

## Holiday Concerts December, 2017

### Program Notes

**Gaudete** opens the concert with a joyful celebration of the birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary. Published in *Piae Cantiones* (Holy Songs) in 1582, this landmark collection of medieval and renaissance songs was meant to capture music in print so that it would not be lost forever. Commissioned originally for Chanticleer, Pennsylvania composer Steven Sametz, captures the energetic late 16<sup>th</sup> century text with his use of changing meters throughout.

Giovanni Gabrieli was principal organist and composer at the *Basilica de San Marco* in Venice from 1584 until his death in 1612. His choral music took particular advantage of the unique design of the church. Writing for multiple choirs, Gabrieli placed groups of singers and instruments in each of the choir lofts on either side of the church. The acoustics of the Basilica are such that, despite the distance between the performers, all the parts can be heard with perfect clarity. This music is especially meaningful to PCC because it has been invited to sing in this church during its summer 2018 Italy tour. **Jubilate Deo á 8** was written for one choir in eight parts (SSAATTBB).

The **Wassail Song** grew out of Vaughan Williams's folk song collecting efforts. He published his arrangement of the tune he had gathered as the last in a collection of folk song settings, the *Five English Folk Songs* of 1913. Although Vaughan Williams was to turn to folk songs for inspiration through much of his life, the five arrangements here are often considered his best; certainly they are the most elaborate, with the material treated freely throughout. The tune used is sometimes called "The Gloucestershire Wassail" to distinguish it from "The Somerset Wassail," each title indicating the venue where the song was collected (the "Wassail" song most of us know today—"Here we come a wassailing among the leaves so green"—comes from Yorkshire). The Gloucester Wassail can be traced back at least as far as the eighteenth century. It is one of many songs celebrating the habit of "wassailing" from door to door, with its expectations of drink in exchange for song.

Gustav Holst composed **Christmas Day** in 1910, five years before he wrote *The Planets*. The piece is dedicated "To the music students of Morley College," and it was premiered at Morley College on January 28, 1911. Holst originally wrote the work for chorus and orchestra, but he stated that it could be performed with any combination of instruments, including piano. Our performance will feature chorus and organ, the version that is most frequently performed today. Holst uses a number of well-known carols in *Christmas Day*, including "Good Christian Men, Rejoice," "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen," "The First Noel," and "Old Breton Melody."

**Once, In Bethlehem** is a newly composed piece that captures the simplicity of the Christmas story. Before turning his attention primarily to composing in 2009, Donald McCullough was the director of the Master Chorale of Washington in the John F. Kennedy Center Concert Hall for more than a decade. A resident of Atlantic Beach, FL, he is the Chorus Master of the Jacksonville Symphony Chorus and the Organist/Choirmaster at the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd.

The Norwegian carol, **O Yule Full of Gladness**, was translated into English and arranged by Carolyn Jennings. In this case, yule is a synonym for Christmas or Christmastide. Jennings is Professor Emerita of Music of St. Olaf College. Choral music is one of her favorite mediums, and she has written over a hundred choral arrangements and compositions. She was an active church musician for over 30 years at St. John's Lutheran Church in Northfield, MN as a choir director.

Matthew Culloton's arrangement of **Infant Holy, Infant Lowly** places the familiar melody of this Polish carol in each of the voice parts while the rest of the voices provide a beautiful vocal accompaniment. The Polish tune is a rounded bar form (AABA). Its lines consist of short figures and phrases bound together by the consistent rhythmic pattern of the Polish mazurka made famous by Frederic Chopin. The lyrics were paraphrased in English in 1920 by Edith M.G. Reed who was an associate at the Royal College of Organists.

**The First Noel** (also spelled "Nowell") is a traditional English carol. The word "Noel" comes from the French word "Noël" meaning Christmas, and the Latin word "natalis," meaning birthday. The carol first appeared in its current form in an 1823 publication entitled *Carols Ancient and Modern*. In this sing-along you will have the chance to blend your voices with the Pittsburgh Concert Chorale. Watch for your cue!

In 1816, Scottish poet James Montgomery wrote the lyrics to **Angels From the Realms of Glory**. The tune, Regent Square, written by Henry T. Smart in 1925, became the beloved setting that people know today. This arrangement by contemporary composer Dan Forrest seeks to musically heighten the story of the text, from the announcement of the angels to calling the shepherds, sages, and finally all creation to "worship Christ the newborn King."

Recorded by both Peggy Lee and Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians, you may have heard **Ring Those Christmas Bells** most recently with its Christmas 2015 performance by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir (MTC). Ryan T. Murphy, Assistant Conductor of the MTC, conducted them in their televised performance of his arrangement, the version we will be singing.

There are some songs that simply define the holiday season. Leroy Anderson's **Sleigh Ride** is one of those songs. Written in 1948 and recorded by Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops in 1949, it has become the orchestra's signature song. Lyrics to the song were written in 1950 by Mitchell Parish, and the first known vocal recording was made later that year by the Andrews Sisters. In his 2004 biography of Leroy Anderson, author Steve Metcalf states, "Sleigh Ride ... has been performed and recorded by a wider array of musical artists than any other piece in the history of Western music." Giddy-up! Let's go!

A call and response, typical of African-American spirituals, is a set of two distinct phrases where the second voice is heard as a response to the first. Throughout **Oh, Jerusalem in the Morning** the title phrase forms a response to the unfolding of the Christmas story. This style foreshadows the purpose and end of Jesus' life on earth as it is constantly intertwined with the nativity narrative. Beginning with unison voices, this complex arrangement builds to a climax with nine different voice parts. Joseph H. Jennings is the Music Director Emeritus of Chanticleer, having served as Music Director from its second year in 1984 until 2008.

Hanukka, the Jewish festival which coincides with the Christmas season, celebrates the resanctification of the Temple of Solomon. When the Maccabees defeated the Assyrians they returned to the Temple but found only a single flask of oil, enough for one day, to keep the Eternal Flame in the Temple burning. Although they knew it would take eight days to prepare new olive oil, they lighted the lamp; it miraculously burned for eight days until the supply of oil was replenished. **S’Vivon**, a traditional Hebrew song, means *dreydl*, a small top with four sides. Each side of the dreydl contains one of the four Hebrew initials of the phrase “A Great Miracle Happened There.” The first section of the piece evokes the celebratory nature of the holiday, imploring *sov, sov, sov*, or spin, spin, spin because Hanukka is indeed a good holiday. This song was arranged for treble voices by Betty Bertaux, founder of the Maryland Children’s Chorus.

Written in 1950, **Everybody’s Waitin’ for The Man with the Bag** has been recorded by artists as diverse as Kay Starr, Lee Womack, Kellie Pickler and Seth McFarlane. This barbershop arrangement features the Chorale’s men. Barbershop singing is a distinctively American art form. The lead is the melody singer with tenor harmonizing above the tune, the baritone singing above or below the lead, and the bass providing the low notes as the foundation for the vocal quartet.

Unlike most of the music on this program, **I Want to Stare at My Phone with You** was written just this year by Nathan Howe. The tongue-in-cheek setting captures today’s generation with its focus on social media and instant connection through smart devices. Howe, an American composer from Colorado, specializes in composing choral and string orchestra music.

The lyrics to **Away in a Manger** are now believed to be of anonymous American origin, although for many years the text was attributed to Martin Luther and was even known as “Luther’s Cradle Song.” It is commonly sung with one of two tunes: the first by James Ramsey in 1887 and the second, upon which this arrangement is based, by William J. Kirkpatrick in 1895. Mack Wilberg, conductor and organist of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, maintains the child-like simplicity of the song by having unison voices sing the first two verses, and then a full four-part setting for the final verse.

The hymn **Joy to the World** was first published in 1719 in Isaac Watts’ collection *The Psalms of David: Imitated in the language of the New Testament, and applied to the Christian state and worship*. It is Watts’ paraphrase of the second portion of Psalm 98. The words were set to a melody believed to have been composed by George Frideric Handel, although Handel did not write the entire tune. Please join in singing this beloved carol with the PCC.

The lyrics to **Hark, the Herald Angels Sing!** were written in 1739 by Charles Wesley, brother of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church. Wesley requested that his words be sung to a somber tune, and originally they were. One hundred years later, Felix Mendelssohn set the words to a new melody. It is this version of “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing!” that we know today. This setting by Robert Hunter features the PCC and organist David Billings in a triumphant finale that captures the wonder and majesty of this glorious season.