In this age of religious division, it is important to remember what unites the three Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In anticipation of the April 14, 2016, performance of Felix Mendelssohn's magnificent oratorio Elijah by the Hartford Chorale and the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, this two-part course will explore the important role of the prophet Elijah in all three Abrahamic faiths, his impact on the shift from polytheism to monotheism, and the vital role this oratorio performs as a unifying agent for all people whose faith and beliefs stem from Elijah's victory over the idolaters of Baal. The first session of the course, presented by Richard Coffey, music director of the Hartford Chorale, will focus on the oratorio as a musical composition, on its historical context, and on its composer. The second session will take the form of a panel discussion on the role of the prophet Elijah in the three Abrahamic faiths, moderated by Mark Silk, with Ronald C. Kiener, Mareike Koertner, and Andrew H. Walsh as presenters.

Thurs., April 7, and Fri., April 8; 2–3:30 p.m.
Harry Jack Gray Center, Wilde Auditorium

Each attendee will receive one complimentary ticket to the April 14 performance at the Bushnell's Mortensen Hall.
ELIJAH THE PROPHET—IN FAITH AND IN MUSIC

THE COMPOSER

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47) was born in Hamburg, the son of a banker and grandson of the great Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. A musical prodigy and a friend of the poet Goethe, he was baptized into the Reformed Church following his father's conversion. His work was particularly popular in Britain, which he visited often as pianist, organist, and conductor—sometimes for extensive periods (Queen Victoria was an admirer of his work). One of the great melodists of his time, he is well known for his symphonic music; his ever-popular overtures, and incidental music (particularly for A Midsummer Night’s Dream); his piano works, especially Songs Without Words; and two major oratorios: St. Paul (1836) and Elijah (1846).

THE WORK

Oratorios began in the 16th century. The oratorio is an extended setting of a religious text for chorus and solo voices, intended for concert or church performance, but sometimes bordering on the operatic. Popularized in Germany by Heinrich Schütz and in Britain by George Frederick Handel, the oratorio soon became a staple element in the British choral tradition, particularly in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The selection of the story of Elijah as the subject of Mendelssohn’s oratorio made the work something of a crossover piece in the Christian and Jewish traditions. The work looks back, particularly to the music of Bach and Handel, while suffused in the harmonies typical of the Romantic era.

THE PERFORMERS

The Hartford Chorale is a volunteer-based, not-for-profit organization that serves as the primary symphonic chorus for the greater Hartford community. The chorale provides experienced, talented singers with the opportunity to study and perform at a professional level of musicianship. Through its concerts and collaborations with the Hartford Symphony Orchestra and other organizations, the chorale seeks to reach and inspire the widest possible audience with exceptional performances of a broad range of choral literature, including renowned choral masterpieces. Elijah will be performed on Thurs., April 14, 2016, at the Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts in Hartford, with the Hartford Symphony Orchestra. Richard Coffey will conduct, and soloists will be Stephen L. Bryant, baritone; Meechot Marrero, soprano; Tamara Mumford, alto; and Joshua Kohl, tenor. The performance will begin at 7:30 p.m. For additional tickets, visit: hartfordsymphony.org/concerts/elijah-with-the-hartford-chorale/

RICHARD COFFEY has been music director of the Hartford Chorale since 2005. Founder of the region’s first all-professional concert choir, CONCORA, in 1974, he stepped down as its artistic director in 2014. He has taught at The Hartt School and the University of Connecticut, and is minister of music for South Church in New Britain.

MARK SILK (PhD, Harvard University) became, in 1996, the first director of Trinity College’s Leonard E. Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life. In 1998, he became the founding editor of Religion in the News, a magazine published by the center that examines how the news media handle religious subject matter. In 2005, he was also named director of the Trinity College Program on Public Values, comprising both the Greenberg Center and a new Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture.

RONALD KIENER (PhD, University of Pennsylvania) is professor of religion at Trinity College and director of Trinity’s Jewish Studies Program. He has published articles in the field of medieval and modern Jewish and Islamic thought in a variety of scholarly journals. He has also published a comparative study of Egyptian and Israeli fundamentalist thought.

MAREIKE KOERTNER (PhD, Yale University) is associate professor of religion at Trinity College. She earned her bachelor’s degree from the University of Leipzig, Germany, in 2008, and has also spent time at the American University in Cairo, Egypt, and the University of California, Santa Barbara, and worked with traditional teachers in Egypt, Syria, and Yemen.

ANDREW WALSH (PhD, Harvard University) is associate director of the Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life, and the coordinator of the Program on Public Values at Trinity College. He is coauthor with Mark Silk of One Nation, Divisible, and coeditor of a forthcoming volume, The Future of Catholicism in America.