



OMAHA  
SYMPHONY

Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director

program notes

2024/25 SEASON

# Mendelssohn's Elijah

November 10, 2024 | 2 p.m.

Holland Performing Arts Center

Ernest Richardson, conductor | A. Barron Breland, chorusmaster

Jessica Beebe, soprano | Siri Howard, mezzo | Eric Barry, tenor

Jorell Williams, baritone | Levi Grein, boy soprano

Bellevue West High School Choir

Omaha Central High School Choir

Creighton Preparatory School Choir

Elkhorn High School Choir

Fremont High School Choir

Millard South High School Choir

**This printed program is a condensed version.**

For more info about the orchestra, guest artists, and the full program notes, download the Omaha Symphony app or scan this QR code with your mobile device.

\*program subject to change



## Ernest Richardson, conductor

Ernest Richardson is in high demand as conductor, composer, arranger, organizational leader and inspirational speaker. His versatility finds him within one season conducting Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite* or Broadway artists in the works of Leonard Bernstein, a live-to-movie production of *Harry Potter*, facilitating strategic decision-making for leading arts organizations, or training young musicians for the passionate, persistent pursuit of perfection.

He has been at the forefront of symphonic video/live music productions, conducting live-to-movie scores of the *Harry Potter* series with CineConcerts, *Indiana Jones*, *Jurassic Park*, *Back to the Future*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Singin' in the Rain*, *Casablanca*, *Ratatouille*, *Star Trek* (2009), the Charlie Chaplin silent film *The Gold Rush*, and *Star Wars*.

In addition to his post in Omaha, Richardson holds the position of music director and principal conductor of the Steamboat Symphony Orchestra in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. During his tenure, the organization has grown from a community orchestra to a resident professional orchestra, attracting the finest musicians from the Front Range of Colorado. He is also the founding artistic director and CEO of the Rocky Mountain Summer Conservatory.



## **A. Barron Breland, chorumaster**

Dr. A. Barron Breland is in demand throughout the country as a conductor, chorumaster, clinician, and adjudicator, and he has prepared choruses for GRAMMY and Tony-winning artists Laura Benanti, John Mellencamp, Norm Lewis, Brian d'Arcy James, and conductors Dale Warland, Craig Hella Johnson, and Ted Sperling. Breland has also served as Chorumaster and prepared numerous works for the Omaha Symphony, including Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, *Carmina Burana*, *Elijah*, *Messiah*, and many others.

With degrees in Music Theory and Choral Conducting from the University of

Georgia and the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, Breland has a diverse background in many different fields of music, including the piano and saxophone. Breland's first exposure to professional choral music was as a member of the Atlanta Boy Choir where he performed with Robert Shaw and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, as well as in tours and festivals throughout Europe.

Today, he is Dean of the Graduate School and Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, and besides his work with the Omaha Symphony and Omaha Performing Arts, he is also the Principal Conductor of Résonance, a semi-professional chorus whose debut album *Pilgrimage* was released in July 2020 on the MSR Classics label, and the Artistic Director of the River City Mixed Chorus, a 160-member community chorus. All the ensembles under Breland's leadership perform regularly with the Omaha Symphony, have headlined and performed at state and regional ACDA and NMEA conferences, and have taken the stages of historic and iconic venues around the region.



## **Eric Barry, tenor**

Spanish-American tenor Eric Barry captivates audiences worldwide and is praised by *Opera News* for his "clear timbre, even projection, and remarkable sensitivity."

Mr. Barry is grateful for the chance to perform on international stages, thanks to his extensive experience in operatic and concert repertoire. His performances have brought him to celebrated venues such as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the National Cathedral, and more, where he continues to showcase a depth of musical expression.

A key collaborator with the Ludwig van Beethoven Easter Festival and the Polish Radio Orchestra, Mr. Barry has contributed to eight acclaimed commercial

recordings, including roles like Gabriele Adorno in *Simon Boccanegra*, Don Luigi in *Maria Padilla*, and Pylade in *Iphigénie en Tauride*. His recording of *The Turn of the Screw* earned a finalist position for the International Classical Music Award's "Opera Album of the Year." Other notable recordings include *La Navarraise*, *Djamileh*, and Gustav Holst's *At the Boar's Head*.

Eric's work has been widely broadcast on PBS as well, where he has starred in productions such as *Rigoletto*, *La bohème*, *Die Fledermaus*, *La traviata*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and *Tosca*. He brings a special warmth to the holiday season with *Eric Barry: Home for Christmas*, set to air on PBS later this year. Mr. Barry holds a Master of Music and an Artist Diploma from the Yale School of Music. His commitment to fostering the next generation of vocal artists led to the establishment of the Eric Barry Vocal Competition, which awards multiple annual scholarships at his alma mater, West Texas A&M University, where he earned a degree in Music Business.



### **Jessica Beebe, soprano**

Lauded as having a “honey-colored tone” and “the most radiant solo singing” from *Opera News*, soprano Jessica Beebe is an affecting interpreter of repertoire from the Renaissance to contemporary American opera. As a highly sought-after concert soloist, Ms. Beebe has performed with several major orchestras across the world including The New York Chamber Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, The English Concert at Carnegie Hall and The Barbican Theatre in London, The Los Angeles Philharmonic, The Philadelphia Orchestra, The Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, Omaha Symphony, Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra, The Folger Consort in D.C., The Washington Bach Consort at the National Cathedral, Aspen Festival Orchestra,

Piffaro The Renaissance Band, Gamut Bach Ensemble, Philadelphia Bach Collegium, Steamboat Springs Orchestra, Utah Symphony, Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra, Asheville Symphony, Philharmonie Orchestra Austin, Baltimore Symphony, Lancaster Symphony Orchestra, Lyric Fest, Brooklyn Art Song Society, and more. Her solo operatic highlights include premiering multiple operas with Opera Philadelphia by Jennifer Higdon, David Hertzberg, Lembit Beecher and Missy Mazzoli, as well as commercially recording David Hertzberg’s *The Wake World* with Opera Philadelphia; covering at Bergen National Opera in Norway, and a Los Angeles Philharmonic role debut in Meredith Monk’s opera, *Atlas*. Ms. Beebe is also member of many professional chamber ensembles across the country including Seraphic Fire, The Crossing, Clarion Ensemble, Variant 6, Trio Eos, The Thirteen, Lorelei Ensemble, Choral Arts Philadelphia, and is on multiple GRAMMY-nominated albums with The Crossing and Clarion Ensemble. In 2023, Ms. Beebe was a finalist in the New York Oratorio Society competition. Most recently, Ms. Beebe debuted in the U.S. premiere of Missy Mazzoli’s *The Listeners* with Opera Philadelphia. Ms. Beebe is on the voice faculty at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, PA. Ms. Beebe holds degrees from The University of Delaware, Indiana University, and The London College of Music.



### **Siri Howard, mezzo**

Siri Howard (mezzo-soprano) is a soloist, recording artist, and Broadway actress who began her professional career at age 10 and continues to perform in some of the world’s most prestigious venues. She is thrilled to return to the Omaha Symphony after previous appearances in Brahms’s Requiem, the Christmas Celebration, and the Independence Day Celebration at Gene Leahy Mall. Additional solo performance collaborations include the Detroit Symphony, Nashville Symphony, New Jersey Festival Orchestra, Steamboat Symphony Orchestra, Symphonic Pops of Long Island, and The Florida Orchestra. Ms. Howard performed with the New York Philharmonic in *Sweeney Todd: Live from Lincoln Center* starring Emma Thompson (PBS broadcast),

and with the Philadelphia Orchestra in *A Little Night Music* 25th Anniversary Concert. On Broadway, Ms. Howard has been in *Les Misérables* and *The Sound of Music* (Broadway Revival cast recording). She has been in the National Tours of *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Parade*, *Les Misérables*, and *The Sound of Music*, starring Richard Chamberlain, and has extensive experience playing major roles in significant regional musical theatre venues throughout the US. On the operatic stage, Ms. Howard’s performances include *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Susanna), *Orpheus Descending* (Carol Cutrere), *Dido and Aeneas* (Dido), *Cendrillon* (Cendrillon), and *La bohème* (Musetta). Other notable credits include performing with the USO for veterans and active-duty military as well as the 2016 Times Square New Year’s Eve Ball Drop. She holds a Bachelor of Music degree in vocal performance from the University of Maryland College Park, and a Master of Arts in vocal performance from the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College. Ms. Howard has enjoyed residencies at numerous music institutes, colleges, high schools, and training programs, giving recitals, masterclasses, and lectures. She resides in Greenville, SC, with her husband and children, where she teaches voice at the University of South Carolina Upstate.



## Jorell Williams, baritone

American baritone Jorell Williams, lauded for his “solid vocal core and easy, natural production” (*Opera News*) and “deliciously resonant baritone voice” (*Broadway World*), is celebrated as “a rock-solid singer with a keen understanding of his own expressive depths” (*The Washington Post*). He is in demand across leading opera and concert stages, bringing both classical and contemporary works to life with remarkable depth and versatility.

In the 2024-2025 season, Williams debuts original compositions and arrangements for Beverly Sills Award-winning soprano Leah Hawkins at the Park Avenue Armory Concert Series, followed by world premiere compositions in the New York Festival of Song’s *My Brother’s Keeper* at Merkin Hall. He makes his Manitoba Opera debut as Belcore in *L’elisir d’amore* and stars in the title role of *Le nozze di Figaro* with Opera Columbus. Additional season highlights include performances with the National Philharmonic in Handel’s *Messiah*, the Omaha Symphony for Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*, Walton’s *Belshazzar’s Feast* with Choir St-Laurent at La Maison Symphonique de Montréal, and a return to Kentucky Opera as the featured artist in their Fannie Lou Hamer Tribute Concert.

The 2023-2024 season saw Williams in the title role of Don Pasquale at Opera Omaha, as Alexandre in Greek National Opera’s *La Ville Morte* (in partnership with Catapult Opera), Dizzy Gillespie in Indianapolis Opera’s *Yardbird*, and in Lincoln Center’s *American Songbook - Cast Album Project: Running Man*. Concert engagements included *Messiah* with the National Philharmonic Orchestra and Elmer Iseler Singers, Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony with Symphony Nova Scotia, *Te Deum* with the Ottawa Choral Society, and a program of works by Margaret Bonds with the Symphony Pops of Long Island.

In previous seasons, Williams’ notable roles included Escamillo in *Carmen* with Pacific Opera Victoria, a Second Nazarene with Canadian Opera Company in *Salome*, and leading the world premiere of *Of the Sea* with Tapestry Opera. His concert appearances spanned *Carmina Burana* with Amadeus Choir, *A Child of Our Time* with the Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra, and *Messiah* with the National Philharmonic Orchestra. His arrangements of Ilse Weber’s *Die Kinderliebeslieder* premiered with the Brooklyn Art Song Society. Earlier engagements included the world premiere of *A More Perfect Union* with the Ridgefield Symphony, inspired by President Obama’s speeches, and roles in *Intimate Apparel* by Ricky Ian Gordon and Lynn Nottage (co-produced by the Metropolitan Opera and filmed for PBS Great Performances), *Die Schweigsame Frau* at Bard Summerscape, and performances with Finger Lakes Opera, Victory Hall Opera, Gateways Music Festival, and the William Warfield Foundation.



## Levi Grein, boy soprano

Levi Grein is a fifth grader at Trinity Lutheran School in Fremont, NE. He has previous experience singing in the Indianapolis Children’s Choir and at church. When Levi is not singing, he loves to read and play video games. Levi would like to thank God for the gift of music and his family for their support.