Madison Symphony Orchestra Program Notes
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Welcome to the 2019 "Madison Symphony Christmas." This program has become a Madison holiday tradition, and is always among our most popular offerings. The program moves from classical styles in the first half—culminating in Handel's great "Hallelujah" chorus—to lighter holiday music in the second half. And as always, we end with a rockin' Gospel finale… and a chance for *you* to sing along! This program features three great choral groups from Madison, the Madison Youth Choirs, the Mount Zion Gospel Choir, and our own Madison Symphony Chorus. We are also proud to feature one of the MSO's own, harpist Johanna Wienholts.

John Rutter is celebrated as both a choral conductor and as a composer of sacred music. His Cambridge Singers have received critical acclaim in a series of performances and recordings of repertoire ranging from the Renaissance to Rutter's own works. As a composer and arranger, and he has produced children's operas, orchestral works, and a multitude of choral works, from small anthems to settings of the *Gloria*, *Magnificat*, and *Requiem*. Rutter has explained that Christmas music has "…always occupied a special place in my affections, ever since I sang in my first Christmas Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols as a nervous ten-year-old boy soprano. For me, and I suspect for most of the other members of the Highgate Junior School Choir, it was the high point of our singing year, diligently rehearsed and eagerly anticipated for weeks beforehand. Later, my voice changed and I turned from singing to composition, but I never forgot those early Highgate carol services..." We have heard many of Rutter's Christmas works over the past several seasons, and on this program, he is represented by his solemn version of **O Come O Come Emmanuel**. Its text, first published in Germany in 1710, is a paraphrase of some of the most ancient surviving Christmas chants—the 8th-century "O antiphons." These chants were traditionally sung on the seven days leading up to Christmas. Rutter's effective arrangement begins with the simple unadorned chant tune, gradually expanding while maintaining a sense of profound mystery.

The Latin *Magnificat*, one of the Biblical canticles (Luke 1: 46-55), is in the voice of Mary: a heartfelt response to the Annunciation that she had conceived a child by the Holy Spirit. The text was chanted during the Vespers service in the Catholic liturgy, but it was also taken up enthusiastically by Martin Luther during the Reformation. In the Baroque era, composers broke the canticle into small sections,

stressing the emotional content of individual passages or words, or exploiting the illustrative qualities of the text. (For example, the words *omnes generationes*—"all generations"—are nearly always marked by a sudden appearance of the full chorus.) This Baroque tradition of *Magnificat*-writing culminated in the great D Major ***Magnificat*** by **Johann Sebastian Bach**, a product of his extraordinarily fertile early years in as *Kantor* at the Thomaskirche in Leipzig. Bach's Lutheran congregation used the Latin *Magnificat* during the most important feasts of the church year: Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. Bach's setting of the *Magnificat* was composed during his first year in Leipzig, for the Christmas service of 1723. This original version was set in E-flat Major, but at some point between 1728 and 1730 or somewhat earlier, Bach revised the work, recasting it in D Major, making some compositional changes. He also reworked the orchestration, substituting flutes for recorders and changing the scoring of some movements. In this work, Bach at once adapts and surpasses the conventions of the Baroque *Magnificat*— Bach only set the *Magnificat* text one time, but what a setting it is! We present four excerpts, beginning with the opening *Magnificat*. The Latin text is presented by the chorus in a joyfully decorated setting accompanied by a festive trio of trumpets. Bach paints the word *Omnes generationes* with a brief but intense fugal chorus that comes to a dramatic pause near the end. *Deposuit* is set as a forceful aria for the tenor soloist with a brilliant violin obbligato. The grand closing chorus, *Gloria Patri*, begins with a solemn threefold acclamation, and concludes with music adapted from the opening chorus.

Concertos for the harp were relatively rare in the Baroque, and the only example composed by **George Friderick Handel** was originally part of his choral ode *Alexander's Feast*, performed in London on February 19, 1736. Within *Alexander's Feast*, the concerto actually played a dramatic role: it followed a recitative describing how, during an entertainment for Alexander the Great, the Greek poet Timotheus, "plac'd on high amid the tuneful quire [choir], with flying fingers touched the lyre [harp]." The concerto was originally designed for either harp or archlute (a lute with an extended neck and additional bass strings), but in 1738, Handel published it as an organ concerto, as part of his six Op.4 organ concertos. The relatively light background, with muted strings and a pizzicato bassline still displays its original intent is a harp concerto however. Aside from widely-separated ensemble *ritornelli*, the opening movement (*Andante allegro*) is carried almost entirely by the solo harp.

The next two pieces feature our vocal soloists. **Franz Schubert** composed his song *Wiegenlied* ("Lullaby") in 1816. The song, which remained unpublished until after his death, may have been composed as a sentimental response to the death of his

own younger brother Theodor in infancy. Its anonymous German text is a gentle lullaby that speaks of angel voices. The Italian text, *Mille cherubini in coro* ("A choir of a thousand cherubs") and the choral refrains were added later in the 19th century. This version with its sweet imagery and sweeter voices has become a Christmas standard. The traditional Basque carol *Gabriel's Message* is based upon a much earlier Latin chant. The avid folksong collector, novelist, and Anglican priest Sabine Baring-Gould published the English translation heard here in the early 20th century. This carol is a gentle retelling of the Annunciation story, and the quiet and effective arrangement heard here inserts part of the Latin *Magnificat* text before the last stanza.

The voices of young girls are then the perfect complement to a second work by **John Rutter**. His *Star Carol* is an alternately playful and solemn song on the birth of Jesus. When the Romantic composer **Charles Gounod** set a lovely *cantabile* melody above a keyboard prelude by **J. S. Bach**, he created what would become one of the best-loved sacred songs of all time. Gounod initially improvised this melody over Bach's *Prelude No.1* from *The Well-Tempered Clavier* in 1853, and it was initially published as an instrumental solo. In 1859 it appeared as a vocal solo with its now-familiar Latin text. The *Ave Maria*, drawn from the Annunciation story in the Gospel of Luke, is one of the most familiar prayers of the Catholic Church.

Felix Mendelssohn composed his *Lobgesang* ("Song of Praise") in 1840, when he was asked to provide a work for a festival in Leipzig marking the 400th anniversary of Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press. He had originally planned to do a small-scale cantata, but soon found the work growing to enormous dimensions, with three purely instrumental movements and a large choral finale that, together, combine to form a work that is over an hour in length. (It is usually listed today as his *Symphony No.2*, but Mendelssohn himself thought of it as "symphony-cantata.") Mendelssohn drew most of the texts for the final movement from Martin Luther's translation of the Bible, and the finale as a whole is a joyous statement of faith. We present here the glorious closing chorus, which begins with the triumphant "Alles danket dem Herrn!" ("Let all creation thank the Lord!"). Mendelssohn then launches into a magnificent fugue worthy of J.S. Bach himself. (The work was in fact premiered at the Thomaskirche in Leipzig, where Bach had worked a century earlier.). The final phrase is a grand statement of a musical motto that Mendelssohn uses to unify this enormous work.

We follow this with music by **Adolphe Adam**. Though he was respected in his day as composer of operas and ballet scores (including a score for the successful ballet

Giselle), Adam is known to American audiences almost exclusively for his Christmas carol *Cantique de Noël*. Written in 1847 as a setting of a two-verse Christmas poem by Mary Cappeaux, this carol was later adapted by J. S. Wright as a three-verse English carol, ***O Holy Night***. This performance features a grand arrangement for orchestra, chorus, and solo soprano by Dan Goeller. And as always, the finale to our first half is the concluding "Hallelujah" chorus from Part II of **Handel's** 1741 oratorio ***Messiah***. While this familiar and exuberant chorus is actually the conclusion of the Easter section of the oratorio, it has long since become a standard part of the Christmas season as well. Feel free to sing along if the spirit moves you!

Our second half begins with the ***Christmas Fantasy*** by **Dan Goeller**. This 2008 work brings together four traditional carols, opening with a brassy version of the *Sussex Carol* (*On Christmas Night All Christians Sing*). The horns lead an equally forceful version of *We Three Kings*. The lullaby *What Child is This?*—set to the traditional 16th-century tune *Greensleeves*—is cast here as a gentle oboe solo. After a brief interlude, the arrangement closes with an exuberant version of *Sing We Now of Christmas*, again led by the horns.

The program continues with a pair of features for the older voices of the Madison Youth Choirs. Canadian composer **Stephen Hatfield** created the version of the traditional English ***Apple-Tree Wassail*** heard here. We tend to associate wassailing with Christmas, but its origins predate the introduction of Christianity to England. According to the composer: "Wassail comes from the Anglo-Saxon *wes hael*—to be healthy. Originally, wassails were taken seriously as blessings on farms and farmers that would help ensure the health of the coming year. The *Apple-Tree Wassail* comes from the cider country of Devon and Somerset, where it might be sung in the orchards or at the farmer's door. The references to 'lily white pins' and 'lily white smocks' are meant to flatter the farmer's family by listing the fine clothes and ornaments they could supposedly afford to wear. The twelfth day of Christmas (Epiphany) was thought to be a perfect time to bless the orchards, in part because it was believed that evil spirits did their best to confound Christmas piety in the twelve days following Christ's birth." The most familiar of all holiday songs, ***Jingle Bells***, was written in the 1850s by **James Pierpont**, a Unitarian minister, organist, photographer, and sometime songwriter who worked in Massachusetts California, Georgia, and Florida. *Jingle Bells*, published in 1857, was not in fact intended as a "Christmas song" at all, but rather a "sleighing song"—a popular genre at the time. It was not really well-known until the later 19th century, when it gained its exclusive association with the holiday season. The good-humored

arrangement heard here is by the eminent English choral director and arranger David Willcocks.

A Texas native, **Randol Alan Bass** lives and works today in Dallas, and is renowned around the country as one of America's premier "Pops" arrangers. His Christmas arrangements are particularly popular, and this program includes a movement from his 1988 medley *Christmas Ornaments*, a lushly-orchestrated fantasia on several familiar holiday tunes. *Christmas Ornaments* closes with ***The Twelve Days of Christmas***—a song that refers to the traditional celebration of Christmas, from December 25 through January 6 ("Twelfth Night" or the Feast of the Epiphany). The song, with its uniquely "cumulative" form, existed by the 18th century, sung to various tunes. In 1909 Frederic Austin published the familiar song we know today, introducing the grand *ritard* on "five gold rings." Bass's version is lively, rhythmically dynamic, and thoroughly witty.

The Madison Symphony Chorus and our soloists then presents of medley of familiar Holiday favorites, in arrangements by **Lee Norris**. *Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!* was written in 1945 by the songwriting team of Sammy Cahn and Jule Styne. It became a No.1 hit the next December and remains one of the most popular and often-covered Holiday standards. 1945 was also when singer Mel Tormé wrote beloved ***Christmas Song (Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire)*** with his collaborator Robert Wells. Tormé quickly showed the song to his friend Nat Cole, whose 1946 hit recording is now a beloved holiday classic. ***Jingle Bell Rock*** comes from 1957, when it was written by amateur songwriters Joseph Beal and James Boothe. It was a huge hit that year for singer Bobby Helms, whose Rockabilly version of the song remains the most familiar recording, despite well over 100 later covers by other singers. Bing Crosby had a huge hit in 1943 with the sentimental holiday song, ***I'll Be Home for Christmas***. This song by the team of Kim Gannon and Walter Kent, struck a deeply emotional chord for the millions of Americans serving overseas in wartime and their families back home.

Of course, no Madison Symphony Christmas program would be complete without the Mount Zion Gospel Choir! As always, they are singing arrangements for choir and orchestra by codirector **Leotha Stanley**. Their set begins with a Stanley original, ***The Joy of Christmas***, which was introduced at our holiday concert in 2016. We also reprise Stanley's version of ***Silent Night***. This most popular of all Christmas hymns was written in 1818 by the organist Franz Gruber and Rev. Josef Mohr for a Christmas Eve service at the tiny church they served in village of Oberndorf, Austria. The set concludes with a newly-composed song by Stanley, ***Christmas Hope***, premiered here by the combined choirs and orchestra.

And then, friends, it's *your* turn to sing!

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