

LOVE
& JOY
come to you



THE ST. OLAF
CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL 2023

The student-led Program Notes Project aims to educate students and audience members about the origins and significance of pieces performed at the Christmas Festival and to continue building bridges of communication between scholars, performers, and audience members.



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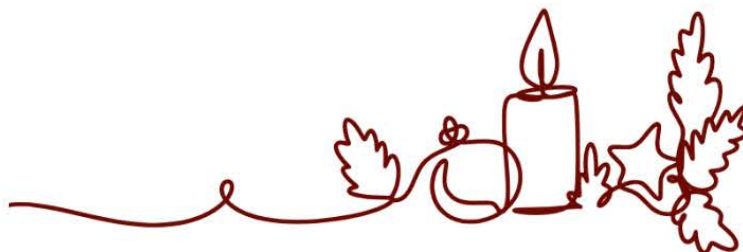
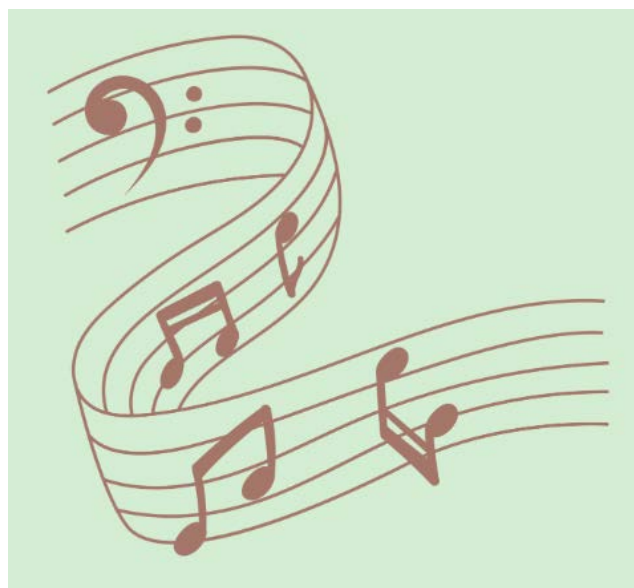


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“Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming”

Michael Praetorius
arr. Steven Amundson

“Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming,” or “Es ist ein Ros entsprungen,” is a traditional German folk carol from the 15th–16th century. The origins of the carol are largely shrouded in mystery, but the carol was most famously harmonized by 16th-century German composer Michael Praetorius. This arrangement for string orchestra by Steven Amundson, retired conductor of the St. Olaf Orchestra, was inspired by another arrangement for choir by Swedish composer Jan Sandström. The original Sandström arrangement is for a double choir, which Amundson translated into a double orchestra. Orchestra One plays the melody and the harmonizations, while Orchestra Two provides the chordal backdrop and interludes between the melodic phrases. This Amundson arrangement was created for the St. Olaf Christmas Festival in 2006 and has been part of the program several times since.

The original German text uses a vivid metaphor to compare the coming of Christ from his mother Mary to a blooming rose: a blossoming light in the darkness that brings hope and remains “bright amid the cold of winter”. Sandström translates these words into his arrangement, making a well-known and loved carol even more interesting. Listen to the gentle lower strings as their soft glow provides the backdrop for the beginning of the piece. As the higher strings join in, they create a transcendent chord which, while lovely, remains nervous, a small light amidst a great winter. When the full warmth of the melody arrives from the other orchestra, it is satisfying, yet still solemn, creating a sense of catharsis and reflection that comes with the winter. In the liner notes for his album *Motorbike*, Sandström describes how he “lets the original ‘rose’ take musical form in a sound which alternately opens and closes”. Even when the melody is not present, the orchestra provides a haunting backdrop that keeps the light alive, flickering like a candlelight in the darkness. The celebration of light found in the middle of a dark winter, both literally and figuratively, is a theme you will see throughout this festival and a theme that is perfectly encapsulated in this opener.¹

¹ [“Motorbike” Liner Notes](#)

[LA Phil Program Note](#) Studwell, William E. *The Christmas Carol Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2011.
Keyte, Hugh, and Andrew Parrott. *The New Oxford Book of Carols*. Oxford, UK: O.U.P., 1998.
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“As the Dark Awaits the Dawn”

Christopher Aspaas

Christopher Aspaas graduated from St. Olaf College in 1995 with a B.M. in Vocal Performance and received his M.M. in Choral Conducting at Michigan State University in 1997. After completing his Ph.D. in Choral Music Education through Florida State University in 2007, Aspaas returned to St. Olaf as a professor of choral and vocal music. During this time at St. Olaf, Dr. Aspaas taught choral literature, choral conducting, and voice, and he conducted the Viking Chorus and Chapel Choir. In 2008 and for many seasons beyond, Dr. Aspaas served as the artistic director of Magnum Chorum, a Twin Cities-based a cappella choral group of 55 singers “founded in the choral tradition of St. Olaf College in 1991”. Dr. Aspaas currently serves as Director of Choral Activities at Texas Christian University.

The text of “As the Dark Awaits the Dawn” derives from a hymn published in 1986 by vocal artist, poet, and hymn writer Susan Palo Cherwien (1953-2021). “As the Dark Awaits the Dawn” was composed for the 100th anniversary of the St. Olaf Christmas Festival in 2011.

The joyous tone of this piece contradicts the terror and loneliness of the night, lighting the darkness with faith that will surpass the time of morning’s arrival. At the outset, treble voices flow in unity with each other and with most of the strings. The treble voices fade while the lower ones take their place, and the strings and woodwinds sustain their sounds and harmonize. The instruments then halt while all voices form a harmony of peace, joined in faith stronger than before by making music together. This becomes amplified once the full orchestra forms a crescendo, ending with the entire symphony booming with triumph. A trumpet cries over the loudness, signifying the presence of Jesus and the gathering of his people. After a decrescendo, a solo flute floats over the soundscape, and the piece concludes on a jubilant note: all is well when the light of Christ shines to break through the darkness surrounding the world, and faith remains before, during, and after his arrival.²

² “As the Dark Awaits the Dawn,” Augsburg Fortress, Augsburg Fortress, 4 July 2011, augsburgfortress.org/store/product/9781451420654/As-the-Dark-Awaits-the-Dawn.
“Christopher Aspaas,” Chorus America, Chorus America, 2012-2023, chorusamerica.org/conf2012/christopher-aspaas.
“Christopher Aspaas,” TCU College of Fine Arts, Texas Christian University, 2023, finearts.tcu.edu/faculty_staff/christopher-aspaas/.
“Magnum Chorum,” Magnum Chorum: Music of Transforming Artistry and Spirit, Magnum Chorum, 2021, magnumchorum.org/about/.
“Remembering Susan Palo Cherwien (May 4, 1953-December 8, 2021),” Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, 8 January 2022, blogs.elca.org/worship/.
“Susan Palo Cherwien,” SPC, Susan Palo Cherwien, 2023, susanpalocherwien.com/.

“Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers”

arr. John Ferguson

“Rejoice, Rejoice Believers” is a hymn with text originally written in German in 1700 by Laurentius Laurenti. Sarah B. Findlater provided the translation we heard tonight. The hymn is sung to the tune of “Haf Trones Lampa Färdig,” a Swedish folk melody. The arranger, John Ferguson, is a former St. Olaf professor of church and organ music and conductor of the St. Olaf Cantorei.

In the first two stanzas, Laurenti references Matthew 25:1-13, which is also referred to as “The Parable of Ten Virgins³”. In the parable, all of the virgins leave with their lamps to meet the bridegroom. However, only some of the virgins were wise, as they brought oil with them, while the others were foolish and neglected to bring more. After the foolish leave to purchase more oil, the bridegroom arrives and welcomes the wise to his feast, and later refuses entry to the foolish. The parable serves as a reminder to Jesus’ disciples that they do not know when Jesus will return, so they must be prepared. In Laurenti’s lyrics, believers are akin to wise virgins, as their faith allows their “lights to appear” upon the arrival of Jesus, the bridegroom.

Because those who believe are welcomed to the feast, the hymn takes on a celebratory tone. It begins with a quiet spark of anticipation, with the choir singing a capella. Soon, however, the piece blooms into a call to prepare for Jesus’ arrival as the orchestra joins the choir. In the second verse, the lower voices continue this call to action, with lyrics such as “go forth as he approaches with alleluias clear”. Then, as the higher voices begin to present the third verse, the text takes on a more somber tone as Laurenti reflects on the suffering that exists in the world and holds hope for joy in a place “where sorrow is no more.” In turn, the music adopts a contemplative tone through clever arrangement by Ferguson.

As this moment of reflection ends, the brass ushers us into the final verse, which is sung by the whole choir in unison with lyrics that implore Jesus to arrive on Earth. Laurenti employs some wordplay in this verse as he describes the Son of God as a “Sun” that will bring light to the world. He also refers back to the parable referenced prior, as “this benighted sphere” refers to the darkness that exists in the world, but also the bridegroom’s midnight arrival. The hymn ends optimistically, both musically and lyrically. Although there is darkness in our world, everyone sings with voices and “hearts and hands uplifted”.

³ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2025&version=NIV>

“Jauchzet, Frohlocket” (*Christmas Oratorio*, BWV 248)

Johann Sebastian Bach

“Jauchzet Frohlocket!” is the joyous celebration of the birth of Christ Jesus from Johann Sebastian Bach’s famous *Weihnachtsoratorium* (The Christmas Oratorio). Its tempo and feel may seem to anticipate the waltz craze of the next century, but Bach likely would have frowned on listeners dancing to his sprightly music. Instead, the intricate and delicate floating choral passages and exuberant orchestration convey the joy and happiness of Jesus’s birth.

Bach composed and premiered the Oratorio during the 1734-1735 Christmas season. At the time of its debut, Bach was Kantor (church music director) in Leipzig, Germany. “Jauchzet Frohlocket” is one of the most popular chorales in the Christmas Oratorio. The chorale was popularized by Martin Luther as a way to have the congregation engage during the worship service in song. Before the Lutheran Reformation, congregations rarely sang. It was far more common to listen to soloists and/or a choir pray through song on the congregation’s behalf. By Bach’s time, chorales had transformed from accessible songs to be sung by partly literate congregations into exemplars of voice leading and harmony that are still used to teach music theory conventions today.

Musically, this piece features what is called *fioritura*, which is an embellishment of a vocal line. *Fioritura* was very common in the Classical and Baroque periods. Almost every line of the piece sung by the massed choir presents that colorful and expressive *fioritura*. But Bach never lost sight of the popular origins of chorale melodies, nor of Luther’s preference that all congregants learn theology through song. When you step out of this performance, you too may find yourself humming the absolute earworm that Bach created - all for the glory of God. ⁴

⁴ <https://bach.org/education/bwv-248/>

“Corde natus ex parentis”

Justin Merritt

“Corde Natus ex Parentis,” translated to “Of the Father’s Love Begotten”, was composed by Justin Merritt as a commission by Scott MacPherson and the Vokalensemble Kölner Dom in 2004.⁵ The piece premiered in the Cologne Cathedral in Rome, Italy. A professor of music at St. Olaf College since 2004, Dr. Merritt feels very honored to have his piece performed in Christmas Fest and is excited to hear it in such an acoustically resonant space as Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis.⁶ He emphasized how the venue’s acoustics play a large role in the piece’s authenticity and the ability to wholly appreciate the chant style in which it is written.

The text by Aurelius Clemens Prudentius (348–413 C.E.) explores not only the vastness of love from and for the divine but also how that love intertwines with all creation. The song begins with a quiet single note held by the basses as the sopranos enter with a gentle ascent of the chanted melody. Following the basses, the altos and tenors enter with their long-held pitches, constructing a stable chord on which the melody builds. As the line continues, listen as the chord grows in complexity until it halts suddenly in a seemingly unfinished fashion. After a brief pause, the melody is passed to the altos with the soprano line serving as a descant, angelically floating over the choir. The tenors and basses move with quiet strength, their tone warm and complementary of the sopranos and altos. As the piece develops, the sopranos and altos end the section with a soaring dissonance that eventually resolves. With the high voices still ringing in our ears, the basses and tenors enter after the line’s climax with lines that mirror one another in contour, pitched differently but moving at the same time. As each part enters, each takes up a different melody of the chant and dovetails into one another. The end of the piece simultaneously grows and fades for what seems like forever, mirroring the meaning of the Latin text, “evermore and evermore.” The repetition of the phrase further accentuates the strength of the divine love in the text, reminding the listener that it goes on for eternity. We are left with the voices smoothly melting away from the melody and into a single sustained note, the same way the piece began. The piece concludes with a simple satisfying chord ringing in our ears after the choir has stopped singing, the final recitation of “evermore and evermore,” floating into eternity.

⁵ Merritt, Justin. “Corde Natus.” Justin Merritt, August 2, 2022. <https://justinmerrittmusic.com/2019/08/03/corde-natus/>.

⁶ Interview with Justin Merritt, November 2023.

“O magnum mysterium”

B.E. Boykin

B.E. Boykin is a native of Alexandria, Virginia. Boykin is an accomplished classical pianist (who attended Spelman College under the leadership of Dr. Rachel Chung), composer, and conductor. After her time at Spelman, Boykin continued her studies at Westminster Choir College, receiving an M.M. in Sacred Music with a concentration in Choral Studies in May 2013. Additionally, she obtained her Ph.D. from Georgia State University in Music Education and is currently an associate professor of music at the Georgia Institute of Technology.⁷



O Magnum Mysterium originates from the Holy Matins service of Christmas, where the text describes the animals as they gaze in wonderment upon the newborn Christ. *O Magnum Mysterium*'s text also paints a picture of the serenity of observing the Christ-child for the first time, while also adding to the mystery of what's to come in the New Year.

The text of *O Magnum Mysterium* has been put to music by many famous composers. Among them have been Poulenc, Palestrina, and the unaccompanied choral arrangement by Lauridsen has placed *O Magnum Mysterium* as “one of the most beloved pieces of [Christmas music] text ever written”⁸. Boykin's setting thus participates in a centuries-old conversation with not only theologians but performers and composers working in a variety of places and times.

As you listen to the piece, listen for the sighing reverence of the singers as the ‘animals look upon the newborn Christ’ and let yourself be transported by feelings of peace, tranquility, and holiness. The basses give grounding to the song, affirming that baby Christ is real, that he has been born. At the same time, the tenors glisten high above the basses, developing an angelic, mysterious sense of veneration that floats above and throughout the space.⁹

⁷<https://beboykin.com/about/>

⁸<https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/o-magnum-mysterium-lyrics-composers/>

⁹<https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/o-magnum-mysterium-lyrics-composers/>
<https://graphitpublishing.com/composer/b-e-boykin/>

“Hodie Christus natus est”

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck

This piece was written by Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562 - 1621), a Dutch composer and organist whose work spanned what we normally think of as the end of the Renaissance era and the beginning of the Baroque era. Having acquired the title “Orpheus of Amsterdam,” throughout his life Sweelinck wove aspects of Catholic, Calvinist, and Lutheran traditions into his musical compositions. Over seventy of his keyboard compositions and two hundred and fifty vocal works have survived. “Hodie Christus Natus est” was first published in 1619 in a book of choral chant called *Canciones Sacrae (No. 13)* in Antwerp. Most of Sweelinck’s sacred works appeared in this book, printed in Latin as was customary at the time. The piece is normally sung as part of the Magnificat for a Christmas Day service.

“Hodie Christus Natus est” sounds like a conversation between two friends. One starts, and the other, very graciously, responds. Throughout the piece, one can hear and feel the joyfulness and excitement as we approach the day of Christ’s birth. With the name of this piece translating to “Today Christ is Born,” we have the opportunity to look forward to hope in this world when sometimes it feels like it can be so dark. Hearing the mixture of voices in all its complexity gives us an outlet to experience peace.¹⁰



¹⁰Hodie Christus Natus Est (Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck) - ChoralWiki. https://www.cpd.org/wiki/index.php/Hodie_Christus_natus_est. Accessed 19 Nov. 2023.

Hodie Christus Natus Est - Sweelinck. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQF7mW2c1c>. Accessed 19 Nov. 2023.
[https://imslp.org/wiki/Hodie_Christus_natus_est,_SwWV_163_\(Sweelinck,_Jan_Pieterszoon\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Hodie_Christus_natus_est,_SwWV_163_(Sweelinck,_Jan_Pieterszoon))

“Love Has Come”

F. Seguin
arr. David Sims

Every year during Christmas, this hymn is sung around the world. Like many hymns in the Lutheran Hymnal, the music and the text were written separately, only later coming together in the current form. The melody was taken from François-Marie-César Seguin (1856) and the text was set and entered into the hymnal in 1996.

While hymns in the Lutheran Hymnal are usually composed in 4-part harmony, this one is presented as a unison melody, perhaps intended to evoke the sense of unity and love for one another so central to celebrations of Christmas. The feeling of not just the mass choir joining in a boisterous song, but the invitation for the audience to join in as well brings out the message of good cheer and celebrating God’s love. Even though the hymn is broken up by a reading from the Gospel, all who share the space during the performance will not help but feel a sense of togetherness. This hymn is musically uplifting, and fits this year’s Christmas Festival theme, “Love And Joy Come To You” like a warm hug. “Love Has Come” enters our ears infectiously and reminds us of the spirit of Christmas. The power of melodies like this is undeniable because of the impression they make in our minds and hearts—it’s transformative.

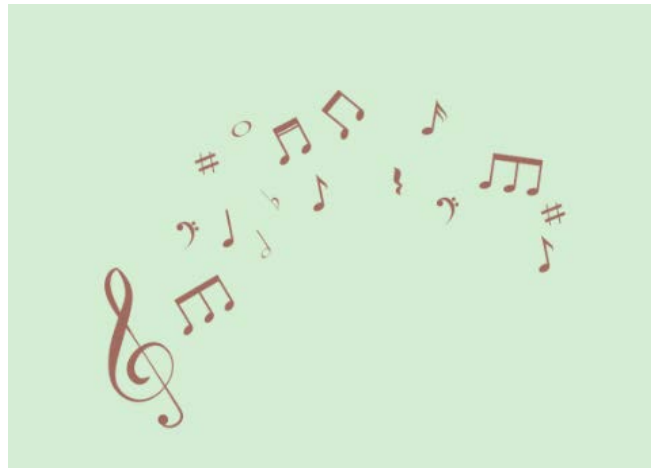


“Gloria” from *Mass in E-flat Major, Op. 109*

Josef Rheinberger

This solo piece for the St. Olaf Chapel Choir is a movement from Josef Rheinberger’s *Mass in E-flat Major*, Opus 109. Rheinberger composed this piece in 1878 and it received its premiere on New Year’s Eve in 1879 at the Allerheiligen-Hofkirche in Munich, Germany.¹¹ The Mass has 6 movements and was written in Latin. It is Rheinberger’s only mass written for two choirs. Rheinberger dedicated the piece to Pope Leo XIII, who honored him later that same year with the Gregorius Medal for it.

The version being sung in the Christmas Festival was edited by John Henry Fowler in 2003. This movement is a symphonic choral piece, using imitative melodies and cathartic cadences to carry the melodies sky-high, and then bring the listener back down to earth.¹² The audience should listen for the call and response between the two choirs - this is a technique developed by Gabrieli and others for Renaissance cathedrals where the two choirs would sometimes be placed in different parts of the nave. In such a setting, the contrast between the choirs singing against each other and singing together creates opportunities for emphasizing certain words over others. Pay special attention to when the choirs come together, especially in the extensive melisma (long phrase sung on one syllable) towards the end: these are the glorious moments that help the piece earn its title.



¹¹ "Favorite Work "Rheinberger: Cantus Missae op. 109" - Carus Verlag." <https://blog.carus-verlag.com/en/favorite-works/rheinberger-cantus-missae-op-109-2/>. Accessed 5 Nov. 2023; "Mass in E-flat major, Op.109 (Rheinberger, Josef Gabriel) - IMSLP." [https://imslp.org/wiki/Mass_in_E-flat_major%2C_Op.109_\(Rheinberger%2C_Josef_Gabriel\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Mass_in_E-flat_major%2C_Op.109_(Rheinberger%2C_Josef_Gabriel)). Accessed 5 Nov. 2023.

¹² "Rheinberger: Mass in E-flat Major, Op. 109 - Ficks Music." <https://www.ficksmusic.com/products/rheinberger-mass-in-e-flat-major-op-109-carus>. Accessed 5 Nov. 2023.

“Ogo Ni Fun Oluwa”

Rosephanye Powell

“Ogo Ni Fun Oluwa” is a lively, joyous piece composed by acclaimed American composer Rosephanye Powell (b. 1962). It comes from a suite of six songs titled *Christmas Give*. “Ogo Ni Fun Oluwa” celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ in the language of the Yoruba people of southwest Nigeria. Its title translates to “Glory to God in the Highest” and invites musicians and audience members alike to rejoice at the birth of the Savior. The text of this piece was shared with composer Rosephanye Powell by her friend Henry Fadamiro, who is Yoruba and a well-regarded professor of Biology at Texas Agricultural and Mechanical University. Powell’s choice to include djembe in this piece further demonstrates a connection to the Yoruba people, who value drums for their spiritual qualities. While much of the piece is rooted in its profound connection to Yoruba culture, Powell shares that this piece was also inspired by her grandfather who frequently told African stories to her and her siblings as they were growing up together.

The celebratory nature of the text can be easily heard in the festive and quick music. The timbre of the treble voices shares the joy of Christmas in an angelic manner and invites all to “shout, dance, rejoice, and clap at the birth of Jesus Christ!” The singers engage in a call-and-response motif throughout the piece. Singers and percussionists alike perform fast-paced and unique rhythms, enlivening and spreading the good news to all. The piece is emphatic, and the consistently loud dynamics invite all to embrace the joy and triumph of the Christmas story. Thanks to Rosephanye Powell’s work and her beautiful mixture of cultural elements, the glory of the Christmas story is shared in this new resounding arrangement for treble voices.¹³

¹³ Bode Omojola. “Yorùbá Drumming: Performance Practice and the Politics of Identity.” *Yorùbá Music in the Twentieth Century*, Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2023, pp. 16-, <https://doi.org/10.2307/ji.4418220.5>.
Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. “Yoruba”. Encyclopedia Britannica, 25 Aug. 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Yoruba>.
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<https://www.rosephanypowell.com/piece/https-www-jwpepper-com-ogo-ni-fun-oluwa-10278879-item-vsygcebmkuk/>.
Accessed 5 Nov. 2022.

Texas A&M University. *Henry Fadamiro*. 2023. <https://entomology.tamu.edu/people/fadamiro-henry/>. Accessed 5 Nov. 2023.

“Summer in Winter”

Kenneth Jennings

“Summer in Winter” was written by Kenneth Jennings for the 1978 St. Olaf Christmas Festival. Jennings was the third director of The St. Olaf Choir from 1968 until 1990 and was previously the director of the Manitou Singers in 1953, before conducting the St. Olaf Chapel Choir from 1954 until his appointment to The St. Olaf Choir. This piece is shorter and simpler than some of the other works on this program. This a capella choral anthem focuses on the metaphysical poetry of 17th-century Anglican cleric Richard Crashaw. The three verses are filled with contradictions and oxymorons that seek to highlight the inherent mysteries within the Christian faith. The concept of the immeasurable power of God being incarnated in a small helpless child is symbolized through metaphysical concepts. “Summer in winter,” “day in night,” and “eternity in a span,” are all examples of these seemingly contradictory ideas that represent the incarnation of Christ.

This same idea of “summer in winter” appears again in Dirksen’s “Welcome All Wonders” later in the program. “Glorification” from *Celestial Spring* by F. Melius Christiansen is also connected to this piece, as the two pieces were programmed alongside each other when “Summer in Winter” was premiered in 1978.¹⁴



¹⁴ Armstong, Anton, in conversation with The St. Olaf Choir, November 8, 2023.
Shaw, Joseph M. *The St. Olaf Choir: A narrative*. St. Olaf College, 1997.

“Glory Hallelujah to the Newborn King”

arr. Mark Butler

Drawing the audience in with reserved yet intense voices, the bass section begins Mark Butler’s arrangement of the spiritual “Glory Hallelujah to the New Born King.” Before the text of the first verse begins, the sound of voices grows as the tenors layer on a bluesy phrase. The sopranos and altos issue the first complete proclamation of the title text, before melting into a brief interlude of the bass line. The emotion builds again with a spirited tenor solo, punctuated by an intense accompaniment from the tenors and basses.

Dr. Mark Butler serves as Director of Choral Activities at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee. He is a highly sought-after conductor and clinician and holds degrees in Music Education and Conducting. This piece was even featured on Good Morning America, performed by the Boys and Girls Choir of Harlem.

Because this piece is a choral arrangement of an African-American spiritual, it is important to note the differences between these concertized spirituals and the folk music they were born out of. Folk spirituals were historically transmitted aurally and often sung by untrained singers. They were sung at communal gatherings such as camp meetings and religious revivals and also accompanied the daily work of enslaved laborers. Concert spirituals, while rooted in similar traditions and musical ideas, are composed with the intention of trained musicians to perform them for wide audiences. While they may remind audiences of African-American history, the performance context for concert spirituals is vastly different from that of folk spirituals.

The text of the spiritual references the 9th chapter of Isaiah, prophesying the birth of a savior who will be called a “wonderful counselor.” The low voices establish this title of Jesus fervently, and more and more voices begin to repeat these words, building intensely to the climax of the piece. As nearly all the voices proclaim this title of Jesus, the sopranos intensify the feeling with glimmering high notes. The conclusion feels to the listener like a shout of joy and wonder, leaving the audience to marvel at the powerful emotion evoked by a cappella voices.¹⁵

¹⁵ Hurston, Zora N. “Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals.” In *Music in the USA: A Documentary Companion*, edited by Judith Tick and Paul Beaudoin, pp. 506-509.

Sheppard, Ella “Historical Sketch of the Jubilee Singers.” In *Music in the USA: A Documentary Companion*, edited by Judith Tick and Paul Beaudoin, pp. 258-265.

“In the Bleak Midwinter”

Harold Darke, orch. Robert V. Scholz

English composer Harold Darke was well known for his choral and organ compositions, most famously the anthem “In the Bleak Midwinter,” which he composed in 1906. Darke grew up in London and led a successful career as a composer and organist, first at Emmanuel Church in West Hampstead, and then for over fifty years from 1911 to his retirement in 1966 at St. Michael Cornhill. During his tenure at St. Michael Cornhill, Darke began playing weekly performances of Bach, which became a tradition known as the Cornhill Lunchtime Organ Recitals. The Cornhill Lunchtime series continues today as the longest-running lunchtime organ series in the world. He was also a professor of Organ Music at the Royal College of Music until 1969. Darke left these posts briefly to both serve in World War I and to spend a year as director of music at King’s College, Cambridge, in 1941.

The lyrics to “In The Bleak Midwinter” were written by English poet Christina Rossetti, who titled her poem “A Christmas Carol.” It was first published in an 1872 issue of *Scribner’s Monthly*. While countless composers have set Rossetti’s words to timeless melodies over the last century, Harold Darke’s 1909 setting stands out among them as one of the most beloved. It is a Christmas staple in choral festivals and ensembles around the world, including the world-renowned Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at King’s College in London. The carol was also often sung by British troops as they fought in the trenches of World War I, speaking to the piece’s universal messages of comfort and safety in the face of hardship.

Throughout the piece, Darke’s setting eloquently balances mixed voices with piano accompaniment. A soprano solo gently welcomes audiences into the first verse, opening with lyrics of the piece’s namesake, “In the bleak midwinter”. This sweet, wistful unison evokes a beautiful stillness as the choirs prepare to tell the story of Christ’s birth. The melody bursts to life in the second verse when tenor and bass voices seamlessly join the trebles. The juxtaposition of the stunning melody with bursts of dissonance along with glittering harmonies evoke distinct senses of love and belonging that lie between the lines of each chord—warmth, perhaps, amid a bleak midwinter. Allow yourself to lean into the rise and fall of this melody, and feel from these very first words how the choir handles every phrase with immense care, holding the story in the palms of their hands before offering it out to you.¹⁶

¹⁶ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-in-the-bleak-midwinter>
https://www.istor.org/stable/23547161?searchText=%28%28Harold+Darke%29+AND+%28In+the+Bleak+Midwinter%29%29&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoAdvancedSearch%3Fq0%3DHarold%2BDarke%26q1%3DIn%2Bthe%2BBleak%2BMidwinter%26f0%3Dall%26c1%3DAND%26f1%3Dall%26acc%3Don&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3A195c52e605b6f13ef70b1ac4c522a97b&seq=6
<https://www.phillipcooke.com/blog/on-in-the-bleak-midwinte>

“Winter Night (Sleigh Ride)” (*Three Small Tone Poems*)

Frederick Delius

Frederick Delius composed “Winter Night” (also known by the alternative title “Sleigh Ride”) for orchestra in 1890 as one part of a larger work entitled *Three Small Tone Poems*. Delius situated the piece as the middle movement of the larger work, preceded by “Summer Evening” and followed by “Spring Morning.” “Winter Night,” itself, however, was originally written a few years before, in December 1887. At that time, a young Delius had recently been introduced to fellow composer Edvard Grieg. The two became fast friends, bonding over their shared love of the country of Norway, the birthplace of Grieg and a favorite vacation spot for Delius. Just a few weeks later, Grieg invited Delius to spend Christmas Eve with him and his wife along with other friends and contemporaries. It was at this event, with guests gathered around a piano, playing songs and singing together, that Delius revealed he had composed a piece just for the occasion. To celebrate the holiday, entertain his companions, and, most importantly, commemorate his blossoming friendship with Grieg, Delius presented “Winter Night.”

Though the original piano score has been lost, the piece survives through its orchestral arrangement. Throughout the piece, Delius pays homage to the musical style of Edvard Grieg, with the theme itself bearing a resemblance to some of Grieg’s compositions.

As the piece opens, it immediately evokes its memorable “Sleigh Ride” image with a playful piccolo melody accompanied by trotting sleigh bells. The trot becomes a gallop, then a full sprint as the rest of the orchestra joins in the melody, erupting into a jubilant chorus before giving way to the piece’s serene, lyrical midsection. Gradually, the team is harnessed once more as the sleigh bells reinstate their presence, alongside our familiar piccolo theme. The theme mounts as before, until the full orchestra breaks out into a final joyous dash all the way home, leaving us to reminisce on a labor of love, and a winter night well spent with those we hold dear.¹⁷

¹⁷ Boyle, Andrew J. “1862–1888: Bradford, Florida and Leipzig.” *Delius and Norway*, NED-New edition, Boydell & Brewer, 2017, pg. 28. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt1pwt4dh.8>. Accessed Nov. 2023.

Carley, Lionel, Robert Anderson, and Anthony Payne. “Delius, Frederick.” *Grove Music Online*. 2001. Oxford University Press. Date of access Nov. 2023, <<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000049095>>

Foss, Hubert. “The Instrumental Music of Frederick Delius.” *Tempo*, no. 26, 1952, pp. 30–37. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/943987>. Accessed Nov. 2023.

Carols for the Choirs and Orchestra: “Love and Joy Come to You”

arr. Christopher Aspaas

As the chimes twinkle like falling snow, the orchestra welcomes all into a St. Olaf Christmas Festival tradition: the carol collage. First, the collected choirs, hundreds of voices strong, beckon us into the Christmas spirit with a playful, lilting melody of “Here We Come A-Caroling.” Immediately afterward, the music spirals into a cascade of little tastes of nostalgic carols. Each choir takes its turn, their respective conductors popping up in new places around the stage, each carol flowing seamlessly into the next. The piece wanders through the angelic tones of Manitou Singers “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” to the Chapel Choir’s almost haunting “What Child Is This” to bring us a true collage full of little delights. Finally, the orchestra returns at the end as all voices join together to majestically sing the message of this year’s St. Olaf Christmas Festival: “Love and Joy, Come to You.”

The composer of this year’s carol collage is familiar to many: St. Olaf’s very own Christopher Aspaas. “Love and Joy, Come to You” was written in 2012 and premiered at that year’s Christmas Festival; at the time, Christopher Aspaas was serving as the director of St Olaf’s Chapel Choir and Viking Chorus.¹⁸ In 2012, this charming carol collage was presented under the theme “The Wondrous Gift is Given.” There, it explored the idea of “the gift of a child born simply and humbly and for us”, and built into what and how we can give back through song.¹⁹ This year, the carols draw us even deeper into that message, inviting us to devote all of ourselves, body and voice, to bring joy to ourselves and others this Christmas season.



¹⁸ “Christopher Aspaas.” *Christopher Aspaas | Chorus America*, Chorus America., 2012, chorusamerica.org/conf2012/christopher-aspaas.

¹⁹ Young, Alison. *St. Olaf Christmas Festival*, 2012, <https://www.yourclassical.org/story/2012/12/02/st-olaf-christmas-festival>.

“Good Christian Friends, Rejoice”

arr. Robert V. Scholz

Tracing its roots to the 14th-century German carol, *In Dulci Jubilo*, which means “in sweet rejoicing, “Good Christian Friends, Rejoice” is a popular Christmas carol with a rich history. Although there have been dozens of versions of this carol, this particular arrangement by Robert V. Scholz has a special meaning to St. Olaf. Known as “Dr. Bob” to many of his students and former colleagues, Scholz is an integral part of St. Olaf’s history. He joined his alma mater’s music department in 1968 and led the Viking Chorus and Chapel Choir. Current St. Olaf Choir conductor Anton Armstrong considers Scholz his “musical godfather.” “When I returned to St. Olaf in 1990 as a faculty member in the Music Department,” Armstrong explains, “Bob was always a supportive colleague and friend. He was perhaps the most ‘pastoral’ musical colleague I’ve been blessed to know in my thirty-one years at St. Olaf College.” Scholz was an exceptional composer and arranger, and many of his pieces are still performed today.

It is claimed that the mystic Heinrich Seuso was taught this carol by angels through multiple visionary experiences around the year 1328, but accounts show that a version of the carol existed before 1328. Regardless, “Good Christian Friends, Rejoice” is believed to be one of the oldest German macaronic (mixed-language) hymns, in this case incorporating both Latin and German. This version of the carol that Scholz arranged can be traced back to J.M Neale’s arrangement, which was initially titled “Good Christian Men, Rejoice,” written in 1853, which was a translation from a sixteenth-century Finnish songbook. Scholz’s “Good Christian Friends, Rejoice” (note the change from “Men”) has the same melody as J.M. Neale’s composition, but the addition of orchestra helps bring an extra sense of “rejoicing.” Listen for the trumpet in the beginning, and as more instruments join, the growing sensation of triumph is continued by the syncopated, upbeat rhythm of the choir.²⁰

²⁰ Bob Scholz 1939–2021. (2021). *The Choral Journal*, 61(11), 68.

<https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/bob-scholz-1939-2021/docview/2622616430/se-2>

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Keyte, Hugh., Parrott, Andrew., & Bartlett, Clifford. (1992). *The New Oxford book of carols : edited by Hugh Keyte and Andrew Parrott ; associate editor, Clifford Bartlett*. Oxford University Press.

Studwell, W. E. (William E. (1995). *The Christmas carol reader*. Haworth Press.

“Glorification” from *Celestial Spring*

F. Melius Christiansen

Conceived in December 1930 as a motet (an unaccompanied vocal composition) in four movements, F. Melius Christiansen composed *Celestial Spring* entirely without the addition of text.²¹ It was only after its composition that his friend and fellow music professor at St. Olaf College Oscar R. Overby wrote the text to fit the existing musical material. Overby and Christiansen had a close friendship that blossomed during their tenures as professors of music at St. Olaf College—a friendship that continued through the rest of their lives.²²

Celestial Spring includes four movements: I. The Spirit’s Yearning, II. Exaltation, III. Regeneration, and IV. Glorification. *Celestial Spring* has been programmed in its entirety two times—in 1932 and 1933, with individual sections of the four-movement motet included in eight other St. Olaf College tours.²³ The text of *Celestial Spring* describes “the creation of the world by the Almighty Lord and of man’s longing for communion with God.”²⁴ One can observe that the work (especially “Glorification,” the last movement) depicts true celebration and new beginnings as heard by the colorful text repetition in the intricate opening lines: “Hosanna, a new hosanna within is ringing, New glory bringing, to God on high.” As “Glorification” continues, listeners can take note of how Christiansen introduces the choir’s voices—as if the world is slowly waking up to the warmth of springtime after an eternity of winter chill. There is no piano accompaniment, leaving the audience in full enthrallment of the power of the human voice. “Glorification” continues to blossom when the choir sings “A new hosanna / all life embraces while growing praises” as we hear the high voices soar with flexibility as the low voices remain strong, acting as a guide for new material. Listening to the choir scale back assures the audience that there is much to be celebrated on the subject of new life. Then the movement ushers towards a conclusion with an exuberant proclamation from the tenors: “A new hosanna shall arise”—this is followed by contributions from the basses, altos, and lastly the sopranos: “My heart is singing now: Hallelujah”. Finally, all voices join together in a harmony that embodies a sense of pure joy, excitement, and celebrates the promise of the Christmas season. Together, the choirs rejoice, “Hallelujah.”

²¹Oscar R. Overby, *Songs, and Poems*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946).

²²Hanson, Richard D. *An Analysis Of Selected Choral Works Of F. Melius Christiansen*, pg. 126, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, United States -- Illinois, 1970. *ProQuest*, <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/analysis-selected-choral-works-f-melius/docview/302529913/se-2>.

²³ Et. adlib, pg. 130.

²⁴ Et. adlib, pg. 170.

“Welcome All Wonders”

Richard Dirksen

Richard Wayne Dirksen (1921-2003) was well known for his contributions to the Washington National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. as a choirmaster and organist. He studied under accomplished organist Virgil Fox at Baltimore’s Peabody Conservatory where he graduated Magna Cum Laude. During his tenure at the National Cathedral, he composed over 300 pieces for choir, theater, and various instruments. Dirksen’s most memorable performances include the U.S. Bicentennial in 1976 and the consecration of the completed National Cathedral in 1990. His philosophy was “memorable music must first and foremost have a great tune.” He proclaimed himself an “occasional composer” because his works were traditionally intended for specific occasions. Throughout his career, he received a Distinguished Alumni Award from the Peabody Conservatory, and the Medal of Excellence by the Shenandoah Conservancy, and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.²⁵

“Welcome All Wonders” premiered on September 29th, 1957 to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the Washington National Cathedral’s first construction efforts. The Cathedral, while a place of worship, also served as the commonplace for funerals to be held for U.S. presidents, First Ladies, inaugural prayer sessions, and other prominent political events. Taking inspiration from the 17th-century English poet Richard Crashaw’s “In The Holy Nativity Of Our Lord,” Dirksen crafted a piece that equated the majesty of the Cathedral with the marvels of God. This celebratory hymn flourishes by including the full range of voices, a variety of string and brass instruments, timpani, and organ. The organ holds a special significance in this piece because of its value to Richard Dirksen and the history of the Cathedral.

The motif of wonder and spirituality is most prominent in the text of this piece. In the beginning, the brass acts as the bells of the Cathedral which beckon listeners into its grandeur as they are welcomed by the voices of the choir. Proceeding through the Cathedral, a fanfare of trumpets and the babble of greetings accompany the listener before the time of reflection in the middle of the piece. In reverence for the Cathedral and God, these welcome transform into encouragement. While reflecting, listeners can come to realize the real sacrifice and gift of rejuvenation brought by the spirits of love and joy.

²⁵https://rwdirksen.com/musical_work/welcome-all-wonders/
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2003/07/30/cathedral-choirmaster-richard-dirksen/aa49080d-ca5f-46dd-abd5-2f920a62fd33/>

“Joy to the World”

arr. Steven Amundson

The announcement of the birth of Jesus Christ is appropriately heralded in this lively arrangement of “Joy to the World” by Steven Amundson, conductor of the St. Olaf Orchestra from 1981 to 2022. Premiered at the St. Olaf Christmas Festival in 2007, Amundson’s arrangement aptly embodies the excitement that the traditional hymn communicates around the holidays. The Lord’s coming is met with a jubilant orchestral fanfare and the combined voices of the St. Olaf massed choirs and audience members, joining together to respond to the invitation given to all people to “Repeat the sounding joy!”

Originally, the text of “Joy to the World” was set to the hymn tune *Antioch* attributed to G.F. Handel (1685-1759). That version was first arranged and published by Lowell Mason in 1819. The opening descending musical gesture (“Joy to the world, the Lord is come”) is reminiscent of Handel’s *Messiah* chorus, pt. 31, “Lift up your Heads”, while the third melodic line of each verse (“let heaven and nature sing”) might have come from the same oratorio, pt. 1, “Comfort Ye, My People.”²⁶ Some music historians believe that the callbacks to Handel’s *Messiah* are not intentional, but rather indicate that Handel went back to the same melodic gestures again and again throughout his compositions.²⁷ Nevertheless, these potential references to the earlier, equally famous work are striking enough that they are well worth listening for.



²⁶ Celebrate, Rejoice and Sing: Christmas Music in America, Roger L. Hall, PineTree Press, 2003. (8)

²⁷ *The Origins of the Tune "Antioch"*, Bulletin No. 166 of the Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland.

“O Holy Night”

Adolphe Charles Adam
arr. John Rutter

This beloved French hymn, originally composed by Adolphe Charles Adam in 1847, is among the most popular Christmas Eve service solo pieces around the world. Originally titled “Cantique de Noel,” French lyricist Placide Cappeau wrote the text and then asked his friend Adolphe Adam to set music to the poem. It received its premiere in Roquemaure, France by famous opera singer Emily Laurey a few weeks later at the Christmas Eve midnight mass. “Cantique de Noel” became popular in Europe, and after American writer John Sullivan Dwight translated it into English, it became widespread in America, too.

On Christmas Eve in 1871, while the Germans were in the midst of a battle with the French during the Franco-Prussian War, there was a twenty-four-hour truce (much like the well-known WWI Christmas Day truce), and legend has it that the French sang the hallowed “Cantique de Noel” during this time.²⁸

John Rutter sets this hymn for orchestra and mixed choir, with a soaring, familiar but occasionally ornamented soprano melody. The piece begins with the distant hums of the altos, tenors, and basses, while the sopranos carry the text to the first chorus. The expectant waiting of Christ in the season of Advent is musically depicted as the piece grows in depth. The gentle support of the sopranos intensifies when the hums become open vowels, with the massed choir joining on the text at the end. There is an echo of the melody as the voices drive the passion, power, and wonder of the newborn Christ to the end of the piece. Finishing with a strong proclamation, the voices leave the orchestra to fade back into the stillness in which the piece began. The steady pulse, the breathtaking build as the melody soars and echoes through the different voices, and the anticipation of the ending all mirror the perfectly planned, glorious birth of Christ, who flawlessly humbled Himself to enter this world in a lowly manger out of love for us. As you hear this cherished melody, you are encouraged to remember the profound, miraculous sight as the Star of Bethlehem shone brightly that first Christmas.

²⁸ McCarron, Patrick, and Ann H Gabhart. “The Story behind the Song O Holy Night.” *Ann H. Gabhart*, 12 Dec. 2021, www.annhgabhart.com/2019/12/16/the-story-behind-the-song-o-holy-night/.

“Beautiful Savior”

arr. F. Melius Christiansen

Performing “Beautiful Savior” is a decades-long tradition for the St. Olaf choral ensembles. The melody is a Silesian folk song arranged by F. Melius Christiansen in 1910. F.M. Christiansen originally set the tune to Norwegian text and later published it in English for the St. Olaf Choral Series. The Christiansen arrangement of the hymn first appeared at the St. Olaf Christmas Festival beginning in 1924, but it did not become a consistent final piece until the early 1950s, under Olaf C. Christiansen (F. Melius’s son). Since its establishment as a tradition, it has been performed in various ways and various parts of the program. In this way, “Beautiful Savior” has come to be regarded as “practically synonymous” with the St. Olaf choirs.²⁹



Christmas Festival Massed Ensemble, 1986, Viking Yearbook

The complete choral setting by F. Melius Christiansen is set in three verses. The first verse is hummed with the melody in the Alto 1 and Bass 1 vocal lines. The second verse features a mezzo-soprano soloist with tenor and bass humming accompaniment. The entire choir sings the third verse with the melody in the soprano and alto vocal parts. The third verse is the most recognizable, as it is now sung at the end of every Christmas Festival. The

²⁹ Shaw, Joseph M. *The St. Olaf Choir: A Narrative* (Northfield, Minn: St. Olaf College, 1997).

song begins softly and gradually crescendos to the triumphant climax with the text “Now and forevermore be thine!” The powerful finish to the piece often leaves the audience in awed silence for several seconds.

“Beautiful Savior” is a familiar hymn across the U.S., and no matter where performers or listeners are from, it will evoke strong emotions. To different people, this song can have different messages. Decades ago, under F. Melius Christiansen, the St. Olaf Choir sang this piece on a hospital lawn in Rochester. Windows opened, and patients were wheeled out onto the balconies to hear the music.³⁰ “Beautiful Savior” was a form of healing for these people. For the choristers, it may be a song of unity and rouse a sense of togetherness. Ultimately, “Beautiful Savior” is a unique opportunity for performers and audience members alike to reflect at the end of every concert on the music that has been shared and the gift that has been given to those listening.



Christmas Festival Performance, 1955, Viking Yearbook

³⁰ Shaw, Joseph M. *The St. Olaf Choir: A Narrative*.