



Dessoff Dialogue:
Messiah: Then &
Now

The Dessoff Choirs
December 6, 2020
4 pm



Sunday, December 6, 2020 • 4:00 pm

The Dessoff Choirs
Malcolm J. Merriweather, *Music Director*

**Dessoff Dialogue:
Messiah: *Then & Now***

Special Guest – Dr. Christopher Shepard

Steven Ryan, piano

Excerpts from **Messiah** (1741)

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)

- Aria Comfort ye, Every Valley Shall be Exalted
 John Tirrano, tenor
 Worcester Chorus and Orchestra at Mechanics Hall
 Christopher Shepard, conductor
- Chorus And the glory of the Lord
- Recit Thus Saith the Lord,
 David Thomas, bass
- Aria But Who may abide
 Emma Kirkby, soprano
 The Academy of Ancient Music at Westminster Abbey
 Christopher Hogwood, conductor
- Chorus For Unto us a child is born
- Recit And suddenly there was with the angel
- Chorus Glory to God
- Aria Rejoice Greatly,
 Jeanine De Bique, soprano
 Chineke! at Royal Albert Hall
 Kevin John Edusei, conductor



Chorus His Yoke is easy

Chorus Behold the Lamb

Aria He was depised
Reginald Mobley countertenor
Bach Collegium of San Diego at Sts Constantine & Helen Greek
Orthodox Church
Ruben Valenzuela, Music Director
Michael Sponseller, Associate Director

Chorus Surely he hath borne

Chorus And with his stripes

Chorus All we like sheep

Chorus Hallelujah

Chorus Since by man came death

Chorus Worthy is the lamb

Meet the Artists



Music Director of The Masterwork Chorus, **Chris Shepard** also serves as Music Director of the Worcester Chorus in Worcester, Massachusetts, and CONCORA, Connecticut's oldest professional choir. He also led The Dessoff Choirs in New York City from 2010 to 2016. His choirs have collaborated with a number of orchestras, such as the Juilliard Orchestra, the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de Mexico and the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, in venues that include Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center and Radio City Music Hall in New York, as well as the Royal Festival Hall in London and the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City.

Chris has prepared choirs for major international conductors, including Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Simone Young, Carlos Miguel Prieto and William Boughton, as well as for Broadway legend Patti Lupone and Ray Davies of the Kinks. He made his Carnegie Hall debut in 2015, and made his conducting debut with the New Haven Symphony in 2016.

Chris returned to America in 2008 after a dozen years in Sydney, Australia, where he founded the Sydneian Bach Choir and Orchestra. He led their *BACH 2010*, a project to perform all of Bach's choral cantatas. Under his direction, the ensemble performed over eighty cantatas, as well as the two *Passions*, *B Minor Mass*, and *Christmas Oratorio*; they completed the cantata cycle in 2013. In addition to the music of J.S. Bach, Chris has conducted many staples of the choral-orchestral repertoire, and he has commissioned and premiered a number of new choral works in both Australia and America. He also leads two of the longest-running annual *Messiah* performances in America, with the Worcester Chorus and at Carnegie Hall with the Masterwork Chorus.

A committed music educator, Chris has served on the faculty of the Taft School, Sydney Grammar School, Hotchkiss Summer Portals, and Holy Cross College. He founded the Litchfield County Children's Choir in 1990 and has conducted numerous middle and high school festival choirs in New England, New York and Australia. He presented two documentaries with SBS-TV, an Australian national public television network, and has given several presentations at conferences for American Choral Directors Association and Australian National Kodály Association. Chris has been a guest conductor at Emmanuel Church in Boston, a church renowned for its four-decade Bach cantata project, and he currently serves as Music Director of St John's Episcopal Church in Stamford, Connecticut.



A pianist and keyboard continuist, Chris holds degrees from the Hartt School and the Yale School of Music, where he studied choral conducting with Marguerite Brooks, and the University of Sydney. He researched the performance history of Bach's *B Minor Mass* in New York City for his PhD in Musicology; his dissertation won the American Choral Directors Association's 2012 Julius Herford Prize for outstanding doctoral thesis in choral music.



Conductor **Malcolm J. Merriweather** is Music Director of New York City's The Dessooff Choirs, founded in 1924 and known for path-breaking performances of choral works from the pre-Baroque era through the 21st century. An Associate Professor, he is Director of Choral Studies and Voice Department Coordinator at Brooklyn College of The City University of New York, Artist-in-Residence at Union Theological Seminary, and Artistic Director of Voices of Haiti, a 60-member children's choir in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, operated by the Andrea Bocelli Foundation. He is also in demand as a baritone soloist, often performing throughout the United States.

Highlights of Merriweather's 2019-20 season included the release of two major recordings. With Dessooff, Merriweather conducted and performed selected songs on *MARGARET BONDS: The Ballad of the Brown King & Selected Songs* released by AVIE Records in November 2019; this project is the premiere recording of the composer's *magnum opus*. In this new arrangement, Merriweather scored Bonds' 1954 work for orchestra for strings, harp, and organ. He is also featured as the baritone soloist in the Oratorio Society of New York's recording of Paul Moravec and Mark Campbell's *Sanctuary Road* released on the Naxos label.

During Dessooff's 95th season, Merriweather conducted the group in sold-out performances of Faure's Requiem, Rutter's *The Sprig of Thyme*, and Gregg Smith's *The Continental Harmonist*. He also conducted a variety of concerts and events at Brooklyn College and Union Theological Seminary. As a baritone soloist, he sang Britten's *War Requiem* at the Eastern Division American Choral Directors Association Conference in Rochester, NY; Bob Chilcott's Requiem, also in Rochester, NY; and *Sanctuary Road*, with the Columbus Symphony Orchestra in Columbus, Ohio, and the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra in Chautauqua, NY.

He is a recipient of the Lotus Foundation Prize and the Outstanding Full-Time Faculty Teaching Award from Brooklyn College. Dr. Merriweather has earned degrees from the Eastman School of Music, Manhattan School of Music, and Syracuse University (*summa cum laude*). Please visit malcolmjmerriweather.com for more information. Connect with him on Twitter and Instagram [@maestroweather](https://www.instagram.com/maestroweather).



Steven Ryan, piano, has been Dessoiff's accompanist and keyboard soloist since 1997, including featured performances in all of Dessoiff's Midwinter Festivals. In February 2017, Dessoiff's "French Fête" concert was a celebration of his 20th anniversary with the group. In recent years, Mr. Ryan has performed in Russia, Austria, France, and Italy. In 2014, he was featured in the Voices Across the Pacific festival in Sydney, Australia, playing a solo concert and working with choirs. He has performed several solos with the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra and the Greater Trenton Symphony Orchestra.

He has played celesta with the Berlin Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall; piano, harpsichord, and organ with Dessoiff; and synthesizer with the Moody Blues. Conductors he has collaborated with include Vladimir Ashkenazy, Charles Dutoit, Neeme Järvi, Sir Neville Mariner, Gerard Schwartz, and Maxim Shostakovich.

Ryan is a regular accompanist at Montclair State University, working with the choirs and in both the voice and string studios. He participated in Montclair's 2015 concerts at Sadler's Wells Theatre in London and the Isaac Stern Auditorium at Carnegie Hall. In 2000, he won second prize at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition for Outstanding Amateurs, and in 2001 he took first place in the Concours des Grand Amateurs de Piano in France.



The Dessoiff Choirs, one of the leading choruses in New York City, is an independent chorus with an established reputation for pioneering performances of choral works from the Renaissance era through the 21st century. Since its

founding in 1924, Dessoiff's mission is to enrich the lives of its audiences and members through the performance of choral music.

Its concerts, professional collaborations, community outreach, and educational initiatives are dedicated to stimulating public interest in and appreciation of choral music as an art form



that enhances the culture and life of our times. With repertoire ranging over a wide variety of eras and styles, Dessoff's musical acumen and flexibility has been recognized with invitations from major orchestras for oratorios and orchestral works.

Past performances include Britten's *War Requiem* and Mahler's Symphony No. 8 with Lorin Maazel in his final performances as Music Director with the New York Philharmonic. Over the course of its 95-year history, Dessoff has presented numerous world premieres, including pieces by Virgil Thomson, George Perle, Paul Moravec, and Ricky Ian Gordon, as well as the first American performance in nearly 100 years of Montemezzi's opera *La Nave* with Teatro Grattacielo; and the American premieres of Philip Glass's Symphony No. 5, and Sir John Tavener's all-night vigil, *The Veil of the Temple*.

Dessoff's discography includes its newest CD, *MARGARET BONDS: The Ballad of the Brown King & Selected Songs*, released in November 2019, along with its other CDs, which include *Reflections*, featuring music by Convery, Corigliano, Moravec, and Rorem, and *Glories on Glories*, a collection of American song featuring composers ranging from Billings to Ives.

The Dessoff Choirs is supported in part by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council. Also, Dessoff's season is made possible in part by funds from The New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature. Please visit dessoff.org for more information.