

**DECEMBER CLEAR AND BRIGHT**  
**December 21 and 22, 2019**  
**PROGRAM NOTES**  
**By Ed Wight**

**REGINA COELI**

by Orlando di Lassus

The 29-volume New Grove Dictionary of Music rests on the work of the greatest musical scholars in their respective fields. Such experienced professionals rarely employ superlative praise; their wide-ranging scholarship is too knowledgeable for facile comparison. So when the article on Orlando di Lassus states he was “in his time [the late 16<sup>th</sup> century] the best-known and most widely admired musician in Europe,” you take notice, because such praise remains rare in that Dictionary. His celebration of Mary, Queen of Heaven includes cadences and chromaticism outside the home base – the modal emphasis on G – reflecting his special penchants for flowing polyphonic lines and dramatic harmony.

**MAGNIFICAT PRIMA TONI**

by Giovanni da Palestrina

The Norton/Grove Dictionary states that “Palestrina ranks with Lassus and Byrd as...the greatest of Renaissance masters.” One mark of Palestrina’s greatness lies in the remarkably wide diffusion of his published works. Another aspect is that as styles changed, while most Renaissance composers were quickly forgotten, Palestrina proved the exception. The disciplined purity of his smooth vocal lines and strict handling of dissonance stood as a conservative model for vocal composers over the next 200 years. Palestrina wrote over 30 settings of the *Magnificat* text, and the style of this one is particularly expressive. He temporarily abandons the seamless vocal writing of his five and six-voice motets for at times dramatic, echo-like dialogue between the two choirs, sometimes at an immediately different pitch level. The late 16<sup>th</sup> century witnesses the peak of the poly-choral vocal art – *cori spezzati* (“separated choirs” in the cathedral) – and pieces like this demonstrate why.

**ALL MY HEART**

by Randall Stroepe

Randall Stroepe takes his place among the handful of composers with special accomplishments in different fields on today’s program. He earned a Masters Degree in Vocal Performance (University of Colorado), a Doctorate in Conducting (Arizona State University) – and yet has also published over 165 compositions! This 20<sup>th</sup>-century American composer sets a 17<sup>th</sup>-century German hymn by Paul Gerhardt, translated by a 19<sup>th</sup>-century English writer Catherine Winkworth. His rich choral textures and harmony celebrating the sacred spirit evoke the similar approach in another great English choral composer, Edward Elgar.

## **CREATOR of the STARS of NIGHT**

by Gabriel Jackson

Born in Bermuda in 1962, Gabriel Jackson continues to fashion an award-winning career as a prominent British choral composer. He studied composition at the Royal College of Music, served as associate composer for the BBC Singers (2010-13) and won the coveted British Composer Award (from the British Academy of Songwriters, Composers and Authors) three times. Works for solo organ constitute another favorite genre, and also play a role in this piece. He fashions a remarkable setting of an anonymous 7<sup>th</sup> century text honoring God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. It opens quietly, in a luminous homophonic texture, with the frequent sustained parts in the lower voices suggesting organ pedal points. The sudden choral modulation coinciding with the prominent introduction of the organ – in celebration of those three aspects of the Lord – provides the single most striking moment on the concert. And the unexpected return to the quiet opening material for an “Amen” seems almost haunting after such a presentation.

## **BALULALOW**

by Oliver Tarney

The title means “Lullaby,” and the 16<sup>th</sup>-century lyrics depict Mary singing to “young, sweet Jesus” in the cradle. The Scottish poet John Wedderburn worked with Martin Luther in Germany around 1540. He published this Scottish translation of Luther’s Christmas Eve carol “Vom Himmel Hoch” in the book *Ane Compendious Buik of Godly and Spirituall Sangis* (“A compendious book of Godly and Spiritual Songs”) in 1567. Born in 1984, British singer and composer Oliver Tarney earned a Masters Degree in Composition at Manchester University. His music always maintains a sense of tonality “but with some interesting harmonic effects and nicely spicey bits” (critic Robert Hugall). Tarney offers many such expressive harmonies in this remarkable setting, the richest on today’s program.

## **THERE IS NO ROSE**

by Alan Smith

The text and music appeared in the “Trinity Roll,” a fifteenth-century manuscript in the Trinity College, Cambridge library. Both the middle-English text – “Ther is no rose of swych vertu” – and the identification of Mary with the rose reflect Medieval practice. Prize-winning British composer Alan Smith specializes in vocal and choral compositions. His primarily light textures and sweet harmony create a lovely, gentle setting of this ancient text.

## **O MAGNUM MYSTERIUM**

by Ēriks Ešēvalds

Early Christians continued the Jewish practice of reciting prayers at certain hours of the day or night. The Matins texts (also called Vigil) are chanted at 2:00 a.m. and *O Magnum Mysterium* is a responsorial chant from the Christmas texts of Matins. It depicts the wonder (“mystery”) of Christ being born in a stable, and only the barnyard animals receiving the first sight of Him.

Eriks Esenvalds reinforces that sense of mystery with this choral setting accompanied by some other-worldly sounds generated by tuned water glasses and crystal bowls. He is a Latvian choral composer with an increasingly world-wide presence, frequent commissions, and a particular favorite of the Southern Oregon Repertory Singers.

### **SANS DAY CAROL**

by John Rutter

Born in London in 1945, John Rutter has become “probably the most popular and widely-performed composer of his generation” (New Grove). He says that *Sans Day Carol* “is a corruption of “St. Day Carol,” a traditional Cornish tune. The song is also known from its first line “Now the holly bears a berry” and “it is unusual in equating the holly with the Virgin Mary” (New Oxford Book of Carols). In this charming and light-hearted setting of an occasionally dark text, the women sing the first verse, men the second before the women join in the refrain, and the final verse alludes to the Resurrection.

### **DING DONG MERRILY ON HIGH**

Arr. by Stuart Nicholson

The melody for *Ding Dong Merrily on High* first appeared as an instrumental dance tune, without text. Thoinot Arbeau, a French writer and vicar, published it in the *Orchesographie*, a 16<sup>th</sup>-century French dance collection from 1588. The collection remains invaluable, one of the most detailed descriptions of Renaissance dances - correlating steps and music together. It also “reveals much about how 16<sup>th</sup>-century dance music was performed” (Norton / Grove Encyclopedia). George Woodward wrote the modern lyrics over 300 years later, first appearing in *The Cambridge Carol Book* of 1924. Stuart Nicholson has some fun, shifting the accents of this standard 4/4 dance tune into a more complex 8/8. And his final rambunctious dialogue of the organ’s augmented sixth and flat-seventh chords alternating with the choir bring the first half of the concert to a lively conclusion.

### **IN DULCI JUBILO**

by Michael Culloton

“This is believed to be the oldest of all German mixed-language hymns” (New Oxford), and also provides a glorious example of classical carols taking centuries to develop completely. A University of Leipzig manuscript from c. 1400 contains the earliest publication of its words and music, though the carol itself probably pre-dates this by two centuries. This version is monophonic, just the melody; the carol had to wait another 150 years for a more familiar harmonized version to appear in 1544 (yet another German publication). Another three centuries elapsed before Thomas Helmore published the first English edition (“Good Christian Men Rejoice”) in his 1854 collection *Carols for Christmas-tide*. The original versions in Germany alternated Latin and German text. Matthew Culloton’s arrangement substitutes English for the initial German passages. He opens with a brief introduction that then serves as accompaniment

for the familiar tune, and recurs periodically, adding further to this harmonically rich arrangement.

### **MID-WINTER**

by Bob Chilcott

The Merriam Webster Encyclopedia of Literature refers to Christina Rossetti as “One of the most important of English women poets in both range and quality. She excelled in works of fantasy, poems for children, and religious poetry.” *In the Bleak Mid-Winter* falls into the latter category. She published this poem about Christ’s birth and second coming in the January 1872 issue of Scribner’s Monthly. Confirming the poem’s popularity, many British composers soon set it to music, including Gustav Holst, Harold Darke, and Benjamin Britten. Bob Chilcott continues that tradition with this heartfelt setting for choir and instruments.

### **DECK THE HALL**

Arr. by John Rutter

This popular carol originated with the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Welsh tune *Nos Galan*, and originally had nothing to do with Christmas. It celebrated the New Year instead, and alternated between two bars of vocal music and two bars for instruments. Later the nonsense refrains “Fa la la” replaced the instrumental parts. In 1862, Thomas Oliphant published the modern English lyrics in *Welsh Melodies*, with the New Year’s reference relegated to the third verse. John Rutter’s delightful setting simply runs amok with those “Fa la las.”

### **LULAJZE, JEZUNIU**

Arr. by Bob Chilcott

Bob Chilcott excels as conductor (London’s Royal College of Music, and BBC Singers), singer (a member of the King’s Singers 1995-1997) and composer. Born in Plymouth, he graduated from Cambridge (King’s College) and now makes his home in Oxfordshire. He offers a sweetly gentle setting, for alto and soprano soloists and chorus, of this 17<sup>th</sup>-century Polish Christmas lullaby.

### **SPANISH CAROL**

Arr. by Andrew Carter

*Esta noche nace un Nino* (“Happy birthday, little baby”) embraces the Spanish Villancico traditions in several different respects. Its joyous, dance-like setting harkens back to the 15<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish origins of the Villancico from Medieval dance lyrics, with melody in the top voice and light counterpoint. Also, from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century on, the Villancico has simply meant “Christmas carol.” This wonderful arrangement by Andrew Carter also invokes traditional Spanish folk-music with its opening modal harmonies of the flat-seventh degree and Phrygian flat-second as well. Yet another celebrated British composer takes us on an international tour, as Andrew Carter heads for the lively warmth of Spain.

## **MARY'S LULLABY**

by John Rutter

Aside from many extended works for choir, John Rutter's lifelong commitment to choral music includes almost forty carols either composed or arranged for choir. *Mary's Lullaby* is one of the most tender and gentle of them all. A record producer mentioned they needed about three more minutes of music for a recording session, and Rutter thus composed both words and music in twenty-four hours. It includes three verses extolling Mary's Son, alternating with the refrain "Sing Lullaby."

## **SILENT NIGHT**

by Franz Gruber and new tune by Peter Anglea

Last Christmas witnessed the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this beloved Austrian carol. Father Joseph Mohr wrote the poem *Stille Nacht* ("Silent Night") in 1816. Two years later he approached his friend, the choirmaster and organist Franz Gruber at Mohr's church in Oberndorf, and asked if he would set it to music. Gruber finished it in time for the 1818 Christmas Eve Mass, where Father Mohr accompanied the choir on guitar in its first performance. At the top of Peter Anglea's new arrangement, he writes that it *incorporates* "Stille Nacht" (similar to all those fictional movies "based on true events.") He keeps the text, with slight variants, but offers a new melody. However, listen closely to the third "verse"; under the choir's textless vocalese the piano plays the original tune.

## **RISE UP SHEPHERD**

Traditional Spiritual arr. by Stacey Gibbs

A longtime favorite musician's joke goes "There are no bad songs – just bad arrangements." Becoming a good arranger is an under-appreciated art, every bit as demanding as becoming a good composer. Frank Sinatra's main arranger, Nelson Riddle, once arranged the song *What is this thing called love?* as a slow ballad for him. Two years later he fashioned an up-tempo big band version for Rosemary Clooney, and both arrangements – totally different – are fabulous. Stacey Gibbs is in demand worldwide as an arranger of spirituals, and you're about to hear why. The text first appeared in 1891 in a story by Ruth Stuart, Kate Wiggin set it to music in 1893, and Gibbs freely borrows from both. For the text, he draws on the title refrain as well as the third verse. Gibbs also employs the spiritual's rich musical heritage (the characteristic and always expressive flatted thirds and sevenths in melody and harmony, and the free-flowing rhythm) in this lively setting for two soloists and choir that brings down the house!