



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 26, 2024

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC PRESENTS US PREMIERE OF

ÉMIGRÉ

**A Semi-Staged Oratorio Composed by Aaron Zigman
Lyrics by Mark Campbell, Additional Lyrics by Brock Walsh
Conducted by Long Yu, Directed by Mary Birnbaum**

Émigré Insights

**Performances Complemented by Events Exploring
Émigré's History and Present-Day Resonance**

The New York Philharmonic gives the **US Premiere of *Émigré***, a semi-staged oratorio in two acts composed by Aaron Zigman, with lyrics by Mark Campbell and additional lyrics by Brock Walsh, February 29 and March 1, 2024, at the Wu Tsai Theater, David Geffen Hall. The performances of *Émigré* — an NY Phil co-commission with the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and its music director, Long Yu — are conducted by Yu and feature an international cast of vocalists and the New York Philharmonic Chorus in a semi-staged production directed by theater and opera director Mary Birnbaum.

Complementing the performances of the work, which centers on the flight of European Jews to Shanghai during the late 1930s, the NY Phil presents ***Émigré Insights***, events that explore the historical context behind the oratorio as well as its resonance in the present day, including a film screening, in-person and streamed panel discussions, and an archival exhibition.

In the late 1930s, Jewish refugees escaping Nazi Germany found a home and a community in Shanghai, China — a country afflicted by Japanese occupation and the atrocities of the Nanjing Massacre. *Émigré* dramatizes the experiences of two Jewish brothers, Otto and Josef Bader, who arrive in Shanghai as refugees in 1938. As the young men navigate their new lives, bonds are formed between the Jewish and Shanghainese communities that test the social boundaries and traditional ideas of both. *Émigré* reaches its tragic conclusion in a love story that mirrors the larger world and affirms the message that our survival depends on diverse communities learning to embrace our shared humanity.

The production features tenor Matthew White (as Otto Bader, in his NY Phil debut), tenor Arnold Livingston Geis (Josef Bader, NY Phil debut), mezzo-soprano Huiling Zhu (Li Song, NY Phil debut), soprano Meigui Zhang (Lina Song, NY Phil debut), bass-baritone Shenyang (Wei

Song), soprano Diana Newman (Tovah Odesska, NY Phil debut), and bass-baritone Andrew Dwan (Yaakov Odesska, NY Phil debut). This is the same cast that gave the work's world premiere in November 2023, with Long Yu conducting the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, and that is featured on Deutsche Grammophon's recording and digital release. In the US Premiere they are joined by the New York Philharmonic Chorus, directed by Malcolm J. Merriweather; the production team includes scenic designer Kristen Robinson, costume designer Oana Botez, lighting designer Yuki Nakase Link, and projection designer Joshua Higgason.

Aaron Zigman said: "If not for Shanghai and the good will of the people of China, some of my ancestors and people very close to me would have perished at the hands of the Nazis during World War II. In writing *Émigré*, I was so blessed to have the opportunity to collaborate with Mark Campbell and Brock Walsh, Maestro Long Yu, the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, and the New York Philharmonic to bring this story to life." Mark Campbell added: "*Émigré's* message about compassion deserves to be heard. The opportunity to help tell that message piqued my interest when Aaron asked me to collaborate on the work back in March 2020. The story of a country that opened its arms to Jewish refugees in 1937 resonated profoundly with me."

Émigré Insights

Complementing the US Premiere of *Émigré*, the New York Philharmonic presents events and an archival exhibition that explore the oratorio's historical context and its present-day resonance.

- ***Émigré: Insights from the Archives***, an NY Phil Archives exhibition in David Geffen Hall, created in partnership with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the Brooklyn Public Library. Drawing from the Archives of the JDC — the global Jewish humanitarian organization that actively supported the Jewish refugee population in Shanghai in the 1930s and '40s, as well as endangered Jews before, during, and after World War II, including those refugees who later relocated to New York City — the exhibition will feature images and ephemera of European Jews displaced during WWII on the Hauser Digital Wall and in the Gary W. Parr Archive Gallery. The exhibition, which will run from January 31–March 16, 2024, will also feature immigrant stories of past Philharmonic musicians and former Music Director Arturo Toscanini.
- A screening of Emmy- and Peabody Award–winning director Violet Du Feng's PBS documentary ***Harbor from the Holocaust*** — which centers on Shanghai's role as a place of refuge for European Jews during World War II — followed by a talkback featuring Feng and Jonathan Kaufman, the Pulitzer Prize–winning reporter and author of *The Last Kings of Shanghai*. The conversation will examine the ripple effects of that period in history on contemporary geopolitical dynamics. The free screening and talkback will take place at the Walter Reade Theater, located at 165 West 65th Street, February 6, 2024, at 7:00 p.m.
- On **Artist Conversation: Inside the Making of *Émigré***, WQXR's Ed Yim interviews the creative team behind the oratorio: composer Aaron Zigman, lyricist Mark Campbell, lyricist Brock Walsh, and director Mary Birnbaum. The event will be livestreamed and later available on demand at [WQXR.org](https://www.wqxr.org). It will take place at the Jerome L. Greene

Performance Space, located at 44 Charlton Street in Manhattan, February 8, 2024, at 4:00 p.m.

- A pre-concert conversation with former US Secretary of the Treasury W. Michael Blumenthal and legal scholar and Harvard University Professor Emeritus Laurence Tribe — both of whom were part of the Jewish diaspora to Shanghai. Moderated by Jonathan Kaufman, the discussion will mark the first-ever meeting of Blumenthal and Tribe, two internationally prominent figures connected by a shared history. The event will be held on the Leon and Norma Hess Grand Promenade, David Geffen Hall, February 29, 2024, at 6:00 p.m., prior to that evening's performance of *Émigré*.
- A pre-concert conversation, *Forced Displacement and Immigration Today*, examines the echoes that the forced displacement of tens of thousands of European Jews during World War II has had in contemporary refugee and migrant crises around the world, from the Middle East to the southern US border. Featuring Wharton School professor and immigration scholar Zeke Hernandez and other panelists, the event will be held at David Geffen Hall, March 1, 2024, at 6:30 p.m., prior to that evening's performance of *Émigré*.
- On *The Unanswered Questions: What Is the American Sound?* Chickasaw composer Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate, Armenian-American composer Mary Kouyoumdjian, and additional panelists discuss the fine line between cultural appropriation and authenticity in classical music through the lenses of their lived experiences. Touching on the themes of migration and displacement addressed in *Émigré*, the discussion also complements the following week's NY Phil subscription program, featuring Tate's *Pisachi* and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*. Moderated by Trevor Weston, the free event will be held at the David Rubenstein Atrium, March 6, 2024, at 7:00 p.m.

Biographies

[Mary Birnbaum](#), [Oana Botez](#), [Andrew Dwan](#), [Arnold Livingston Geis](#), [Joshua Higgason](#), [Yuki Nakase Link](#), [Diana Newman](#), [Kristen Robinson](#), [Shenyang](#), [Matthew White](#), [Long Yu](#), [Meigui Zhang](#), [Huiling Zhu](#), [New York Philharmonic](#), [New York Philharmonic Chorus](#)

Tickets

Tickets to the New York Philharmonic's performances of *Émigré* may be purchased online at nyphil.org or by calling **(212) 875-5656**, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday through Friday; 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Saturday; and noon to 5:00 p.m. Sunday. Tickets may also be purchased at the **Welcome Center at David Geffen Hall**. The Welcome Center opens at 10:00 a.m. Monday through Saturday, and at noon on Sunday. On performance evenings, the Welcome Center closes one-half hour after performance time; other evenings it closes at 6:00 p.m.

For press tickets, contact Lanore Carr at (212) 875-5714 or carrl@nyphil.org.

Attending Émigré Insights:

- *Harbor from the Holocaust* — free, with reservations required; click [here](#) to reserve
- Artist Conversation: Inside the Making of *Émigré* — streamed live and later available on demand at WQXR.org
- February 29 and March 1 pre-concert conversations — available to all same-day ticket holders at no additional cost
- *The Unanswered Questions: What Is the American Sound?* — free and available on a first-come, first-served basis

Event Listing

***HARBOR FROM THE HOLOCAUST*
FILM SCREENING FOLLOWED BY TALKBACK**

Walter Reade Theater
165 West 65th Street

Tuesday, February 6, 2024, 7:00 p.m.

Violet Du Feng, speaker
Jonathan Kaufman, speaker

A screening of director Violet Du Feng's documentary *Harbor from the Holocaust* followed by a talkback with Feng and reporter and author Jonathan Kaufman.

ARTIST CONVERSATION: INSIDE THE MAKING OF *ÉMIGRÉ*

Jerome L. Greene Performance Space
44 Charlton Street

Thursday, February 8, 2024, 4:00 p.m.

Ed Yim, moderator
Aaron Zigman, speaker
Mark Campbell, speaker
Brock Walsh, speaker
Mary Birnbaum, speaker

WQXR's Ed Yim interviews the creative team behind *Émigré*: composer Aaron Zigman, lyricist Mark Campbell, lyricist Brock Walsh, and director Mary Birnbaum.

**LONG YU CONDUCTS THE US PREMIERE OF
AARON ZIGMAN, MARK CAMPBELL & BROCK WALSH'S *ÉMIGRÉ***

Wu Tsai Theater, David Geffen Hall at Lincoln Center

Thursday, February 29, 2024, 7:30 p.m.

Friday, March 1, 2024, 8:00 p.m.

Long Yu, conductor

Mary Birnbaum*, director

Matthew White*, tenor

Arnold Livingston Geis*, tenor

Huiling Zhu*, mezzo-soprano

Meigui Zhang*, soprano

Shenyang, bass-baritone

Diana Newman*, soprano

Andrew Dwan*, bass-baritone

New York Philharmonic Chorus

Malcolm J. Merriweather, director

Kristen Robinson, scenic designer

Oana Botez, costume designer

Yuki Nakase Link, lighting designer

Joshua Higgason, projection designer

Aaron ZIGMAN /

Mark CAMPBELL, lyrics &

Brock WALSH, additional lyrics

Émigré (Semi-Staged; US Premiere–New York
Philharmonic Co-Commission with the
Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and
Long Yu)

*New York Philharmonic debut

**PRE-CONCERT CONVERSATION:
W. MICHAEL BLUMENTHAL AND LAURENCE TRIBE**

Leon and Norma Hess Grand Promenade, David Geffen Hall at Lincoln Center

Thursday, February 29, 2024, 6:00 p.m.

Jonathan Kaufman, moderator
W. Michael Blumenthal, speaker
Laurence Tribe, speaker

A pre-concert interview with former US Secretary of the Treasury W. Michael Blumenthal and legal scholar and Harvard University Professor Emeritus Laurence Tribe, moderated by Jonathan Kaufman; this event takes place prior to the evening's performance of *Émigré*.

**PRE-CONCERT CONVERSATION:
*FORCED DISPLACEMENT AND IMMIGRATION TODAY***

David Geffen Hall at Lincoln Center

Friday, March 1, 2024, 6:30 p.m.

Zeke Hernandez, speaker

A pre-concert panel discussion with immigration scholar Zeke Hernandez and others; this event takes place prior to the evening's performance of *Émigré*.

THE UNANSWERED QUESTIONS: WHAT IS THE AMERICAN SOUND?

David Rubenstein Atrium at Lincoln Center

Wednesday, March 6, 2024, 7:00 p.m.

Trevor Weston, moderator
Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate, speaker
Mary Kouyoumdjian, speaker

An *Unanswered Questions* panel discussion on cultural appropriation and authenticity with composers Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate and Mary Kouyoumdjian, and additional panelists, moderated by Trevor Weston.

ALL PROGRAMS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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Émigré is presented by **Linda and Mitch Hart.**

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Lead support for *Émigré* is provided by **Ling Tian and Diana Wang.**

* * *

Generous support for these concerts is provided by **Jane and Stuart Weitzman.**

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Generous support for Long Yu's appearances is provided by the **US-China Cultural Institute, in memory of Shirley Young.**

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Support for the commission of Aaron Zigman, Mark Campbell, and Brock Walsh's *Émigré* is provided by **Starr International Foundation.**

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