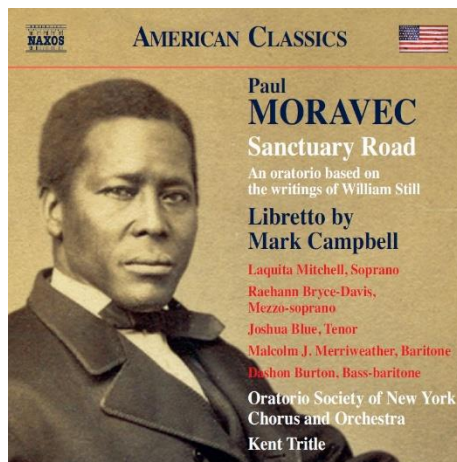


**ORATORIO SOCIETY OF NEW YORK'S ACCLAIMED WORLD PREMIERE PERFORMANCE OF *SANCTUARY ROAD*, MUSIC BY PAUL MORAVEC, LIBRETTO BY MARK CAMPBELL AFTER THE WRITINGS OF WILLIAM STILL, IS A NEW NAXOS RECORDS RELEASE**

**The 2018 work about the Underground Railroad was the Oratorio Society's first Moravec commission; the second is to premiere May 6, 2020**



*Kent Tritle, Mark Campbell, Paul Moravec, Laquita Mitchell, Raehann Bryce-Davis taking a bow after the world premiere performance of Sanctuary Road on May 7, 2018; photo by Eduardo Patino.NYC; Naxos CD cover*

The 2018 world premiere performance by the Oratorio Society of New York of the Paul Moravec/Mark Campbell work *Sanctuary Road* is now a Naxos Records release (January 10, 2020). Based on the writings of William Still, a “conductor” on the Underground Railroad who chronicled “the death struggles of slaves in their efforts of freedom,” the oratorio was led at its premiere by OSNY Music Director Kent Tritle, and featured soloists Laquita Mitchell, Raehann Bryce-Davis, Joshua Blue, Malcolm J. Merriweather, and Dashon Burton.

*Sanctuary Road* was commissioned by the Oratorio Society of New York, and is the second of a series of what Paul Moravec has dubbed his “American historical oratorios” – the first being *The Blizzard Voices*, about the catastrophic so-called “Children’s Blizzard” that struck the Midwest in 1888, which was given its New York premiere by the OSNY in 2013. On May 6, 2020, the Oratorio Society will give the world premiere performance of the third work in the series, which it has also commissioned: *A Nation of Others*, with libretto also by Mark Campbell, that captures the experience of immigrants arriving at Ellis Island on one day in 1921.

Oratorio Society of New York Chairman and President Richard Pace said, "From the moment we began rehearsing *Sanctuary Road* with Paul Moravec and Mark Campbell in attendance, we recognized what an important addition this was to the oratorio repertoire and set the wheels in motion to record the premier performance. We are thrilled that Naxos has chosen to release this as part of its 'American Classics' series." (See the entire series catalog: [https://www.naxos.com/series/american\\_classics.htm](https://www.naxos.com/series/american_classics.htm))

As Kent Tritle writes in the recording's notes, "*Sanctuary Road* began as an initiative from one of our singers in the Oratorio Society of New York, Jody Spellun. Having grown up in segregated Kentucky, Jody expressed to me a desire to address questions such as, 'How could we make a statement with deep roots about racial disparity in our history?' We had performed in recent seasons the New York premiere of Paul Moravec's *The Blizzard Voices*. On the strength of that experience, Ms. Spellun wished to commission Paul to create a new work along these lines. To our delight, he and librettist Mark Campbell proposed an oratorio based on William Still's *The Underground Railroad*."

### **Praise for the premiere**

The May 7, 2018, premiere at Carnegie Hall was acclaimed by critics, Broadway World's Richard Sasanow saying, "The bass-baritone of Dashon Burton was filled with dignity as William Still....The luscious voices of soprano Laquita Mitchell and mezzo Raehann Bryce-Davis, the sweet sound of tenor Joshua Blue, and the soothing baritone of Malcolm J. Merriweather brought the score to life for us, together or in solo. While none of them was familiar to me, I couldn't imagine any other singers who would have sung of the dreams, hopes and fears of the slaves on their way (hopefully) to freedom with more passion." The work "was unquestionably an oratorio in the full quasi-operatic sense, rich in character, action, and vocal display, and also cinematic in rhythm," wrote David Wright in New York Classical Review. And from Joshua Rosenblum in Opera News: "Mark Campbell based his libretto for *Sanctuary Road* on William Still's *The Underground Railroad* Records, and the result, as brought to vivid life by Moravec's perfect match of a score, is extraordinary. Written for five soloists, chorus, and orchestra, the work provides an astonishing illumination of multiple slaves and their escape experiences. ... Conductor Kent Tritle showed magnificent command of these challenging new works and his massive musical forces."

### **Subsequent performances of *Sanctuary Road***

Since its premiere, *Sanctuary Road* has been performed by the Columbus Symphony (October 11, 2019), and two performances are scheduled for 2020: the Oakland Symphony on May 15, and the Chautauqua Symphony on July 18.

### **Naxos release includes audio documentary, "Write It!"**

The Naxos recording includes "Write It! Reflections on *Sanctuary Road*," an audio documentary featuring interviews with Moravec, Campbell, the singers, and Kent Tritle by WQXR host Terrance McKnight. Each of the five soloists talks about his or her personal impressions of and experience with the work and its subject, Blue and Merriweather recounting their family histories with slavery, and Laquita Mitchell reflecting the work's relevance to current events: "It would be one thing if this specific blight in our history only happened once ... but now that we have this issue with migrants'" detention and separation from family members, " ... we're repeating it again." Paul Moravec also brings the story to our current doorstep: "I'd like to think that this story is timeless and universal ... because the story isn't over."

"Write It! Reflections on *Sanctuary Road*": <https://youtu.be/nLjsff8dh4o>

### **Oratorio Society of New York**

Since its founding in 1873, the Oratorio Society of New York has become the city's standard for grand choral performance. It has given world, U.S., and New York premieres of works as diverse as Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem* (1877), Berlioz' *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 *Requiem* (2015), Moravec's *Blizzard Voices* (2013) and *Sanctuary Road* (2018), and Ranjbaran's *We Are One* (2018). On its 100th anniversary the Oratorio Society received the Handel Medallion, New York City's highest cultural award, in recognition of these contributions. [www.oratoriosocietyofny.org](http://www.oratoriosocietyofny.org).

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**Naxos 8.559884**

**Paul Moravec**

***SANCTUARY ROAD* – World premiere recording**

**Libretto by Mark Campbell**

**Laquita Mitchell, Soprano**

**Raehann Bryce-Davis, Mezzo-soprano**

**Joshua Blue, Tenor**

**Malcolm J Merriweather, Baritone**

**Dashon Burton, Bass-baritone**

**Oratorio Society of New York Chorus and Orchestra**

**Kent Tritle, Conductor**

Naxos recording page: [https://www.naxos.com/catalogue/item.asp?item\\_code=8.559884](https://www.naxos.com/catalogue/item.asp?item_code=8.559884)

Link to download on various platforms: <https://naxos.lnk.to/SanctuaryRoad>

Naxos press release: <https://mailchi.mp/ec130c1e7c09/naxos-releases-sanctuary-road-paul-moravec-mark-campbells-oratorio-based-on-writings-of-william-still-a-conductor-for-the-underground-railroad>

*January 9, 2020*