



**World Premiere of Visionary Director Peter Sellars’  
*Shall We Gather at the River*,  
a Musical Call to Action against Climate Change,  
Melds Black American Spirituals and Bach Cantatas**

**Co-Commissioned by Park Avenue Armory and the Asia Society, Evocative  
Production Takes Place in the Armory’s Wade Thompson Drill Hall  
for One Night Only, May 21, 2024**

New York, NY—February 29, 2024—This May, *Shall We Gather at the River*—a musical call to climate action delivered through powerful performances of J.S. Bach’s cantatas and Black American spirituals—makes its world premiere at Park Avenue Armory. The production centers on the power and transcendental dimensions of water, interweaving emotive songs of resistance and renewal such as “Wade in the Water” and “Deep River” with three Bach cantatas that evoke images of water in drought and full flood. Staged by celebrated director **Peter Sellars**, *Shall We Gather at the River* features performances by the Baroque ensemble **Oxford Bach Soloists** under the direction of **Tom Hammond-Davies**, the Grammy-nominated **Choir of Trinity Wall Street**, countertenor **Reginald Mobley**, tenor **Nick Pritchard**, bass **Jonathan Woody**, soprano **Molly Quinn**, and sheng player **Wu Tong**, with original choreography by **Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray**. *Shall We Gather at the River* is co-commissioned with the Asia Society as part of the exhibition and programming initiative COAL + ICE: Inspiring Climate Action Through Art and Ideas, and presented in the Armory’s monumental Wade Thompson Drill Hall for one night only, **May 21, 2024**.

“*Shall We Gather at the River* is an inventive and deeply moving synthesis of musical genres that dares to confront one of the world’s most existential issues with hope and unity,” said **Pierre Audi, the Anita K. Hersh Artistic Director of Park Avenue Armory**. “We’re delighted to welcome longtime Armory collaborators Peter Sellars and Reggie Gray back to the Drill Hall to bring to life this performance that reaffirms the power of music as a universal language that can connect us with each other and our planet.”

“Reflecting the kind of boundary-pushing performance that audiences come to the Armory to experience, *Shall We Gather at the River* embodies our commitment to bringing together unique artistic collaborations that spark dialogue on the social and moral issues that define our time,” added **Rebecca Robertson, the Adam R. Flatto Founding President and Executive Producer of Park Avenue Armory**. “We are grateful to embark on this collaboration with our neighbor, the Asia Society, to offer New York audiences a transformative evening of healing and reflection at the hands of artists and performers at their creative pinnacle.”

“What does the music of J.S. Bach and Black American spirituals have in common? They are both heartfelt musical expressions of the frailty of life and the abuses we humans have too often heaped on our planet and our fellow inhabitants,” says **Orville Schell, Asia Society Vice President and Arthur Ross Director of the Center on U.S.-China Relations**. “In gathering ‘at the river that flows by the throne of God’ we aim to inspire audiences and bring our voices together to respond to our shared global predicament through song.”

For more than 400 years, the Black American spiritual tradition has moved over, across, and through the waters, depicting the element as a source of life, passage, cleansing, resistance, and renewal. The strength and spirituality of water also resonates in the poetic, sacred texts of Bach’s cantatas. *Shall We Gather at the River* intermingles

these two musical sources specifically selected by the artists as part of the offering to celebrate this vital life force and conjure an act of awakening, mobilization, and restorative beauty in the face of climate change.

This musical gathering conceived by Sellars—who returns to the Armory following his direction of the celebrated productions of *St. Matthew Passion* in 2014, *FLEXN* in 2015, *FLEXN Evolution* in 2017, and *Monochromatic Life (Afterlife)* in 2022—the powerhouse group of performers convened for this production process into and move freely about the Drill Hall as they perform a selection of cantatas and spirituals that flow seamlessly into one another. Layering movement onto music, dancers perform new choreography from Flex pioneer Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray, who co-directed the *FLEXN* performances with Sellars. These multidimensional elements coalesce into a deeply emotive production that unites and inspires.

*Shall We Gather at the River* is part of the COAL + ICE exhibition and series of programs, designed to provoke thought and action on climate change.

Now on view at Asia Society Museum at 725 Park Avenue, through August 11, 2024, the COAL + ICE immersive photography and video exhibition brings together the work of over 30 photographers and artists from around the world to visualize the causes and consequences of the climate crisis and foreground creative solutions. The exhibition traces a photographic arc from deep within coal mines to the melting glaciers of the greater Himalaya, and across the globe where rising sea levels and extreme weather events are wreaking havoc. Through intimate portraits and vast altered landscapes, the exhibition documents the consequences triggered by our continued reliance on fossil fuels, and brings to life the environmental and human costs of climate change while highlighting innovative solutions that provide hope for a more sustainable future.

**World Premiere, Co-Commissioned with the Asia Society**

**SHALL WE GATHER AT THE RIVER**

May 21, 2024

**Co-Presented with the Asia Society**

**World Premiere**

Soprano **Molly Quinn**

Countertenor **Reginald Mobley**

Tenor **Nick Pritchard**

Bass **Jonathan Woody**

Sheng **Wu Tong**

**Oxford Bach Soloists**

**The Choir of Trinity Wall Street**

Conductor **Tom Hammond-Davies**

Director **Peter Sellars**

Choreographer **Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray** and members of the flexn community

Lighting Designer **Seth Reiser**

Sound Designer **Mark Grey**

*Shall We Gather at the River* is co-presented with the Asia Society as part of COAL + ICE: Inspiring Climate Action through Art and Ideas.

**PERFORMANCE**

Tuesday, May 21 at 7:30pm



TICKETS: Tickets are currently sold out but may be released to the in-person standby line starting one hour prior to the event.

## **SPONSORSHIP**

Citi and Bloomberg Philanthropies are the Armory's 2024 Season Sponsors.

Support for Park Avenue Armory's artistic season has been provided by the Thompson Family Foundation, Charina Endowment Fund, the Donald A. Pels Charitable Trust, The Shubert Foundation, Wescustogo Foundation, the Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust, the Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, the Howard Gilman Foundation, the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, the Marc Haas Foundation, Mary W. Harriman Foundation, the Reed Foundation, the Leon Levy Foundation, the May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation, Gregory Annenberg Weingarten, GRoW @ Annenberg, The Emma and Georgina Bloomberg Foundation, the Richenthal Foundation, and the Isak and Rose Weinman Foundation. Additional support has been provided by the Armory's Artistic Council. Public support is provided by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature as well as the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council under the leadership of Speaker Adrienne Adams.

## **ABOUT PARK AVENUE ARMORY**

Part palace, part industrial shed, Park Avenue Armory supports unconventional works in the performing and visual arts that cannot be fully realized in a traditional proscenium theater, concert hall, or white wall gallery. With its soaring 55,000-square-foot Wade Thompson Drill Hall—reminiscent of 19<sup>th</sup>-century European train stations—and an array of exuberant period rooms, the Armory provides a platform for artists to push the boundaries of their practice, collaborate across disciplines, and create new work in dialogue with the historic building. Across its grand and intimate spaces, the Armory enables a diverse range of artists to create, students to explore, and audiences to experience epic, adventurous, relevant work that cannot be done elsewhere in New York.

The Armory both commissions and presents performances and installations in the grand Drill Hall and offers more intimate programming through its acclaimed *Recital Series*, which showcases musical talent from across the globe within the salon setting of the Board of Officers Room; its *Artists Studio* series curated by Jason Moran in the restored Veterans Room; *Making Space at the Armory*, a public programming series that brings together a discipline-spanning group of artists and cultural thought-leaders around the important issues of our time; and the *Malkin Lecture Series* that features presentations by scholars and writers on topics related to Park Avenue Armory and its history. In addition, the Armory also has a year-round Artists-in-Residence program, providing space and support for artists to create new work and expand their practices.

The Armory's creativity-based arts education programs provide access to the arts to thousands of students from underserved New York City public schools, engaging them with the institution's artistic programming and outside-the-box creative processes. Through its education initiatives, the Armory provides access to all Drill Hall performances, workshops taught by Master Teaching Artists, and in-depth residencies that support the schools' curriculum. Youth Corps, the Armory's year-round paid internship program, begins in high school and continues into the critical post-high school years, providing interns with mentored employment, job training, and skill development, as well as a network of peers and mentors to support their individual college and career goals.

The Armory is undergoing a multi-phase renovation and restoration of its historic building led by architects Herzog & de Meuron, with Platt Byard Dovell White as Executive Architects.

[armoryonpark.org](http://armoryonpark.org)

### **ABOUT COAL + ICE**

COAL + ICE was first developed by Asia Society's Center on U.S.-China Relations for exhibition at Three Shadows Photography Art Center in Beijing in 2011. After publishing numerous policy reports on the urgent need for the U.S. and China to collaborate on climate issues, Orville Schell, the Center's director, began looking for other methods of change: "In recognizing that policy alone could not solve this crisis, we began asking, how else can we go at this problem? One way was visually. If we could present something that was telling at the same time that it was beautiful, then maybe we could get people to look." The exhibition traveled across China, and to Paris, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C.

Co-curated by Susan Meiselas and Jeroen de Vries, the exhibition has continued to evolve along with the climate crisis, most significantly with the addition of a growing set of works that visualize the human consequences of climate change, including droughts, floods, fires, and migration. That said, COAL + ICE is not a comprehensive photographic overview of the climate crisis, but rather a presentation of imagery curated from long-term, authored bodies of work, which demonstrate each photographer's commitment to capturing our changing environment and its human toll.

The first presentation of COAL + ICE in Beijing was now over a decade ago, and yet the urgency to combat the climate crisis is more pressing than ever. What will ultimately move the needle? This exhibition, and the related programming series during its six-month run, are an ongoing creative experiment to help catalyze more effective action.

### **ABOUT ASIA SOCIETY**

Founded in 1956 by John D. Rockefeller 3rd, Asia Society is an educational institution based in New York with 16 locations in the United States, Europe, and Asia including state-of-the-art cultural centers and gallery spaces in Hong Kong and Houston. Through exhibitions and public programs, Asia Society in New York provides a forum for the issues and viewpoints reflected in both traditional and contemporary Asian art, and in Asia today.

[AsiaSociety.org/coalandice](http://AsiaSociety.org/coalandice).

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