

PRESS RELEASE

Media Contact: Jennifer Scott

jscott@lmasterchorale.org | 213-972-3142

L O S A N G E L E S

MASTER CHORALE

Syrian-Armenian Artist Kevork Mourad to Bring a Contemporary Perspective to Los Angeles Master Chorale Production of Handel's *Israel in Egypt*



One Performance Only!
Conducted by Grant Gershon
Sunday, February 11 at 7 PM
Walt Disney Concert Hall

CONCERT TICKETS START AT \$29
LAMASTERCHORALE.ORG | BOX OFFICE: 213-972-7282



135 NORTH GRAND AVENUE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012-3013
213-972-3122 | LAMASTERCHORALE.ORG

(Los Angeles, CA) December 6, 2017 – A new production of Handel’s *Israel in Egypt* by the Los Angeles Master Chorale and Syrian-Armenian artist Kevork Mourad aims to present the oratorio’s story of human diaspora through a contemporary lens. The one-night-only performance on Sunday, February 11 will be conducted by Grant Gershon, the Master Chorale’s Kiki and David Gindler Artistic Director, and feature 80 singers and 7 soloists. In addition to creating animated projections for Walt Disney Concert Hall for the performance, Mourad will be on stage, creating his paintings in real-time to be projected as he draws them.

Born in Syria and of Armenian descent, New York-based Mourad is committed to highlighting the current Syrian refugee crisis in his work. With *Israel in Egypt*, he aims to explore parallels between the exodus of the Israelites and the plagues that besieged Egypt, as chronicled in the libretto, with today’s refugee experience. “I am addressing the crisis as a Syrian-Armenian, as a descendant of people who were saved by the Syrian people during the genocide of 1915 by being welcomed into, and nurtured by, Syrian society. I have no choice but to express in my works the need for unity and the fact that human suffering is the same wherever you go.”



[Learn more about Mourad’s vision for *Israel in Egypt*](#)



The *Israel in Egypt* performance is part of the Los Angeles Master Chorale and Gershon's "Hidden Handel" project that aims to present Handel's under-performed oratorios in collaboration with artists and directors. The project began in 2016 with a performance of *Alexander's Feast* directed by Trevore Ross. This will be the Master Chorale's first full performance of all three parts of *Israel in Egypt*, a work that contains 20 choruses, the most of all of Handel's oratorios. The Master Chorale previously performed parts II and III in 2002 during Gershon's first season as Music Director. Owing to the 2002 performance following the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the political climate at the time, Gershon wrote a letter in the program book about the oratorio's, at times troubling, subject matter: "It is certainly one of the most ancient and enduring ideas in times of war that God or 'the gods' are on our side exclusively. But the passages from the book of Exodus that Handel chooses to set go way beyond God helping the (self-acknowledged) righteous in battle. With the graphic depiction of the ten plagues visited upon the Egyptian people, and in particular the account of the slaying of the first-born of Egypt, we are presented with a disturbing narrative of blind vengeance and genocide visited even upon innocent children. There are other uncomfortable moments in this work. Given the events of September 11th, and the now familiar hate-filled invocations of the terrorists to an angry deity, it is difficult to hear the duet 'The Lord is a Man of War' as pure musical entertainment."

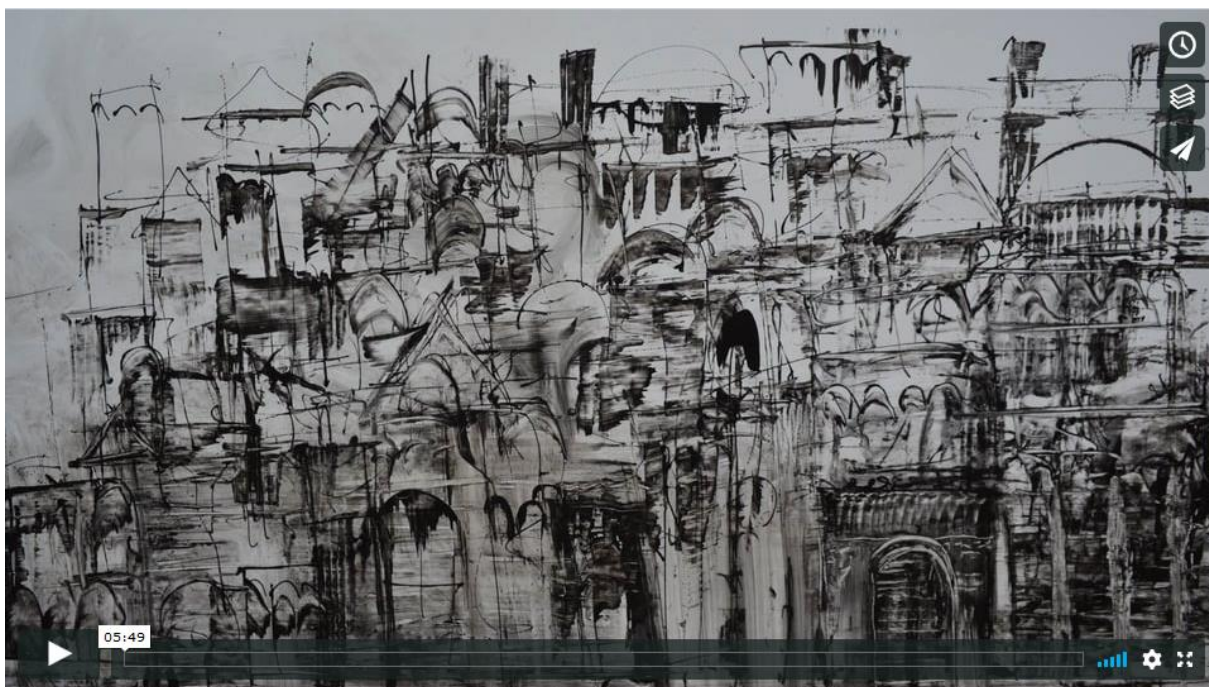
He concluded: "I believe that one must simply approach this piece with eyes wide open to all of its contradictions and implications. By looking equally at both the beautiful and the repugnant in such works as *Israel in Egypt* ... we are presented with an opportunity to fearlessly examine our own humanity and values."

Fifteen years later, Gershon said he still feels it necessary to view Handel's work with a contemporary gaze.



“I still believe that *Israel in Egypt* is a thematically challenging piece, but in the time since I first conducted it, I’ve come to consider it to be fundamentally a story of refugees who, having endured untold hardships, are miraculously and improbably delivered back to their homeland. This is a piece about hope and miracles, two things that the world desperately needs more of right now.”

When creating his paintings on stage, Mourad uses a small bottle of ink that he squeezes onto the page and smears with a lightning-fast technique, the results having a calligraphic quality, allowing Mourad to create a massive amount of art in a brief period of time. He said the aim is to capture what he feels about the music as he is hearing it: “At first you think it’s random lines, but when you start to see the image — when it appears in front of your eyes — it’s almost like a song, like the music appears out of the paper.”



[Watch an example of Mourad creating a visual world for *Israel in Egypt*](#)

It is a technique Mourad honed with *Home Within*, an acclaimed audio-visual work he co-created with Syrian clarinetist Kinan Azmeh. *Home Within* is the pair’s “impressionistic



reflection on the Syrian revolution and its aftermath” that has been performed in North America and Europe including the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto.

Soloists for *Israel in Egypt* will be: Sopranos Elissa Johnston and Anna Schubert; alto Shabnam Kalbasi; mezzo-soprano Niké St. Clair; tenor Jon Lee Keenan; bass-baritone David Dong-Guen Kim; and bass Chung Uk Lee. The performance will feature a 42-piece chamber orchestra.

The Los Angeles Master Chorale is grateful for the generous support of the lead sponsors The SahanDaywi Foundation and Kiki and David Gindler for making this production possible. Support from contributing sponsors Cheryl Petersen and Roger Lustberg, Susan Erburu Reardon and George Reardon, Cheryl and David Scheidemantle, and Jann and Kenneth Williams is also gratefully recognized.

TICKETS & BOX OFFICE INFORMATION:

Tickets are available now, starting from \$29:

Online: lamasterchorale.org

Phone: 213-972-7282

Tickets can be purchased in-person at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion Box Office Monday – Saturday, 10 AM – 6 PM.

On concert days, box office staff can be reached at 213-972-7282 beginning at 10 AM and the Disney Hall Box Office will be open for will call and sales beginning 2 hours prior to curtain time. Group rates are available. Los Angeles Master Chorale offers \$10 Student Rush Tickets at the box office 2 hours prior to the performance, subject to availability. Student ID required; 1 ticket per ID. Please call for additional details.

Please note: children under the age of six are not admitted to Los Angeles Master Chorale concerts.



CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: Handel's *Israel in Egypt*

WHO: Los Angeles Master Chorale

Grant Gershon, conductor

Kevork Mourad, visual artist

80 singers

7 soloists

42-piece chamber orchestra

WHEN: Sunday, February 11, 2018 at 7 PM

WHERE: Walt Disney Concert Hall, 111 S. Grand Ave.

[ABOUT KEVORK MOURAD](#)

[ABOUT GRANT GERSHON](#)

[ABOUT LOS ANGELES MASTER CHORALE](#)

LOS ANGELES MASTER CHORALE MEDIA CONTACT:

Jennifer Scott, Director of Public Relations

jscott@lamasterchorale.org | 213-972-3142 office; 702-510-4363 cell

High res photos are available to download from our online [Press Room](#).

Photo of Grant Gershon by Marie Noorbergen/Tao Ruspoli.

