

LOVE DIVINE

St. Olaf Christmas Festival 2021

Program Notes 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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Nimrod (Enigma Variations)

Edward Elgar

Sir Edward Elgar (1857-1934) was an English composer most widely known for his orchestral compositions such as the *Enigma Variations* and the *Pomp and Circumstance Marches*, the latter of which are often performed at graduation ceremonies today. Although Elgar was from Britain, his musical influences stem mainly from continental Europe. Elgar was a self-taught composer from a humble background who did not find much musical success until his forties, when he released the *Enigma Variations*.

Elgar composed the *Enigma Variations* between October 1898 and February 1899. This work comprises fourteen variations on an original theme, where each variation is dedicated to an important person (or pet) in Elgar's life. *Nimrod* is the most famous of these fourteen variations and is dedicated to Elgar's good friend and music editor Augustus J. Jaeger, whom Elgar treasured for his ability to give both kind praise and harsh, honest criticism to his works. Instead of a musical portrait of Augustus J. Jaeger, which was common in other variations, *Nimrod* tells a story. Because of his limited success in his previous compositions, Elgar became very depressed and heavily considered quitting music. When Elgar told Jaeger about this, Jaeger reportedly hummed the second movement of Ludwig van Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 8, also known as the *Pathétique*, referencing the fact that although Beethoven went through many hardships, he kept composing and became one of the most treasured musicians in history. Elgar owed the continuation of his musical practice to Jaeger, and inserts small quotes from Beethoven's *Sonata Pathétique* in the beginning of *Nimrod*. Elgar named the movement *Nimrod* because the biblical figure Nimrod was a mighty hunter, and "Jaeger" means "hunter" in German. *Nimrod* has become the most famous of Elgar's Enigma Variations due to its heartwarming melody and is often programmed on its own as a demonstration of appreciation, like how Elgar intended it to be for Jaeger. This piece demonstrates "Love Divine" in the sense of deep friendship and gratitude for others.

Nimrod begins with a slow, quiet theme in E-flat major in the string section of the orchestra. Elgar gradually expands the instrumentation of this main theme to the flutes, clarinets, bassoons, and French horn before shifting to new harmonic material led by the oboe and clarinet. Soon after, the first melodic material returns with the full orchestra and reaches an inspiring climax in the brass section before returning to a softer and gentler atmosphere to end the piece.

In a Deep, Unbounded Darkness

arr. Chris Aspaas

In an interview with Dr. Aspaas, he shared these notes about his arrangement of DIVINUM MYSTERIUM/ In a Deep, Unbounded Darkness:

"I originally arranged the tune, DIVINUM MYSTERIUM, to open the St. Olaf Chapel Choir Vespers in 2011, with the desire to take advantage of the beautiful acoustics in Boe Memorial Chapel. The freely ringing handbells and sustained drone exchanged by the supporting voices creates a timeless quality, and allows the chant melody and text to emerge clearly and simply. The layered voices at the end of the piece also inspire a timelessness while the voices sing, "songs and praises I will raise forevermore." This was one of my earliest arrangements for SATB voices, having only arranged one other piece before this for mixed choir: a setting of Byzantine chant from the Bridegroom Matins of the Orthodox Church.

In 2014, Anton Armstrong and the Christmas Festival Artistic Committee wanted to use my arrangement of DIVINUM MYSTERIUM, but with the more familiar text, *Of the Father's Love Begotten*, by Marcus Aurelius Clemens Prudentius (348-413) (translation, composite). I reset the music to these words, and it was performed at Christmas Festival that year by the Massed Choir in the round following the St. Olaf Orchestra's performance of Matthew Peterson's *Corde Natus*, a beautiful work quoting the same chant tune.

Earlier this fall, Anton approached me with a new text, *In a Deep, Unbounded Darkness*. This text originates from China, and was adapted from the translation around 2012 by Dr. Mary Louise Bringle, Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Brevard College in North Carolina. In keeping with the original musical setting, I only utilized three of the four verses of her adaptation. I am truly

honored at the opportunity to contribute to the vibrant musical heritage of St. Olaf College, and excited to hear its realization at the Christmas Festival this year.”

Arranger Christopher Aspaas currently serves as the Director of Choral Activities and Associate Professor of Music at Texas Christian University. Formerly an Associate Professor of Choral Music at St. Olaf College, Aspaas conducted the Viking Chorus and the Chapel Choir. Aspaas has produced more than forty arrangements and compositions for a variety of choral settings. This arrangement was written for the 2011 St. Olaf Chapel Choir vespers and arranged for the 2021 St. Olaf College Christmas Festival.

Carol of the Advent

arr. Philip R. Dietterich

Set to the classic text of *People, Look East* by Eleanor Farjeon, *Carol of The Advent* (arr. Philip R. Dietterich) is a cheerful Christmas tune that has been delighting singers and audience members alike for almost 40 years. Eleanor Farjeon was a life-long London resident and devout Catholic. She was best known for her critically acclaimed poetry and nursery rhymes, the most memorable of which is her poem *Morning Has Broken*. Farjeon enjoyed a life long relationship with the Catholic Church and described her faith as “a progression toward which her spiritual life moved rather than a conversion experience.”¹

The piece was originally published in 1928 as *Carol of The Advent* in the 3rd part of *Modern Texts Written for or Adapted to Traditional Tunes* in *The Oxford Book of Carols*. In that version, the text by Farjeon was set to an ancient Besançon carol tune called “Chantons, Bargiés, Noué, Noué” that paints the picture of a lively call to action for people, furrows, birds, stars, and angels alike to begin preparations for Christmas or “the crowning of the year.” The playful language and personification of furrows and stars project a lively and cheerful atmosphere.

This lively atmosphere is further developed by Philip R. Dietterich in this arrangement. The song begins at a moderate tempo with Sopranos encouraging the people of the audience to look East and sing praises and make preparations for the coming of the Lord. There is a brief moment of reflection when the piece changes meter and moves to minor as the choir sings of “love the bird.” The song then increases to a brisk tempo for the remainder of the song and eventually culminates into all voices singing in glorious unison that “Him who cometh from the East " is near. The piece ends when all voices burst into an ecstatic fit of divine harmony proclaiming that “Love, the Lord is on the way.”

There is also a more inclusive and secular interpretation of the text. While the line “Love, the Lord is on the way.” can be interpreted as religious because of the mentioning of the Lord,

¹ *The Presbyterian Hymnal Companion*, p. 323, accessed at “People, Look East.” *The Hymns and Carols of Christmas*.
https://www.hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com/Hymns_and_Carols/people_look_east.htm.

one can choose to focus more heavily on the aspect of Love and the personal emotional intensity that comes with the holiday season. This projects a more human and global context for audience members from all walks of life to enjoy.

God is Love (ABBOT'S LEIGH)

arr. John Ferguson

John Ferguson (b. 1941) is a well-known organist, teacher, and composer from Cleveland, Ohio with more than 100 titles to his credit in the Lutheran liturgy. Ferguson earned a Bachelor of Music from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, a Master of Music from Kent State University, and a Doctor of Musical Arts from Eastman School of Music. Ferguson has been a visiting professor at the University of Notre Dame and the Yale Institute of Sacred Music, as well as a full-time professor at Kent State University and St. Olaf College. At St. Olaf, Ferguson was a professor of organ and church music, as well as the conductor of the St. Olaf Cantorei choir from 1983 to 2012.

Originally arranged in 2004 for the hymn text *Lord of Light*, Ferguson's treatment of the traditional hymn tune ABBOT'S LEIGH has been slightly modified to fit this year's processional text *God is Love*. ABBOT'S LEIGH was written in 1941 by composer Cyril Vincent Taylor (1907-1991) and was named after the English city in which it was composed. The hymn *God is Love* was written by Welsh Bishop Timothy Rees (1874-1939) in 1922.

ABBOT'S LEIGH is a hymn tune in moderate 3/4 time in the key of C Major, and in this arrangement is accompanied by organ and orchestra. This hymn text *God is Love* has three stanzas with text most likely based on Bible verses such as "But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love," (1 John 4:8) and "We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them," (1 John 4:16) which demonstrates the divine love of God.

Hallelujah (Mount of Olives)

Ludwig van Beethoven

Ludwig van Beethoven composed his first and only oratorio, *Christus am Olberge* (*The Mount of Olives*), in late 1802. The piece features a text written by Franz Xaver Huber which tells the narrative of the Passion of Christ from a humanist perspective, emphasizing Christ's love for all humankind.² 1802 was a year of great emotional turmoil for Beethoven as he was discovering that he was permanently losing his hearing. His music began to take on themes of triumph over great suffering and pain, but also an overall dark and moody tone, expressing his own emotional struggles. In October 1802, just months prior to the premiere of *Christus*, Beethoven wrote the Heiligenstadt Testament, detailing the intense despair he felt about losing his hearing.³ Huber's text for the oratorio has a significant number of thematic and textual similarities to the Heiligenstadt Testament, implying that Beethoven played a significant role in Huber's writing process.⁴

Breaking a convention of the oratorio genre, Beethoven assigned to a tenor the role of portraying Jesus, rather than the traditional bass soloist, putting Jesus into the archetype of a suffering hero. As a whole, *Christus* is extremely dramatic and urgent; many scholars consider it to have been a step in Beethoven's process towards writing his opera, *Fidelio*.⁵ However, a dramatic tone for such a religiously significant narrative brought quite a bit of criticism from Beethoven's contemporaries. Despite this, *Christus* was generally received quite well following its premiere. It was played no less than four times a year in Vienna, drawing full houses as late as 1825.⁶

² Stanley, Glenn. *The Cambridge Companion to Beethoven*. Cambridge University Press, 2000. 221.

³ Kerman, Joseph, Alan Tyson, Scott G. Burnham, Douglas Johnson, and William Drabkin. "Beethoven, Ludwig van." *Grove Music Online*. . Oxford University Press. Date of access 21 Nov. 2021, <<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000040026> >

⁴ Bekker, Paul, and M. M. Bozman. *Beethoven*. [3rd. revised edition],. Dent, 1932. 263.

⁵ Stanley. 221-2.

⁶ Bekker and Bozman. 263.

The final movement of the *Christus* takes the form of a Hallelujah Chorus. This movement especially exemplifies the theme of triumph over fear. It begins with a majestically bold instrumental introduction largely featuring the brass, then the chorus enters in firm unison. After this dramatic and bold opening, the strings and sopranos begin a lively fugue with the altos, with more and more instruments and voices weaving in. It is during this fugue that Beethoven quotes the Hallelujah from Handel's *Messiah*, one of the most influential oratorios in the Western canon.⁷ The chorus then begins a call and response between the upper and lower voices, building the dramatic tension that underpins the chaos of the fugue. The whole ensemble then repeats this call and response, dramatically swelling again to rebuild the tension. The music accelerates, becoming more urgent but less chaotic, with staccato unison proclamations from the chorus while the orchestra dizzyingly climbs up and down the register, occasionally joining the chorus in unison. The piece concludes with a dramatic arpeggiation in the chorus, while the brass gets the last word with a triumphant final cadence.

With its urgent and dramatic setting of a text dealing with such historically significant themes as the inherent and equal dignity of all humans, Christ's love, and triumph over sorrow and suffering, this oratorio remains relevant in the Western canon, especially now as the world has dealt with the global health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁷ Shrock, Dennis. *Choral Repertoire*. Oxford University Press, 2009. 447.

Bogoroditse Devo (All-Night Vigil, Op.37)

Sergei Rachmaninoff

Bogoróditse Dévo is the sixth movement of Sergei Rachmaninoff's Op. 37, the *All-Night Vigil*. The *All-night Vigil* follows the traditional liturgical structure of the [orthodox vespers](#) service, including the hymn, *O Gladsome Light*, Psalm 104, and a setting, the Nunc Dimittis. Vespers is typically held on Sunday evenings following Matins, however, the *All Night Vigil* was premiered in 1915 at a benefit for war relief less than one year following the commencement of WWI.



Rachmaninoff referred to the movements of the *All-Night Vigil* as “conscious counterfeits”⁸ of the traditional chants used in the orthodox church. *Bogoróditse Dévo*, one of the 15 movements not based on a specific chant, mimics and sustains the same meditative effect. The piece opens with a lush major chord that grounds us in peace while simultaneously ringing with joy.⁹

Though this piece is written in the dead language of old church slovanic, interweaving chant-like melodies and ever changing dynamics draw us into the spirit of prayer. *Bogoróditse Dévo* can be translated to “O Virgin” or “[Hail Mary](#),” a fundamental prayer of the Catholic Church that asks Mary to pray on our behalf. Rachmaninoff evokes this reverence toward Mary and the indescribable exchange of repentance and forgiveness as the choir swells into the height of the piece, each voice nearing the edge of their range and dynamic intensity and sustaining this brink of discomfort, to finally find resolve and grounding on the same peaceful chord that began the piece.

⁸ Bertensson, S. (1956). War and Night Vigil. In J. Leyda (Ed.), *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music* (pp. 189–209). essay, New York University.

⁹ F major as described by 19th century musician and educator, Ernest Pauer. p. 25. Pauer, E. (1977). Characteristic Beauty. In *The elements of the beautiful in music* (pp. 19–48). essay, Novello & Company.

Lo, How a Rose

Michael Praetorius

arr. Archibald T. Davidson

While the origin of the text is widely disputed, an element of mystery adds to the beauty and catharsis that *Lo, How a Rose e'er Blooming* provides to audiences and singers alike. The text is of Germanic origin and riddled with symbolism. The rose is generally regarded as a reference to the virgin Mary. The hymn also references the Old Testament and the prophecies of Isaiah, which foretell the Incarnation of Christ, the Tree of Jesse, and the traditional symbol of the lineage of Jesus. Because of its prophetic theme and foretelling of familial lines, it is a popular Christmas hymn.

Performed by the first-year Tenor/Bass Choir, *Viking Chorus*, under the direction of Tesfa Wondemagegnehu, the piece has a somber yet cathartic tone. The hymn begins at a modest volume and slowly builds over time until the singers proclaim that “She[Mary] bore to men a Savior” to show God’s love to mankind. This bold apex of the piece ends softly reminding the audience that while the birth of Jesus Christ was triumphant, throughout His life He was a modest figure.



First printed in 1599 Speyer Hymnal.

Llega la Navidad!

Roman Diaz

arr. Juan Tony Guzman

¡Llega la Navidad! was composed by Ramón Díaz (1901-1976) and arranged by Juan Tony Guzmán (b. 1959). To create an exciting and enticing Christmas carol, the piece combines two traditional song forms: the villancico and the merengue. The villancico developed during the Spanish Renaissance and is characterized by its poetic form and performance in both sacred and secular contexts.¹⁰ The merengue is the national dance of the Dominican Republic. Its music draws on folk and popular music traditions, traditionally performed by those who were politically, socially or economically marginalized.¹¹ In the late twentieth century, around the time when this piece was written, the merengue came to represent the national identity of the Dominican Republic, emphasizing the power of the voices of the people performing it.

Díaz's arrangement of the piece is lively and emphasizes the celebratory nature of the lyrics that refer to the joyous birth of Jesus. The dance rhythms of the merengue accompanied by two percussion instruments, the güiro and the tambora, maintain the dynamic nature of the song. In its clarity and simplicity, the piece communicates a vibrant energy that encapsulates both the anticipation of Christmas day and the celebration of Jesus' birth.

¹⁰<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000029375?rskey=xhWny3>

¹¹<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000018440?rskey=1vaF4f>

Holy Child

Steven Amundson

St. Olaf Orchestra conductor and Professor Emeritus of Music Steven Amundson composed *Holy Child* in 2002. *Holy Child* is arranged for treble voices, with the option of piano accompaniment or pairing with a small string section and solo flute. The original composition exclusively featured piano and chorus parts, but Amundson added the option of string accompaniment in order to enhance the warmth of the piece. Amundson and Gary Eliason, the author of the text, were good friends who met while attending Luther College together in the mid-1970s. Amundson explains that while composing *Holy Child*, he “sat at the piano and came up with some music first, which is very odd - normally we start with text, and then we go to the music. But I just wrote this little lullaby that needed words, and Gary came up with them.”¹²

Holy Child is a loving, tender, gentle lullaby, sung for the Christ child by his mother Mary.¹³ But as the lyrics are being sung by the choir, one can imagine that voices of angels join Mary in singing to Baby Jesus. Listen for exchanges between the instrumentalists and the chorus within the various key changes. The melody and harmony run distinctly between both the chorus and the orchestra, which makes *Holy Child* a simple, yet sweet selection to listen to. *Holy Child* is a perfect example of “Love Divine,” whether it is a mother singing to her child or extending an act of kindness to a stranger. Not only is love evident in the text of “Holy Child”, but the love can be seen between the performers as well through their gracious collaboration. Dr. Therees Hibbard states, “This is the first time I have chosen a piece because of a person. Because this is Professor Amundson’s final Fest before he retires, I wanted to find a piece that honors him the best way we can, while also showcasing Manitou’s talent.”¹⁴

¹² Quote taken from Steven Amundson, Professor Emeritus of Music; Conductor, St. Olaf Orchestra

¹³ Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., 2018.

¹⁴ Quote taken from Therees Tkach Hibbard, Visiting Associate Professor of Music - Voice, Choral Conducting and Choral Literature; Conductor, Manitou Singers and Chamber Singers

Silent Night

Stephen Paulus

The text for *Silent Night* was written in 1816 by an Austrian, Catholic priest, Father Joseph Mohr (1792-1848). He was looking for a new Christmas Eve hymn and recruited the church's organist, Franz Gruber (1787-1863), to set the text to music. Since its composition the hymn has been translated into over three hundred languages; including eight English translations. Perhaps the most famous performance of *Silent Night* took place on Christmas Eve, 1914, when German soldiers sang it from their trenches to serenade English soldiers in a rare gesture of goodwill during the opening months of World War I. The English soldiers responded by singing "The First Noel," and later soldiers from both sides met in No Man's Land (between the opposing trenches) to share whiskey, cigars, and an all-too-brief Christmas truce.

Stephen Paulus, the arranger, is a prolific American music composer who has written for a variety of ensembles and has earned Grammy Award nominations for various choral and classical works.¹⁵ Paulus is a Minnesota native and worked closely with the Minnesota Orchestra. He also founded the Minnesota Composers Forum, now known as the American Composers Forum, in 1973.

Paulus' arrangement of *Silent Night* was written for Dale Warland and the Dale Warland Singers and came on the back end of a series of Christmas carol arrangements he began releasing in the early 1980s. This arrangement features two soloists who begin and end the piece. Paulus wrote drama into his arrangement, drawing the ear to rise in tension and the satisfying resolution of that tension. The simplicity and uniqueness of this arrangement highlights some of the marked characteristics of Paulus' choral writing, making it an exciting addition to the program.

¹⁵ <https://stephenpaulus.com/pages/biography>

God's Love Made Visible

Dave Brubeck

orch. James E. Bobb

Dave Brubeck is most famous to the public for being a jazz composer and pianist, having gained notoriety in the jazz world for experimenting with time signatures that were not typical of jazz music at the time. (Ironically, his most famous piece, *Take Five*, was not composed by him, but rather the saxophonist in his Quartet, Paul Desmond.) The very same quintuple-time backbone that made *Take Five* such a hit and allowed it to remain the jazz standard that it is today is also what drives the Brubeck-composed “God’s Love Made Visible.” To get into the groove, wait for what feels like a downbeat, then start counting to five quickly along with the eighth-note pulse.

Brubeck’s first release of this piece was in 1975 within a distinctly non-jazz context for choir and orchestra in the score for *La Fiesta de La Posada*. The posada is a tradition for many Latin Americans that takes place from December 16 to Christmas Eve that re-enacts Mary and Joseph’s search for a place for Jesus to be born. The reference to the posada is less out of place in this piece than it may initially seem. The composer’s own program note includes the following:

“I was born in a California town founded by the Spanish, raised on a cattle ranch that had been a Mexican land grant, and have absorbed and observed Mexican folk music all my life. As a musician, I have toured Mexico six times and always enjoyed listening to the folk music of the various regions. [The music I heard there] reflects those qualities I most admire in people... dignity in moments of tragedy, infectious high spirits in moments of joy, and an unshakeable religious faith made evident in a strong sense of one’s own worth and a deep respect for the shared values of one’s own group — family, church, village. These qualities, I think, are universal to people with a strong communal sense — an increasingly rare attribute in urban

culture. It is this sense of sharing in an event which I have tried to capture in the simple retelling of the Christmas story.”¹⁶

While he used this cultural exposure as a point of influence for this work, it was his wife, Iola, who provided the lyrics to the piece at large, including “God’s Love Made Visible.” The words of the song are those of immense praise for God. The choir (as well as the audience!) joyously sing in celebration of that which God provides to us, including the Son of whom the preceding events of His birth are the focus of the tradition that *La Fiesta de La Posada* highlights.

¹⁶ Dave Brubeck, program note for *La Fiesta de La Posada*, accessible at <https://www.davebrubeck.com/la-fieta-de-la-posada>.

Good Christian Friends, Rejoice!

arr. Robert Scholz

Good Christian Friends Rejoice is a Christmas carol and hymn written by Heinrich Suso that dates back to the Renaissance era. This unique hymn is classified as a macaronic hymn, meaning it is written in two different languages: Latin and German. Although the writing dates back to the Renaissance, it would not have been performed at Roman Catholic services, as these were only in Latin. Another reason is many macaronic hymns also require dance and folk instrumental accompaniment, which is not common practice within Roman Catholic services. This carol gained popularity because the hymn was rooted in popular idioms. It was commonly performed in part because the hymn did not have the constraints of a chapel service like other popular hymns.

Listen for the joyous and bouncing rhythms of solo French horn followed by the bright entrance of the piccolo and flute with fast grace notes. The texture is very light until the choir begins to sing. When the choir starts, the active melody takes off with lots of different voices playing the tune. It almost sounds like a story should be told over the music!

Christus Natus Est

Rosephayne Powell

Hope is a precious thing. Seeking it in the midst of a war is constant for many, but finding it is a gift few receive without encouragement. Young Countee Cullen, a prominent figure and poet of the Harlem Renaissance, would find it in reflecting on the story made new to him during the Christmas season of 1943. Having been raised by a pastor following the death of his Grandmother, Cullen had once considered himself to have “a pagan inclination,” and only publicly changed his opinion with the publishing of *The Black Christ, and other Poems* in 1929.¹⁷ Although his time of certain faith would have been short at the time of writing this poem, Cullen was able to deeply connect his own emotions and understanding of the event within the concept of what an absolving savior might mean for the African American community during his time. His connection of the birth of Christ in humility to the purpose of exalting the oppressed is reflected in the contrasting language of his poem depicting regal beauty and royal court dejects. The progression of the shift in the nature of the thematic language from delicate to roughcast, with the final stanza’s words, “The manger still outshines the throne, Christ must and will come to his own.” This line challenges the initial idea of a “perfect” savior for “perfect” people.

Dr. Rosephanye Powell, the nationally acclaimed composer whose works “touch the heart and soul of both listener and performer,”¹⁸ used this poem as the text for her thought-provoking piece. Her understanding of African American Spirituals and expertise in voice health inform the construction of this piece, which reflects not a tone of mere joy or awe, but a call to “lift up the downtrodden... without apology” for coming retributive redemption.¹⁹ Each note is written with powerful pain that demands to be felt, and yet these notes ring with hope. No longer is it time for mourning; the “voice crying out in the desert” that the prophet Isaiah spoke of so long ago has been brought forward in song. The structure of the piece creates a vivid image of music

¹⁷ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/countee-cullen>

¹⁸ <http://rosephanyepowell.com/biography/>

¹⁹ <http://rosephanyepowell.com/compositions/christmas/>

resonating throughout a city as news of deliverance by the Messiah's hand passes from house to house.

The intentionality behind every sound resounds with the retribution and recompense of each drop of blood shed throughout generations of Black people. From the rising and falling melody that creates a sound reminiscent of languished wails that returns with each verse, to the repetition of the litany of the poem *Hosannah! Christus natus est*, Rosephanye Powell crafts a piece that remembers and honors the past of her people, recognizes the conflicts we face in the present, and foreshadows a turning of the tide for every hurt and broken person.

Go Tell It On the Mountain

arr. Rollo Dilworth

Go Tell it On the Mountain is an African American Spiritual with origins in slavery, and as such it surrounds various contemporary discourses such as the history and present reality of racism in America, cultural appropriation and traditions of choral music, identity of performers, and religious expression. After emancipation, several individuals and institutions undertook the important task of notating and transcribing these songs, including Fisk University's music director, George L. White, and keyboardist, Ella Sheppard.²⁰ (Follow [this link](#) for more information about the Fisk Jubilee Singers' 1871 international tour.)

John Wesley Work Jr. and his brother, Frederick Jerome Work, led the Fisk Jubilee Singers from



Members of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, and Ella Sheppard at the keyboard (circa 1870)

1898-1904.²¹ John Work's book explains that lyrics from spirituals are generally derived from the Bible. For most enslaved people at the time, literacy was illegal, but the Bible was frequently disseminated orally. The lyrics of *Go Tell It On the Mountain* come from [Luke 2:8-20](#) where angels appear to shepherds during the night, and tell them a Messiah has been born.

It is crucial to acknowledge the discourse surrounding the appropriateness of a predominantly white institution performing songs that originated in slavery. In October 2018, [Dr. Marti Newland](#), author of [Sounding "Black": An Ethnography of Racialized Vocality at Fisk University](#), lectured on campus. She argued that folk songs, originally sung by enslaved people, are transformed into "concert spirituals" through the "transcription and arrangement in standard Western notation for soloists or choirs and sung with a bel canto vocal aesthetic with occasional

²⁰ Newland, Marti, and Fox, Aaron A. *Sounding "Black": An Ethnography of Racialized Vocality at Fisk University*, 2014, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

²¹ Hawn, C. Michael. "History of Hymns: "Go Tell It On the Mountain." Discipleship Ministries, The United Methodist Church.

use of straight-tone singing.” Furthermore, she posits that as part of the Western canon, these songs should be sung by well-informed performers of all races.²² However, Newland also recognized *there are songs that should not be performed by non-blacks*. An example would be *Cycles of My Being* by Tyshawn Sorey and Terrance Hayes which focuses on contemporary experiences of Black Americans.²³ (Click [here](#) for a performance excerpt). Importantly, the concept of “well-informed” is certainly subjective, but one way of increasing our knowledge as performers is by reading (and writing) program notes, learning about the history and present-day practice of spirituals, and reviewing Dr. Newland's talk, all of which can be accomplished [here](#).

²² Newland, Marti. "Concert Spirituals and the Fisk Jubilee Singers." *American Music Review* XI, no. 1 (2010): 4-5,14-15.

²³ "Cycle of My Being." <https://www.operaphila.org/whats-on/events/recitals/2018/cycles-of-my-being/>

Love Came Down at Christmas

arr. Richard Lloyd

This setting of the popular English poem “Love Came Down at Christmas” is a tender expression of one person’s understanding of love and devotion during the Christmas season - perfect for our theme of “Love Divine.” Because the poet, Christina Rossetti, was a devout Christian herself, this particular poem explicitly references love and devotion through the birth of Jesus Christ. Rossetti’s expression of faith, however, is quite subtle. In the poem, she describes a love that exists everywhere during this time of year. Whether one explicitly associates this love with divine love or with the more humanistic experience of love, Rossetti illustrates a love that is accessible to all : “love be yours and love be mine; / love to God and others.”

Two hymn tunes are commonly associated with Christina Rossetti’s poem: [Gartan](#) and [Hermitage](#). Although this piece of music features an older English poem with strong melodic associations, arranger Richard Lloyd does not limit himself to these two commonly utilized tunes. Rather Lloyd creates a new and tranquil melody decorated with a rich harmonic backdrop. Composed in 2009, Lloyd undermines many of the listener’s expectations regarding the direction of each of Rossetti’s lines. His tender and expressive melody encapsulates some of the same subtleties that the poet explores in her work. For a majority of the piece, the choir seems to happily and peacefully reflect on the arrival of “Love,” and then shifts harmonically when asking Rossetti’s important question: “But wherewith for sacred sign?,” in other words “how will we know that this is love?” Ultimately, Richard Lloyd’s setting of “Love Came Down at Christmas” successfully articulates the poet's meditations on love during the Christmas season.²⁴

²⁴ Interview with James E. Bobb, 15 November 2021.

https://hymnary.org/text/love_came_down_at_christmas

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God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

arr. Marques L. A. Garrett

This arrangement is a contemporary spin on a classic Christmas carol. Its arranger, Marques Garrett, is an Assistant Professor of Music in Choral Activities at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the Glenn Korff School of Music. He describes his piece as follows:

“This arrangement slowly unfolds with each verse from unison to eventual three parts. To use as many verses as possible yet not make the arrangement laborious, the fourth through sixth verses use telescoping offset by two beats with the melody in the accompaniment.”

The singers feed off of the building tension in the chords struck by the piano to focus into the middle section of the piece. This section modulates to a different key and is performed a cappella. It is also much slower and softer than the preceding section, adding a moment of calm and clarity in an otherwise beautifully chaotic piece.

God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen is particularly fitting for a choir populated by first-year tenors and basses. This is emphasized in the final stanza of the piece when the singers proclaim “Now to the Lord sing praises, all you within this place, and with true love and brotherhood, each other now embrace.” After all, *Viking Chorus* is the perfect place to sing praises and uplift your peers when you’re a new first year student on the Hill.

In Silent Night

Mitchell B. Southall

In Silent Night by Mitchell B. Southall makes a welcome return to the St. Olaf Choir repertoire and to the Christmas Festival this year. This piece, though often characterized as “deceptively simple” due to the intuitive harmonic resolutions and melodic repetition, finds moments of crescendo and harmonic tension that mimics the anticipation that must have been felt on the night Christ was born. In the beginning, the text²⁵ instills a sense of wonder and hope as it places the audience at the nativity. When the third verse begins, it sets a different tone. Chords that echo harmonies of early blues ring with more melancholy. Suddenly, the audience is no longer in disbelief of this “innocent” and “holy” child. Christ is presented for all that He embodies, “this son of God and son of man [who] shall one day cry and later die upon a cross for you and for me.”²⁶ Throughout this revelation, the piece maintains its harmonic structure. However, at the end of the piece, the choir fades into a moment of instability, only to find complete resolution with repetition of the phrase “the prince of peace is born.” Perhaps, this was Southall’s reminder to us that Jesus and the hope and love he embodies is our most steady force.



Unfortunately, there is not enough documented information about Mitchell B. Southall (1922-1989) to fully understand or speculate his inspiration for writing this piece.²⁷ Southall was a black-american pianist (classical and jazz), composer, and educator born in Rochester, NY in 1922. He became a [published composer](#) in 1943 and later served as a conductor and music theorist at Mississippi Valley State College.²⁸ *In Silent Night* is among his most notable works, and was dedicated to Dr. Lena B Morton, a professor at Langston University in Oklahoma where Southall had attended.²⁹

²⁵ Origin of the text is unknown.

²⁶ Southall, M. B. composer. *In Silent Night* sheet music. Ralph Jusko Publications, Inc. 1957.

²⁷ As we reflect during this season on the gifts of life, let us not forget the sacrifices that have been made. Let us as a community of musicians be reminded of histories that have been hidden or lost and be empowered to preserve the memory and music of all artists going forward.

²⁸ Horne, A. (1996). Southall, Mitchell Bernard (1922-1989). In *Brass Music of black composers: A Bibliography* (pp. 247-248). essay, Greenwood Press.

²⁹ Photo of Dr. Lena B. Morton, to whom *In Silent Night* was Dedicated. Unknown. (1922). Negro Higher Education in 1921-1922. *The Crisis*, 24(3), 108-115.

Mary's Little Boy Child

Jester Hairston

Jester Hairston is a man of the twentieth century. He was born in North Carolina in 1901 and died in 2000 in Los Angeles, at 98 years old. He was around to see many of the greatest turning points for popular and folk music in America throughout that century, and “Mary’s Little Boy Child” was one of his many valuable contributions to this greater story.

By the 1950s, Hairston had already developed a reputation as both a talented arranger of African-American folk songs for choir as well as an in-demand conductor nationwide since the mid-1930s. At some point, Hairston was asked to write a Christmas carol for Walter Schumann and his Hollywood Choir. Already in his catalog was a song he composed that took inspiration from calypso, a musical style that originated from Trinidad and Tobago and had gained commercial success in the United States in the post-war era. He decided to give this song holiday lyrics and repackage it for Schumann as “Mary’s Little Boy Child.” Since then, this song has taken two separate lives: one as a 1956 hit by the singer Harry Belafonte, and another as a classic piece to perform with choirs.

The version heard in the festival is upbeat and glides across the calypso rhythm by virtue of a solo vocalist singing the melody, supported by the rest of the choir until the soloist drops out and the entire choir sings the core of the piece with as much power as they can give. The version you hear also adds percussion to reinforce the cultural background from which this piece is written, as Hairston’s appreciation of music outside of the United States gives the song an attitude of joy and praise. Even in borrowing from calypso, Hairston does something inherently American: he mixes cultures to create brand new expressions. It is also consistent with the song’s joy directed towards the birth of Jesus, a man who is very famous for his promotion of the acceptance of all and love given to everyone.

Gloria Fanfare

Jeffery Ames

Some pieces of music take a moment to build up before they decide to knock you off your feet and force you to surrender control to the music, but “Gloria Fanfare” does not think to wait. It introduces itself with an a cappella blast of glory on its very first syllable. Only after the initial choral passage does the piece simmer down with the introduction of piano as well as two trumpets to accompany the choir. Every element then builds and builds throughout the course of the piece until you hear the choir and the trumpets both dish out the same force that the choir gave at the very beginning.

The text of “Gloria Fanfare,” is largely based on the hymn “Gloria in excelsis Deo.” Its opening presents what the Angels sang when Jesus was born: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to all people.” In the piece, several phrases from the hymn are repeated in combination with passages in English and other passages in Latin, all of which weave together to elaborate on the primary message conveyed by the title of the original hymn. The choir gives praise to God and asks Him to give all He can to bring freedom and happiness to them, and it translates musically as these textual elements build with the music until “Christ is born, the angels sing ‘Alleluia’” and the singers sing “Gloria” one last time.

“Gloria Fanfare” was composed by Jeffery L. Ames, who is the Director of Choral Activities at Belmont University and has gained a strong reputation as both an in-demand conductor and composer. He arranged this piece to be performed for 2009’s *Christmas at Belmont*, a holiday celebration put together by the university that is broadcast on television nationwide (perhaps they got the idea from St. Olaf?). Despite the relative recency of this piece, it takes from very old traditional elements and builds on them to create something fitting with the rapturous joy that is implied in the story of Jesus’ birth that has resonated with many for centuries.

Past Three A'Clock

John Rutter

Part of a larger set of twelve carols, John Rutter's arrangement of this old English traditional tune is lively and energetic. Described in the New Oxford *Book of Carols* as a "romantic concoction," the tune harkens back to the medieval tradition of the London waits. The waits would blow their "horns or even pla[y] tunes to mark the hours," while patrolling every night to keep watch and order in the town. Although their watchmen duties would slowly dissipate, these groups continued to utilize a unique piece of music or trademark melody that was attributed to that particular group, "which often derived from the old hourly calls." "Past Three A'Clock" is one example of this tradition.

The traditional aspect of these carols is partly what draws Rutter to them. In an interview, Rutter explains that "[t]he Christmas carol is a humble art form that has a very long history ... dating back to the middle ages." In his arrangement of "Past Three A'Clock," listen for how the composer continuously builds onto the tune by adding a thicker harmonic texture and shifting between different settings of the stanzas. The piece begins with a clear presentation of the familiar tune in the treble voices. The second stanza continues the treble melody, adding a choral "ah's" accompaniment underneath. Then, the full choir joins in the text by the third stanza. This arrangement is full of ebb and flow, shifting between an expressive and transparent melodic line or a complex and joyous full-choir celebration.

This jubilant musical writing seems to be representative of the composer's long history of Christmas carol writing. In the same interview, Rutter describes the resonance of his other popular original carols: "Shepherd's Pipe Carol" and "Star Carol," among others. Around the holidays, Rutter claims that so many aspects have the possibility of going awry, but "the music of Christmas is always perfect, so [he] love[s] to remember and celebrate Christmas in music and

song.” Overall, this arrangement of “Past Three A’Clock” embraces that “sense of wonder” Rutter and so many others experience during the Christmas season.³⁰

³⁰ Wine, Tom., David N. Childs, René Clausen, Libby. Larsen, Morten Lauridsen, Kirke. Mechem, James. Mulholland, et al. *Composers on Composing for Choir* Chicago: GIA Publications, 2007.

Keyte, Hugh., Andrew. Parrott, and Clifford. Bartlett. “The New Oxford Book of Carols : edited by Hugh Keyte and Andrew Parrott ; associate editor, Clifford Bartlett.” Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

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Angels' Dance

Steven Amundson

Composed by St. Olaf's very own Steven Amundson, *Angel's Dance* begins with an uneven time signature that alternates the feeling in every other measure. The melody is first introduced in the solo woodwinds. You then can hear in the French Horn a melody inspired by the very popular Christmas Carol "Angels We Have Heard on High" (on which you can find another program note in this collection). In the middle, the fast melody becomes a slow melodic line sung by the flute. The melody heard in the middle section continues with the brass, and the woodwinds return with the tune heard at the beginning. The piece ends with energetic lines in the strings and woodwinds while the brass returns with the carol finishing off the piece with a bang.

Although the melody is light and spritely, it belies a deeper meaning. When asked about the piece's origin, Amundson wrote,

I composed *Angels' Dance* in 1995 soon after my father passed away. Although I had composed a few small pieces, this was the first work I created for orchestra and I did so with the intent of honoring my dad who was a very important and inspiring presence in my life. Dad felt tremendous pride when I joined the faculty at St. Olaf back in 1981, and I've long felt deep gratitude for all his generous support.

The St. Olaf Orchestra premiered *Angel's Dance* in 1995. The piece has gone on to be performed by many different professional orchestras across the United States, including performances by the Atlanta Symphony, BBC Concerto Orchestra, Chicago Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, and many more. In all, there have been over 175 performances of *Angel's Dance*. But the piece's success was far from its composer's mind when he decided to perform it at this concert: "I chose to program this piece for my last Christmas Festival both because of its personal significance, but also because it has special meaning for my extended family."

Carols for the Choirs

setting by John Ferguson

The tradition of the choral collage began in the late 1960's when Kenneth Jennings took post as conductor of the St. Olaf Choir.³¹ This ensemble choir piece features each of the choirs individually while simultaneously finding unity among them. John Ferguson, known affectionately as “Ferg” to former students and colleagues, has often been called upon to arrange works in this tradition. Ferguson served 29 years at St. Olaf College as Elliot and Klara Stockdal Johnson Professor of Organ and Church Music, conductor of Cantorei, and cantor for the student congregation.³² He is well recognized for his arrangements and settings of hymn texts and tunes. Such compositional talents can be heard in this year's choral collage *Carols for the Choirs*.³³

Carols for the Choirs was originally commissioned for the 2007 Christmas Festival, yet feels particularly relevant in the context of this year's theme “Love Divine.” The piece centers around the Cameroon traditional carol *He Came Down*, which is set as a call and response. Each choir takes turns questioning, “Why did he come?” to which the remaining choirs join in, acclaiming, “He came down that we may have love” and “light/hope/joy” in the following verses. Interspersed between each of these verses is a carol that echoes these promises of Jesus' coming. Chapel choir leads us in this time honored tradition with the hymn *Love Has Come*, followed by the *Sussex Carol* (St. Olaf Choir), *Todo la Tierra* (Cantorei), *Jeg er så glad* (Viking Chorus), and ending with *Stille Nacht* (Manitou Singers). Ferguson intentionally chose these hymns from the Evangelical Lutheran Worship to reflect the diversity of language and culture within the St. Olaf community as well as to remind us that “Christ's incarnation is a gift for all people of every place and time.”³⁴

³¹ This is according to Dr. Anton Armstrong.

³² <https://www.stolaf.edu/singforjoy/about/musicadv.html>

³³ <https://web.archive.org/web/20130616202405/http://www.morningstarmusic.com/composers-ferguson.cfm>

³⁴ Quoted from Performance Suggestions printed in *Carols for the Choirs: A carol collage* by John Ferguson Arr. © 2008 Augsburg Fortress

Angels We Have Heard on High

arr. Robert Scholz

The melody of “Angels, We Have Heard on High” originates from “Les Anges dans nos campagnes,” a traditional French tune first set with the Latin refrain “Gloria in excelsis deo” in James Montgomery’s “Angels from the Realms of Glory” in 1816. His piece originated in a local newspaper, the *Sheffield Iris*, and quickly gained widespread popularity. It was published in many different hymn books from 1819 onwards, and evolved into the tune that you will hear during this performance. Since then, “Angels We Have Heard on High” has become a staple in the Christmas carol repertoire, ranging from covers by popular a capella group Pentatonix to being included in worship services.

This particular arrangement was created by a former professor at St. Olaf, Robert Scholz, who passed away earlier this year. The piece begins with the main melody in solo flute, with light string accompaniment. The extravagant orchestration quickly picks up the melody, passing it between voices. Scholz's orchestra arrangement welcomes the audience to join the ensembles in singing the tune. In the latter half of the piece, while the strings and brass continue with the tune, the woodwinds play fast flourishes enhancing the climax of the hymn. The finale is a large recap of the main melody, in unison with the entire orchestra.

Praise to the Lord

arr. F.M. Christiansen

Born in Norway in 1871, F. Melius Christiansen became proficient in piano, organ, and violin from a young age.³⁵ He moved to the United States at only 17 years old in search of more job opportunities. After spending several years working and studying at Augsburg College and the Northwestern Conservatory of Music, Christiansen moved back to Europe and spent some time in Leipzig, Germany. There he observed the St. Thomas Church choir—an experience that was likely a large source of inspiration for him later in his choral career. He was invited to be head of the St. Olaf Music Department in 1903, and founded the St. Olaf Choir in 1912. Christiansen's compositional legacy consists of over 250 choral arrangements as part of the “St. Olaf Choral Series” by Augsburg Publishing.³⁶

Prolific German hymn-writer Joachim Neander authored “Praise to the Lord” in 1680, and the words were translated to English in 1863 by Catherine Winkworth, who did lots of work with translating German religious texts.³⁷ This hymn falls under one of Christiansen's signature styles that René Clausen calls “extended choral fantasias.”³⁸ In these elaborate pieces, textual and rhythmic variations are used to rework and add onto traditional tunes.³⁹ F. Melius Christiansen is perhaps best known as a pioneer of a cappella, or unaccompanied, choral music. There are several reasons that he so favored this style of composition. First of all, during his time at St. Olaf, there weren't many skilled instrumentalists to call on for accompaniment.⁴⁰ Additionally, when the choir was on tour, it was hard to know whether venues would have good pianos. Christiansen also held the belief that “the union between poetry and music was more evident when the text could emerge naturally.”⁴¹

³⁵ “Dr. F. Melius Christiansen A Brief Biography.” Shaw-Olson Center for College History. St. Olaf College.

<https://wp.stolaf.edu/archives/my-years-at-st-olaf/dr-f-melius-christiansen-a-brief-biography/>

³⁶ Gehl, Robin. “Christiansen, F. Melius (1871–1955).” MNopedia. Minnesota Historical Society, February 26, 2019. <https://www.mnopedia.org/person/christiansen-f-melius-1871-1955>.

³⁷ Albert Pinsonneault, “A Conductor's Guide to Selected Choral Works of F. Melius Christiansen (1871-1955),” (2009).

³⁸ René Clausen, “The Compositional Style of F. Melius Christiansen,” *Choral Journal* 37, no. 4 (1996): 19.

³⁹ Clausen, 21.

⁴⁰ Anton Armstrong, “The Musical Legacy of F. Melius Christiansen,” *Choral Journal* 37, no. 4 (1996): 11.

⁴¹ Armstrong, 12

This piece is an arrangement published in 1920 resembling an advent hymn.⁴² The vocal texture starts simply and broadens as the piece progresses. The first verse is sung by sopranos and altos beginning in unison before breaking into four-part harmony, and then the tenors and basses come in. The lower voices take on the melody for a reiteration of the first verse and for the second verse, while the treble voices sing ornamental lines above. This gives the middle section of the piece a lighter feeling before the simpler rhythms of the last verse. The voices all join together for one of the final lines “Let the Amen // Sound from His people again,” launching the piece into its strong, triumphant ending.

⁴² “Praise to the Lord.” Augsburg Fortress. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. <https://www.augsburgfortress.org/store/product/9780800645045/Praise-to-the-Lord>.

Light Dawns on a Weary World

Mack Wilberg

Commissioned specifically for the 2016 St. Olaf Christmas Festival, “Light Dawns on a Weary World” by [Mack Wilberg](#) makes a reappearance on this year’s program. Notably, Wilberg is no stranger to composing for large ensembles like the St. Olaf Christmas Festival. This seasoned composer has worked with the The Tabernacle Choir since 1999.



This piece evokes many qualities characteristic of the Tabernacle Choir’s performance. Willberg taps into the expansive ranges and ringing sonorities available to choirs of St. Olaf’s size. This piece doesn't only create a large and impressive full-choir sound; it also breaks down into softer moments, before drawing the voices together for a joyous conclusion.

Set to the popular [hymn text](#) of [Mary Louise Bringle](#), Wilberg’s “Light Dawns on a Weary World” put a unique spin on the original text. Throughout the piece, both the choir and accompanying orchestra fly through many tonal centers, constantly driving forward with the asymmetrical time signature. Each of Wilberg’s turns of phrase will keep both the audience and performers on their toes with remarkable delight.⁴³

The hopeful message of this piece makes a fitting addition to the return of the St. Olaf Christmas Festival this year. Our world is weary in more ways than one. The lasting exhaustion of the pandemic and the pervading social unrest has consumed our St. Olaf Community, in addition to many across the country. Yet, a hopefulness and goodness springs forth from that

⁴³https://hymnary.org/text/light_dawns_on_a_weary_world

“Mack Wilberg.” Oxford University Press. Accessed 15 November 2021. [https://global.oup.com/academic/category/arts-and-humanities/sheet-music/composers/wilbergm/?cc=us&lang=en&Jones, Elliott S. "A Survey of the Choral Arrangements of Mack Wilberg and Musical Analyses of Representative Arrangements." Order No. 9992503, University of Miami, 2000. https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/survey-choral-arrangements-mack-wilberg-musical/docview/304608480/se-2?accountid=351. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/370637](https://global.oup.com/academic/category/arts-and-humanities/sheet-music/composers/wilbergm/?cc=us&lang=en&Jones, Elliott S.)

same weary world, found in both the natural world and our fellow human beings. Indeed, this music requires a high level of energy and challenges its performers. More importantly, however, Wilberg's setting of this text is a collective celebration of how these dark moments actually reveal a resilience (or light) in all of us.

Love Divine

arr. John Ferguson

Given the theme of the 2021 St. Olaf Christmas Festival, it only seems appropriate to end the concert with *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*. Composed by Charles Wesley and arranged by John Ferguson, *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling* illustrates the exaltation of and prayers to God typical of Wesley's works. Published in 1747 in a collection of hymns titled *Hymns for those that Seek, and those that Have, Redemption in the Blood of Christ*,⁴⁴ *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling* displayed Charles Wesley's desire to compose something other than the formal, old-style psalm tunes that were so often sung and played. As such, Wesley's compositions represent a new movement of music that moved away from the Calvinist metrical psalm and towards music that allowed the expression of personal emotions, specifically the emotions of the evangelical congregation.⁴⁵ It is important to note, however, that Wesley's new style of music was not always accepted, as some churches only authorized certain types of music to be played.

In *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*, different aspects of Wesley's revolutionary hymnal ideas are apparent, such as the lyrics of this hymn being a "textual parody of Dryden's 'Fairest Isle, all isles excelling.'"⁴⁶ Wesley's setting alternates between righteous, majestic, and reverent sounds. This becomes apparent as the orchestra continues to add to the texture until we are left with the instruments playing the melody or a counter melody that pushes the piece to its climax in the final verse. The progression of thoughts presented through the lyrics also reflect the motivation behind this piece. The progression is as follows: our prayers for the Holy Spirit; praying for the return of our Lord through the second coming; and prayers for the finalization of his new creation.⁴⁷ Ultimately Charles Wesley created a piece which fulfills the spiritual and musical needs of the listener as he takes us through the journey of praising God.

⁴⁴ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-love-divine-all-loves-excelling>

⁴⁵ <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199579037.001.0001/acref-9780199579037-e-3366?fromCrossSearch=true>

⁴⁶ https://www.lieder.net/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=5060

⁴⁷ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-love-divine-all-loves-excelling>

Nunc Dimittis

Robert Scholz

[Nunc Dimittis](#) is a time honored canticle in Christian faith. Since the 4th century, the Nunc Dimittis, translating roughly to “Now release,” 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.”

[Robert Scholz](#)'s *Nunc Dimittis* makes a welcome, though bittersweet, return in the 2021 Christmas festival. Dr. Bob, as he was affectionately known to his students, graduated from St. Olaf College in 1961 with a B.A in Music Education and returned in 1968, after obtaining his doctorate in choral conducting from University of Illinois. He served as conductor of Viking Chorus and Chapel Choir for 37 years, during which time he also founded what is now known as St. Olaf's Cantorei. Dr. Scholz was often described as a “musical godfather” and “the most pastoral of colleagues” by his former student and colleague Dr. Anton Armstrong '78. Scholz was a deeply faithful person, a loving husband and father, and a truly caring educator. On February 21, 2021 Robert Scholz passed away. This Christmas Festival we sing his setting of the *Nunc Dimittis* in his memory.

Beautiful Savior

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 1910.⁴⁸ F.M. Christiansen originally set the tune to Norwegian text and later published it in English for the St. Olaf Choral



Christmasfest Dress Rehearsal, 1989⁵⁰

Series. The hymn became a staple of the annual St. Olaf Christmas Festival beginning in 1924, but it did not become a consistent recessional or final piece until 1950, 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.⁴⁹

The complete hymn is in three parts. The first part is hummed, the second features a mezzo-soprano soloist with tenor and bass backing, and the third is sung by the entire choir. The third portion is the most recognizable, as it is sung at the end of every Christmasfest. 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 a 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 Choir sang this piece on a hospital lawn in Rochester. Windows opened, and patients were wheeled out onto the balconies to hear

⁴⁸ <https://wp.stolaf.edu/stolaf-choir/frequently-asked-questions/>

⁴⁹ Shaw, Joseph M. *The St. Olaf Choir : a Narrative* Northfield, Minn: St. Olaf College, 1997.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

the music.⁵¹ 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 said in an interview, the piece provides “a wonderful bonding for everyone”.⁵² 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.

⁵¹ Shaw, Joseph M. *The St. Olaf Choir : a Narrative* Northfield, Minn: St. Olaf College, 1997.

⁵² *Ibid.*

