Destiny)*, Op. 81

BRAHMS *Ein deutsches Requiem (A German Requiem)*, Op. 45

This concert is made possible in part by a grant from the Casement Fund.

Tickets: \$90–\$25; also available as part of a subscription

October 4, 2017