

A New Song of Grace and Truth

St. Olaf Christmas Festival 2019 Program Note Project

The student-led **Program Notes Project** aims to educate students and audience members about the origins and significance of pieces performed at the Christmas Festival and to continue building bridges of communication between scholars, performers, and audience members.

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 Laudamus Te (from Gloria)
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 Jeg er så glad hver julekveld
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 Sanctus (from Requiem)
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 Beautiful Savior

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O Magnum Mysterium
 Wana Baraka

Cantorei:

Adam Lay Ybounden
 The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy

St. Olaf Choir:

Our Father
 Cradle Hymn
 Alleluia

Newborn Glimmer

By Matthew Peterson

Since moving from North Dakota to Sweden, composer and St. Olaf graduate Matthew Peterson ('06) has explored a wide variety of musical genres and expressions. He draws from a variety of sources to inspire his music, from Wisconsin court cases to sacred texts. His works are known for their mystical soundscapes, lifelike power, and wide variety of colors. *Newborn Glimmer* is inspired by the traditional Swedish Hymn "[När juldagsmorgon glimmar](#)," known in English as *When Christmas Morn is Dawning*.

The piece draws from the juxtaposition of dark and light evoked in the hymn and in the nativity narrative. The opening is a lullaby: the oboe and trumpet play the hymn melody over a tender accompaniment in the strings. The oboe continues the lyrical melody line as the music becomes more atmospheric. The haze clears and a sweet, longing string melody emerges. The winds and percussion join, and the orchestra comes together with a series of descending canons, mimicking a grand descent from the heavens. The descent finally comes to rest on an ethereal final chord that fades into the distance. The piece ends with a return of the lullaby, bringing the music to a close with humility and a reminder of Christ's humble beginnings.

Newborn Glimmer is a joint commission by St. Olaf College, James Madison University, and First Baptist Church San Antonio. St. Olaf College is commissioning another major orchestral work from Peterson for a premiere in the fall of 2020. This work will be a Minnesota-legacy composition based on conservationist Sigurd F. Olson's seminal work, *The Singing Wilderness*.

35. När juldagsmorgon glimmar.

BETTY EHRENBORG. TYSK MEL.

1. När jul-dags-mor-gon glimmar, Jag vill till stal-let gå, Där
 2. Hur god du var, som vil-le Till jor-den komma ner! Nu
 3. Dig, Je-sus, vi be-hö-va, Du käre bar-na-vän. Jag

Gud i nat-tens tim-mar Ren vi-lar up-på strå. up-på strå.
 ej i synd jag spil-le Min barndoms dagar mer! dagar mer!
 vill ej mer be-drö-va Med syn-der dig i-gen. dig i-gen.

From *De Ungas Sångbok* (1914), page 38.

A New Magnificat

By Carolyn Jennings

A New Magnificat is a dramatic dialogue between two biblical figures, Mary and Hannah. Set for mixed choir and orchestra, the text is based on the [Song of Mary](#) and the [Song of Hannah](#). The piece begins with sparse textures, one line at a time, and gradually builds in richness and complexity. As a dialogue between two figures, the layering of musical lines adds to the sense of jubilation and triumph associated with their stories. The orchestral part serves to emphasize and uplift the message of hope. *A New Magnificat* is intended to be performed in the liturgical season of [Advent](#) (in Christian theology, the four weeks leading up to Christmas day), a time traditionally associated with a sense of preparation, and expectant waiting for the birth of Jesus.

The title of the piece refers to a magnificat, a very specific kind of music that is based on the text of the Song of Mary (found in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke). The word “song” here refers to a piece of Biblical poetry (most often written in monologue form) meant to dramatize an important event. The Song of Mary is among the best known of these songs, and describes the reaction of [Mary](#), the mother of Jesus, to being told that she will become the mother of God. The text is one of hope, trust, and gratitude.

In the Bible, [Hannah](#) is the mother of Samuel, one of the judges (military leaders) in the Old Testament. Hannah was infertile, and prayed to God for a son, who is born shortly thereafter. The Song of Hannah is recited when she brings Samuel to the temple and gives a thanksgiving prayer. The Song of Hannah is primarily one of gratitude, but there is also a significant theme of justice. Both the Song of Mary and the Song of Hannah refer to earlier parts of the Bible as sources of historical authenticity. They are significant in many ways because they are written from the perspectives of women in a book where women’s perspectives are somewhat rare. The two songs together have similar themes, and refer to similarly miraculous events. Set to music, the texts present a moving dialogue between two very different eras of history, and our own time.

All Earth is Hopeful

Arr. James E. Bobb

Arranged by St. Olaf faculty member Associate Professor James E. Bobb and premiered at the 2015 St. Olaf Christmas Festival, *All Earth is Hopeful* is an interpretation of the Spanish hymn *Toda La Tierra* for the season of advent. The hymn's sound evokes a folk song feel that provides contrast to more traditional hymns. The text was published by Alberto Taulé (1932-2007) in 1972, and later transformed into a musical composition in 1993. Bobb's rendition of the folk song-like hymn is written in four voices with traditional latin percussion and orchestra.¹ Taulé, a Catholic priest in the Catalonia region of Spain, was born in Barcelona where he worked for most of his life after having studied theology and sacred music in Rome. Taulé's text, which in Bobb's arrangement contains both Spanish and English, makes numerous references to biblical characters (from the books of Isaiah, Matthew, Luke, and James).²

All Earth is Hopeful is the second work the massed choir sings while surrounding the audience. It opens acapella with a proclamatory rising fifth from upper voices, suggesting exuberance and the coming of the Messiah. Shortly after, the other voices chime in creating a sense of all-encompassing community. The rhythms in the instrumental accompaniment and voices add vivacity to the singing. An interview with Professor Bobb confirmed that the primary focus of this piece is a declaration of great joy and immense hope that stems from the coming of the Messiah. The text and music articulate that "God is with us" and communicate the belief that the omniscient and miraculous Christ holds a great truth.

Towards the end of the piece, we are brought back to a sense of warmth in the music expressed in the final fermata, signifying the wonder and immense peace that fills the hearts of people. This musical marking also serves as a final moment to linger on this realization as well as implement ideals such as renewal and healing into our world. This piece proclaims the wondrous realization that even the "mountains, hills and valleys" must rejoice since "God is nearing in beauty and grace." *All Earth is Hopeful* sets the scene for the 2019 Christmas Fest theme of *A New Song of Grace and Truth*. But most importantly, it alerts us as a vast community that through God's presence we must strive to create action, search for justice, and make constructive steps in serving the world.

¹ Taulé, Alberto Taulé/Alberto. "All Earth Is Hopeful (Toda La Tierra)." Hymnary.org, hymnary.org/text/all_earth_is_hopeful_the_savior_comes_at.

² "Toda La Tierra (All Earth Is Waiting)." *Toda La Tierra (All Earth Is Waiting)* | Hymnary.org, hymnary.org/hymn/LUYH2013/57.

Blessed Be the God of Israel

By R.V. Williams arr. James E. Bobb

The birth of Jesus is the most famous origin story in the Bible. However, the origin story of John the Baptist holds perhaps just as much significance. John's father, Zecharia, is so shocked by the news that the angel Gabriel gives him of Elizabeth's pregnancy that he loses the ability to speak. He did not understand how she could have fallen pregnant in her advanced age. Nevertheless, Elizabeth gives birth to John, and it is assumed that John will be named Zecharia after his father. Zecharia regains the ability to speak only after he writes "His name is John" on a writing tablet. When his tongue is freed, he proclaims the "Song of Zecharia", which can be found in [Luke 1:67-79](#), and which provides the text for *Blessed Be the God of Israel*.

This processional hymn opens the concert with one of the main themes of Luke. Throughout the gospel, it is shown that God has a special interest in the poor, oppressed, and those who are deemed insignificant or unworthy of praise. Professor James E. Bobb, the arranger of this piece, wanted to show how attention to the oppressed is not only a contemporary issue, but dates back many years to the time of Jesus. Those who were vulnerable, such as Elizabeth and Zecharia, paved the way for Jesus, who was also vulnerable and still able to accomplish so much. Bobb's arrangement echoes the story behind *My Soul Proclaims Your Greatness, Lord*, which highlights Mary as a demure figure who rises to greatness.

Blessed Be the God of Israel is based on *Forest Green*, an [English folk tune](#) often associated with *O Little Town of Bethlehem*. Ralph Vaughan Williams turned it into a traditional Anglican hymn for *The English Hymnal* (1906), but the orchestration of this arrangement strays slightly from [traditional Anglican music](#) that often aimed to stay in "tune with heaven." With the inclusion of a tambourine and more rugged orchestral elements, the piece performed in this year's fest honors the story of the birth of John and the theme of uplifting the downtrodden.

My Soul Proclaims Your Greatness, Lord

By R.V. Williams arr. James E. Bobb

Although the Visitation in the gospel of Luke is a seemingly small part in the Christmas story, it retains some of the most memorable words of Mary: The Magnificat.³ After the Immaculate Conception, Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth who is pregnant with John the Baptist. During their reunion, John senses the holiness of Christ and leaps for joy in his mother's womb. Elizabeth exclaims words of praise now known as the prayer "Hail Mary," which was commonly used as a greeting prayer, but now is used for many reasons in the Catholic tradition. Mary then responds with the Magnificat, adapted into the lyrics of this hymn.

The Magnificat, however, was a later addition to this hymn melody. The original name of the melody is "Kingsfold," a song of [English and Irish descent](#). Ralph Vaughan Williams is the credited composer, but he might be more accurately considered the song's arranger. Vaughan Williams was known for avidly collecting folk songs across the English countryside. In 1904, he became an influential member of the Folksong Society and supported the English Folk Dance and Song Society.⁴ As part of his preservation efforts, Vaughan Williams introduced "Kingsfold" in *The English Hymnal* published in 1906, arranged with the lyrics of "I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say" rather than the Magnificat. *The English Hymnal* became widely known for the high-quality music included, and is now known as one of the most significant hymnals of the 20th century.

Professor James E. Bobb re-arranged Vaughan Williams' choral arrangement of the piece. The Magnificat, or "My Soul Proclaims the Greatness, Lord," opens the St. Olaf Christmas Festival with a clear understanding of this year's theme, "A New Song of Grace and Truth." Mary's new song is the Magnificat, her grace is attributed to God, and her truth is that she did not acquire her grace alone for "the almighty has done great things for [her]." By taking a simplistic melody and setting the grandiose words of the Magnificat to it, the choir pays respects to Vaughan Williams' folk song preservation efforts and the story of Mary. Regardless of religious beliefs, this hymn tells the story of how someone that is seen as insignificant or unworthy has the strength and faith to accomplish great things beyond what is expected of them.

³ Luke 1:46-55

⁴ Williams, Ralph Vaughan. "The English Folk Dance and Song Society." *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1958, pp. 108. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/924653.

God of Life (from *The Seasons*)

By Franz Joseph Haydn ed. Robert Scholz

Known as “Father of the Symphony” and “Father of the String Quartet,” Franz Joseph Haydn composed his oratorio *The Seasons* (1801) following the success throughout Europe of his first oratorio, *The Creation* (1798). Drawing inspiration from Georg Frideric Handel’s massive oratorios and from James Thomson’s four-part poem *The Seasons*, Haydn’s piece depicts spring, summer, autumn, and winter. With his health failing him, Haydn composed *The Seasons* as a “secular oratorio,” implying that it was for performance or recreational purposes, rather than for religious purposes like many other oratorios of his time.

Spring, part one of *The Seasons*, begins with the depiction of the transition from winter to spring with a moody G minor introduction. It then resolves into the key of G major, with the chorus singing, “Come, gentle spring.” Next it moves into Austrian folk songs celebrating the beginning of the new season of spring. The final section of Spring is titled “God of Life.” A fanfare of brass and stringed instruments opens the section, then a mixed chorus enters, singing “God of Life! / God of Love!” This is followed by the three soloists accompanied by the orchestra, and finally the mixed choir joins in again.

Robert Scholz (‘61), the arranger of the piece, is a prolific arranger and composer who conducted the Viking Chorus, Chapel Choir, and the Campus Choir during his time as a St. Olaf faculty member from 1968-2005. The four parts of the mixed choir (sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses) create a fugal passage, with all four parts weaving in and out of each other, creating a sense of enveloping sound. The piece concludes with the words, “Merciful God! Lord, God of all, Infinite God!” by the massed choir.

The Word was God

By Rosephanye Powell/arr. William Powell

[Dr. Rosephayne Dunn Powell](#) is considered one of America's finest composers of choral music. Her music has been premiered by many renowned conductors including Philip Brunelle, Bob Chilcott, and André Thomas. Educated in vocal performance at The Florida State University, Westminster Choir College, and Alabama State University, Dr. Powell currently serves as a Professor of Voice at Auburn University. In 2015, The St. Olaf Choir commissioned a new work titled *With What Shall I Come* in celebration of Dr. Armstrong's 25th anniversary as conductor of the St. Olaf Choir, and premiered it on the 2015 tour which included a performance at Carnegie Hall.

Powell's focus on the art of African-American spirituals shines through in *The Word was God*, which she describes as a "musical-word painting" meant to give the sense that "God was in a 'mad hurry' to create the world." Originally a piece composed for a mixed chorus, Powell's adaptation of the piece for TB choir is reminiscent of regal proclamations of old, calling for the dawn of a new era. She chooses to begin the piece simply, developing its textures as the song progresses to represent the creation of the world through the two entities which are one - God and Christ (who is the Word). Her decision to weave the story in such a manner is enhanced by the overlapping calls of "the word was God" as each section calls attention to a different aspect of the very act of creation, and her choice of lyrics is only further grounded by her decision to stick to the original text of John 1: 1-3, which inspired the piece.

In Darkest Night

By Philip Biedenbender



As a Minnesota native and an alumnus of St. Olaf College, [Philip Biedenbender](#) is no stranger to the St. Olaf Christmas Festival tradition. With a B.M. in theory/composition from St. Olaf and a M.M. in choral conducting from Florida State University, he composes choral pieces for a variety of voicings and genres. In addition to his compositional and choral experience, Biedenbender is a pianist who has worked collaboratively with multiple ensembles like the St. Olaf Choir, Florida State Chamber Choir, College Light Opera Company, and the Manitou Singers.

The performance of *In Darkest Night* at the St. Olaf Christmas Festival of 2019 is a joint world premiere of the piece with the Florida State University Women's Glee Club, who will also premiere this piece the same weekend. Biedenbender composed *In Darkest Night* for four treble voices, piano, and strings.⁵ The piano delicately introduces the main melodic idea, setting a scene of peace and serenity. After this introduction, vocals in two parts enter quietly and sensitively. In an interview, Biedenbender describes how “[t]he piece is meant to be extremely visceral. You must imagine and experience the entire narrative: the stable, the magnificence and glory of the night and of the light, feel the embrace of Mary, smell the hay, etc.”⁶ Listen to how the vocals split into four parts, creating a thicker texture that emphasizes the dynamic high points located in the middle of this piece. Because it returns to the same sense of serenity found in the opening, this piece forms one giant arch of sound. Thus, *In Darkest Night* highlights how gentle *and* powerful a treble voice can be.

In addition to composing *In Darkest Night*, Philip Biedenbender wrote the lyrics. This five stanza poem tells the story of Christ's birth. Although the poem mainly focuses on this famous story, Biedenbender's words also speak of a world that longs for change. Biedenbender specifically notes how “the fourth stanza becomes a true pivot point, moving from the world of then to the world of before and after that night in Bethlehem, the want of the ancients and the tears of today, the most intense longing ever felt and the culmination of history in a lonely manger. For this

⁵ The strings part is optional, however, this performance *will* contain a small ensemble of strings.

⁶ Interview with Philip Biedenbender, 12 Nov 2019.

moment when Christ is sent from heaven to earth, I very intentionally chose the verb ‘exile.’ In its purest sense, to exile someone is to send them from a familiar place to an unfamiliar one as a form of penance or punishment. In this case, however, it is not because of the failures of the individual, but the continued failures of humanity.”⁷ This “world in need, awash in fear” desires “peace and joy to earth belong.” This desire for a change (or something new) to expel the ugliness in the world exemplifies the Christmas Festival theme, “A New Song of Grace and Truth.” In a conversation about the piece, Dr. Therees Hibbard, the conductor of the Manitou Singers, expressed the overwhelming joy that accompanies bringing something completely new to life. She pointed out that Philip’s “strong words and powerful melodies convey universal themes of grace and truth” within and beyond the Christmas tradition.⁸ Philip Biedenbender’s music and lyrics paint a picture of hope, that peace and joy will be restored to our world even in the darkest night.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Interview with Dr. Hibbard, 1 Nov 2019.

Adam Lay Ybounden

By Frank W. Boles

Adam Lay Ybounden (1993) is a setting of a medieval poem for mixed choir and organ by Frank W. Boles. [Boles](#) is a prolific composer of sacred music who spent 37 years composing and directing music for St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Indianapolis, elevating the church's music program to one of national renown. *Adam Lay Ybounden* is one of his many modern arrangements of ancient texts. The text of this piece is taken from an anonymous English poem written around the year 1400. Most of the text is understandable, if a little awkward in modern English. However, there are some phrases like "Ne had the apple taken been" ("had the apple never been taken"), and "abeen heav'ne queen" ("have become heaven's queen") that are likely to make the modern English speaker pause to translate. This poem serves as an artifact of the many changes the English language underwent (and will continue to undergo) through its development.

The text tells the story of Adam through a more positive lens than is typically presented. Adam, the first man in the Bible, is credited for initiating "the fall of man," or the capacity for sin by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, which God specifically forbade him from doing. However, in [Adam Lay Ybounden](#), the author makes the case that since all of human history as we know it began with the apple, Jesus could not have been born, or died for the forgiveness of sins, and Mary never would have been the Queen of Heaven without Adam's fall. Through that reasoning, the author believes that the time the apple was taken is blessed. The last line of the piece is "deo gratias!" ("thanks be to God!") a Latin phrase often used in Christian worship, and a medieval convention that meant that the author intended to dedicate and credit the work to God, rather than themselves.

There is near constant repetition of the words "Adam lay ybounden" throughout the first half of the piece, with the melody switching between higher voices and lower voices. After the organ enters, the harmonies become more complex, building to a triumphant, celebratory ending.

Our Father

By Alexander Gretchaninov

Emerging from the rich tradition of music in the Russian Orthodox Church, *Our Father* represents the height of composer Alexander Gretchaninov's success in the genre of sacred choral works. Gretchaninov weaves together multiple musical traditions as a student of what has been called the "New Russian Choral School" of composition for sacred music. In the piece, the composer adapts the *znamenny* chant which historically has been [used by the Russian Orthodox Church](#). The chant style encourages vocal unity and constant fluidity, where breaks and rests are rare. While the chant is typically sung melismatically - with many notes per syllable - and in unison, this piece puts the chant style in conversation with the choral composition conventions of its time. While the composer draws on the chant's influence throughout the piece, the final two phrases of the piece are the most evident examples of the *znamenny* style. One can hear the accentuated lower range of the bass voices, providing the foundation of the constant flow of sound one would also hear in an Orthodox service.

[Alexander Gretchaninov](#) (1864-1956) was a Russian composer who later lived in both France and then the United States. He is most remembered for his sacred compositions. A student of acclaimed Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Gretchaninov studied at the Moscow Conservatory at the same time as the more famous Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff. Gretchaninov is credited with bringing back a connection between text and music in choral writing that was lost in the previously popular Italianate compositional style.

Like much of the liturgical music in the Orthodox Church, *Our Father* was originally written in Church Slavonic, a [sacred Slavic liturgical language](#). While the piece is performed by the St. Olaf Choir in English at this festival, Church Slavonic can still be heard in various Orthodox traditions and denominations today.⁹ Listeners from a Christian tradition might find portions of the text familiar to the *Our Father* prayer taught in many denominations, but the translation includes language that emphasizes connotations of social justice in the original text setting.

⁹ Myers, Gregory. "Russian Orthodox Church Music." *Notes*. Music Library Association, Inc., June 1, 2012.

O Magnum Mysterium

By Morten Lauridsen



Still Life with Lemons, Oranges and a Rose (1633) by Francisco de Zurbarán

Commissioned by Marshall Rutter and premiered by the Los Angeles Master Chorale on December 18th, 1994, Morten Lauridsen's *O Magnum Mysterium* is a staple of the choral repertoire. Lauridsen (b. 1943) was inspired to write this piece after one of his many trips to the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena, California, where he encountered *Still Life with Lemons, Oranges and a Rose* (1633)¹⁰ by 17th century Spanish artist Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664). Upon seeing the oil painting, Lauridsen described a "visceral reaction" that "knocks you off your feet."¹¹ At first glance, the painting is seemingly meaningless, but upon further inspection, Lauridsen found greater religious symbolism. A light illuminates the objects from the left and the objects are otherwise surrounded by a dark background, giving the objects a sense of suspension in time and place. Lauridsen interpreted the objects as offerings to the Virgin Mary (symbolized by the rose) that are placed on an altar.

¹⁰ de Zurbarán, Francisco. *Still Life with Lemons, Oranges and a Rose*. Oil on canvas, 24-1/2 x 43-1/8 in. Pasadena: Norton Simon Museum, 1633.

¹¹ Lauridsen, Morten. 2009. "Leisure & Arts -- Masterpiece: It's a Still Life That Runs Deep --- A composer explains how this Zurbarán painting, filled with religious symbolism, inspired him." *Wall Street Journal*, Feb 21. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/399135219?accountid=351>.

When writing *O Magnum Mysterium*, Lauridsen drew upon the innate simplicity of this painting and on a Renaissance style of composition, specifically that of Josquin des Prez (c. 1450-1521) and Giovanni de Palestrina (c. 1525-1594), both of whom wrote music that amplified textual meaning and that sought to clarify the text for listeners.¹² The text Lauridsen utilized in *O Magnum Mysterium* is anonymously attributed and has been set by composers for centuries. It describes the “great mystery” of Jesus Christ’s birth and blesses the Virgin Mary, as her womb was chosen to give birth to the Christ. To highlight the importance of the text, Lauridsen keeps the piece simple. He avoids complicated vocal lines and dissonances while allowing the specific chord structures to give an ethereal quality to the music. *O Magnum Mysterium* thus resembles *Still Life with Lemons, Oranges and a Rose* by maintaining a simplistic nature that removes unnecessary flourish and allowing the music to speak for itself. Furthermore, the piece connects with the carol group “The Friendly Beasts” arranged by Robert Scholz heard elsewhere in the Christmas Festival. Both pieces draw upon imagery of the birth of Christ, evoking images of the people and animals that surrounded the manger at the Nativity.

Choirs across the world continue to perform this piece as it continually captivates audiences. Ten years after its premiere, H. Robert Reynolds (b. 1934) premiered a transcription of the work for wind band that has fared equally well in the wind band repertoire.¹³

¹² Bond, James Arthur. 2018. "THUNDERSTRUCK" BY ART: The Interdisciplinary and Interpretive Contexts of Morten Lauridsen's *O magnum mysterium*." *The Choral Journal* 59, no. 2: 8-21, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2087331008?accountid=351>.

¹³ Powell, Sean R. 2009. "Recent Programming Trends of Big Ten University Wind Ensembles." *Journal of Band Research* 44, no. 2: 1-12, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1092794?accountid=351>.

Joy to the World

Arr. Steven Amundson

The announcement of the birth of Jesus Christ is appropriately heralded in this lively arrangement of *Joy to the World* by Steven Amundson, conductor of the St. Olaf Orchestra. Premiered at the St. Olaf Christmas Festival in 2007, Amundson's arrangement aptly embodies the excitement that the traditional hymn communicates around the holidays. The Lord's coming is met with a jubilant orchestral fanfare and the combined voices of the St. Olaf massed choirs and audience members, joining together to respond to the invitation given to all people to "Repeat the sounding joy!"

Originally, the text of [*Joy to the World*](#) was set to the hymn tune *Antioch* attributed to G.F. Handel (1685-1759). That version was first arranged and published by Lowell Mason (1792-1872) in 1819. The opening descending musical gesture ("Joy to the world, the Lord is come") is reminiscent of Handel's *Messiah* chorus, pt. 31, *Lift up your Heads*, while the third melodic line of each verse ("let heaven and nature sing") might have come from the same oratorio, pt. 1, *Comfort Ye, My People*.¹⁴ Some music historians believe that the callbacks to Handel's *Messiah* are not intentional, but rather indicate that Handel went back to the same melodic gestures again and again throughout his compositions¹⁵. Nevertheless, these potential references to the earlier, equally famous work are striking enough that they are well worth listening for.

¹⁴ Celebrate, Rejoice and Sing: Christmas Music in America, Roger L. Hall, PineTree Press, 2003. (8)

¹⁵ *The Origins of the Tune "Antioch"*, Bulletin No. 166 of the Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland.

In Terra Pax

By Gerald Finzi

Following a Christmas Eve party in the mid-1920s, Gerald Finzi stood outside of his host's cottage and listened as church bells filled the midnight sky of Gloucestershire county.¹⁶ This moment would later inspire *In Terra Pax*, subtitled "Christmas Scene." The piece [opens with cello and bass playing a bell-like melody](#), which is shortly transferred to viola and violin. Finzi's use of harp throughout the piece likely represents the twinkling of stars, completing the image of the midnight sky on Christmas Eve. You may recognize a familiar motif from [Fauré's "Pie Jesu"](#) (part of his 1890 *Requiem*), layering another symbol of Christmas over the scene.



Finzi was a great lover of poetry and the English romantic tradition, and is well known for his text-painting.¹⁷ *In Terra Pax* draws from both biblical text and [Robert Bridges' poem, "Noel: Christmas Eve, 1913"](#) subtitled *Pax hominibus bonae voluntatis*. These texts are designated to either soloist or choir, each playing a distinct role in the piece. The baritone soloist narrates the poem, setting the Christmas scene. Next, the choir presents the words of Luke 2:8-14. The soprano soloist emerges as the angel, reassuring the shepherds that the Messiah had been born. Finzi brings these words to life through what Trevor Hold calls "rhythmic flexibility." In a 1936 letter to Howard Ferguson, Finzi explained, "a fine poem is complete in itself." He had a talent for setting natural, speech-like rhythms into his music as an acknowledgment of the musicality of poetry. The baritone solo exemplifies this trend. Its varied rhythmic patterns, rarely repeating from one measure to the next, create a captivating, speech-like performance.

[Gerald Finzi](#) was born in 1901 in London and grew up in Yorkshire where he studied under Ernest Farrar and Edward Baristow. Despite the premature deaths of his father, brothers, and mentor Farrar, Finzi never lost his inspiration - not even after he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Disease in 1951. Though many of Finzi's works were commissioned, *In Terra Pax* was utterly unique, in that its creation from beginning to end was Finzi's sole desire.¹⁸ He completed the piece in 1954. *In Terra Pax* (rescored 1956) was premiered with full orchestra at the [1956 Three Choirs Festival](#) (Gloucester, England). Finzi passed away just a few months later, September 27, 1956.

¹⁶ Banfield, Stephen. *Gerald Finzi an English Composer*. London: Faber and Faber, 1998. (96)

¹⁷ Hold, Trevor. *Parry to Finzi: Twenty English Song-Composers*. Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002.

¹⁸ McVeagh, Diana M. *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005. (227)

Wana Baraka

Arr. Shawn L. Kirchner

[Shawn Kirchner](#) first learned the traditional Kenyan folk hymn *Wana Baraka* by ear in four-part harmony. The piece [so moved him](#) that he later transformed it into the six-part arrangement presented here by the Chapel Choir. As part of the publication process and in an effort to ensure that proper credit was given, he tried to determine who originally composed the hymn. Dr. Anton Armstrong put him in touch with a conductor in Kenya, but his contacts could only confirm that it was a widely known song, and the search for its origins continues. *Wana Baraka* had its premiere in 1998 at a choir workshop of the Song and Story Fest in Oregon.

Kirchner's rendition of *Wana Baraka* is perhaps best described as a slow build of a cappella voices. It begins with the lowest voice parts repeating a tune. Layer by layer, Kirchner adds musical texture and volume. Eventually, the song reaches an ecstatic, climactic moment: the musicians seem to achieve cathartic joy, released through synergy in rhythm and harmony as the topmost vocal lines float higher and higher. Kirchner's build is utterly suited to the piece's praiseful Swahili text, which translates, "They have blessings, those who pray; Jesus himself said so. Alleluia! They have peace/they have joy/they have well-being."

The text of *Wana Baraka* exemplifies the cultural synthesis at the center of the piece. The language of the text is Swahili, a Bantu dialect and the national language of Kenya;¹⁹ its style, replete with rhythmic themes and in a diatonic scale, is typical of Kenyan music.²⁰ Yet the hymn's explicitly Christian method and its six-part harmony reveal the lasting influence that colonialism has had on Kenyan musical expression.²¹ This cultural complexity likely intrigued Kirchner, who continues to write choral arrangements of folk and Christian music; his current repertoire includes Gospel songs like *I'll Fly Away* and Americana folk songs like *Unclouded Day*, among others.

Wana Baraka is a musical expression of immense faith and jubilation. When asked about Kirchner's composition style, his friend and colleague Tesfa Wondemagegnehu was enthusiastic: "[Shawn's ability] really is a gift because... for that music to be as aurally and emotionally accessible as it is, you could totally lack craft and it is full of craft, full of creativity."²² In other words, Kirchner's arrangement of *Wana Baraka* captures its spirit both thoughtfully and beautifully, inviting every voice to join in song.

¹⁹ Paul N. Kayvu, "Music in Kenya," in *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, vol. 1, ed. Ruth M. Stone (New York: Routledge, 1997), 622.

²⁰ William Umbiba, "Kenya," *Grove Music Online*, Oxford University Press, 2001, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000014901>.

²¹ Kayvu, "Music in Kenya," 626.

²² Blake, Alexander L. *Flowers must Come Out to the Road: Shawn Kirchner and Choral Music of Social Justice*, University of Southern California, Ann Arbor, 2019. *ProQuest*, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2299503003?accountid=351>. 28.

Make We Joy Now In This Fest

By Troy Robertson

Troy Robertson's arrangement of *Make We Joy Now in this Fest* blends the original melody and rhythm of a traditional English carol with modern harmonies and textures to create an exuberant, new Christmas classic. *Make We Joy Now in this Fest* is a popular carol from the British Isles that was prominently performed in religious contexts throughout the Middle Ages and the early half of the Renaissance. Robertson mainly drew inspiration for his version of the carol from [The Selden Carol Book](#) at the Bodleian Library at Oxford University. His version is also reminiscent of the most well-known and widely-performed [arrangement of the carol](#) by William Walton.

Robertson prepares the audience for his fun and exciting take on the carol by opening with a triumphant trumpet fanfare and a powerful, joyful iteration of the Latin *Eya* refrain - essentially an enunciatory gesture meaning "Hey!" - before introducing the traditional verses. Throughout the carol, Latin and English are put in celebratory conversation around the Nativity of Jesus. Robertson employs syncopated rhythms to evoke the feeling of a festive, dance-like Renaissance carol.

Additionally, as he had St. Olaf College's Viking Chorus in mind while arranging, he felt there was an undeniable kinship between the *Eya* refrain and St. Olaf's own fight song, [Um! Yab! Yab!](#) As a result, the refrain is much more ornamented and emphasized than the one most commonly heard in an earlier arrangement by William Walton. Robertson directly positions the carol's traditional rhythms against contrary, more contemporary rhythmic ideas, imbuing the piece with a modern flair. These contrasts often serve as highlights for the singers and make the piece especially exciting and truly delightful to sing. Above all else, in an interview Robertson reinforced that he simply wanted the performers to enjoy singing his arrangement. His contemplations and decisions about modern harmony contribute to a simple and compelling piece that vibrantly maintains the original message of the carol in a truly enjoyable performance, and Viking Chorus is honored to present the piece's world premiere.

The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy

Arr. Mack Wilberg

The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy is a piece that is unlike most songs heard around Christmas time. This spiritual draws its roots from a variety of cultures. Though it is sometimes considered an African-American spiritual, its origins can be [traced back to the Carriibbean](#). The West Indian carol was originally notated by the Trinidadian native and calypso performer, Edric Connor, as he watched 92-year-old James Bryce sing the piece. Since spirituals were passed down orally, there is no known date or composer for this piece. However, it has grown in popularity to such a point that it can now be seen in many hymnals and choral arrangements in the United States and other countries.

A spiritual is a type of religious folk song that is most closely associated with the enslavement of African people in the American South, although they can also be tied to areas in the Carriibbean.²³ According to a [Library of Congress](#) article, “Many spirituals, known as ‘sorrow songs,’ are intense, slow and melancholic,” which is why *The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy* as arranged by Mark Wilberg is such an interesting case. The original spiritual, although simple, reflects the varying experiences encountered by enslaved Africans when they came to the Americas. However, instead of a more intense and somber feel usually associated with spirituals, this arrangement remains bright and joyful, signalling hope for the coming of the savior.

As is typical in spirituals, the constant repetition throughout *The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy* enhances the carol’s accessibility and ease of memorization of its story. The choir often repeats lines, usually in groups of three, eventually building up to the line “and they say that his name is Jesus.” The thickening texture draws in listeners as they wait to hear where the climax will go. The excitement of the savior who has come is evident in many of the melodic gestures throughout the piece. The calypso-like accompaniment gestures towards the carol’s original West Indian roots. It is truly hard to listen to this arrangement without smiling as we hear the joyful telling of the birth of Jesus.

²³ Wyatt Tee Walker. *Spirits That Dwell In Deep Woods: The Prayer and Praise Hymns of the Black Religious Experience* (New York: Martin Luther King Fellows Press, 1987).

Cradle Hymn

By Kim André Arnesen

In the past few years, Norwegian composer Kim André Arnesen has become a recognized figure not only at St. Olaf, but also on the global stage. In fact, one of his newest works, *Nordic Christmas*, will be premiered by Twin Cities-based choral group VocalEssence in mid-December. Educated at the Music Conservatory in Trondheim, he gained a strong interest in baroque music, contemporary classical music, and popular music. However, he is [best known](#) for his choral works, both a cappella and accompanied, and for his large-scale works for choir and orchestra. He has collaborated with several high-profile groups including, but not limited to, Denver-based choral ensemble Kantorei and the world renowned Conspirare, led by St. Olaf alum Craig Hella Johnson ('84). Several of Arnesen's pieces, such as *I Will Light Candles this Christmas* and *His Light in Us*, were written specifically for St. Olaf ensembles. One of his most well-performed pieces, *Flight Song*, was written as a birthday gift for Dr. Anton Armstrong.

Cradle Hymn was composed in 2010 and appeared in the 2013 TV production "[Christmas in Norway](#)," featuring the St. Olaf Choir and Nidaros Cathedral Girls' Choir. It has also been performed at the [White House](#) for President Barack Obama. The text, taken from a [poem](#) by famous hymn writer Isaac Watts, depicts Mary singing baby Jesus to sleep. Arnesen deliberately selected this text because he believes that "Christmas is a special time for children and a time where every child should have someone caring and singing to them." He dedicates his piece to "those who need comfort and hope at this time of the year."²⁴ A vivid image of a mother coaxing her child is painted by the rocking orchestral foundation and soaring vocal lines. In the third verse, the tone shifts, and the contrast between the words of the lullaby and the feelings of reverence and passion recognizes the greater purpose that the holy infant will serve in bringing light to the world.



Nidarosdomen Jentekor, Christmas in Norway

In a final flourish, the parts weave together and proclaim, "Then go dwell forever near Him /See His face, and sing His praise!" culminating in a message of hope and blessing for all.

²⁴ Personal correspondence with the composer.

Alleluia

By Jake Runestad

Jake Runestad's *Alleluia* is a vibrant work that paints with a wide palette of musical color, expressing exaltation with some sections of contemplative jubilation. The world premiere for Runestad's *Alleluia* was February 21, 2014 with Brady Allred and the Salt Lake Vocal Artists at the Western ACDA Conference in Santa Barbara, California.²⁵ Since then, the piece has enjoyed widespread popularity among choirs in the United States. Though only one word is set, it is treated in a variety of ways across the piece. The pace of the music seems to slow dramatically in the middle and grows back into an excited dance. This steady increase in intensity represents one's praises being lifted upward to the heavens. The celebratory dance is enhanced by clapping, which further emphasizes the piece's message of joy.

Runestad's wish for this piece is clear and simple: "My hope is that this piece explores two sides of celebration: an outward exuberance (the two outer sections) paired with inward self-introspection (the middle section). The whole-tone and lydian harmonic material offers a sense of expansiveness as lines rise higher and higher into the air."²⁶ His website continues detailing the piece: "The work begins with a rhythmic declaration of joy and builds intensity through metric changes, tonal shifts, glissandi, and hand clapping. This lively exultation soon gives way to a reverent meditation with soaring melodic lines and lush harmonies."²⁷

Jake Runestad has always been a composer to prize the text of a musical work at the same level of importance as the music. In an interview with the International Choral Bulletin, he explained, "I try to hone in on the essence of the human experience and be completely honest and vulnerable in bringing that out through the marriage of text and music."²⁷ The honesty of Jake's work manifests itself in the enlivened, expansive harmonies across the piece that paint the musical picture of rejoicing. A majority of the musical lines in the work are ascending – usually as a way to indicate joy – similar to other pieces in this program, like Carolyn Jennings' *A New Magnificat* during the refrain, or in Francis Poulenc's *Laudamus Te* to indicate praise as well as joy. Under the theme of this festival's program, this song is a perfect fit; it is not only a song of joy, but a song of truth.

²⁵ "Alleluia." *Jake Runestad*, 2014, jakerunestad.com/store/alleluia/.

²⁶ Runestad, Jake. "Re: St. Olaf Christmas Festival Program Notes." Received by Tony May, 8 Nov. 2019.

²⁷ Tasher, Cara. "Interview with Jake Runestad: When the Text Always Comes First!" *The IFCM Magazine*, 7 Sept. 2016, icb.ifcm.net/en_US/interview-jake-runestad-text-always-comes-first/.

And Suddenly

By Michael Englehardt

Michael Engelhardt's *And Suddenly* provides a gospel-influenced narrative of the scene depicted in [Luke 2:13-14](#): "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Similar words are heard elsewhere in the festival program, specifically in the excerpt of Gerald Finzi's *In Terra Pax* sung during the Gospel reading. Engelhardt's composition, sung by the Manitou Singers, begins with a [recitative](#). The recitative is a classic musical style dating back to the early 17th century that typically features a soloist or soloistic line free of strict tempo or meter, meant to take on a speech-like quality. The composer has intertwined this musical tradition with the musical background often heard in the preaching styles of the American Black church.

The piece is written and performed in the [gospel tradition](#). Gospel developed in the 1920s out of the already-present spiritual tradition among African Americans in the American South. Beginning in the 1910s, the so-called "Great Migration" of Black Americans from the rural South to Northern cities also marked the migration of Black musical tradition. As many previously enslaved people and their descendants began to create new lives, they created new musical traditions whose influence on American music more broadly has been profound. The sounds of spirituals began to work its way into religious services, eventually morphing into the gospel sound familiar to many today. However, gospel music took time to become fully established. Many religious denominations and leaders rejected some of the secular musical elements in gospel (including elements of ragtime, blues, and jazz that are so apparent in the gospel we hear today). As a result, many early gospel arrangements were scored for a quartet of singers that would sing simple melodic lines with little embellishment or influence from secular styles.

Decades after the advent of gospel music within the Black church, the sounds of this genre have been embraced by many Americans no matter their race or religion. St. Olaf's own [Gospel Choir](#) exemplifies this trend. And [as the Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians article on "Gospel" makes clear](#), there are a number of overlapping strands of gospel within contemporary American music. Engelhardt's piece blends elements of traditional Black gospel style with contemporary Christian music, a combination especially clear in his use of piano, electric bass, and drum set to accompany the choir.

Laudamus Te (from *Gloria*)

By Francis Poulenc

Francis Poulenc was a prominent French composer born at the turn of the twentieth century. He was introduced to the piano at a young age by his mother, who was an amateur pianist herself. Poulenc first began composing in 1914, around age fourteen; however, it was not until 1917 that his first successful composition, *Rapsodie nègre*, premiered in Paris.²⁸ Poulenc's compositions were highly influential in the French musical scene of the 1920s and 1930s. His works became especially prominent when he began collaborating with baritone vocalist, Pierre Bernac.

The composition of his first religious work came only in 1936 after the death of a close friend reconnected him with the Catholic faith. Poulenc subsequently composed three sacred works for a chorus, vocal soloist, and orchestra. These works are unique because they transform the orchestra from its normal accompaniment role and instead cast it as a more equal voice alongside the voices of the singers.²⁹ *Laudamus Te* is the animated second movement of Poulenc's *Gloria*, the second of his three sacred works for orchestra and chorus, written in 1959, just three years before Poulenc suddenly died of a heart attack.

Gloria is Poulenc's personal and powerful setting of the Gloria hymn from the Catholic Mass Ordinary. The piece was [first performed](#) in January of 1961 with the Boston Symphony Orchestra conducted by Charles Munch.³⁰ *Laudamus Te* employs a jaunty and joyful melody in the chorus. For much of this movement, the soprano and tenor voices are paired together with the alto and bass voices responding. The piece begins with the orchestra introducing an angular and buoyant brass motivic line, before the two paired vocal groups begin conversation. These conversations reach a tranquil interlude before returning to the fast-paced rhythm and melody the audience was first greeted with. Ultimately, *Laudamus Te* is an optimistic and colorful depiction of part of the Gloria prayer and an exemplification of Poulenc's unashamed dedication and commitment to his own faith.

²⁸ Chimenes, Myrian, and Roger Nichols. "Francis Poulenc." Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, January 20, 2001. <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy.stolaf.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000022202?rskkey=ii9O6x>.

²⁹ Gutmann, Peter. 2001. Classical notes: Poulenc's "gloria" - in tune with our times. *Goldmine*. Nov 16, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.stolaf.edu/docview/1492531?accountid=351> (accessed November 3, 2019).

³⁰ Daniel, Keith W. *Francis Poulenc: His Artistic Development and Musical Style*. Ann Arbor: UMI research Press, 1982.

Glories Ring

By Steve Amundson

Glories Ring was written by Steven Amundson, conductor of the St. Olaf Orchestra, for the 2007 St. Olaf Christmas Festival. Its [premiere](#) by the St. Olaf Orchestra and St. Olaf Handbell Choir was broadcast nationally on PBS television and National Public Radio.

This jubilant exclamation is one of Amundson's most performed works, and quotes "Ding Dong Merrily on High." Though it is now known as a Christmas carol, the tune was originally a secular dance song titled "Branle de l'Official." English composer George Ratcliffe Woodward wrote the lyrics to the carol, and drew upon his interest in church bells for inspiration. The song was first published as a carol in 1924 Woodward's *The Cambridge Carol-Book: Being Fifty-two Songs for Christmas, Easter, And Other Seasons*.

In *Glories Ring*, the carol tune is first introduced in the upper strings, independently of Amundson's original melody, and is stated again more confidently in the woodwinds. Both melodies are eventually combined in the climactic moment of the piece. Much of the carol melody can also be found in the 5-octave handbell choir, which provides a unique addition rarely seen in standard symphony orchestra repertoire. Combining uplifting melody, exuberant brass fanfares, and beautifully sweeping lyricism in the strings, *Glories Ring* is a joyous celebration of the birth of Christ.



Handbell Choir at Christmas Fest in 2011

Friendly Beasts

Arr. Robert Scholz

A beloved Christmas carol, [*The Friendly Beasts*](#) is presented here in an arrangement by longtime St. Olaf faculty member, conductor, and alumnus Robert Scholz '61. Though widely performed today, both the music and words of *The Friendly Beasts* have unclear origins. The words are certainly from the twentieth century and the music from medieval Europe, but both prove difficult to source. The music has at various times been attributed to Pierre de Corbeil, a 13th-century bishop in France, and might have been derived from the 12th-century hymn *Orientis Partibus* (*Song of the Ass*), and [the similarity is noticeable](#).³¹ Either way, the music has long been sung around the Christmas season.³² The words, by contrast, originate in the twentieth century, where they were first printed in 1934. They have been attributed to an obscure lyricist named Robert Davis, and were first copyrighted in 1949.³³ Today the carol is found in many different forms and arrangements, showing the versatility of the music.

The verses of the carol highlight a common theme of Christmas carols, the giving of gifts to the infant Jesus when he was born. In *The Friendly Beasts*, each of the common domesticated animals provides a service to the newborn as a demonstration of the loyalty of all creatures to the son of God. In this performance of Scholz's arrangement, each individual choir takes a verse by itself before they all join together on the final verse.

³¹ "The Friendly Beasts." In *The Christmas Encyclopedia*, by William D. Crump. 3rd ed. McFarland, 2013. https://ezproxy.stolaf.edu/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/mcfc/the_friendly_beasts/0?institutionId=4959

³² Stevens, John, and Nicky Losseff. "Feast of Fools." Grove Music Online. 2001; Accessed 31 Oct. 2019.

³³ Studwell, William E. (William Emmett). *The Christmas Carol Reader* New York: Haworth Press, 1995.

Jeg er så glad hver julekveld

Arr. Robert Scholz

Jeg Er Så Glad Hver Julekveld (English: *I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve*) is one of Norway's most beloved Christmas hymns. The [lyrics](#) of this traditional folk song were published in 1859 in



Norwegian novelist [Marie Wexelsen](#)'s book *Ketil. En Julegave for de Smaa* (*Ketil. A Christmas gift for the Little Ones*). As an educator who focused heavily on women's and children's rights and social issues, Wexelsen aimed to include the image of a mother's love and Jesus' love. The message within the lyrics was one of the first to present children with an accessible version of the meaning of Christmas, centered around joy and positivity that softened the Church's traditionally strict religious messages. Just decades earlier, the Norwegian king controlled the church and thus the ways in which holidays like Christmas could be understood and celebrated.³⁴ However, starting in the

1830's, groups of Norwegians [began dissenting](#) from the traditional church. Wexelsen's [lyrics](#), first translated into English by Peter A. Sveeggen, encourage children to be joyful during the Christmas season, for Jesus opens the kingdom to every child.

Composer Peder Knudsen (1819-1863) wrote the melody to accompany Marie Wexelson's lyrics. The melody, traditionally sung in 6/8 time, has become a pinnacle of Norwegian Christmas celebrations because of its simplicity and memorability. Sung in a major key, in Robert Scholz's arrangement the piece sounds as if it is imitating the wind on a snowy day as each measure sways back and forth until the final resolution.

Jeg Er Så Glad Hver Julekveld reflects the theme of this year's Christmas Festival, "A New Song of Grace and Truth" through its history and context. Marie Wexelsen took the Christmas narrative and incorporated it into a children's story, creating a new song that ended up improving the lives of Norwegians and non-Norwegians alike. The lyrics allow religious and non-religious listeners to reflect on the time spent with family and loved ones. While the Christmas narrative is not new, the ways it can be interpreted and used in different holiday traditions brings those of varying backgrounds together to enjoy the music and holiday season.

³⁴ The king was in charge of ensuring that all public teachers of religion conformed to the norms established for them. To learn more about the dissent from this tradition, go [here](#).

O Day Full of Grace

Arr. F. M. Christiansen

“O Day Full of Grace” was originally a Danish Folk Hymn, and versions of the tune were sung throughout Scandinavia as early as 1450.³⁵ On the thousandth anniversary of Christianity coming to Denmark in 1859, Nikolaj Grundtvig rewrote the folk hymn of “O Day Full of Grace” to the tune that we know today. In the late 19th century, Grundtvig was known as the best of all hymn writers as he composed or arranged around 1500 hymns. Grundtvig’s ideas have had a lasting impact in Danish education, politics and the church. He is known as the father of the Danish Folk School movement that aimed to educate Danish youth in national culture and history as well as learn how to be an active member of the Danish democracy.³⁶ In fact, Folk Schools gained enough traction to come to the USA, even educating Rosa Parks at the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee.

F. Melius Christiansen has been an influential figure to both the St. Olaf Choir and choral community, as well as nationally through sacred music repertoire and hymn arrangements. In fact, “O Day Full of Grace” has become a beloved Christmas standard for choirs around the US.³⁷ As a conductor and composer, Christiansen felt that a cappella music was the strongest way to show the talent and vocal integrity of the choirs.³⁸ In his arrangements, Christiansen begins most pieces with the steady, well known original hymn settings in order to settle the audiences’ ears to the composition before expanding an arranging the original melody. He is very well known for his use of text painting in musical phrases, showcasing the meaning in the texts. Listen as Christiansen paints a sunrise through the choirs’ voicings. When the text reads “then rose, the sun divine,” notice the melodic lines ascending in chords leading into the final cadence before B section, as if the sun has finally broken above the horizon when the final chord is reached.

The first two verses of “O Day Full of Grace” focuses on Jesus’ incarnation and birth, talking about “light” coming into a “dark” place. The final verse brings us to the end of life and into eternity, written as a reminder that the goal of faithful works is to strengthen us and keep us grounded in His word and faith always. “O Day Full of Grace” perfectly embodies the message of Christmas Festival 2019, “A New Song of Grace and Truth,” offering the idea that God fills our every day with grace and guides us towards the light.

³⁵ Stafford, Shawn. “‘O Day Full of Grace’: A Scandinavian Hymn for Pentecost.” *Steadfast Lutherans*, 17 May 2013.

³⁶ Grundtvig Library. “Grundtvig on Education, Politics, Church.” *Grundtvig*, Grundtvigsk Forum, 2019, grundtvig.dk/grundtvig/.

³⁷ Plantinga, Harry. “O Day Full Of Grace.” *Hymnary.org*, Hymnary Society, 2007.

³⁸ “F. Melius Christiansen.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 19 Sept. 2019.

Sanctus (from *Requiem*)

By G. Verdi

Giuseppe Verdi is revered by many for his operas, often regarded as the greatest Italian opera composer of the Romantic era. Yet his choral compositions are also well-regarded, which should come as no surprise given his strengths in both orchestral and vocal composition. Verdi's *Requiem* was composed just after the midpoint of his career in 1874, at a time when he was already well known throughout Europe.³⁹ The *Requiem* was initially conceptualized as an homage to Gioachino Rossini, who died in 1868, but was rededicated instead to the Italian poet Alessandro Manzoni who died in 1873.⁴⁰ It premiered on May 22, 1874 on the one year anniversary of Manzoni's death.⁴¹ The initial critical reception was predictable in that many tried to compare it to his operas, but there were some distinct differences. For example, Verdi made particular use of counterpoint and harmonic motives that wouldn't have been viable in operatic composition. In opera, the dramatic relationships take center stage and the music primarily reinforces the story. In contrast, *Requiem* (particularly as performed by the chorus) takes precedence and creates the drama.

The *Requiem* itself is a huge and dramatic work that follows the traditional movements of a requiem mass. It is scored for soloists, two choirs, and orchestra. Unable to escape his operatic roots, Verdi's soloists seem to take on their own personalities as the work progresses. The *Sanctus* is the only movement that makes use of both choirs at the same time, making it a particularly powerful and intense moment in the work. The text for the *Sanctus* is the section of the requiem mass that is the most enthusiastic about praising God, and the theme of praise is clearly reflected in the music. Verdi uses the musical forces available to him to the greatest extent possible, beginning the movement with a trumpet and choral fanfare which quickly becomes a fugue for the two choirs. Perhaps suitable for massed choir, the movement ends triumphantly as the words *hosanna in excelsis* echo throughout the hall.

³⁹ Parker, Roger. "Verdi, Giuseppe." Grove Music Online. 2001; Accessed 31 Oct. 2019.

⁴⁰ Rosen, David (1995), *Verdi: Requiem*, Cambridge University Press. ISBN 0-521-39448-1

⁴¹ Summer, Robert J. (2007), *Choral Masterworks from Bach to Britten: Reflections of a Conductor*. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press. ISBN 0-8108-5903-3

O Come, All Ye Faithful

Arr. John Ferguson

O Come All Ye Faithful (*Adeste Fidelis* in the original Latin) is a staple of Christmas time. The ancient origins of this hymn are as unclear as its modern-day popularity is undeniable. *Adeste Fidelis* was originally published in 1751 by English hymn copyist John Francis Wade in his collection of hymns titled *Cantus Diversi*.⁴² Although Wade is often credited with the composition of the text and musical setting of the hymn, the accuracy of this attribution remains debatable. Other potential creators include St. Bonaventure, King John IV of Portugal, and Cistercian monks.⁴³ The text of *Adeste Fidelis* was translated to its English version in 1841 by an English priest named Frederick Oakeley. This is the translation that has become the standard for *O Come All Ye Faithful* and that provides the four verses included in John Ferguson's arrangement.⁴⁴ These words reflect the joy and excitement of the first visitors to Bethlehem – feelings shared by millions of Christians each year since. Yet the third verse, in the midst of the “exultation” and “choirs of angels,” reminds listeners of human sin and urges these sinners to love Jesus as deeply as Jesus loves despite that sin. Before long, though, excitement returns as verse four tells of the “happy morning” of Jesus' birth.

John Ferguson has spent a lifetime enriching church music in the United States. A cornerstone of the church music and organ programs at St. Olaf, where he served on the faculty for nearly thirty years, Ferguson is a nationally renowned organist, composer, and pedagogue.⁴⁵ His arrangement of *O Come All Ye Faithful* for full orchestra, massed choir, and audience deftly matches the musical texture to the mood of each verse of Oakeley's translation. Listen for the declamatory flourishes from the brass leading up to verse one and for the soaring, acrobatic descant written by Sir David Willcocks for the sopranos in verse three. Finally, the orchestra returns in full for the return of exuberance that comes with the fourth and final verse.

⁴² Stephan, John. *Adeste Fidelis - A Study on its Origin and Development*. n.d. (accessed February 3, 2019).

⁴³ Polman, Bert. *John Francis Wade*. n.d. (accessed November 3, 2019).

⁴⁴ Adams, Richard. *Frederick Oakely*. 2019. (accessed November 3, 2019).

⁴⁵ St. Olaf Sing For Joy. *Dr. John Ferguson*. n.d. (accessed November 3, 2019).

Nunc dimittis

By René Clausen

Nunc Dimittis, in any musical setting, is a time honored canticle in Christian faith. Since the 4th century, the Nunc Dimittis, translating roughly to “Now dismiss,” is typically recited during evensong or compline as a final prayer. [The text](#) is derived from Luke 2:29-32, well known as the song of Simeon. God had promised an aged Simeon that he would not rest until he had seen the Messiah. When Simeon saw the infant Jesus presented at the temple, he prayed, “Lord now lettest

thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared for all thy people. A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.”



Dr. [René Clausen](#), a St Olaf alumnus, embraced the magnificence of Simeon’s revelation with his vibrant setting of this text. Despite the solemn nature of the Nunc Dimittis, Clausen does not shy from incorporating his own “eclectic” flair.⁴⁶ His striking harmonic shifts within a “spacious and panoramic choral texture”⁴⁷ beautifully support Simeon’s emergence into true belief and his satisfactory resolution and acceptance of eternal rest. A shift from flowing

melodic lines to denser harmonic patterns over the phrase “according to they word” reflects Simeon’s assertion of faith. The intensity continues to build as voice parts echo one another’s “a light to lighten the gentiles.” Beginning in the relative minor, each echo builds into a powerful transition back to D major, rejoicing “to the glory of thy people Israel.” The excitement, however, does not end here, as we reference the opening of the piece, reaffirming the salvation of the Lord. Finally, we are granted rest with a swelling “amen.”

This piece was commissioned for the St. Olaf Christmas Festival in 2002, making it particularly special for Dr. Clausen. As is traditional, the *Nunc Dimittis* will be performed at the end of each performance, as a final prayer. In a documentary exploring choral music in Minnesota, Clausen remarked, [“I can’t think of a better reason to make choral music in our society if it be not for helping make us more human.”](#) (37:16) As you look about the audience, many of whom will be in tears and others smiling with joy, be reminded of the power of music and its ability to make us feel all human emotions.

⁴⁶ Aitken, Paul A. “Hallelujah!: René Clausen’s ‘Crying for a Dream.’” *Choral Journal* 49, no. 4 (October 2008): 69–71.

⁴⁷ Quoted from an email interview with Rene Clausen

Beautiful Savior

Arr. F.M. Christiansen

Performing *Beautiful Savior* is a decades-long [tradition](#) for St. Olaf choral ensembles. The melody is a Silesian folk song that was arranged by F. Melius Christiansen in 1910. F.M. Christiansen originally set the tune to Norwegian text and later published it in English for the St. Olaf Choral Series. The Christiansen arrangement of the hymn first appeared on the St. Olaf Christmas Festival beginning in 1924, but it did not become a consistent final piece until the early 1950s, under Olaf C. Christiansen. Since its establishment as a tradition, it has been performed in various ways and in various parts of the program. In this way, *Beautiful Savior* has come to be regarded as “practically synonymous” with the St. Olaf choirs.⁴⁸



Christmas Festival Massed Ensemble, 1986, [Viking Yearbook](#)

The complete choral setting by F. Melius Christiansen is set in three verses. The first verse is hummed with the melody in the Alto 1 and Bass 1 vocal lines. The second verse features a mezzo-soprano soloist with tenor and bass humming accompaniment. The third verse is sung by the

⁴⁸ Shaw, Joseph M. *The St. Olaf Choir: A Narrative* (Northfield, Minn: St. Olaf College, 1997).

entire choir with the melody in the soprano and alto vocal parts. The third verse is the most recognizable, as it is now sung at the end of every Christmas Festival. The song begins softly and gradually crescendos to the triumphant climax with the text “Now and forevermore be thine!” The powerful finish to the piece often leaves the audience in awed silence for several seconds.

Beautiful Savior is familiar hymn across the U.S., and no matter where performers or listeners are from, it will evoke strong emotions. To different people, this song can have different messages. Decades ago, under F. Melius Christiansen, the St. Olaf Choir sang this piece on a hospital lawn in Rochester. Windows opened, and patients were wheeled out onto the balconies to hear the music.⁴⁹ Beautiful Savior was a form of healing for these people. For the choristers, it may be a song of unity and rouse a sense of togetherness. As Dr. Armstrong once said in an interview, the piece provides “a wonderful bonding for everyone.”⁵⁰ Beautiful Savior is a unique opportunity for performers and audience members alike, at the end of every concert, to reflect on the music that has been shared and the gift that has been given to those listening.



Christmas Festival Performance, 1955, [Viking Yearbook](#)

⁴⁹ Shaw, Joseph M. *The St. Olaf Choir: A Narrative*.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who made this project possible:

- ❖ To Professors Anton Armstrong, Therees Hibbard, Tesfa Wondemagegnehu, James Bobb, and Steven Amundson for their support of the project;
- ❖ To Jeff O'Donnell, for providing the online space in order for the Program Notes project to be shared around campus and beyond;
- ❖ To Troy Robertson, Matthew Peterson, Kim André Arnesen, James Bobb, Philip Biedenbender, and Steven Amundson for taking the time to provide additional insight on their pieces;
- ❖ To Professor Rehanna Kheshgi, for allowing us time and a platform to recruit writers from her Musicology classes;
- ❖ To all writing faculty, at St. Olaf and elsewhere for their guidance and instruction;
- ❖ To all performers and audience members for taking the time to read these notes!

Finally, a big thank you goes out to our advisor, Professor Louis Epstein, for guiding us through the process of researching and writing program notes!