

**April 2, 2023**

**Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847): *Elijah*, Op. 70 Oratorio  
after Words of the Old Testament**

**Arranged for Chamber Orchestra by Joachim Linckelmann**

**Program notes by Dr. Joshua Harper**

Our final concert presents Arizona Philharmonic and the professional chorus Quartz Ensemble performing Felix Mendelssohn's acclaimed oratorio, *Elijah*, under the baton of Dr. Joshua Harper. Like last year's presentation of the Brahms *Requiem*, we are performing an Arizona premiere of Joachim Linckelmann's arrangement of the work for chamber orchestra.

As is frequently the custom in modern performances of *Elijah*, Dr. Harper has removed a number of movements not critical to the story line in order to fit the work into a standard concert-length program. The numbers attached to the movements performed today represent the original numbers within the full oratorio.

*And Behold, the Lord passed by...*

The oratorio as a musical genre was initially created to entertain and educate during the season of Lent when Opera was banned. The most well-known oratorio is Handel's *Messiah* amongst his many other compositions within the genre. Haydn took up Handel's mantle and followed with even more dramatic works, evolving the genre. The popularization of the form by the eighteenth-century promoted the genre to one of the most favorite amongst the Romantic era audiences. This status led to the creation of the Birmingham Triennial Musical Festival held in Birmingham, England every three years. A three-day festival, the organizers regularly commissioned a new oratorio to be performed. In 1837, the festival invited twenty-eight-year-old Felix Mendelssohn to conduct his recently premiered oratorio, *St. Paul*. The success *St. Paul* enjoyed at the Birmingham Festival provided an already in-vogue and widely reputed Mendelssohn with a commission for yet another oratorio, a work with which the composer would cement his place in music history – *Elijah*.

Jakob Ludwig Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) was born on 3 February in Hamburg, then under Napoleonic rule. He was well-versed in drama, religion, rhetoric, and music history - the perfect combination for a composer of oratorio. Felix was the grandson of Jewish Enlightenment philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. Felix was born Jewish but baptized a Protestant at the age of seven along with his siblings in a political effort by his family to avoid widespread discrimination. Felix was of course mindful of his Judaic roots. His specific beliefs are not

deeply understood, nor commonly spoken of. Nevertheless, he remained understandably proud of his grandfather's intellectual legacy and Jewish heritage. He would take on an active role in shaping how Elijah, an Old Testament prophet's story, should be told. The music of J.S. Bach also had a profound influence on Mendelssohn's compositional style. Mendelssohn is partly responsible for the nineteenth-century revival of Bach's music and notoriety (Bach was practically unknown not long after his death). When he was just seventeen, Mendelssohn received a manuscript copy of Bach's St. Matthew Passion from his grandmother. The piece had not been heard for almost a century until Mendelssohn conducted it at just twenty years old. The performance followed three years of study, edits, and cuts to bring the work down to around two hours. His affinity for this early music drama, along with Handel's well-known oratorio choruses, would influence Mendelssohn throughout his career, particularly in his own oratorio – Elijah.

The Elijah project was on Mendelssohn's mind as early as 1837, but he did not begin work on the score until he received the invitation in the summer of 1845 to compose the piece for the Birmingham Festival. The oratorio's libretto (text) was written by Julius Schubring (William Bartholomew translated the text into English, which we will perform today). The primary source for the text of Elijah is taken from numerous sections of the Old Testament, particularly 1 and 2 Kings. The text combines direct Biblical quotations with paraphrases and other texts that broaden numerous events from the Old Testament. Elijah is different from Handel's typical archetypes. Elijah directly confronts the well-known Handelian tradition. The biggest issue for Mendelssohn, however, was that the story found in 1 Kings 17-19 itself is not very well known. This issue was the primary reason Schubring decided to insert portions from other chapters of the Bible, something Handel also often did. Complimentary texts were pulled from Deuteronomy, Exodus, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Chronicles, Psalms, Malachi, and the gospel of Matthew.

The libretto has been the greatest source of criticism of Elijah from both Mendelssohn's contemporaries as well as musicologists. Chester Alwes perhaps captures the piece's shortcomings best, stating "The libretto illustrates the lack of temporal coherence increasingly found in nineteenth-century oratorio libretti in sharp contrast to the earlier adherence to the Metastasian unities of time, place, and action, mostly seen and heard in opera seria." Schubring's best elements present themselves at both the end of the first part, where Elijah confronts the prophets of Baal, as well as when Elijah encounters God towards the end of the second part. The ending lacks a lyrical punch typically found at the end of Oratorios, but luckily, not musically. The oratorio was positioned in two parts, each with twenty-two numbers. We will omit a few movements in today's performance that hold less musical and dramatic value (similar to what Mendelssohn did to Bach's St. Matthew). Musically, the oratorio consists of mixtures of recitatives, arias, and choral movements – many of them threaded together to seamlessly form extended sections, or scenes, of continuous music. Most scholars agree Elijah represents Mendelssohn's most ambitious attempt to compose on a large, grand scale, and represents some of his greatest successes within the genre – it would be his last major work.

Elijah premiered on 26 August 1846 to great acclaim. The first performance used just short of 400 musicians: some 125 in the orchestra with doubled winds and about 270 in the chorus. As musicologist Michael Steinberg stated in his essay on the piece, "space does not permit a description of all the musical events of Elijah. It is hardly necessary, anyway. Attention to the words will open the way to the music, just as, conversely, the music illuminates the texts and the

events.” I will select a few details to highlight as you listen today, all the same. The opening of *Elijah* is unlike most oratorios, as it begins with a recitative by the title character. Part I forms a serious, highly structured labyrinth, with a clear tonal plan (focused on the keys of D-minor and E-flat major) and recurring motivic material. Two primary motives, which return melodically and harmonically in multiple iterations throughout the work, appear in *Elijah*’s opening recitative: a glorified, rising triadic figure (d-f-a-d) associated with *Elijah* as a servant of the Lord (God’s strength); and a discordant series of descending augmented fourths (c-f#, g-c#, d-g#) underscored by the brass and the curse-like pronouncement (famine), “there shall not be dew nor rain these years.” Following the Overture (one of Mendelssohn’s most serious orchestral extracts, the fugal, D-minor writing reminiscent of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*), the chorus rides the ever-rising wave with its opening chorus “Help, Lord!”. Following the curse of famine and drought, the major section of Part I focuses in on the scene where *Elijah* confronts the prophets of Baal. *Elijah*’s mockery of the priests of Baal when their god fails to answer their appeal provides the occasion for a delightful, if not humorous, scene: The dissonant, shrill, chords from the woodwinds that echo the Prophet’s acerbic “Call him louder!” show the humanity, good and bad, of this titular character. The following rage aria “Is Not His Word like a Fire” not only shows Mendelssohn’s careful understanding of modern-day opera, but also Handel, comparable to *Messiah*’s “Why Do The Nations.” *Elijah* prays for rain as Part I ends, infusing drama and suspense into the audience’s deserved intermission.

Whereas Part I focuses on the cultural and political events of *Elijah*’s narrative, Part II focuses more on who *Elijah* the prophet was as a human – his struggles. The opening aria, “Hear Ye, Israel”, was composed for famed nineteenth-century soprano Jenny Lind and sets the stage for a few “Bachian” moments found in Part II. The B-minor aria cast in 3/8 time recalls Mendelssohn’s deep affinity for the St. Matthew Passion. Michael Steinberg notes that “F-sharp was Mendelssohn’s favorite note in Lind’s voice, and that note would inevitably be especially prominent in a B-minor/major aria.” Lind, unfortunately, would not sing the aria until after Mendelssohn’s death. Another Bach Passion mirror can be found in no. 26, *Elijah*’s great aria “It is enough, O Lord, now take away my life” where *Elijah* thinks he can withstand no more. The title translates in German to “es ist genug”, which is not far off of Bach’s aria from the St. John Passion “es ist vollbracht,” also sung in a low tessitura, but by a mezzo-soprano. The added solo cello further connects the two arias, along with contrasting middle sections, highlighting the composer’s deep appreciation and affinity for one of the original musical drama composers. Of perhaps a smaller note, no. 27 mentions a Juniper tree, something all Prescottonians can get excited about. Audience favorite “Lift Thine Eyes” sung by three treble singers is followed by the great chorus “He watcheth over Israel”, certainly some of Mendelssohn’s most memorable vocal ensemble writing within the entire work.

While the libretto’s drama weakens towards the end of the piece, the music most certainly does not. The concluding chorus is a fugue centered firmly in D-major and is reminiscent of the conclusion of Handel’s *Messiah* (Blessing and honor... not Hallelujah). The subject contains rising interlocked fourths (d-g, f#-b) which now lay in contrast to the descending tritones previously found in the introduction. The final contrapuntal declamations of “Amen” affirm *Elijah*’s chariot ride into heaven, overcoming the “famine” tritone one final time. These final musical moments highlight Mendelssohn’s overarching theme that with perseverance and faith, there can be beauty found at the end of a long journey.

Nineteenth-century music critic Henry Fothergill Chorley stated after the London premiere “Elijah is not only the sacred work of our time, we dare fearlessly to assert, but it is a work ‘for our children and for our children’s children.’” While the work has indeed morphed throughout history, including our performance today which features a reduced orchestration by Joachim Linckelmann, Elijah is still one of the most significant pieces of art in our history. Mendelssohn’s story of hope and overcoming profound adversity are just as paramount today as they were in the nineteenth-century. No matter what your religious beliefs are, we hope that the beauty, drama, genius, intellect, and musical artistry today move you in a way that indeed, you might even feel that –

*And Behold, the Lord passed by.*

## **PROGRAM**

### **Part I**

#### **ELIJAH’S CURSE**

*Introduction (Elijah): As God the Lord of Israel liveth*

#### ***Overture***

1. Chorus: Help, Lord! Wilt Thou quite destroy us?  
Recitative (chorus): The deeps afford no water
2. Duet with chorus: Lord, bow thine ear to our prayer!
3. Recitative (Obadiah): Ye people, rend your hearts -
4. Air (Obadiah): If with all your hearts ye truly seek Me
5. Chorus: Yet doth the Lord see it not

#### ***THE CONTEST ON MOUNT CARMEL***

10. Recitative (Elijah) and Chorus: As God the Lord of Sabaoth liveth
11. Chorus: Baal, we cry to thee
12. Recitative and Chorus: Call him louder! For he is a god!
13. Recitative and Chorus: Call him louder! He heareth not
14. Air (Elijah): Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel
16. Recitative and Chorus: O Thou, who makest Thine angels
17. Air (Elijah): Is not His word like a fire?
18. Arioso (alto solo): Woe unto them who forsake Him

### ***ELIJAH BRINGS RAIN***

19. Recitative and Chorus: O man of God, help they people!
20. Chorus: Thanks be to God! He laveth the thirsty land

## **INTERMISSION**

### **Part II**

### ***JEZEBEL ORDERS ELIJAH'S DEATH***

21. Air (soprano): Hear ye, Israel
22. Chorus: Be not afraid

### ***ELIJAH FLEES TO MOUNT HOREB***

25. Recitative (Obadiah): Man of God, now let my words
26. Air (Elijah): It is enough
27. Recitative (tenor solo): See, now he sleepeth
28. Trio (the Angels): Lift thine eyes to the mountains
29. Chorus (the Angels): He, watching over Israel
30. Recitative (the Angel) Arise, Elijah
31. Air (the Angel): O rest in the Lord
32. Chorus: He that shall endure to the end

### ***ELIJAH IS SWEEP BY A WHIRLWIND TO HEAVEN***

33. Recitative (Elijah): Night falleth round me
34. Chorus: Behold! God the Lord passed by!
36. Chorus: Go, return upon thy way!
37. Arioso (Elijah): For the mountains shall depart
38. Chorus: Then did Elijah the prophet break forth
39. Air (tenor solo): Then shall the righteous shine
42. Chorus: And then shall your light break forth

## PERFORMERS

### **Dr. Joshua Harper, Conductor**

Praised for his “inspired” conducting (*The Daily Courier*), Dr. Joshua Harper is thrilled to be beginning his fourth year at Yavapai College as a Professor of Choral Music. Dr. Harper enjoys a multifaceted career as a Conductor, Tenor, and Educator. At YC, he directs the Chamber Singers, Master Chorale, Vocal Ensemble, and Community Chorale.

Along with the YC Choirs, Dr. Harper teaches the Advanced Integrated Music Theory courses, Voice Class, Music of World Cultures, and maintains a private voice studio.

Harper’s 22-23 season began as a featured soloist this past summer at “Jazz at Lincoln Center” with the Austin Artists Project in New York City. He will return to NYC in March of 23, leading the Yavapai College choruses to Carnegie Hall for a performance of Verdi’s *Requiem*.

Outside of his concert schedule at YC, Harper will collaborate with local organizations such as the Arizona Philharmonic and Quartz Ensemble here in Prescott (*Elijah* - April 2). He previously served as Music Director at YC for *Chicago* and Co-Music Director for *It’s A Wonderful Life* and *Phantom of the Opera*. He has prepared choruses and music directed for productions such as *Madame Butterfly*, *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*, and *In The Heights*.



A native of Huntsville, Alabama, he holds a Bachelor of Arts in Vocal Performance and Music Composition from Lipscomb University (Nashville, TN), the Master of Music degree in choral conducting from UMass Amherst and the Doctor of Music degree from the Jacobs School of Music, Indiana University with a minor in Music History and Literature.

### **Cailin Marcel Manson (Elijah)**

Cailin Marcel Manson, baritone and conductor, is currently Associate Professor of Practice in Music and Director of Music Performance at Clark University, Music Director of The Keene Chorale, Music Director of Barn Opera, and Artistic Director of the New England Repertory Orchestra.

Cailin, a Philadelphia native, has toured as a soloist and master teacher at major concert venues throughout the United States, Europe and Asia with many organizations, including the Radio-Sinfonieorchester Stuttgart, SWR Sinfonieorchester, Taipei Philharmonic, Bayerische Staatsoper

- Münchner Opernfestspiele, Choral Arts Society of Philadelphia, Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, Teatro La Fenice, Teatro San Carlo, Konservatorium Oslo, and the Conservatoire de Luxembourg.

He has also been a guest cantor and soloist at some of the world's most famous churches and cathedrals, including Notre Dame, Sacré-Coeur, and La Madeleine in Paris, San Marco in Venice, Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence, San Salvatore in Montalcino, Santa Maria Maggiore and San Giovanni in Laterano in Rome, Thomaskirche and Nikolaikirche in Leipzig, and Wieskirche in Steingaden.

Cailin has held positions as Music Director of the Vorarlberger Musikfest, Music Director and Conductor Laureate of the Chamber Symphony of Atlantic City, Artistic Director and Conductor of the Montgomery County Youth Orchestra, Chair of Vocal Studies at the Hazleton Conservatory for the Performing Arts, Director of Music at The Putney School, and as the Music Director of the Bennington County Choral Society. He has served as a member of the faculty of the Vermont Governor's Institute on the Arts and the Performing Arts Institute of Wyoming Seminary. Cailin also founded and directed the Germantown Institute for the Vocal Arts and the Germantown Concert Chorus.

Cailin is a frequent guest conductor, clinician, presenter, panelist, and adjudicator for conventions, conferences, competitions, and music festivals. Cailin studied voice performance at Temple University, and opera performance and orchestral conducting at the Universität Mozarteum Salzburg.

### **Hannah Penzner, Soprano**

Hannah Penzner is a soprano from Los Angeles, California. She received her Bachelor's in Music, Vocal Performance from the Bob Cole Conservatory of Music.

While at BCCM she performed the roles of Comtesse (*Cherubin*), Esmeralda (*The Bartered Bride*) as well as scenes including roles such as Cleopatra, Manon and Frasquita, and was a featured soloist in Mendelssohn's *Elijah*.

Hannah has performed with a number of professional choral ensembles including Tonality and Grammy-award winning ensemble Conspirare. Highlights in choral singing include performing on the soundtrack for *Space Jam: A New Legacy* and *Spiderhead*, as well as Bjork's *Cornucopia* tour in Los Angeles and San Francisco.



Hannah is currently studying to obtain her Masters degree in Vocal Performance at the Frost School of Music, at which she will be covering the role of Susanna in Frost Opera Theater's production of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, performing as the soprano soloist in Robert Kapilow's *Green Eggs and Hams*, and performing the famous Dulcissime solo in the Frost School of Music's performance of *Carmina Burana* in April 2023.

### **Claire Penneau, Mezzo-soprano**

Mezzo-soprano Claire Penneau has most recently toured Germany as featured soloist in the Schumann Liederfest. She has performed solo and ensemble work throughout Europe.

Locally, she actively performs as a soloist in concerts and recitals. Recent operatic roles include: as Fiordiligi in Mozart's *Così fan Tutte*, as The Mother in Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors* Phoenix Opera; as Third Lady in *Die Zauberflöte* and as Mimi in a mini production of Puccini's *La Bohème* with Three Oaks Opera.

Ms. Penneau has sung as soloist with the Arizona Bach Festival, Phoenix Opera, Musica Nova, Canticum Novum, Solis Camerata, Arizona Musicfest, San Tan Performing Arts, North Valley Chorale and many others. She teaches music and also holds a private voice studio.



### **Paul Nicosia, Tenor**

Paul Nicosia, American tenor, most recently appeared as the Tenor soloist in Arizona Musicfest's performance of Joseph Haydn's *The Creation*. He has previously performed on the stages of Opera in the heights as Tamino in their production of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* and U of A Opera's *La Hija de Rappaccini* as Giovanni.

Previous engagements with Arizona Opera include *Telemachus* in their production of *Hercules vs Vampires* and *Danny* in *Arizona Lady*. Other notable engagements include *Tonio* in Donizetti's *La fille du régiment* and the tenor soloist in Saint-Saëns's *Requiem*.





## **The Singers**

- Hannah Penzer - Soprano Soloist
- Claire Penneau - Alto Soloist
- Paul Nicosia - Tenor Soloist
- Cailin Marcel Manson - Bass Soloist
- Sarah Smith - Soprano 1
- Brittany DeCristofaro - Soprano 1
- Emily Spencer - Soprano 2
- Vera Lugo - Alto 2
- Ariana Iniguez - Alto 2
- Mackenzie Nelson - Alto 1
- Taylor Jacobs - Tenor 1
- Jacob Gilbert - Tenor 2
- Elijah Frank - Tenor 1
- Craig Ralston - Bass 1
- William Vallandigham - Bass 2
- Jordan Murillo - Bass 1

## **Instrumentalists**

- Flute - Andrea Graves
- Oboe - Laura Arganbright
- Clarinet - Mary Jackson
- Bassoon - Chip King
- French Horn - Karen Teplik
- Trumpet - Stephen Martin
- Trombone - Richard Bass
- Timpani - Maria Flurry
- Concertmaster - Emily Chao
- Violin II - Luke Hill
- Viola - Nancy Buck
- Cello - Ruth Wenger
- Contrabass - Nathaniel de la Cruz
- Piano - John Massaro