

Saturday, March 9, 2024 | 8PM

Terrace Theater



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# Brahms Requiem

**Eckart Preu**, conductor

**Elissa Johnston**, soprano | **Kevin Deas**, baritone

**Long Beach Camerata Singers**, chorus | **James K. Bass**, chorus master

**The UCLA Chamber Singers**

**CONNESON** *Cosmic Trilogy (Aleph)*

**VAUGHAN WILLIAMS** *Serenade to Music*

\*\*\* 20 min. Intermission \*\*\*

**BRAHMS** *Requiem*

This concert is generously sponsored by

**Lyn and John Pohlmann**

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**Elissa Johnston, soprano**

Cited by the *New York Times* for her “especially lovely” singing, Elissa Johnston enjoys diving into repertoire ranging from Bach, Handel and Mozart to Messiaen, Carter and Unsuk Chin.

Elissa has recently appeared with the L.A. Philharmonic in *Die Staat* by Louis Andriessen, conducted by John Adams, and in performances with Street Symphony in Bach’s *Wedding Cantata No. 202*. She has frequently appeared as soloist with the Los Angeles Master Chorale, most recently in Peter Sellars’ production of *Music to Accompany a Departure*, which is being presented in the 2023 Salzburg Festival. In June 2023 Elissa returns to Pacific Symphony to sing the world premiere of James MacMillan’s *Fiat Lux*. Other recent performances include John Adams’ *Grand Pianola Music* with the L.A. Philharmonic under Gustavo Dudamel, Canteloube’s *Chants d’Auvergne*, with Pacific Symphony under Carl St. Clair, and numerous chamber music and recital performances with Jacaranda Music, Le Salon de Musique, Hear/Now Festival and Pittance Chamber Music.



**Kevin Deas, baritone**

Kevin Deas has gained international renown as one of America’s leading bass-baritones. He is perhaps most acclaimed for his signature portrayal of the title role in *Porgy and Bess*, having performed it with the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, National Symphony, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Pacific Symphony, as well as the most illustrious orchestras on the North American continent, and at the Ravinia, Vail and Saratoga festivals.

Kevin Deas’ 2023-24 season includes performances of Mozart’s *Requiem* with the Vermont Symphony and Mobile Symphony, Handel’s *Messiah* with the North Carolina Symphony, National Cathedral, Houston Symphony, and the NAC Orchestra in Ottawa. Other notable performances in the season include a Gershwin program with Oregon Symphony and Rochester Philharmonic, Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 9* with the Pacific Symphony, and will be performing the role of Commendatore in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* with Boston Baroque, as well as the role of Dick Hallorann in Paul Moravec’s critically acclaimed opera *The Shining* with the Opera Atlanta.

A proponent of contemporary music, Kevin Deas has performed Menotti’s *Amahl and the Night Visitors* at Italy’s Spoleto Festival, Derek Bermel’s *The Good Life* with the Pittsburgh Symphony, and Hannibal Lokumbe’s *Dear Mrs. Parks* with the Detroit Symphony. He also enjoyed a twenty-year collaboration with the late jazz legend Dave Brubeck.

# Featured Artists



**James K. Bass**

**Camerata Singers chorus master**

James K. Bass, GRAMMY® award-winning conductor and singer, is Professor and Director of Choral studies at the Herb Alpert School of Music at UCLA. James serves as the Program Director for the Professional Choral Institute. He is Associate Conductor for the Miami based ensemble Seraphic Fire and is Artistic Director of the Long Beach Camerata Singers. Bass received his Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Miami–Florida, Master of Music and Bachelor of Science degrees from the University of South Florida and is a graduate of the Interlochen Arts Academy. His career has coincided with the development of Seraphic Fire as one of the premier vocal ensembles in the United States. He is co-founder of the Professional Choral Institute. In its inaugural year of recording, Seraphic Fire and PCI received the GRAMMY® nomination for Best Choral Performance for their recording of Brahms’ *Ein Deutsches Requiem*. In 2017 Seraphic Fire and UCLA launched the Ensemble Artist Program. In 2021, Bass won the GRAMMY® for Best Choral Performance for his work as director of the UCLA Chamber Choir in partnership with the Buffalo Symphony Orchestra and Chorus for “The Passion of Yeshua.”

## Long Beach Camerata Singers, chorus

The Long Beach Camerata Singers was founded in

1966 by Frank Allen as the Vocal Arts Ensemble. In 1983, Dr. David Wilson, professor of choral music at USC, succeeded Frank Allen and led the choir for over twenty years. LBSC has also been led by CSULB Choral Director Dr. Jonathan Talberg (2005–2009) and Dr. Robert Istad, Director of Choral Studies at CSU Fullerton (2009 to 2017).

The 2023-2024 season marks the seventh season for GRAMMY® award-winning artistic director, Dr. James K. Bass, Director of Choral Studies at UCLA, Associate Conductor Seraphic Fire and Program Director of the Professional Choral Institute. Currently in its 58th season, the Long Beach Camerata Singers offers the *Peace Project* in fall, Handel’s *Messiah* in December, *ChoralFest* in spring and *Evening of Song* in May. Camerata has enjoyed an artistic partnership with the Long Beach Symphony Orchestra since 2015. LBSC offers two Education programs: the Camerata Children’s Music Academy, which provides fundamental music instruction focused on the vocal arts for 3 to 5 year-old children and *Peace4Youth* program which brings the *Peace Project* into LBUUSD Middle and High Schools. The newest member of the Camerata brand, Catalyst Chamber Ensemble, is now in its second season.

## The UCLA Chamber Singers

The UCLA Chamber Singers, a 32-40 voiced mixed-choir, represents the highest level of ensemble singing. The ensemble has been conducted by choral luminaries including Roger Wagner, Donn Weiss, Donald Neuen and now Dr. James K. Bass. At UCLA, the choir routinely presents performances representing the entire spectrum of choral literature on campus and in the community. The choir annually performs with UCLA Philharmonia in presentations of major choral orchestral works in the historic on-campus venue Royce Hall. The ensemble has collaborated with other nationally recognized arts groups, including the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, Minneapolis Guitar Quartet, Seraphic Fire, and the touring production of *Distant Worlds*, the music of *Final Fantasy*. Additionally, Chamber Singers often participate in the performing and recording premieres of new works such as Richard Danielpour’s *The Passion of Yeshua*, recorded by Naxos Records.

## Guillaume Connesson – Cosmic Trilogy

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French composer and educator Guillaume Connesson – not yet a household name in the U.S. – is reportedly among the most frequently performed living French composers. Born in 1970, raised and educated in Boulogne-Billancourt and nearby metropolitan Paris, he studied piano and then began composing in his teens while at conservatory. In his early 20s, his compositions for orchestra became very successful award winners, launching a career fueled to this day by a robust schedule of commissions from respected international ensembles including the Philadelphia and Chicago Symphony Orchestras, Royal Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), Orchestre Nationale de France, and many others. Connesson describes his music as “a complex mosaic of the contemporary world.” In his spare time, he is also a professor of orchestration at the National Music Conservatory in Paris.

*Cosmic Trilogy* originated as three separate works, composed over a ten-year period and later combined into the thematically united *Cosmic* suite. The Supernova finale was actually the first to be composed, premiering in 1997 with its commissioning orchestra, the Montpellier Philharmonic, and winning Connesson the prestigious Cardin Prize. Eight years later, Connesson’s countryman and fan, conductor Stéphane Denève, commissioned *Aleph* for his Royal Scottish National Orchestra. Two years after that, another RSNO commission produced *Une lueur dans l’age sombre*. Only then did Connesson combine the three works into the *Trilogy – Aleph, Une Lueur, Supernova* – we are enjoying this evening.

The arc of *Cosmic Trilogy* traces the birth, radiant lifespan, and death of a star. *Aleph*, named for both the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and the symbol in mathematics for infinite cardinal numbers, is described as “a symphonic dance of life and energy.” The second movement, translated as *A Glimmer in the Age of Darkness*, ruminates with impressionistic lyricism on the passage of time and celestial existence. Finally, Supernova is a gorgeous extended fanfare heralding our star’s ultimate explosive flaming zenith and ensuing collapse. Brace yourself!

## Ralph Vaughan Williams – Serenade to Music

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Ralph Vaughan Williams was raised in a privileged, learned, and well-connected patrician British family. His great uncle was Charles Darwin, and his great-great-grandfather was Josiah Wedgwood of ceramics fame. He showed early interest in music, studying piano and violin from age five, and was fascinated by English folk tunes which he collected. He studied music in a suitably posh academic environment, attending first the Royal College of Music and then Trinity College, Cambridge, where excelled and made many notable (later) lifelong friends, including Gustav Holst and Leopold Stokowski. He was an outspoken student, mightily opposing the existing compositional norms among the music faculty which were heavily influenced by the German traditions of Brahms and Wagner. After graduating, he decamped to study orchestration in Paris with impressionist Maurice Ravel, developing his own distinct, original musical style. Upon returning to England, he embarked on a prolific career as a composer writing operas, symphonies and concerti, incidental music for theater and ballet, works for voice and chorus, and scores for radio and film. He was still actively composing when he died at age 86 in 1958.

The *Serenade to Music* is a perfect reflection of the close relationships he cultivated throughout his extended career, and of the central position he held among contemporary English musicians,

composers, and conductors. Inspired by an extended passage praising the Music of the Spheres in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, the *Serenade* was written to celebrate the success of the London "Proms," or Queen's Hall Promenade Concerts. Founded in 1895 by conductor Sir Henry Wood, another of Vaughan Williams' close friends, the Proms today are a summer institution, central to the musical life of London. In 1938, a Jubilee Concert was held honoring their longtime conductor Wood, and Vaughan Williams' bespoke *Serenade* was premiered. In his highly unusual work, the composer specifically wrote roles large and small to feature many of his and Wood's musical friends and colleagues; it calls for 16 vocal soloists, which at the premiere were performed by a who's who of singing talent. At maestro Wood's insistence, the Jubilee concert proceeds went to endow London hospital beds for English musicians. The *Serenade* premiere was such a resounding success, Columbia Records immediately arranged to record it and reconvened the entire illustrious Jubilee ensemble only 10 days later. Vaughan Williams signed over the copyright to ensure that proceeds from the recording also supported the Jubilee hospital endowment fund.

### Johannes Brahms - Requiem

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When Johannes Brahms composed *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, he was a relatively young man in his early 30s. Renowned during his lifetime as a very reserved and private person, no reliable archives exist to illuminate what his motivations were for spending the enormous amount of time and energy creating such a mammoth work requires. The composer was not writing on a commission, as were Mozart and Beethoven, for example. Brahms undertook this formidable task for reasons of his own.

Scholars have determined that key portions of the Requiem incorporate relics of an earlier attempt at orchestral composition, now thought to be Brahms' abandoned first symphony. Brahms was only 21 when making his first attempts to compose a symphony and he was wracked with fears, very aware of his lack of maturity and doubtful of his capacity to master the intricacies of symphonic composition. Ultimately, he left the work unfinished, setting it aside to concentrate on other modes. Twelve years later, he proved himself magnificently able to harness the full power of orchestration with the *Requiem* which was his first full-scale orchestral work.

The *Requiem* is unusual in many ways. Brahms named it *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, not only because he chose the unorthodox path of using German text instead of Latin, but also because he intended it as a work of solace and comfort for humanity after the loss of loved ones, in contrast to the traditional religious purpose of being a prayer to carry the departed to the next life. His selection of biblical texts was also different from the norm, clearly reflecting his wish to offer comfort to the living, as evidenced in the first line: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Scholars believe that when writing, having recently lost both his beloved mother and his friend and mentor, Robert Schumann, the comfort Brahms sought to bestow was as much for himself as for humanity at large. In both regards, he clearly succeeded. The Requiem became a great success, enjoying 20 performances in its first year alone, never fading in popularity thereafter, and today it stills ranks in the topmost tier among works of its kind.

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Susan Swinburne has been a lover and student of music since demanding piano lessons at age six. Her work in orchestra management has enriched her life personally and professionally for the past three decades. A habitué of concert halls throughout southern California, she lives, listens, writes, and researches in the South Bay.