

SUNDAY EVENING, JANUARY 5, 1969 AT 7:30 P.M.



SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA  
CHORAL MUSIC  
ASSOCIATION

# LOS ANGELES MASTER CHORALE AND SINFONIA ORCHESTRA

ROGER WAGNER, Music Director

**ROGER WAGNER**

*Conductor*

**DONALD GRAMM**

*Bass-Baritone, as the Prophet Elijah*

**KARAN ARMSTRONG**

*Soprano, as the Widow and as an Angel*

**CLAUDINE CARLSON**

*Contralto, as Jezebel the Queen,  
and as an Angel*

**ROBERT BEHAN**

*Tenor, as Obadiah, as Ahab the King,  
and as an Angel*

MENDELSSOHN *Elijah*

PART I

Introduction. *Elijah*. As God the Lord

Overture

Chorus. *The Israelites*. Help, Lord!

Duet and Chorus. *The Israelites*. Lord, bow thine ear

Recitative. *Obadiah*. Ye people, rend your hearts

Air. *Obadiah*. If with all your hearts

Chorus. *The Israelites*. Yet doth the Lord

Recitative. *An Angel*. Elijah! get thee hence

Double Chorus. *The Angelic Choir*. For He shall give His angels

Recitative. *An Angel*. Now Cherith's brook

Recitative and Air. *The Widow and Elijah*. What have I to do with thee

Chorus. *The Angelic Choir*. Blessed are the men who fear Him

Recitative. *Elijah, Ahab and his Courtiers*. As God the Lord

Chorus. *The Priests of Baal*. Baal, we cry to thee!

Recitative and Chorus. *Elijah, Priests of Baal*. Call him louder!

Recitative and Air. *Elijah*. Draw near, all ye people

Chorus. *The Angelic Choir*. Cast thy burden upon the Lord

Recitative. *Elijah*. O Thou, who makest thine angels spirits

Chorus. *The Israelites*. The fire descends from heaven

Air. *Elijah*. Is not His word like a fire

Air. *An Angel*. Woe unto them who forsake Him!

Recitative. *Obadiah*. O man of God, help thy people!

Recitative and Chorus. *Elijah, a Youth, The Israelites*. O Lord, thou hast overthrown

Chorus. *The Israelites*. Thanks be to God!

INTERMISSION

PART II

Air. *An Angel*. Hear ye, Israel!

Chorus. *The Angelic Choir*. Be not afraid

Recitative. *Elijah, the Queen and her followers*. The Lord hath exalted thee

Chorus. *The followers of Jezebel*. Woe to him!

Recitative. *Obadiah and Elijah*. Man of God

Air. *Elijah*. It is enough

Recitative. *An Angel*. See, now he sleepeth

Chorus. *Angels*. Lift thine eyes

Chorus. *The Angelic Choir*. He, watching over Israel

Recitative. *An Angel, Elijah*. Arise, Elijah

Air. *An Angel*. O rest in the Lord

Chorus. *The Angelic Choir*. He that shall endure

Recitative. *Elijah, an Angel*. Night falleth round me

Chorus. *The Angelic Choir*. Behold, God the Lord

Recitative and Double Chorus. *An Angel, the Seraphim*. Above Him stood the Seraphim

Recitative. *Elijah*. I go on my way

Chorus. *The Angelic Choir*. Then did Elijah

Air. *An Angel*. Then shall the righteous shine forth

Chorus. *The Angelic Choir*. And then shall your light break forth



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## PROGRAM NOTES

by  
ARTHUR F. EDWARDS  
Annotator, Los Angeles  
Master Chorale

### Elijah, Op. 70

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Shortly after Mendelssohn's first oratorio, *St. Paul*, was completed (in 1836), the composer began to plan a second oratorio on the subject of "the wrath and the grief of the prophet Elijah" (to use H. E. Jacob's phrase). However, the work on the libretto did not go well, and the project was shelved until 1845, when the composer received an invitation to write and conduct a new oratorio at the Birmingham Festival the following year. The first performance took place August 26, 1846. It was the second of four evenings of choral music of the festival, the other works being Haydn's *Creation*, Handel's *Messiah*, and the Beethoven *Missa Solemnis*. A correspondent who was present at the performance wrote,

"How shall I describe what today has been in the Music Hall? After such an intense enjoyment it is a hard task to express one's feelings in cold words. It was a great day for the festival, a great day for Mendelssohn, a great day for art. There were eight encores..."

In spite of the success of the premiere, Mendelssohn was not satisfied with the work, and all but five numbers were revised during the following months, in time for the first London performance on April 16, 1847. This was Mendelssohn's tenth and last trip to England. Friends pressed him to remain in London a little longer, but he had a presentiment that he must leave hurriedly. "Ah, I wish I may not already have stayed too long here! One more week of this unremitting fatigue and I should be killed outright." He was manifestly ill. Upon his arrival in Frankfurt, he abruptly learned that his beloved sister, Fanny, had died at the piano while conducting a choir rehearsal. With a cry, Felix collapsed. The shock of the news and the violence of his fall on hearing it brought about a rupture of one of those delicate cerebral blood vessels which had caused so many deaths in the Mendelssohn family. He made a partial recovery, but another stroke on November 3 caused his death the following day, three months short of his 39th birthday.

The text of *Elijah* was prepared by

Mendelssohn's friend, Julius Schubring and translated into English by William Bartholomew, under the constant supervision of the composer. "The personages should act and speak like living beings — for Heaven's sake let them not be a musical picture, but a real world, such as you find in every chapter of the Old Testament; and the contemplative and pathetic element, which you desire, ought to be entirely conveyed to our understanding by the words and the mood of the acting personages."

The decision to limit the text to words from the Bible proved to be an unfortunate one, particularly in the second part. Pastor Schubring's desire to derive uplifting lessons from the story of the prophet led to an extension of the work beyond the ascent of Elijah into heaven (where Mendelssohn originally planned to end the oratorio). The few cuts in tonight's performance are excisions of this added section.

Despite occasional unevenness, largely due to dramatic deficiencies of the text, *Elijah* contains much music of great power and beauty. "Elijah is elemental music . . . Just as the depths of the Rhine and the rocks in Wagner's *Ring* are not merely the scene of the human and divine drama, but help to shape the drama, in fact form the basis for it — similarly, the soil of Palestine in *Elijah* shares the stage with Elijah himself. It is a land of drought, thirst and hunger, and also of lightning, thunder, blue-black torrents of rain; of earthquakes, fires, raging storms, green oases and golden deserts, of leathery palm leaves and aromatic shrubs, and whistling wind 'in which is the Lord.' Such is the ground on which Elijah walks, and he himself, the zealot, quick to wrath and subsiding into sorrow, has the character of the soil itself." (H. E. Jacob: *Felix Mendelssohn and His Times*, p. 251)

*Elijah* consists of a series of tableaux. After the master-stroke of the prophet's curse occurring before the overture: "A fugue. A fear-stricken crowd creeps along, on winding paths; this is not a march but a slow dragging movement of dying creatures who fall out by the wayside — we can almost see it! This is drought . . . The Israelites languish and die." (*Ibid.*, p. 252)

Elijah is sent to a widow who will provide sustenance until the three years of the curse are concluded. Her son sickens and "there is no breath in him." Elijah prays that the child be

brought back to life. *This scene, though operatic in treatment, provides the only interior scene in the work and shows the wrathful prophet in a more gentle mood.*

The three years are over. Elijah issues his challenge to Ahab: let two sacrifices be prepared, one altar for Baal and one for Jehovah. "The God who answers by fire, he is God." Confidently at first, then desperately, the priests of Baal cry to their God; as they vainly wait for a response, Elijah mocks them. Finally, in one of the most dramatic grand pauses in musical literature, it becomes evident that there will be no answer for the impotent priests of Baal. Elijah then quietly prays to the "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel" that His prophet may be vindicated. The prayer is answered, the fire descends, the awed populace reaffirms a belief in one God as they proclaim the *Sh'ma Yisroel*.

Elijah is now completely in charge — as he has been all the time — and orders the false priests slain. In a fanatical song of triumph, Handelian and inexorable, the victorious prophet sings of the judgment of Jehovah. But He is also merciful, and in response to Elijah's prayers, the heavens are opened and torrents of rain pour upon the thirsty land. *This entire tableau is highly effective, musically and dramatically. Mendelssohn manages to limn the drama of the miraculous happenings, and, without unduly slowing the pace, performs his homage to Bach and Handel in chorale and arioso.*

*Mendelssohn and Schubring were not as successful in keeping up the pace and comprehensibility in the second part. Much of the music is glorious, but the taut drama of the first part is often lacking. Often, little seems to be happening, but it is commented on at length. Mendelssohn's desire for drama yields to Schubring's wish to uplift the listener. The aria which begins the second part is a good example. It has great beauty, but is not very relevant to the story, which must be reconstructed partly from sources outside the libretto.*

Ahab and his people have lapsed again into idolatry. Elijah continues to warn them, but people grow weary of being told they are wrong. Jezebel, the Sidonite, has never forgiven Elijah for the slaughter of her priests and directs that he be seized and slain. Elijah flees into the desert and takes refuge "beneath a juniper tree." And now occurs "a passage of such grandeur

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that it makes us forget the dramatic weakness of the second act. For now Elijah no longer wishes to serve . . . He feels that he has lived in vain. He has been unable to extirpate the worship of Baal. All his anger has accomplished nothing. Profound melancholy overpowers him. He wishes to die. He pleads with God to grant him death. It is no Bachian death he desires, no consoling entrance into Eternal Life, but a quiet passage into nothingness . . . But God will not permit Elijah to die. For the present he is still needed on earth . . . Elijah continues to hold

back, but an angel leads him to Mount Horeb." (*Jacob*, p. 255).

Here God speaks to him, and gives him his marching orders. It is not the substance of the Lord's commands that Mendelssohn deals with; rather, it is the glory of God's presence. *Behold God the Lord passed by* is the greatest, most inspired chorus Mendelssohn ever wrote. It "is elemental music, begotten of the Palestinian landscape; and at the same time it is spiritual music. Greater intensity is scarcely possible than the intensity achieved in the *Ascension of Elijah*.

God sends His chariot of fire and carries the prophet off to Heaven. There are flashes of jagged lightning in the orchestra; the winds are like molten metal; the chorus accompanies the miracle with stormy rhythms and long-drawn-out cries." (*Ibid.*, p. 155).

*Of the five numbers in the final section, only two are included in this performance. Although they serve to end the work with fine dignity (and endeavor to relate the prophet to the fulfillment of the New Testament), one must admit that the best music of the oratorio has already occurred.*



**ROGER WAGNER'S** name has become well-known over the years in the field of choral art. The ensemble which bears his name has appeared in every state of the United States in addition to overseas tours covering the Middle East, Eastern and Western Europe, all of South America, Central America, Mexico, Canada and Japan. The list of Roger Wagner's musical activities embraces every phase of music. He is Music Director of the Southern California Choral Music Association, which is a member of the Performing Arts Council of The Music Center. He directs his own Sinfonia Orchestra and 100-voice professional Chorale in full seasons of choral master works. He has appeared as guest conductor with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. He is an exclusive recording artist for Angel records and director of choral activities at the University of California at Los Angeles. Roger Wagner holds a doctorate cum laude in musicology and was knighted by Pope Paul VI for his contributions to sacred music throughout the world. His tours are made under the management of S. Hurok.

at thirteen. He began studying voice at sixteen, and during his senior year in high school won the first prize at the Chicagoland Music Festival. He then began a four-year scholarship at the Chicago Musical College. He won the Oliver Ditson award three times and was granted a Paul Lavalle Scholarship, the largest given by the National Federation of Music Clubs. This prize led to repeated appearances on the Chicago Theatre of the Air. Twelve years ago, Mr. Gramm made his debut with the New York City Opera Company and has been heard since with the Metropolitan and Chicago Lyric Operas, the Washington and American Opera Societies, and the New Orleans, Santa Fe, and Miami Operas. He has created roles either in world or U.S. premieres in Martinu's *The Marriage*, Milhaud's *Medea*, Orff's *The Moon*, Frank Martin's *Tempest*, Britten's *Gloriana*, Offenbach's *Voyage to the Moon*, Handel's *Joshua*, and Giannini's *Taming of the Shrew*. Mr. Gramm also sang the world premiere of Giannini's *Canticle of Martyrs* and Richard Cumming's *The Crowne*. His appearances in the major summer concert series include the Berkshire Festival, Ann Arbor, Aspen, Bethlehem Bach, Boston Arts, Brevard, Caramoor, Cincinnati, Grant Park, Hollywood Bowl, and others.

very early age, Miss Armstrong studied, practiced and performed in pursuit of a career as a concert pianist. It was not until her junior year of college (less than six years ago) that she began to sing with Thelma Halverson, protegee of London's Maggie Teyte. She was encouraged to move to Santa Barbara to study with Lotte Lehmann, as well as Tilly DeGarmo and Fritz Zweig in Los Angeles. Three key auditions resulted in three key achievements. The first, in 1964, was for the Roger Wagner Chorale; she was chosen as featured soloist for a national tour. The second audition resulted in a debut as Musetta in San Francisco Spring Opera's *La Bohème* in 1965. The third was for New York's Metropolitan Opera. Not only did Miss Armstrong win the auditions, but she was offered a three-year contract. During her Met seasons, the vivacious brunette has toured Europe and has appeared in New York's Town Hall and Carnegie Hall, Boston's Symphony Hall, Lake George Opera Festival, Metropolitan Opera Verdi Festival at Newport, Memphis Opera and Milwaukee. Last September, she made her debut with the Santa Fe Opera as Adina in *Elixir of Love* and this fall performed as Mimi and Susanna in Lyric Opera's productions of *La Bohème* and *The Marriage of Figaro* in Laguna Beach.



**DONALD GRAMM**, bass-baritone, was born in Milwaukee where he began piano studies at eight and pipe organ



**KARAN ARMSTRONG**, soprano, was born in Havre, Montana, and graduated from Concordia College. From a



**CLAUDINE CARLSON**, mezzo-soprano, was born in Paris. She has



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been a student of Gertrude Gruenberg of San Francisco, has studied in Europe, Latin America and Los Angeles where she has been a member of Master Classes conducted by Mme. Nina Koshetz and by Aksel Schiotz who said of Miss Carlson: "The purity of her voice, her natural musicality, her understanding in her interpretation, together with a sound technical background left a very strong impression on me and gave me much joy." Miss Carlson has appeared as soloist with the San Francisco Symphony under Arthur Fiedler as well as with other California orchestras. She has sung with the Panama National Symphony and in many cultural centers in South America, and has made numerous radio and television appearances in California and Japan. Her recording career began as soloist for Angel and recently continued with Toshiba Records in Tokyo. During 1966, she toured Europe and the Middle East as featured soloist with the Roger Wagner Chorale, and in 1967 she sang throughout the major musical centers of Japan. Miss Carlson is now performing with the New York City Opera Company.



**ROBERT BEHAN**, tenor, was born in Flint, Michigan. His educational background includes philosophy, organ and voice. He went to Europe in 1955 after his initial American singing success. While in Europe, he studied voice under Professor Ferdinand Grossmann in Vienna. He gave successful concerts in Austria with the Vienna Philharmonic and Vienna Symphony, with the Salzburg Camerata Academica and Munich Graunke Symphony Orchestra. He has toured both Italy and Switzerland. Mr. Behan has also participated in various international festivals including the Salzburg Festival, Vienna Festival Weeks, and Kerkade International Festival in Holland. He is one of the few singers who specialize in performing the Passions by J. S. Bach.

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