

**Concerts of Thursday, March 22 and Saturday, March 24, 2018, at 8:00p**

**Robert Spano, Conductor**

**Kim-Lillian Strelbel, soprano**

**Kelley O'Connor, mezzo-soprano**

**David Walton, tenor**

**Hadleigh Adams, baritone**

**Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chamber Chorus,**

**Norman Mackenzie, Director of Choruses**

**Michael Kurth (b. 1971)**

***Miserere (2017)***

I. *Miserere I*

II. By the Rivers of Babylon

III. *Quoniam iniquitatem*

IV. How Deserted Lies the City

V. You Must First Look Past

VI. *Miserere II*

VII. Gimme the Broke Skin

VIII. *Miserere III*

Kelley O'Connor, mezzo-soprano

**World Premiere, Commissioned by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra,  
Robert Spano, Music Director**

**Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)**

**Orchestral Suite (Overture) No. 3 in D Major, BWV 1068 (ca. 1717-1723)**

I. *Ouverture*

II. *Air*

III. *Gavotte I et II*

IV. *Bourrée*

V. *Gigue*

**Intermission**

**Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)**

***Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G Major, BWV 1048 (1721)***

I. (*Without tempo marking*)

II. *Adagio*

III. *Allegro*

**Cantata No. 80, “Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott”, BWV 80 (ca. 1744)**

I. Chorus: “Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott”

II. Aria (Soprano, Bass): “Mit unser Macht”

III. Recitative (Bass): “Erwäge doch, Kind Gottes”

IV. Aria (Soprano): “Komm in mein Herzenshaus”

V. Chorale: “Und wenn die Welt von Teufel wär”

VI. Recitative (Tenor): “So stehe denn bei Christi blutgefärbten Fahne”

VII. Duet (Alto, Tenor): “Wie selig sind doch die”

VIII. Chorale: “Das Wort sie sollen lassen stahn”

Kim-Lillian Strebel, soprano

Kelley O’Connor, mezzo-soprano

David Walton, tenor

Hadleigh Adams, baritone

Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chamber Chorus

English surtitles by Ken Meltzer

## Notes on the Program by Ken Meltzer

### *Miserere* (2017)

Michael Kurth was born in Falls Church, Virginia, on November 22, 1971. These are the world premiere performances. *Miserere* is scored for mezzo-soprano solo, mixed chamber chorus, percussion I (suspended crash cymbal, djembe, kick drum, hi-hat cymbals), percussion II (congas, cajon, shekere, bucket of nails, crotales), percussion III (bowed China cymbal, maracas, coins in kettle, two brake drums, shekere, mounted tambourine), clavinet, and strings. Approximate performance time is twenty-three minutes.

When ASO Music Director Robert Spano asked me for new music for the 2017-18 season, I told him I was eager for an opportunity to write for the spectacular ASO Chorus or Chamber Chorus. My ASO commissions so far have been purely instrumental, but I've written quite a bit for voices. When Robert agreed, I decided to push my luck a bit further: could I also include mezzo-soprano megastar and frequent ASO collaborator Kelley O'Connor? To my great delight, everyone's schedules aligned, and the work was inked on the calendar.

The next task: what to write? I have enjoyed previous choral collaborations with Atlanta poet Jesse Breite, who wrote text for my works *Magnificat* and *Tenebrae*. His poetry captures both the mysterious beauty and the tragic bleakness of the modern faithscape, and I wondered what the subject of betrayal might inspire him to create. Betrayal is something we all experience, both as victims and perpetrators, and the deep agony and shame we all feel merits artistic exploration.

*Miserere* was written as a personal expression of conviction, contrition, and self-admonition. Texts from ancient Judeo-Christian tradition about the Israelites in captivity and the spiritual infidelity of Jerusalem are interwoven with modern poetic reflections on the New Testament characters of Judas, who betrayed, and Thomas, who doubted. These condemnations of the inability of the faithful to live into their covenants are bookended by impassioned cries for forgiveness; we are all captive to our flawed nature, we are all unfaithful, we all doubt, and we all betray our better selves. Perhaps we think ourselves Christ-like, but if we can muster the courage and humility to identify with someone like Judas, to behold the repugnance of our flaws and all their attendant misery, and aspire to become holier, more beautiful creatures, we will be much better equipped to envision and enact the progress toward enlightenment and justice to which our faith traditions call us.

Musically, *Miserere* is written in a style I think of as "modern-primitive-sacred-spooky". It's completely tonal, often groove-based, and tends to dwell in the

shadowy corners of spirituality. It involves a lot of percussion, mostly played by hand, and in a modern twist on the traditional Baroque ensemble's reliance on harpsichord, it features the clavinet, a funk-drenched electric keyboard most familiarly heard in Stevie Wonder's "Superstition".

The work's opening Latin choral statement of penitence segues into the first aria, a lament which introduces both the mezzo-soprano and the clavinet. The third movement presages the finale's fugue subject in a gentle chorale. The fourth movement mourns the destruction of Jerusalem with a cappella women's chorus led by the mezzo soloist.

The fifth movement aria examines hypocrisy from the perspective of Judas in modern verse by Jesse Breite. The sixth movement briefly recalls the work's opening theme before transitioning to the seventh movement, a Breite-penned aria sung from the perspective of "Doubting" Thomas. The movement features a novel addition to the percussionist's arsenal: the "bucket of nails", an instrument I designed and built with my daughter. A tin cylinder filled with small nails turns on a spit, providing a sinister backbeat. The work's finale, a fugue, is an homage to the staggering genius of J. S. Bach, with whose music I am honored to share this program. I believe he would be pleased to know that his influence has endured through three centuries, and I am equally certain he would chastise me for the parallel fifths in measure 24.

—Michael Kurth

Michael's *Miserere* draws primarily from *Psalms* 51, 37, and *Lamentations* 1, my contributions reconsider the voices of Judas and Thomas respectively. These reconsiderations are less concerned with historical accuracy and/or context and more centered in the gritty emotional core of disbelief, betrayal, and doubt that seems to persist and transcend historical context and moment. As the psalms and lamentations yearn for relief from oppressive sorrow and suffering, my poetic texts turn to the self-wounding that brings the speaker, the nation, the audience back yet again to the woeful prayer for mercy.

"You Must First Look Past" reads like instructions on how to ignore one's conscience or betray one's integrity. The voice is aware but unaffected by the harm that accompanies position and privilege in the narrative. The decision to choose silver, or money, while consciously ignoring so many in need becomes the steadying and tenuous poetry of interior existence, and while the voice claims power and authority, it is socially corrupting as well as self-abusive. The text owes much to potent and depraved dramatic monologues of Robert Browning. "Gimme the Broke Skin" is a voice of insatiable demand. In asking for proof, the speaker is one of doubt and disbelief, but this skepticism immediately breeds excess, obsession and addiction—a rapid-fire desire for an obliterating and apocalyptic consumption, destructive to all in its presence. Conceptually, both voices are biblical, but they speak to a sense of national disease, noxious authority and demand that revives the old sorrows.

—Jesse Breite

**1. Miserere I** (Ps. 51:1)

*Miserere mei Deus secundum magnam misericordiam tuam  
et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum dele iniquitatem meam*

(Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love  
According to your great compassion blot out my transgressions)

**2. By the Rivers of Babylon** (Ps. 137)

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion  
There on the poplars we hung our harps  
For there our captors asked us for songs  
Our tormentors demanded songs of joy  
They said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"  
How can we sing?

**3. Quoniam iniquitatem** (Ps. 37)

*Quoniam iniquitatem meam annuntiabo  
et cogitabo pro peccato meo  
Ne derelinquas me Domine Deus meus  
Ne elongeris a me*

(For I will announce my iniquity  
and I will think about my sin  
Forsake me not, O Lord my God  
Do not thou depart from me)

**4. How Deserted Lies the City** (Lam. 1)

How deserted lies the city, once so full of people  
How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations  
She who was queen has now become a slave  
Bitterly she weeps at night  
Tears are on her cheeks  
Among all her lovers, there is no one to comfort her  
All her friends have betrayed her  
Her eyes fail from weeping  
Her heart is poured out on the ground

**5. You Must First Look Past** (Jesse Breite)

You must first look past the little corpses  
The useless limbs  
The clown-faced fools who wear your name  
The calcified pressures of shame

You must then stage the terrible romance over your eyes

Cut out the tongues of the poor  
Unsee widows, orphans dropping coins into kettles

Stuff the shorn heads with silver:  
Silver tongues, silver eyes,  
Silver-sweet hellos and goodbyes  
Reach your hand in, brush against God-flesh  
Tear the freshly broken bread

How can you account the cost,  
Looking back before you scry?  
How can you doubt your own satisfactions  
When the sun drops like a circular saw  
Into the earth's tired face,  
Its keen blades searing the great rolling eye?

**6. Miserere II (Ps. 51)**

*Miserere mei Deus  
Sacrificium Deo spiritus contribulatus  
Cor contritum et humiliatum*

(Have mercy on me, O God  
A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit  
A contrite and humbled heart)

**7. Gimme the Broke Skin (Jesse Breite)**

Gimme the broke skin, metal thorned wrist and foot  
Blood volcanic wound-core, its purple tongue-swell  
The curtains of hurt draping the face with sweat and gore

Gimme the flesh filleted by cheers, the wood turnt on the horizon,  
The cut wet stuck to these fingers, the ooze of adoration lost  
The shame-murmuring shadows, the heartless fist of angels,  
Body wretched of all feeling

Gimme the sinister air, the voice emptied of its gravelly depths  
The buzzed-grass burnt hill, the prickled skull  
Spotted red and achey with lack.

**8. Miserere III (Ps. 51)**

*Miserere mei Deus secundum magnam misericordiam tuam  
Dele iniquitatem meam  
Quoniam iniquitatem mean ego cognosco  
Et peccatum meum contra me est semper  
Miserere mei Deus*

(Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love  
Blot out my iniquity  
For I know my iniquity  
And my sin is always before me  
Have mercy on me, O God)

**Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach, Germany, on March 21, 1685, and died in Leipzig, Germany, on July 28, 1750.**

**Orchestral Suite (Overture) No. 3 in D Major, BWV 1068 (ca. 1717-1723)**

**The Third Orchestral Suite is scored for two oboes, three trumpets, timpani, harpsichord, and strings. Approximate performance time is twenty minutes.**

**First Classical Subscription Performance: December 22, 1946, Henry Sopkin, Conductor.**

**Most Recent Classical Subscription Performances: September 26, 27, and 28, 2013, Robert Spano, Conductor.**

In 1717, Johann Sebastian Bach began his seven-year tenure as Kappellmeister to Prince Leopold in the German town of Cöthen, located some sixty miles north of Weimar. Prince Leopold was a talented musician (Bach described him as “a gracious prince, a lover and connoisseur of music”). The Prince hoped to duplicate in Cöthen the superb court music establishments he encountered during his studies throughout Europe. Thanks to the patronage of Prince Leopold, Bach was able to compose for several of Europe’s finest instrumentalists.

As Prince Leopold’s court was Calvinist, Bach’s duties did not include the composition of liturgical music. Instead, Bach’s Cöthen years resulted in an extraordinary outpouring of instrumental works. Solo compositions during this remarkable Cöthen period include the *Orgelbüchlein*, the first book of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, the *Two and Three-Part Inventions*, the *English and French Suites* for harpsichord, the *Sonatas and Partitas* for Solo Violin, and the *Suites* for Solo Cello. During his Cöthen tenure, Bach also composed stunning ensemble works, including his *Four Orchestral Suites* and the *Six Brandenburg Concertos*.

The orchestral suite, an extremely popular form of instrumental ensemble music in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, comprises an overture and several dance movements. Because of the preeminence of the introductory movement, the entire works were known as overtures (French: *ouverture*). 19<sup>th</sup>-century scholars later applied the term “suite” to the multi-movement overture.

Overtures showcase the talents of the instrumentalists, and Bach certainly allows for moments of thrilling display. The Third Orchestral Suite prominently features

oboes, trumpets, and timpani in the generally festive piece. However, as with virtually of all of Bach's works, the Third Suite also contains moments of unrivaled poignancy and eloquence, notably in the second movement *Air*.

### **Musical Analysis**

I. *Ouverture*—The *Ouverture* begins with a stately introduction featuring characteristic dotted rhythms and prominent trumpets and timpani. The violins and oboes initiate a lively fugue. The grand introduction returns to conclude the *Ouverture*.

II. *Air*—The second movement is scored for strings and continuo. The *Air* consists of two sections, each repeated. The first violins, over counterpoint by the second violins and violas, sing the hauntingly beautiful central melody. The cellos, basses, and keyboard provide continuo accompaniment throughout.

III. *Gavotte I et II*—The full ensemble returns for the final three movements. The *Gavotte* is a dance popular during the late 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, set in duple meter and moderate tempo. This movement features two separate dances, with a repetition of the first serving to close the movement.

IV. *Bourrée*—The *Bourrée* is a sprightly duple meter dance.

V. *Gigue*—The *Gigue* ("Jig"), is a Baroque dance of moderate to quick tempo. The *Gigue* that concludes Bach's Third Orchestral Suite consists of two repeated sections, cast in a genial 6/8 meter.

### ***Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G Major, BWV 1048 (1721)***

**The Third *Brandenburg Concerto* is scored for three violins, three violas, three cellos, and basso continuo (violone and harpsichord). Approximate performance time is ten minutes.**

**First Classical Subscription Performance: November 23, 1949, Henry Sopkin, Conductor.**

**Most Recent Classical Subscription Performances: October 7-9, 1993, Yoel Levi, Conductor.**

In the winter of 1718-19, Bach traveled from his residence in Cöthen to Berlin. There he purchased a superb new harpsichord, the creation of Michael Mietke, the instrument maker at the court of Berlin from 1697 until his death in 1719.

It was during this journey that Bach probably first met the Margrave Christian Ludwig of Brandenburg, the youngest son of the "Great Elector," Frederick William. The Margrave offered Bach a commission to compose a series of works. Two years later, Bach presented the Margrave with scores he entitled,

“Six Concerts Avec plusieurs Instruments,” (“Six Concertos with Several Instruments”).

It appears that the Margrave never heard the magnificent works ultimately known as the *Brandenburg Concertos*. The Margrave employed a small ensemble of musicians, too few in numbers to encompass all the parts of the *Six Concertos*. Scholars believe that Bach did not initially compose these works for the Margrave. Rather, he wrote them for performance at various concerts by the excellent musicians in the court of Prince Leopold in Cöthen, for whom Bach served as Kappellmeister. Bach ultimately presented these independent works as a collection to fulfill the Margrave’s commission.

According to Bach’s son, Carl Philipp Emanuel, his father preferred to play the viola when leading an instrumental ensemble. It seems reasonable to assume that in performances of the Third *Brandenburg Concerto*, Bach played first viola and led the instrumental group that features strings in nine parts (three each of violins, violas, and cellos).

### **Musical Analysis**

I. (*Without tempo marking*)—The vigorous sixteenth and eighth-note figure immediately presented by the violins forms the basis for the entire movement. Bach’s masterful combinations of instruments in solo, group, and *tutti* fashion creates sonorities of extraordinary variety.

II. *Adagio*—The printed score of the *Adagio* consists of a single measure comprising two chords. In Bach’s time, a solo cadenza may have been performed here as prelude to the finale.

III. *Allegro*—The final movement is a lively *gigue*. The concluding *Allegro*, which features stunning contrapuntal writing, consists of two repeated sections, the second of which is three times as long as the first.

### **Cantata No. 80, “Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott”, BWV 80 (ca. 1744)**

**The Cantata No. 80 is scored for soprano, alto, tenor, and bass solos, mixed chorus, three oboes, three trumpets, timpani, organ, and strings. Approximate performance time is twenty-five minutes.**

### **These are the First Classical Subscription Performances.**

Johann Sebastian Bach composed his great Cantata, “Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott” in Leipzig, for the Feast of the Reformation. In the Cantata, Bach incorporates Martin Luther’s hymn “Ein feste burg ist unser Gott” (“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”), based upon Psalm 46. Bach was able to draw upon an earlier work, his Cantata *Alles, was von Gott geboren*, BWV 80a (1715), which also employed the Luther hymn. In the Cantata No. 80, Bach sets the text of the

Luther hymn, as well as additional, complementary verse by the Weimer court poet, Salomo Franck.

The Cantata opens with one of the glories of Bach's choral writing, a setting of the first verse of the Luther hymn that is breathtaking in its complexity, beauty, and emotional power. Throughout, Bach vividly depicts Man's battle with the powers of Satan, a conflict that is not fully and finally resolved until the final Chorale.

#### I. Chorus

**Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott,  
Ein gute Wehr und Waffen.  
Er hilft uns frei aus aller Not,  
Die uns itzt hat betroffen.  
Der alte böse Feind,  
Mit Ernst ers jetzt meint,  
Groß Macht und viel List  
Sein grausam Rüstung ist,  
Auf Erd ist nicht seinsgleichen.**

Our God is a solid castle,  
a good defense and weapon.  
He helps keep us free from all need  
that presently strikes us.  
The old evil enemy,  
he means it in stern seriousness,  
great power and much cunning  
are his cruel armor,  
our earth is not his equal.

#### II. Aria (soprano, bass)

Alles, was von Gott geboren,  
Ist zum Siegen auserkoren.

All that was born of God,  
is chosen for victory.

**Mit unsrer Macht ist nichts getan,  
Wir sind gar bald verloren.  
Es streit' vor uns der rechte Mann,  
Den Gott selbst hat erkoren.**

Nothing is accomplished with our power,  
we are soon lost.  
The righteous man,

whom God himself has chosen, fights for us.

Wer bei Christi Blutpanier  
In der Taufe Treu geschworen,  
Siegt im Geiste für und für.

All who in baptism have faithfully sworn  
upon Christ's blood's banner  
conquer in spirit on and on.

**Fragst du, wer er ist?  
Er heißt Jesus Christ,  
Der Herre Zebaoth,  
Und ist kein andrer Gott,  
Das Feld muss er behalten.**

Do you ask who he is?  
He is called Jesus Christ,  
the Lord of Hosts,  
and there is no other God,  
the battlefield he must retain.

Alles, was von Gott geboren,  
Ist zum Siegen auserkoren.

All who was born of God,  
is chosen for victory.

III. Recitative (bass)

Erwäge doch, Kind Gottes, die so große Liebe,  
Da Jesus sich  
Mit seinem Blute dir verschriebe,  
Wormit er dich  
Zum Kriege wider Satans Heer und wider Welt, und Sünde  
Geworben hat!  
Gib nicht in deiner Seele  
Dem Satan und den Lastern statt!  
Lass nicht dein Herz,  
Den Himmel Gottes auf der Erden,  
Zur Wüste werden!  
Bereue deine Schuld mit Schmerz,  
Daß Christi Geist mit dir sich fest verbinde!

Consider then, the child of God, so great a love,  
that Jesus himself

proscribed to you with his blood.  
By which he  
has sent you to war against Satan's army, and against the world,  
and sin!  
Do not let Satan and his vices  
into your soul!  
Let not your heart,  
the heaven of God on earth,  
become a wasteland!  
Repent your guilt with pain,  
so that the spirit of Christ be bound with you!

#### IV. Aria (soprano)

Komm in mein Herzenshaus,  
Herr Jesu, mein Verlangen!  
Treib Welt und Satan aus  
Und lass dein Bild in mir erneuert prangen!  
Weg, schnöder Sündengraus!

Come into my heart's house,  
Lord Jesus, my desire!  
Drive the world and Satan out  
and let your image be renewed in me!  
Begone, shameful sins!

#### V. Chorale

**Und wenn die Welt voll Teufel wär  
Und wollten uns verschlingen,  
So fürchten wir uns nicht so sehr,  
Es soll uns doch gelingen.  
Der Fürst dieser Welt,  
Wie saur er sich stellt,  
Tut er uns doch nicht,  
Das macht, er ist gericht',  
Ein Wörtchen kann ihn fällen.**

And if the world were full of devils  
who wanted to devour us,  
yet we are not so much afraid,  
for still we shall succeed.  
The prince of this world,  
how sour he is,  
yet he does nothing to us,  
he has been judged,

a single word can cut him down.

VI. Recitative (tenor)

So stehe dann bei Christi blutgefärbten Fahne,  
O Seele, fest  
Und glaube, dass dein Haupt dich nicht verlässt,  
Ja, dass sein Sieg  
Auch dir den Weg zu deiner Krone bahne!  
Tritt freudig an den Krieg!  
Wirst du nur Gottes Wort  
So hören als bewahren,  
So wird der Feind gezwungen auszufahren,  
Dein Heiland bleibt dein Hort!

So stand by Christ's blood-dyed flag,  
o soul, stand fast  
and believe, that your leader will not leave you,  
yes, his victory  
will lead the way to your crown!  
Come joyfully to battle!  
If you will only hear and keep  
God's word,  
your enemies will be forced to depart,  
your Savior remains your refuge!

VII. Duet (alto, tenor)

Wie selig sind doch die, die Gott im Munde tragen,  
Doch selger ist das Herz, das ihn im Glauben trägt!  
Es bleibt unbesiegt und kann die Feinde schlagen  
Und wird zuletzt gekrönt, wenn es den Tod erlegt.

How blessed are they, who bear the word of God in their mouths,  
but even more blessed is the heart that carries Him in faith!  
It remains unbeaten, and can conquer all enemies  
and will at last be crowned when it defeats death.

VIII. Chorale

**Das Wort sie sollen lassen stahn  
Und kein' Dank dazu haben.  
Er ist bei uns wohl auf dem Plan  
Mit seinem Geist und Gaben.  
Nehmen sie uns den Leib,  
Gut, Ehr, Kind und Weib,**

**Lass fahren dahin,  
Sie habens kein' Gewinn;  
Das Reich muss uns doch bleiben.**

They shall allow the word to stand  
and will receive no thanks for it.  
He is with us on the battlefield  
with his spirit and gifts.  
Take away our life,  
good, honor, child, and wife,  
if we lose all these things,  
they have gained nothing;  
the Kingdom will still remain for us.

Text by Salomo Franck (1659-1725)

Remaining text, by Martin Luther (1483-1546), in bold type.

English translation by Ken Meltzer