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National Philharmonic Season Continues With Brahms' *Requiem* March 18, at 8 p.m.

*Featuring National Philharmonic Chorale,
The Washington Debut of Jonathan Leshnoff's Zohar,
and Renowned Soloists Nmon Ford and Danielle Talamantes*

North Bethesda, MD (Jan. 31, 2017)—The National Philharmonic's 2016-2017 season at The Music Center at Strathmore continues with Johannes Brahms' *Requiem*, Op. 45, and features the Washington, D.C.-area premier of Jonathan Leshnoff's oratorio, *Zohar*. The spiritually influenced concert, led by Philharmonic Music Director and Conductor Piotr Gajewski, will also feature renowned baritone Nmon Ford and soprano Danielle Talamantes. The concert is part of Gajewski's new initiative titled, "Exploring Jewish Identity through Music." The *Requiem* is often cited as the pinnacle piece in Brahms' career, showcasing his love for both voice and orchestra. Likewise, Leshnoff's *Zohar* (which means "radiance" in Hebrew) also features orchestra and voice, and is based on writings from the Jewish mystical Kabbalah. Ford and Talamantes are also prominent singers: Nmon was a singer for two Grammy award-winning albums, and Talamantes is an international recitalist, who most recently performed in *Carmen* at the Metropolitan Opera. The performance is Saturday, March 18, at 8 p.m., in Strathmore's Concert Hall. Ticket prices are \$19-\$66 and are free for young people age 7-17. Strathmore is located at 5301 Tuckerman Lane, North Bethesda. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit www.nationalphilharmonic.org or call 301.581.5100

Gajewski was born and raised in Warsaw. The son of a Holocaust survivor, Gajewski's family emigrated from Poland in 1969. Many of the National Philharmonic musicians are Jewish, as is Leshnoff. "Exploring Jewish Identity through Music" continues with the April 22-23 concerts featuring Max Bruch's composition *Kol Nidrei*, Op.47 and Ernest Bloch's *Schelomo*. In 2018, the series will recognize American composer Leonard Bernstein's 100th birthday.

Brahms (1833-1897) is one of the greatest German composers and pianists of the Romantic era, producing symphonies, choral compositions, chamber music, and more than 200 songs. His music was more traditional in rhythm and movement than his Romantic contemporaries, aligning him with Classical musicians Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. One of Brahms' most popular works, *A German Requiem*, was inspired in part by the death of friend and mentor Robert Schumann. Years later after the death of Brahms' mother, he began actual work on the composition, which took him another three years to complete. The seven-movement *Requiem* features chorus, soloists, and orchestra, and is a consolation for the living who mourn their dead.

Praised by *The Washington Post* as one of the "gifted young composers" of this generation, Leshnoff, of Baltimore, is described by *The New York Times* as "a leader of contemporary American lyricism." His compositions have earned international acclaim for their striking harmonies, structural complexity, and powerful themes. Leshnoff's works have been performed by more than 50 orchestras worldwide in hundreds of orchestral concerts. A prolific musician, Leshnoff has composed several symphonies and oratorios in addition to numerous concerti, solo, and chamber works. He has received commissions from Carnegie Hall and orchestras, including Nashville Symphonies, the Buffalo Philharmonic, and Philadelphia Orchestras. Leshnoff's compositions have been performed by classical music's most celebrated stars, such as Gil and Orli Shaham and Roberto Díaz, and have been conducted and embraced by esteemed music directors including Marin Alsop, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, and Michael Stern. He has released three albums to date, all on the Naxos American Classics label. A recording of the Atlanta Symphony performing Leshnoff's Symphony No. 2 and *Zohar* oratorio was released in November 2016. Leshnoff is a professor of music at Towson University.

Zohar was commissioned by Robert Spano and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Carnegie Hall, and the Deborah A. Kahn and Harris N. Miller Charitable Fund. The *Zohar* is one of the pillars of Jewish mysticism and a commentary on the mystical aspects of the Five Books of Moses. The *Zohar* deals with the most basic and deepest issues of Judaism and life. "I view the subject matter of *Zohar* and Brahms as complementary. *A German Requiem* offers comfort to those grieving over the loss of a beloved. *Zohar*, on the other hand, is an ecstatic, mystical embrace of life and the living," said Leshnoff.

Talamantes has sung with internationally acclaimed orchestras, including the National Symphony Orchestra, Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler in Berlin, Seoul Philharmonic, Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, Trujillo Symphony Orchestra of Peru, and the U.S. Army Chorus. She made her stage debut in the Metropolitan Opera's 2014-2015 season as Frasquita in Bizet's *Carmen*, and performed in the National Philharmonic's production of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and Mozart's *Requiem* and *Exsultate Jubilate*, among others. Talamantes is again performing in the Metropolitan Opera's 2016-17 season as Frasquita, and will also debut as Anna in Verdi's *Nabucco*. She has performed as soloist in Händel's *Messiah* with the Phoenix Symphony, Violetta in *La Traviata* at Cedar Rapids Opera and Finger Lakes Opera, and Mimí in *La Bohème* at St. Petersburg Opera. Her debut album, *Canciones españolas*, was released on the MSR Classics label and her sophomore album, *Heaven and Earth, A Duke Ellington Songbook*, is due to release this spring. Both albums can be found on the MSR Classics label.

Ford is featured on the four-time Grammy-winning album *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (Naxos) and the Grammy-winning album *Transmigrations* (Telarc). The Panamanian-American baritone enjoyed many successful debuts over the past season, including the role of Jochanaan in *Salome* with the Pittsburgh Opera and Opéra National de Bordeaux, and the title role of Ernest Bloch's *Macbeth* at Chicago Opera Theater. Recently, Ford, a Billboard Top 20 recipient, performed *Carmina Burana* with the Atlanta and St. Louis Symphonies, an all-Gershwin concert with the Boston Pops, and Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* with Orchestre National des Pays de la Loire, among others. Ford has performed in various title roles in international festivals in Europe and the United States. His award-winning music has been recorded on three albums: *Vai DaCapo – Songs of Delight* (Universal/Decca; Billboard Top 20, Classical and Classical Crossover), Vaughan Williams' *Serenade to Music* (Concord) with Robert Spano and the ASO, and Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* (In-Akustik).

The nearly 200-member National Philharmonic Chorale is showcased each year at four or more concerts at the Music Center at Strathmore. The Chorale is under the direction of Chorale Artistic Director Stan Engebretson. Dr. Theodore M. Guerrant serves as the Chorale's rehearsal accompanist.

Gajewski is one of a select group of American conductors equally at home in nearly all musical genres. He is the music director and conductor of the National Philharmonic at the Music Center at Strathmore, and a sought-after guest conductor. He was a student and disciple of the late Leonard Bernstein, and is described by *The Washington Post* as an “immensely talented and insightful conductor, whose standards, taste and sensitivity are impeccable.”

Led by Maestro Gajewski, the National Philharmonic is known for performances that are “powerful,” “impeccable,” and “thrilling” (*The Washington Post*). In July 2003, the National Chamber Orchestra and Masterworks Chorus merged to create the National Philharmonic, an ensemble with more than 50 years of combined history, bringing high caliber musical performances to the Washington area. The National Philharmonic took up residence at the state-of-the-art Music Center at Strathmore upon its opening in February 2005. Now, more than 250 performances later, and with far-reaching educational programming, the National Philharmonic is the largest and most active professional orchestra based in Montgomery County.

The National Philharmonic boasts a long-standing tradition of reasonably priced tickets and free admission to all young people age 7-17, assuring its place as an accessible and enriching component in Montgomery County and the greater Washington, D.C., area.

As the Music Center at Strathmore's orchestra-in-residence, the National Philharmonic showcases world-renowned guest artists in time-honored symphonic masterpieces conducted by Maestro Gajewski, with additional conducting by Associate Conductor Victoria Gau, and monumental choral masterworks under National Philharmonic Chorale Artistic Director Stan Engebretson.

To purchase tickets for the performances and for a complete schedule, please visit www.nationalphilharmonic.org or call the Strathmore Ticket Office at 301.581.5100. Tickets are \$19-\$66; young people 7-17 are free through the ALL KIDS, ALL FREE, ALL THE TIME

program. ALL KIDS tickets must be purchased in person or by phone. Complimentary parking is available.

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Photo Cut Line 1: The National Philharmonic's 12th anniversary season features spiritually influenced works by Johannes Brahms and Jonathan Leshnoff, conducted by Maestro Piotr Gajewski, with soloists Danielle Talamantes (soprano) and Nmon Ford (baritone), Saturday, March 18 at 8 p.m. at Strathmore.

Photo Cut Line 2: Award-winning composer Jonathan Leshnoff's oratorio *Zohar* is featured during the National Philharmonic's 12th anniversary season, along with Johannes Brahms' greatest work, *Requiem*, Saturday, March 18 at 8 p.m. at Strathmore.

Photo Cut Line 3: International performer Danielle Talamantes (soprano) will perform during National Philharmonic's 12th anniversary season, in a concert featuring Johannes Brahms' greatest work, *Requiem*, Saturday, March 18 at 8 p.m. at Strathmore.

Photo Cut Line 4: Emmy award-winning singer Nmon Ford (baritone) will perform during National Philharmonic's 12th anniversary season, in a concert featuring Johannes Brahms' greatest work, *Requiem*, Saturday, March 18 at 8 p.m. at Strathmore.