

# MUSICA SACRA

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## Musica Sacra 2023-24 Season: Celebrating 60 Years of Professional Choral Music with “Re-Soundings,” a Concert in 360°; the 60<sup>th</sup> Year of Performing *Messiah*; Mozart Requiem with the New York Philharmonic, and More



*Musica Sacra led by Kent Tritle, photo by Jennifer Taylor*

The 60<sup>th</sup> season of Musica Sacra, New York’s elite professional chorus led by Music Director Kent Tritle, nods to the ensemble’s origins with Handel’s *Messiah* at Carnegie Hall and a Baroque program of signature Handel and Schütz works, and introduces a novel program format, “Re-Soundings” – an immersion in sound, with singers moving around the audience and throughout a candlelit Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

In addition, Musica Sacra continues its tradition of collaborations with other top-tier organizations: the chorus joins the New York Philharmonic for a series of performances of Mozart’s Requiem led by Jaap van Zweden and returns to the New York City Ballet for that company’s beloved production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Musica Sacra, New York’s longest running professional chorus, was founded in 1964 by Richard Westenberg, and the 2023-24 season marks Kent Tritle’s 19<sup>th</sup> year as Music Director. Created with the mission to create choral performances of the highest caliber, profound statements made simply and elegantly, Musica Sacra was recently described as one of “the great choruses of the world” by conductor

Pablo Heras-Casado after a collaboration with the Orchestra of St Luke's. Musical America, in its coverage of the April 2023 performances of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* with the New York Philharmonic, praised the chorus's "stunning transparency," saying the group "achieved ravishing homogeneity in the frequent chorales while triumphing in the complex and moving 'Wir setzen uns mit Tränen' that closes the work."

**"Re-Soundings" – October 17, 2023, at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine**

Echoing past ventures in surround-sound performance, Musica Sacra introduces "Re:Soundings," an immersive concert in 360° in the candlelit Cathedral of St. John the Divine. The audience, seated in the choir stalls, in the Great Choir section between them, or up by the High Altar, will experience sound in motion from all corners of the cathedral – medieval, Renaissance, and contemporary works including a world premiere by Daniel Ficarri written for performance in the spaces surrounding the Great Choir.

**Handel's *Messiah* – December 20, 2023, at Carnegie Hall**

Musica Sacra's acclaimed rendition of Handel's *Messiah*, praised as "buoyant and burnished" by The New York Times, returns to Carnegie Hall, with period bows and performance practices, and soloists Susanna Phillips, soprano; Clifton Massey, countertenor; Steven Caldicott Wilson, tenor; and Joseph Parrish, bass-baritone. "With an excellent chorus and reliably top-notch soloists," said the Times in 2015, "the annual performances of Handel's 'Messiah' by Musica Sacra, under the direction of Kent Tritle, command a loyal following."

**Schütz and Handel – March 19, 2024, at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine**

Musica Sacra's spring concert is a Baroque program of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century German-language requiem *Musikalische Exequien* of Heinrich Schütz and Handel's virtuosic Latin psalm setting *Dixit Dominus* – two signature works championed by the group's founder, Richard Westenburg. Sopranos Elisse Alban and Emily Donato, contralto Kirsten Sollek, tenor Richard Pittsinger, and bass-baritones Nathaniel Sullivan and Joseph Beutel are the concert's soloists.

**Collaborations with New York Philharmonic and New York City Ballet**

Continuing its distinguished tradition of collaborations with many of New York's top musical organizations, Musica Sacra is the featured chorus in the New York Philharmonic's spring performances of Mozart's Requiem, led by NYP Music Director Jaap van Zweden (May 23-28, 2024). The chorus, prepared by Kent, received praise for its participation in NYP performances of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in April. Musica Sacra also returns to the New York City Ballet for that company's signature production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (May 28 – June 2).

**MUSICA SACRA**

Since its founding in 1964 by conductor Richard Westenburg, the mission of Musica Sacra has been to create definitive, professional, choral performances of the highest caliber: profound statements made simply and elegantly. It does so with concerts, recording, the commissioning and performing of new choral works, and collaborating with other top tier performing arts organizations.

Musica Sacra is known for its interpretations of the masterpieces of choral music – Tallis's *Spem in Alium*, the choral oeuvre of J. S. Bach, the masses of Mozart and Haydn, the Requiems of Mozart, Brahms, and Fauré, Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*, Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, Strauss's *Deutsche Motette*, Bruckner's motets, and Schönberg's *Friede auf Erden*, among others – and its involvement in contemporary repertoire; the group has given the world and New York premieres of choral works by composers including Benjamin Britten, Dave Brubeck, Anthony Davis, Aaron Copland, David Diamond,

Aram Khachaturian, Duncan Patton, Vincent Persichetti, Daniel Pinkham, Bernard Rands, and Peter Schickele.

### ***Musica Sacra commissions***

Musica Sacra first commissioned a new work in 1982, when Alan Hovhaness's *Revelations of St. Paul* was composed for and premiered by the group at Lincoln Center. Subsequent commissions include McNeil Robinson's *Missa Brevis*, and two works that are based upon biblical texts for which there is little or no music available for use by church and synagogue choirs: *The Death of Moses* by Ned Rorem and Richard Danielpour's *Prologue and Prayer*. Other commissions include works by Alessandro Cadario, Robert Convery, Michael Gilbertson, Ricky Ian Gordon, Wang Jie, Libby Larsen, Meredith Monk, Robert Moran, and Kim D. Sherman.

### ***A tradition of collaborations and recordings***

Recent highlights of Musica Sacra's singular history of collaborations with other ensembles and organizations include the New York Philharmonic's live score performances of *Amadeus*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (which the chorus also performed with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra); the New York City Ballet's performances of *Les Noces* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; the Requiems of Brahms and Mozart and Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* with the New York Philharmonic and Orchestra of St. Luke's; *Così fan tutte* at the Mostly Mozart Festival; the New York City Opera Renaissance production of *Tosca*.

Musica Sacra has recorded on the RCA, BMG, MSR Classics and Deutsche Grammophon labels, including the first digitally recorded performance of *Messiah*, released in 1982 by RCA and reissued on High Performance, BMG's audiophile label. Recent releases include *Messages to Myself*, the first Musica Sacra recording led by Kent Tritle, a disc of contemporary works including commissions by Daniel Brewbaker and Michael Gilbertson; and *Eternal Reflections*, recent choral compositions by Robert Paterson.

### ***Musica Sacra educational outreach***

Musica Sacra maintains a long-term partnership with the Newark Boys Chorus School through which the chorus of 4<sup>th</sup>- through 8<sup>th</sup>-graders receive workshops with Assistant Music Director Michael Sheetz and Musica Sacra singers and perform pre-concert recitals at Musica Sacra's concerts at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. In addition, each year Michael Sheetz, aided by Musica Sacra singers, works with students in Title 1 schools across New York City, giving workshops focusing on musical features of Handel's *Messiah*; the students are given tickets to the annual performance of the work at Carnegie Hall to hear the classroom concepts applied in a live performance. In March 2022, schools were invited to participate in a pre-concert workshop with composer Wang Jie about her work which was then premiered in performance.

[www.musicasacrany.com](http://www.musicasacrany.com)

**Kent Tritle** has been Music Director of Musica Sacra since 2008. One of America's leading choral conductors, called "the brightest star in New York's choral music world" by The New York Times, he is also Director of Cathedral Music and Organist at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City and Music Director of the Oratorio Society of New York. In addition, Kent is a member of the graduate faculty of The Juilliard School, serving its Vocal Arts Department. An acclaimed organ virtuoso, he is also the organist of the New York Philharmonic. <https://kenttritle.com>

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## MUSICA SACRA 2023-24 SEASON

**Tuesday, October 17, 2023, at 7:30 pm**  
**Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York, NY**

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**“RE:SOUNDINGS”**

Kent Tritle, conductor

“Re:Soundings” is an immersive, 360° surround-sound concert in the candlelit Cathedral of St. John the Divine. The audience, seated in the choir stalls, in the Great Choir section between them, or up by the High Altar, will experience sound in motion from all corners of the cathedral – medieval, Renaissance, and contemporary works including a world premiere by Daniel Ficarri written for performance in the spaces surrounding the Great Choir.

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**Wednesday, December 20, 2023, at 7:30 pm**

**Carnegie Hall, New York, NY**

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Kent Tritle, conductor

Susanna Phillips, soprano

Clifton Massey, countertenor

Steven Wilson, tenor

Joseph Parrish, bass-baritone

G. F. HANDEL

*Messiah*

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**Tuesday, March 19, 2024, at 7:30 pm**

**Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York, NY**

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**SCHÜTZ & HANDEL**

Kent Tritle, conductor

Elisse Albian and Emily Donato, sopranos

Kirsten Sollek, contralto

Richard Pittsinger, tenor

Nathaniel Sullivan, bass- baritone

Joseph Beutel, bass-baritone

Musica Sacra Chorus & Orchestra

HEINRICH SCHÜTZ

*Musikalische Exequien*

G. F. HANDEL

*Dixit Dominus*

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May 23-28, 2024

David Geffen Hall, New York, NY

[NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC](#)

Jaap van Zweden, conductor

Amanda Forsythe, soprano

Cecelia Hall, mezzo-soprano

Nicholas Phan, tenor

Michael Sumuel, bass-baritone

Antoine Tamestit, viola

Musica Sacra,

Kent Tritle, director

SOFIA GUBAIDULINA

Viola Concerto

W. A. MOZART

Requiem

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May 28 – June 2, 2024

David H. Koch Theater, Lincoln Center, New York, NY

[NEW YORK CITY BALLET](#)

*A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Musica Sacra, Kent Tritle, director, is featured in performances of Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

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*July 12, 2023*