

# A Native-Inspired Symphony in Phoenix

**A series of special events leads up to the premier. Jan. 24–26, at three different venues, the symphony performs Dvorak's *New World Symphony* and a**

An ancient story of the Navajo people is played out in a contemporary retelling in music, when the Phoenix Symphony presents ***Enemy Slayer: A Navajo Oratorio***, Feb. 7–9 at Phoenix Symphony Hall downtown. The world premiere of the orchestral and chorus work, by Composer-in-Residence Mark Grey with both Western and Native American musical components, will be performed by the 76-piece orchestra and 150-voice chorus, promising a very special event.

Based on the Navajo's epic oral tale of Enemy Slayer, who was born to protect the Navajo and rid the world of monsters, the oratorio describes the journey of the young Navajo man Seeker (sung by baritone Scott Hendricks), an Iraq War veteran, who returns home to a heartfelt welcome. But while he has left the war behind, Seeker's battles are not over. The emotional scars of combat plague him as he wrestles with the demons now in his mind. He seeks balance and wholeness again.

Playing a major role in bringing Grey's artistic vision



DEBORAH O'GRADY

**selection of other compositions including Native sounds and references. Featured is flutist James Pellerite. Tickets \$19–\$52. Jan. 26, 2 p.m., Grey, librettist Tohe and filmmaker Larry Blackhorse Lowe (Navajo) lead a viewing and a discussion of Lowe's notable work *5th World*, set on the Navajo Reservation. Free. Jan. 27, 7:30 p.m. a condensed version of *Enemy Slayer* for piano and chorus, followed by a discussion with Grey and Tohe. Free.**

to life was librettist Dr. Laura Tohe (Diné), a poet, editor and assistant professor at Arizona State University. Tohe helped shape the story and incorporated Navajo as well as English into the musical score. The piece will also include the digital artwork of photographer Deborah O'Grady as a visual backdrop.

"Through the multi-dimensional artistic expressions of story, voice, orchestra and visual imagery, the audience is invited into the world of Seeker, the protagonist, who returns from war and struggles to find his path toward healing and peace that the Diné call the corn pollen path way of life," Tohe explains. "Through this unique production, grounded within the mythic world of the Diné, I hope the audience can reflect on a personal level on the destruction and costs of war on our families, communities, nation and on our spirituality—and further, how can we restore peace and harmony after times of war."

Grey now lives in Phoenix but grew up in San Francisco. He made his Carnegie Hall debut in 2003 with the Kronos Quartet, and his music has been performed in Sydney, Paris, London and other cities worldwide. He served as collaborator, sound designer and soundscape engineer for John Adams's *On the Transmigration of Souls*, which received the 2004 Pulitzer Prize in music and won three Grammy awards. The oratorio was specially commissioned as part of the Phoenix Symphony's 60th-anniversary season.

The world premiere of *Enemy Slayer: A Navajo Oratorio* is on Feb. 7 at 7:30 p.m., with a repeat performance on Feb. 9 at 8 p.m. Both performances will be preceded by a moderated discussion by Grey and Tohe. It will be paired with performances of another Arizona-inspired work, *Grand Canyon Suite* by Ferde Grofe. Tickets are \$19 to \$68 and are available by calling 800/776-9080, in person at the Phoenix Symphony Box Office downtown, or online at phoenixsymphony.org. For event details, call 602/495-1117. 