

**Madison Symphony Orchestra Program Notes**  
**December 3-4-5, 2021**  
**96th Season**  
**Michael Allsen**

Welcome to the 2021 edition of “A 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 Gospel finale...and a chance for *you* to sing along! We welcome two distinguished vocal soloists, soprano Elizabeth Caballero and tenor Jared Esguerra. This program also features three fine choruses: 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, flutist Stephanie Jutt.

Among the most famous hymns of Christmas, *Joy to the World* may also be the most famous case of misattribution among Christmas hymns. It has traditionally been credited to Handel, and indeed one of its first publishers, the hymn writer **William Holford** printed it with Handel’s name in the early 1830s, probably because of its close resemblance to a few bits from the ever-familiar *Messiah*: the choruses “Lift Up Your Heads” and “Glory to God,” and the instrumental sections of the aria “Comfort Ye.” The great Methodist hymn writer **Lowell Mason** cemented the association with Handel when he revised the tune in 1839 and used it to set a Christmas hymn text by Handel’s contemporary Isaac Watts. This familiar hymn is heard here in an appropriately joyous and grand arrangement by Mack Wilberg, longtime director of the famed Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

**Johann Sebastian Bach**’s *Christmas Oratorio* was written in Leipzig for the Christmas season of 1734-35. Not really an “oratorio,” in the dramatic sense of *Judas Maccabeus* and other contemporary works by Handel, Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio* is instead a series of six self-contained cantatas for Christmas Day and the feasts that follow it. The exuberant *Ehre sei dir, Gott, gesungen* (*Let honor be sung to you, O God*) is the opening chorus of the fifth cantata, serving as a prelude to the stories of the Three Wise Men and King Herod. It is actually one of just three choral movements Bach composed originally for the *Christmas Oratorio*—the other choruses were all reworkings of earlier material. Set in a three-part form above an unendingly energetic orchestral background, *Ehre sei dir* is a showcase for Bach’s brilliant fugal writing. A brief middle section is slightly more reserved, before a return of the opening music.

**Jonathan Dove** (b.1956) is a successful English composer, particularly in the world of opera: following the success of his comic opera *Flight* in 1998, he has composed nearly 30 operas. Dove has also written extensively for chorus, chamber groups and orchestra. His flute concerto, *The Magic Flute Dances*, was written for Welsh flutist Emily Beynon, who played its premiere in February 2000 with the Milton Keynes City Orchestra. It is freely based upon Mozart's 1791 opera *The Magic Flute*. Dove provides the following imaginative description:

“What happens to the magic flute at the end of Mozart's opera? Does Tamino give it back to the three ladies? Does it lie in a box, forgotten, at the back of a cupboard? Or does it, perhaps, when no one's looking, come out and dance, singing to itself about Tamino's adventures? When Emily Beynon asked me for a concerto that had some connection with Mozart, I thought this could be an opportunity to let the flute out of its box, not to play the music it plays in the opera, but to play the music it has heard other people sing. The concerto begins with music from the moment before Tamino and Pamina walk through fire and water, while the flute plays fragments of ideas it will explore later. The opening chords of the Overture open a door into the imaginary world of the flute, and usher in its first reminiscence: the Queen of the Night, a character with whom it seems particularly fascinated. In the next section the flute dances around ideas from the Overture; a short cadenza (a recollection of Tamino fleeing from the serpent) leads to the moment Tamino sees Pamina's portrait. The next memories are a little confused—Papageno left alone, no one answering his pipes. His isolation is echoed by that of Pamina, bewildered by Tamino's silence. The vibraphone announces the three helpful boys; their music becomes a kind of passacaglia. This is followed by a scherzo, made out of Pamina's and Papageno's duet; and then, with the flute once again entranced by the Queen of the Night, the opening chords of the Overture return, closing the memory door.”

Though this is clearly a challenging virtuoso piece and music written by a 21st-century composer, Dove handles the quotations from the opera with a mix of seriousness, wit, and good humor worthy of the Mozart original.

Romantic composer **Charles Gounod** set a lovely *cantabile* melody above one of **Bach's** keyboard preludes to create 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. It is heard here in an arrangement by Dan Goeller, a South Dakota-based conductor, composer, and arranger.

Though hymn-writer **George Ratcliffe Woodward** penned the words to ***Ding Dong Merrily on High*** in 1924, he reached back much earlier for the melody: it was originally a tune included in a 16th-century dance manual, **Thionot Arbeau's** *Orchesographie* (1588) intended to be played with a circle-dance called the bransle. Mack Wilberg's sprightly arrangement plays up the "dancey" nature of this melody. It begins with girls' voices and a lively accompaniment of bells and woodwinds, and gradually involves the entire choir and orchestra. Though he was respected in his day as composer of operas and ballet scores (including the well-known *Giselle*) **Adolphe Adam** is known to American audiences mostly 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 an arrangement for tenor voice and orchestra by Dan Goeller.

The distinctive musical style of Englishman **John Rutter**, together with his skill as choral conductor have made him a familiar name in the world of choral music. (Nearly all of our holiday programs over the last quarter century have featured at least one of his pieces!) His ***Gloria***, composed in 1974, was one of his first works to gain wide attention. It was commissioned by a chorus in Omaha, Nebraska, but in relatively short order it became a favorite of choruses throughout the United States and England. The *Gloria* text is drawn from the Latin liturgy, and it has proved a fertile source of inspiration to composers from the Middle Ages onwards. Rutter provides the following description of his *Gloria*: "The Latin text, drawn from the Ordinary of the Mass, is a centuries-old challenge to the composer: exalted, devotional, and jubilant by turns. My setting, which is based upon one of the Gregorian chants associated with the text, divides into three movements roughly corresponding with traditional symphonic structure." The original version was accompanied by a brass and percussion ensemble, but at this program we feature Rutter's later arrangement for chorus and full orchestra.

And as always, the finale to our first half is the concluding "**Hallelujah**" chorus from Part II of **George Frideric 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.

*Deck the Halls* is one of the oldest Christmas songs generally heard today—a 400-year-old Welsh carol that features the “fa-la-la” refrains popular in 16th-century madrigals. It is heard here in an arrangement for orchestra by Carmen Dragon. Dragon, a composer, arranger, and conductor, was a fixture of the Hollywood music scene for decades. He conducted music for thousands of hours of radio broadcasts, and composed film scores, winning an Oscar in 1944 for *Cover Girl*. He remains best-known today for hundreds of orchestral arrangements—mostly created for performances at the Hollywood Bowl—that are mainstays of orchestral “Pops” programs. Dragon wrote his boisterous arrangement of *Deck the Halls* for a 1957 recording by the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra.

Composer **Noel Regney** and his wife, lyricist **Gloria Shayne Baker** wrote the Holiday standard *Do You Hear What I Hear?* in 1962 and it became a huge hit for Bing Crosby in 1963, selling over a million copies. Though usually heard as a sentimental song to the Baby Jesus, Regney later said “I am amazed that people can think they know the song, and not know it is a prayer for peace.” It was written in October 1962, at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis, when nuclear war seemed imminent. Contrary to their usual practice, Regney wrote the lyric, and his wife wrote the melody. The result was a song that they found so moving that they couldn't bear to sing it at first. The final stanza, with its “Pray for peace, people everywhere!” makes this as appropriate in 2021 as it was in 1962. Here, the popular choral arrangement by Harry Simeone is combined with a new orchestration by Brant Adams.

**Peter Jaffe** is a well-regarded conductor and guest conductor who currently leads two orchestras in California: the Stockton Symphony Orchestra and the Folsom Lake Symphony Orchestra. He is also active as an arranger. Jaffe wrote his *Symph-Hanukkah* for the Stockton Symphony Orchestra in 2018. As its punning title suggests, this is a lighthearted work. Jaffe uses the familiar *Dreidel Song* to link together several traditional Hanukkah songs: *Ma'oz tzur* (*Rock of Ages*), *Mi y'malel* (*Who Can Retell?*), *Hanukkah chag yafeh* (*Hanukkah, Beautiful Holiday*), *Blessing over the Hanukkah Lights*, and *Sevivon* (*Spinning Top*). This witty medley works in a bit of *klezmer* style along the way and ends, in what the composer describes as a “blaze of glory,” with *O Hanukkah*, and a joyful shout.

*I Saw Three Ships Come Sailing In* is an old English carol, dating from the 17th century or earlier. The notion that ships could somehow sail into the city of Bethlehem is geographical wishful thinking, but the text is metaphorical and joyous, possibly relating to the three wise men who visited the baby Jesus. In this arrangement by James Stephenson, it is combined with the Provençal carol *Bring a*

***Torch Jeannette Isabella***. This song, which may have existed by the 14th century, might actually have been a “carol” in the original sense of the word. Medieval French carols were dance songs, and in this case it may have been connected to the ancient Provençal tradition of erecting an elaborate *crèche*, or nativity scene, to honor the Baby Jesus.

This section of the program ends with a pair of slightly more contemporary holiday songs. The ever-popular ***The Christmas Song*** (*Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire*), with all of those cozy wintertime images, was actually written during the roasting heat of a California summer. In his autobiography, **Mel Tormé** related the story how in July 1945, he drove to the home of his lyricist and collaborator **Robert Wells** in Toluca Lake. He found the lyrics lying on the piano, and when Wells finally appeared sweating and hot even in shorts and a t-shirt, he told Tormé: “It was so damn hot today, I thought I’d write something to cool myself off. All I could think of was Christmas and cold weather.” Tormé replied: “You know, this just might make a song.” *The Christmas Song* was written in about 45 minutes later that day. Tormé quickly showed the song to his friend Nat Cole, whose 1946 hit recording is now a beloved holiday classic. ***It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year*** was written by the songwriting team of **Eddie Pola** and **George Wyle**. Pola and Wyle, who specialized in silly novelty numbers like *I Said My Pajamas* (*And Put On My Prayers*), are largely forgotten today, aside from this exuberant holiday waltz—a big hit for Andy Williams in 1963.

Part of our tradition since 2005 has been to welcome the Mount Zion Gospel Choir to perform on this program, singing works composed and arranged by its codirector **Leotha Stanley**. They open their set with a Stanley original, ***Christmas Hope***. They continue with a medley of ***Away in a Manger*** and ***Yes, This is Jesus***. *Away in a Manger* is relatively unusual among Christmas carols in existing with two equally well-known melodies—it is familiar both as a hymn tune published in 1887 by James Murray and as a lilting “cradle song” written in 1895 by William Kirkpatrick; it is this second version that Mr. Stanley has adapted here. The words first appeared in a Sunday school magazine in 1884, attributed—undoubtedly incorrectly—to Martin Luther. Kirkpatrick, a prolific songwriter, wrote his version of *Away in a Manger*, itself an adaptation of an earlier hymn tune, for a Christmas musical in Philadelphia. Stanley describes his *Yes, This is Jesus* as a “reply” to *Away in a Manger*: an assurance that this baby, born in the humblest of surroundings was indeed the savior. The Mt. Zion Gospel Choir is joined by our soloists and the other two choirs for the finale, ***Christmas Time is Here***. This another Stanley original, with lyrics of reassurance and hope that respond to the “cloud that has been hanging over all of us in the last 18 months.”

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

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texts and translations

**Bach, *Ehre sei dir, Gott, gesungen* from the *Christmas Oratorio*, BWV 248**

*Ehre sei dir, Gott, gesungen,  
dir sei Lob und Dank bereit.  
dich erhebet alle Welt,  
weil dir unser Wohl gefällt,  
weil anheut  
unser aller Wunsch gelungen,  
weil uns dein Segen so herrlich erfreut.*

Let honor to you, God, be sung  
for you let praise and thanks be prepared.  
all the world exalts you  
because our welfare is pleasing to you;  
because today  
all our wishes have been achieved;  
because your blessing delights us so gloriously.

**Bach/Gounod, *Ave Maria***

*Ave Maria, gratia plena,  
Dominus tecum;  
benedicta tu in mulieribus,  
et benedictus fructus ventris tui.*

Hail Mary, full of grace,  
the Lord is with you;  
you are blessed among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

**Rutter, *Gloria***

**I**

*Gloria in excelsis Deo,  
et in terra pax hominibus  
bonae voluntatis.  
Laudamus te, benedicimus te,  
adoramus te, glorificamus te.  
Gratias agimus tibi propter  
magnam gloriam tuam.*

Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth, peace towards  
men of good will.  
We praise You, we bless You,  
we adore You, we glorify You.  
We give thanks to You for  
Your great glory.

**II**

*Domine Deus, rex coelestis,  
Pater omnipotens,  
Domini Fili unigenite,  
Jesu Christe altissime,  
Domine Deus, Agnus Dei,  
Filius Patris.  
Qui tollis peccata mundi,  
miserere nobis,  
suscipe deprecationem nostram.  
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,  
miserere nobis.*

Lord God, heavenly king,  
Father almighty,  
Lord, the only-begotten Son,  
Jesus Christ, the most high,  
Lord God, Lamb of God,  
Son of the Father.  
You, who takes away the sins  
the world, have mercy upon us,  
and receive our prayers.  
You, who sits at the right hand of  
the Father, have mercy upon us.

**III**

*Quoniam tu solus sanctus,  
tu solus Dominus,*

For You alone are holy,  
You alone are the Lord,

*tu solus altissimus,  
Jesu Christe;  
cum Sancto Spiritu  
in gloria Dei Patris.  
Amen.*

You alone are the most exalted,  
O Jesus Christ;  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father.  
Amen.