



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

Hartford Premiere of *Letter from Italy, 1944*  
Thursday, May 4, 2017 at 7:30 PM  
The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts, Hartford, CT  
GMChorale & Hartford Chorale, Hartford Symphony Orchestra

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**Hartford Premiere of *Letter from Italy, 1944* at The Bushnell on May 4**

Middletown, Conn. (April, 2017) - "For every soldier killed in combat, 25 veterans are dying by suicide. It's time to broaden efforts against PTSD." Robert M. Morgenthau, Op Ed, Wall Street Journal, 9/24/12.

A new American Masterwork, *Letter from Italy, 1944* — a soldier's story told in music — is indeed most timely as our nation strives to understand and address our veterans' struggles with the emotional consequences of war, known as PTSD. The oratorio explores the national problem and its effect on families by examining the true story of one soldier through music, art and theater. The Hartford Premiere of *Letter from Italy, 1944*, will be presented on May 4, 2017, at 7:30 p.m. at The Bushnell.

The story of Dr. John K. Meneely, a WWII combat medic in the Army's fabled 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, who returned home suffering from what is now termed PTSD, inspired *Letter from Italy, 1944*. He spent the next 18 years dealing with the haunting memories of his war experience, memories of soldiers he could not save and the death of fellow soldier, Bill, his close friend, just days before the fighting ended in Italy. Finally, Dr. Meneely, who "in the end...can do no more," ended his struggle. The family, who had struggled along with him, was left with bittersweet memories, but also with a legacy of love, music and poetry, which his daughters embraced. For composer Sarah Meneely-Kyder and librettist Nancy Fitz-Hugh Meneely, the writing of the oratorio was cathartic, liberating the sisters from decades of anguish and giving them a greater understanding of their father. Commissioned by GMChorale, the moving and powerful oratorio was first performed to a sold-out audience in Middletown in 2013. A documentary about this project, "*Letter from Italy, 1944: A New American Oratorio*," narrated by Meryl Streep, won a 2016 Emmy Award for filmmaker Karyl Evans after being broadcast on CPTV in 2015.

During the past three months, a series of ten Community Conversations, held to bring awareness to PTSD and to prepare audience members for the oratorio, included lectures on PTSD and several screenings of the documentary, accompanied by discussions with the composer, librettist and filmmaker, all Connecticut residents. An ongoing exhibit of photos, letters, 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division artifacts, poetry and scores from the Meneely Collection that were used in the oratorio's creation, will be on display at the West Hartford Public Library until May 30.

After one recent documentary screening, a Vietnam veteran spoke of leaving the first performance of *Letter from Italy, 1944* with tears streaming down his face, and a newfound ability to finally share with his wife his war experiences from 40 years before.

The Hartford Premiere of the work, conducted by GMChorale Artistic Director, Joseph D'Eugenio, will feature the combined voices of the GMChorale and the Hartford Chorale (Artistic Director Richard Coffey), accompanied by the Hartford Symphony Orchestra (Artistic Director Carolyn Kuan). The Artistic Director of the Opera Theater of Connecticut, Alan Mann, is the production's Staging Director.

Tenor **Jack Anthony Pott**, who sang the role of Dr. John K. Meneely in the April 2013 world premiere of this dramatic oratorio, will be reprising that role in Hartford. Librettist Nancy Meneely has said of Mr. Pott in his role as her father, "When he sings, he IS my father." The role of Delia, wife of John Meneely, will be sung by soprano **Sheri Hammerstrom**, who portrayed their daughter Nancy in the world premiere. Singing the roles of the three daughters of Delia and John will be soprano **Christi McLain** as Nancy, the oldest daughter; soprano **Megan Weikleenget** as Sarah, the second daughter; and mezzo-soprano **Lindsay Cabaniss** as Dorothea, the youngest daughter. **Spencer Hamlin** will appear as "Boppi," the father of Dr. Meneely.

It is hoped that through the multi-faceted lens of *Letter from Italy, 1944*, its music and accompanying discussions will open doors to understanding and healing. In the words of Jack Anthony Pott, "If this story touches one person, it has done its work."

The Hartford Premiere of *Letter from Italy, 1944* is being made possible, in part, by the support of our two Gold Sponsors: Exencial Wealth Advisors and GM2 Associates, and also by The Richard P. Garmany Fund and The Edward C. and Ann T. Roberts Foundation, with additional support from The William and Alice Mortensen Foundation and The Greater Hartford Arts Council. Please visit [www.gmchorale.org](http://www.gmchorale.org) for further information and [www.bushnell.org](http://www.bushnell.org) for tickets.

Photo attached: Tenor Jack Anthony Pott to sing lead role of Dr. John Meneely

