

Madison Symphony Orchestra Program Notes
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We welcome you to the 2023 edition of “A Madison Symphony Christmas”—our most popular program each season, and a well-established and beloved Madison holiday tradition. It features hundreds of musicians on stage: the MSO and Madison Symphony Chorus, groups from Madison Youth Choirs, the Mount Zion Gospel Choir, and two fine vocal soloists: soprano Evelyn Saavedra and tenor Lemmie Pulliam. As always, the show opens with more Classical fare: choral and solo works by Bach, Mozart, Poulenc and more. The MSO features one of its own, Linda Pereksta, as soloist in Vivaldi’s *Piccolo Concerto*. You’ll head into intermission with Handel’s great *Hallelujah* chorus in your ears. The second half is devoted to a wide variety of lighter and more popular holiday music, ending with a Gospel finale...and a chance for some audience participation.

Our opening work, *Angels We Have Heard on High*, had its origins as an anonymous French carol, but was adapted as an English carol in about 1860 by an Anglican bishop, James Chadwick. It is heard here in an arrangement by Mack Wilberg, director of the famed Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Sweet solo voices begin this version, which continues with five increasingly grand verses and a stirring coda.

The *Mass in B minor*, **Johann Sebastian Bach’s** most monumental sacred work, was completed in the last year of his life, but it is actually an immense patchwork of movements assembled over the course of some thirty years. The choruses heard on this program date from the 1730s, when Bach was becoming dissatisfied with the limited resources available to him as Kantor of Lewipzig Thomaskirche. He made several attempts during this period to better his situation. In 1733, he sent a “Missa,” a setting of the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* of the mass, to the opulent Dresden court of the Elector of Saxony. Bach hoped that this sample of his work, which he referred to as a “trifling product of that science which I have attained in Musique,” would lead to a position in Dresden. In the end, only a more modest request was granted: that the Elector name him court composer, a position of little more than honorary significance. The chorus *Gloria in excelsis Deo* is joyous, with complex vocal lines intertwining with a trumpet *ritornello*. At *Et in terra pax hominibus*, the mood becomes more pensive, with a pair of musical ideas combined in ever more complicated counterpoint.

Before **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** married Constanze Weber in August 1782, he made a solemn vow that he would write a Mass of thanksgiving to be presented in his hometown of Salzburg. This was at least partly to pacify his father Leopold, who strongly objected to the marriage. It took nearly a year and half for Mozart to make good on his vow...and then only partially. His *Mass in C minor* was incomplete, without a *Credo* and *Agnus Dei*. The portions that were complete were performed at the Salzburg church of St. Peter in October 1783. Despite its “unfinished” nature, the *Mass in C minor* stands alongside the equally unfinished *Requiem* as one of his greatest works. By all accounts, Constanza Mozart had a fine, if small, soprano voice. The soprano solos in the Mass were written for her, and she sang them at the first performance. Among the music Mozart wrote for his wife is the aria *Laudamus te*, part of the Mass’s *Gloria* movement: a brilliant *coloratura* showpiece for solo soprano.

Antonio Vivaldi was the most prominent and influential Italian composer of the late Baroque. He composed in nearly every genre—some 40 of his operas, dozens of his sacred works, and nearly 100 of his chamber works survive—but it was his 500 concertos that had the broadest influence. These concertos were widely circulated and emulated in Vivaldi’s day, and it was he who established many of the standard operating procedures followed by his contemporaries Bach, Handel, and Telemann in their concerto writing. Most of his works were written for use at the Ospedale della Pietà, the girl’s orphanage in Venice where he spent much of his early career. The orchestra he directed at the Pietà must have been a fine one, and the concertos were written to feature either Vivaldi himself (a leading Italian violinist), other professional musicians associated with the school, or the students themselves. His *Piccolo Concerto* was probably written originally for the *flautino* (sopranino recorder), but it is most frequently heard today on the piccolo. Though we are unsure as who played the solo part originally, Vivaldi was associated with at least two fine German recorder players who taught at the Pietà, Ignaz Sieber and Ludwig Erdman, and met many other players who toured through Venice in the earlyh century. The concerto is in the standard Baroque form, with three contrasting movements. The opening *Allegro* features the usual Baroque alternation of tutti sections with more virtuosic writing for the soloist. The *Largo* is set in the sensuous *Siciliano* rhythm. The closing movement, *Allegro molto*, has a more sprightly character, and again leaves plenty of room for flashy playing by the soloist.

John Rutter is celebrated as both a choral conductor and as a composer of sacred music, 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 several of Rutter’s Christmas works over the years, and on this program, he is represented by his *Star Carol*, an alternately playful and solemn song on the birth of Jesus.

The Belgian organist and composer **César Franck** would eventually be appointed organ professor of the Paris Conservatory in 1872, but he spent nearly all of his working as a church musician. He settled permanently in Paris in 1845, securing a series of increasingly prestigious organ jobs that led eventually to his appointment as organist at the basilica of Ste. Clothilde in 1858, a position he held until his death in 1890. His beloved *Panis Angelicus* was composed in 1872 for the choir of Ste. Clothilde. It is part of a 13th-century Latin communion hymn written by St. Thomas Aquinas. Franck’s setting shows his gift for presenting a straightforward and lyrical melody above skillful and complex counterpoint.

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 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 an arrangement for orchestra and solo voice by William Ryden.

Francis Poulenc, known most often as a musical humorist, was also a deeply religious man. He rediscovered his Catholic faith while in his late 30s, and many of his choral works, beginning with the *Mass in G Major* of 1937 were settings of Latin religious texts. Poulenc's religious vision reflected his own *joie de vivre*, and his religious music is never pompous or conventional. The *Gloria*, one of Poulenc’s last completed works, was written in 1959-60, for a commission from the Koussevitsky Music Foundation, and first performed in Boston in 1961. Poulenc divides the traditional text of the Gloria, part of the Latin Mass, into six sections, three of them performed here. The music reflects both a deep understanding of the text and Poulenc’s own joyful spirituality. The opening movement begins with delicate orchestral textures, but soon gives way to exuberant calls of *Gloria*—a word returns constantly throughout this movement.

Nowhere in the Gloria is Poulenc's sense of humor more evident than in the witty *Laudamus te*. Only in the central section (*Gratias agimus tibi gloriam tuam*), does the mood become sober, but even here, there is a sense of tongue-in-cheek dignity that shows that Poulenc's praises are offered with a cheerful spirit. The final movement, *Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris*, beginning with an intonation by men's voices of the opening prayer, returns to the exalted mood of the first movement. Poulenc expands on this text, an invocation of the the Trinity, in an elaborate development section, but the movement closes with hushed *Amens* from the chorus and soprano. [MSO historical note: In 1963, just two years after its premiere, The Madison Civic Chorus and Madison Civic Symphony—predecessors of today's chorus and orchestra—then under the direction of Roland Johnson, gave the first Midwestern performance of this now-standard work. - M.A.]

As always, we turn to **Handel's *Messiah*** for the finale to our first half: the concluding *Hallelujah* chorus from Part II of the oratorio. This chorus, undoubtedly the single most famous work by Handel, has been a sensation since the first performance of *Messiah* in Dublin in 1742. 50 years later, while on tour in England, Joseph Haydn heard a festival performance of *Messiah* in May of 1791, and was profoundly moved: bursting into tears during the *Hallelujah* chorus. (The experience was a primary inspiration for his own great oratorio, *The Creation*, of 1798.) The chorus is heard today in contexts that Handel—tireless self-promoter though he was—never dreamed of: movies, TV ads and sitcoms, and in cover versions in styles ranging from gospel and jazz to rock, punk, and rap. The music is in no danger of becoming a mere cliché, however: it remains true to Handel's original intent. Following the first performance of *Messiah* in London, the composer remarked: "My Lord, I should be sorry if I only entertained them. I wished to make them better."

John Williams is one of America's greatest film composer of over 80 film scores. We begin the second half of this program with combined choirs singing a selection from Williams's music for the *Home Alone* movies. *Home Alone* was the hit of the holiday season in 1990. This film, pitting young Kevin (Macaulay Culkin) against a pair of bumbling burglars was an enjoyable blend of sentimentality and slapstick nastiness. *Home Alone II: Lost in New York*, released in 1992, repeated the same formula. Williams wrote music for both movies, and his scores feature just the right mixture of naïve sweetness and naughtiness. *Merry Christmas Merry Christmas* appeared in the second movie, an irrepressible holiday song packed with good cheer.

Most of our notions about Santa and his standard operating procedures—reindeer, rooftops, and chimneys—come straight from Clement Clark Moore’s classic 1823 poem *A Visit From St. Nicholas*, better known today as ***‘Twas the Night Before Christmas***. There were many musical settings, but the best-known was written by **Ken Darby**, a successful film and choral composer throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Darby’s version became a huge hit for Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians in 1942, in a colorful arrangement heard here, created by Waring’s arranger **Harry Simeone**. The version heard here was further adapted by William Schoenfeld

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 with *O Hanukkah* in what the composer describes as a “blaze of glory,” and a joyful shout.

Amaury Veray Torregrosa was a leading figure in Puerto Rican music from the 1950s through his death in 1995. A composer, singer, teacher, and writer, Veray was an advocate for preserving traditional Puerto Rican forms in contemporary music. He composed his most famous song, the ***Villancico Yaucano (Song of a Man from Yauco)*** on Christmas Eve in 1951, when he was leader of a church choir in the small coastal city of Yauco, his home town. The *villancico* was a musical form that originated in medieval Spain, but by the 20th century, *villancicos* were generally simple Christmas songs in both Spain and Latin America. Veray’s *Villancico Yaucano*, sung by a humble peasant to the newborn Jesus, is heard here in a new arrangement by Scott Gendel.

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 of 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.

In 1963, singer Andy Williams recorded *Happy Holiday / It's the Holiday Season*, a medley that brought together a pair of holiday songs from the 1940s. *Happy Holiday* was written by the great American songwriter **Irving Berlin**, and it was introduced in the 1942 Paramount movie musical *Holiday Inn*, where it was crooned by Bing Crosby. Though its popularity was dwarfed by the film's greatest hit, *White Christmas*, Crosby's recording of *Happy Holiday* was a respectable hit as well, and other singers had covered it by 1963. *It's the Holiday Season* was written in 1945 by **Kay Thompson**. She was a successful actress and dancer, and music director, and songwriter. She had been closely associated with Williams since 1947, when a 20-year-old Williams and his three brothers started touring with Thompson as a nightclub act. (Thompson became a mentor to Williams, and helped him to develop a solo career in the 1950s.) Thompson sang *It's the Holiday Season* a few times in the 1940s, but it was not recorded until she combined it with Berlin's *Happy Holiday* in 1963 and gave it to Williams. It became a tremendous hit for Williams that year, together with his cover of *It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year*. (These cheerful songs seem to have been a welcome escape for Americans still reeling from the Kennedy assassination.) Their popularity led to several hit Christmas albums by Williams, and a series of equally successful television Christmas aired from the 1960s through the 1980s—all of which earned Williams the nickname “Mr. Christmas!”

We close, as usual with a rousing Gospel finale led by the Mt. Zion Gosele Choir, singing music arranged for the MSO by its codirector **Leatha Stanley**. The set opens with a pair of Stanley originals, beginning with his new song *Special Christmas Love*. We introduced the second song, *Christmas Peace*, at these concerts in 2017. The final song, sung by all three choirs is the familiar spiritual *Go Tell it on the Mountain*. This traditional song seems to have had its origins in the early 1800s. It was popularized by the Fisk Jubilee Singers, a remarkable choir from Nashville's Fisk University, whose tours after the Civil War brought African American music to a worldwide audience. The most familiar version of this spiritual was published in 1907 by a Fisk professor and longtime director of the Jubilee Singers, **John Wesley Work, Jr.**

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