

PROMISE OF PEACE



St. Olaf Christmas Festival
2022 Program Notes Project

THE ST. OLAF
CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL 2022

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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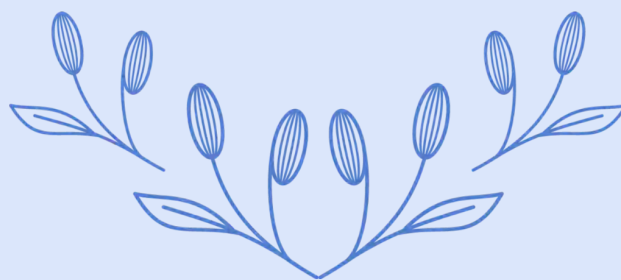


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II. “Noël” from *Symphonic Sketches*

George Chadwick

George Whitefield Chadwick (1854-1931) was an American composer, born to a musical family in Lowell, Massachusetts. Chadwick’s older brother Fitz Henry introduced him to music through teaching him organ lessons. Chadwick began his studies at New England Conservatory in Boston, Massachusetts in 1872, where he studied organ, piano, and music theory¹. In 1876, Chadwick accepted a position on the music faculty at Olivet College in Michigan, where he was both an instructor and an administrator. During his time at Olivet, Chadwick founded the Music Teachers National Association, a professional nonprofit organization for music educators that remains active today.² In 1877, Chadwick began two years of study at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Leipzig, Germany.³ He subsequently studied at the Hochschule für Musik in Munich before returning to Boston in 1880 where he became an established pedagogue, organist, and conductor. In 1897, Chadwick was appointed Director of New England Conservatory.

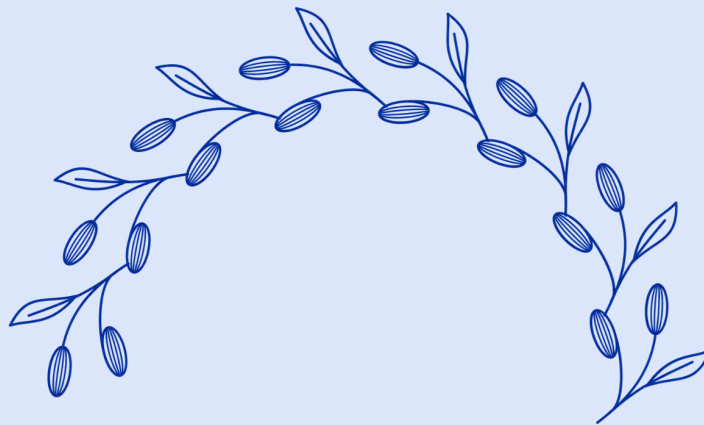
Throughout his lifetime, Chadwick composed music in many genres, including opera, chamber music, choral works, art songs, and orchestral pieces. Chadwick’s *Symphonic Sketches* is a symphonic work written between 1885 and 1904 when Chadwick was experimenting with Americanism and Modernism in his music. Music critic Bill F. Faucett describes *Symphonic Sketches* as having a conventional four-movement pattern that incorporates programmatic references (meaning it tells a story), pentatonic melodies, and impressionist qualities. Faucett goes on to explain that “the orchestration contains unexpected elements such as bass clarinet cadenzas, saxophone solos, extended brass solos, and large percussion batteries.” Noël is the second of the four symphonic sketches and was written for the birth of Chadwick’s son Noël, which is also the French word for Christmas.⁴

Chadwick’s programmatic intentions are outlined in the poems he uses as epigraphs for each of the four movements. For Noël, Chadwick writes:

*Through the soft, calm moonlight comes a sound;
A mother lulls her babe, and all around
The gentle snow lies glistening;*

*On such a night the Virgin Mother mild
In dreamless slumber wrapped the Holy Child,
While angel-hosts were listening.*

The movement begins in D-flat major in 3/4 time with a sweet and expressive English horn solo over string swells and quiet woodwind accompaniment. The English horn melody is passed briefly to the oboe before coming to a cadence again on the English horn. The melody then manifests in the strings as woodwinds have an imitative countermelody. Soon thereafter, a nostalgic-sounding solo violin takes over the melody accompanied by arpeggiated harp strums. The full orchestra then rejoins at a slightly more animated tempo. A haunting soli traded between the oboe, English horn, and the bassoon transitions the piece to a sweeping climax where the strings have the melody. The movement ends quietly with chordal changes catalyzed by the clarinet and English horn while the solo violin restates the beautiful melody one last time.¹



¹ Rines, George Edwin, ed. (1920). "Chadwick, George Whitefield" . *Encyclopedia Americana*.

² Block, Adrienne Fried, 1998, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, Oxford University Press, p. 21

³ Wilson, J. G.; Fiske, J., eds. (1891). "Chadwick, George W." . *Appletons' Cyclopædia of American Biography*. New York: D. Appleton.

⁴ "Symphonic Sketches." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 17 Jan. 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphonic_Sketches.

“The Heart Worships”

Gustav Holst

“The Heart Worships” is a song of contradictions. The piece simultaneously conveys intense tranquility and passion. Though the choir sings powerfully, it projects the virtues of silence. The lyrics feel ancient, while the composition incorporates a more modern sound.

Holst was a curious composer with a wide span of influences. Throughout nearly 50 years of composition, he found inspiration near and far, from his home in the British Isles (which brought about *A Somerset Rhapsody*), to Hindu tradition (which spurred *Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda*), to space (the inspiration for *The Planets*).²

Holst wrote “The Heart Worships” during the first decade of the 20th century, when his work was influenced by British folk culture. With his lifelong friend and fellow composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, he set out to redefine English music and viewed the melody-driven folk style of singing as the key to doing so.³ Originally written for solo voice with piano accompaniment, “The Heart Worships” embodies that idea; the melody functions as both the centerpiece and the pillar of the song. One senses that every beautiful idea in the piece is derived from the melody’s central presence. In fact, the chord changes often follow, rather than lead or go in step with, melodic phrases, meaning the melody literally and figuratively sets the tone of the song. To create its peaceful, absorbing mood, Holst draws upon the folk aspects of his personal life, translating into music the sense of peace he experienced during his weekend getaways to the remote Isle of Sheppey, where he owned a small cottage.⁴ The result is a ponderous song with an overarching sense of tranquility.

The lyrics for the piece originated six years prior to Holst’s composition. In 1901, Alice M. Buckton published *Through Human Eyes*, a book of 43 poems. Holst ultimately set several verses from her poems.⁵ They provide an ironic twist to the song’s context; though her words are presented audibly, they convey a message

² Graebe, Martin. “Gustav Holst, ‘Songs of the West’, and the English Folk Song Movement.” *Folk Music Journal*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2011, pp. 5–41. JSTOR, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23208179#metadata_info_tab_contents; 11, March. “In the Shadow of ‘the Planets’ Lies Gustav Holst’s Sweet Little Suite.” *Classical 99.5 | Classical Radio Boston*, National Public Radio, 11 Mar. 2020, <https://www.classicalwcrb.org/2020-03-17/in-the-shadow-of-the-planets-lies-gustav-holsts-sweet-little-suite>.

³ Ibid (JSTOR, pg. 7); Lance, Ian. “Biography of Gustav Holst.” *Gustav Holst (1874–1934) | Chapters 2 and 3*, <http://www.gustavholst.info/biography/index.php?chapter=2>.

⁴ Ibid (Biography).

⁵ “Alice Buckton.” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 11 Sept. 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_Buckton#cite_note-10.

centered around the joy of silence. Though such a pairing may seem odd, closer examination reveals a message hidden in the irony. When the choir sings, “Thy hush, O Lord / O’er all the world covers the din”, they refer to how silence can actually enhance what one hears.⁶ Rather than hearing distractions and chaotic noise, silence exposes the sounds that have been deliberately crafted—such as music.

In keeping with the song’s spirit, “The Heart Worships” has enjoyed a quiet, slow-burning story of success. Upon its premiere on November 16th, 1907, in London, it did not initially create a frenzy for Holst; his fame would come in later years. However, a performance by singer Edith Clegg and piano accompanist Ethel Attwood was powerful enough to earn the praise of *The Daily Telegraph*, and has since stood the test of time.⁷ Today, the song is Holst’s most popular solo piece.



⁶ Buckton, Alice M. “The Heart Worships: Song Texts, Lyrics & Translations.” *Oxford Lieder*.

⁷ Short, Michael. “Chapter 4: The Teacher.” *Gustav Holst: The Man and His Music*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990.

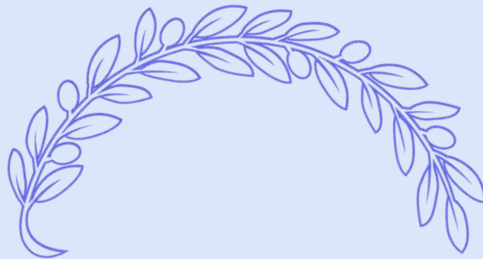
“Awake! Awake and Greet the New Morn”

Marty Haugen, arr. John Ferguson

“Awake! Awake and Greet the New Morn!” is a hymn composed by Marty Haugen and arranged by John Ferguson. The hymn’s text proclaims the joy felt when Jesus was born. Written and premiered in 1983, the inspiration for the piece followed Haugen’s attendance at a concert that moved him to write an accessible and contemporary carol. Haugen took well-known verses and images from the Bible and framed them in a new way. Haugen pulls from Isaiah 9:6, Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23, Isaiah 35:5-6, and Isaiah 2:4.⁸

Cleverly, the composer chose to have the hymn set at a quicker speed and with some faster-moving notes to emulate the joy that people felt about the birth of Jesus. The cheery tune also shows the turning of the tide for people experiencing oppression, in keeping with the sentiment of the line, “One without voice breaks forth in song, a lame one leaps in wonder, the weak are raised above the strong, and weapons are broken asunder.”

Haugen’s piece boasts a deep, rich, and righteous sound. That sound encapsulates a warmth that invites everyone in and pushes them to go out in the world and share their feelings and experiences. Haugen created a hymn that did precisely what the lyrics call for: “Music to heal the broken soul and hymns of loving-kindness, the thunder of the anthems roll to shatter all hate and injustice”.



⁸ The full text is available at <https://hymnary.org/text/awake-awake-and-greet-the-new-morn#authority-media-flexscores>.

“Awake the Harp” from *The Creation*

Franz Joseph Haydn

“And the heavenly host proclaimed the third day, praising God, and saying -”⁹

Thus begins Franz Joseph Haydn’s grand chorus “Awake the Harp.” At the 1799 Vienna premiere of the larger work from which it comes, “The Creation,” curious spectators thronged the venue and it took 30 police officers to control the crowd.¹⁰ By that time, Haydn was already famous in both his home country of Austria as well as England, having been a court composer for decades and having toured twice to London.¹¹

It was on one of these trips to England that Haydn was first exposed to the beguiling music of Georg Friedrich Handel. The loud, bright sounds of the orchestra and the power imbued in the vocal lines conveyed through a one thousand voice choir was a new and humbling experience for Haydn. It was a stark contrast to the more intimate concert settings and smaller ensembles he was used to. On the second of these trips, Haydn encountered the text to “The Creation”, a libretto following the story of the first seven days of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The libretto drew inspiration from Genesis and the book of Psalms, as well as the epic poem *Paradise Lost* by John Milton.¹² It is said that the libretto was actually offered earlier to George Friederich Handel, but was turned down due to its length. Haydn, however, was not intimidated and jumped into writing what would become one of his most iconic works.¹³ The translation into German for composition, and subsequently back to English for a wider audience, was undertaken by Baron Gottfried von Swieten, a diplomat and good friend of Haydn's. This dual translation, combined with the fact that von Sweiten does not appear to have been completely fluent in English, resulted in some quirks in the language. Despite this, the meaning is clearly conveyed musically through its bright harmonies and light tone.

⁹ Haydn, Franz Joseph. “Recitative.”

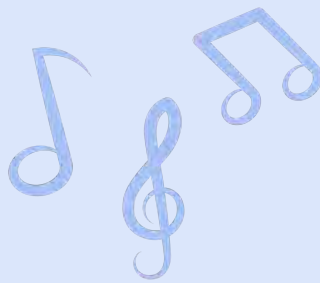
¹⁰ Rubenstein, Eliza. “Haydn’s “The Creation: Text and Notes on the Music.” Orange County Women’s Chorus, 2022 <http://ocwomenschorus.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Haydns-Creation-Program-Notes.pdf>

¹¹ Driscoll, Michael. “Haydn’s “The Creation”: Program Notes.” Andover Choral Society, 2019 <https://andoverchoralsociety.org/2019-2020-season/the-creation/haydn-creation-program-notes/>

¹² Edwards, F. G. “First Performances. II. Haydn’s “Creation” The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular Vol. 32, No. 580.” Musical Times Publications Ltd., Jun. 1, 1981

¹³ Edwards, F. G. “First Performances. II. Haydn’s “Creation” The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular Vol. 32, No. 580.” Musical Times Publications Ltd., Jun. 1, 1981

In “Awake the Harp”, Haydn seamlessly reaches backwards to the strict conventions and popular forms of the mid-18th century and seems to forecast the musical future, anticipating trends of complex harmonies that would not be popular for 50 years to come.¹⁴ The playful bouncing of the chords in the strings and the fluttering vocal melodies bring lightness, while the complex layering paints a piece of art in real time. There could not be a better word to describe this piece than “joyous,” inviting the listener to reflect on and rejoice in all the work God has done to bring peace and prosperity to the world, and so we invite you to reflect and rejoice as well.



¹⁴ Smith, Harriet “Franz Joseph Haydn The Creation (Die Schöpfung)” Barbican Center, Jan. 10, 2009
<https://web.archive.org/web/20120121112327/https://www.barbican.org.uk/media/events/6772haydncreationforweb.pdf>

“The Song of Peace”

Olaf C. Christiansen

“The Song of Peace”, composed by Olaf C. Christiansen in 1960, serves as a harmonious vessel for Lillian Atcherson’s sacred poem depicting God’s gift of love through Christ’s birth. A devout Lutheran and the second conductor of the St. Olaf Choir (following the tenure of his father, F. Melius Christiansen), Christiansen paid deliberate attention to the meanings behind musical texts. He based his choral repertoire selections heavily on lyrics, which suggests that Atcherson’s poem held significant religious meaning to him. The piece’s first chords wash us in an ethereal pool of sound, out of which the melody seems to float down like a feather from the sky. This drifting lullaby motion cradles the poem’s opening allusion to God coming down to humanity in the nativity of Jesus. Christiansen chooses to set the text in a complementary relationship to his music. Upper and lower voices describe the centuries since the first Christmas, alternating roles of keeping a steady pulse and creating new rhythms. An unexpected harmony blossoms as we discover God’s song of love “still lives in human hearts” today.

Over the years since its 1961 St. Olaf Christmas Festival premiere, “The Song of Peace” has been treasured by the St. Olaf Choir. The original poem historically uses the term “men” as a synonym for “humankind;” due to discriminatory connotations identified in male-based language, in 21st-century performances the St. Olaf Choir has chosen to substitute this word with “all” in its first occurrence and “we” in its second. Despite these small instances, the piece can relate to a variety of audiences as its text elegantly presents engaging imagery without use of direct Christ-related language. As a fitting closure to the piece, the eerie harmony which paints the atmospheric “realm of blue” begins to evaporate as the original lullaby sway takes its place, bringing with it on the final chord a celestial light to pierce through our earthly clouds with a new hope.¹⁵

¹⁵ Armendarez, Christina. “The Influence of Frederik Melius Christiansen on Six Minnesota Conductor-Composers” (PDF). University of North Texas, May 2006. https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc5298/m2/1/high_res_d/thesis.pdf.
Johnson, Albert Rykken. “The Christiansen Choral Tradition: F. Delius Christiansen, Olaf C. Christiansen, and Paul J. Christiansen.” Order No. 7407389, The University of Iowa, 1973.
<https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/christiansen-choral-tradition-f-melius-olaf-c/docview/302657175/se-2>.
<http://www2.mnhs.org/library/findaids/00983.xml?return=brand%3Dfindaids%26q%3Datcherson>

“Keep Your Lamps!”

arr. Andre J. Thomas



A song of hope and longing, “Keep Your Lamps!” originated among enslaved African Americans and references Matthew 25:1-13.¹⁶ The passage tells the story of ten virgins, some foolish and some wise, who go out with their lamps to meet the bridegroom. The foolish, however, do not bring oil and must leave to get more. While they are gone, the bridegroom arrives and welcomes the wise into the wedding banquet. The parable reminds Jesus’ disciples that they know neither the day nor the hour of his return; they must be ready at any time.¹⁷ “Keep Your Lamps!” applies this parable’s message to the lived experience of enslaved African Americans, who could not know when their earthly or spiritual liberation might come. The music serves, thus, as a gateway into others’ lives and theology, carrying the audience a little closer to the spirit of hope with which enslaved people survived strife and oppressive conditions. Through hundreds of years of oppression, the divine intervention of heartfelt spirituals like “Keep Your Lamps!” helped a people come together and look toward the possibility of spiritual deliverance. The song likely also had a coded meaning for enslaved people, sung to communicate an opportunity for physical deliverance—escape from slavery—without raising the suspicions of the overseer.¹⁸

“Keep Your Lamps!” has been a cornerstone of gospel repertoire since it was first recorded by African American blues singer [Blind Willie Johnson](#) in 1928. Variations of the piece have been performed by many prominent gospel-blues artists, such as [Reverend Gary Davis](#) and [Mississippi Fred McDowell](#), and has been included in several hymnals.¹⁹ Today, this arrangement by Dr. André J. Thomas stands among the world’s

¹⁶ André Thomas, “About the Music,” *Keep Your Lamps!* (Glendale, CA: Hinshaw Music, 2017).

¹⁷ Matt. 25:1-13 ESV

¹⁸ Glenda Franklin, “Performance Notes,” *Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning* (New York, NY: BriLee Music, 2012).

¹⁹ Calvin University Staff, “Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning,” hymnary.org, hymnary.org/text/keep-your-lamps-trimmed-and-burning.

most purchased spiritual arrangements. Originally arranged for an SATB (Soprano Alto Tenor Bass) choir, Thomas later produced this arrangement for a TTBB (Tenor Tenor Bass Bass) chorus with conga drums.²⁰ For most of the piece, the four voice parts progress in lockstep, creating a sense of solidarity and harmonic depth. The sharp rhythms of the voice and percussion, almost a heartbeat, convey both the yearning and the attentiveness implicit in the text. The middle of the piece deviates from this powerful motif and features a smooth line of comfort and encouragement from the first tenors. They sing, "Children, don't get weary 'til your work is done." Under this moving refrain, the audience experiences the affliction of the weary through the choir's simple yet expressive accompaniment. Throughout the piece, the congo drum contributes powerful weight and rhythmic emphasis in its interplay with the vocal line. This vocal line is repetitive, its impact magnified by each refrain. Indeed, the piece's simplicity may be its greatest asset, allowing the power of its soulful texture to emanate. For the faithful but downtrodden, every line becomes an active demonstration of persistent hope.



²⁰ "Keep Your Lamps! - SATB," Hinshaw Music, 2003, www.hinshawmusic.com/product/keep-your-lamps-satb.

"I Will Make a Way!"

arr. Tom Trenney

Based on Isaiah 43:19-20 and 2 Corinthians 5:17

Commissioned by the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, "I Will Make a Way!" was composed by church musician and educator Tom Trenney.²¹ "I Will Make A Way!" was first premiered in 2018 by St. Olaf's very own Assistant Professor of Music Tesfa Wondemagegnehu to dedicate the church's new community space made possible by the "Open Doors, Open Futures" project.

"I Will Make a Way!" is an Advent hymn derived from the biblical scriptures of Isaiah 43:19-20 and 2 Corinthians 5:17:

Isaiah 43:19-20 "See, I am doing a new thing. Now it springs up; do you not perceive it... The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen."

2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"²²

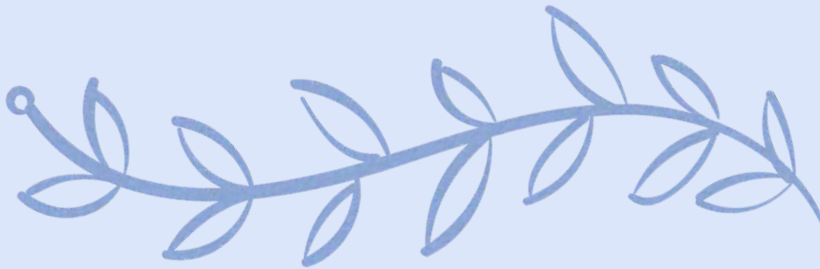
These verses discuss the promise of God's love and his ways of providing for his people during their everyday lives. The text encapsulates the message of promise and healing that comes with the advent season, and reminds us of the power of hope during times of darkness—an admirable representation of the 2022 Christmas Festival theme, "Promise of Peace".

Audience members should note the powerful opening chords of the piano in D minor as the choir sings a proclamation of "a new thing," which is God announcing that he will one day return to Earth. When the piece references nature, "I will make a way in the wilderness / I will make rivers in the desert," the audience can imagine the very description of the text: sprawling forests and meadows, paired with flowing rivers on dry, desert banks. This imagery is musically demonstrated as the tenors and basses

²¹"I Will Make a Way!" Tom Trenney, SoundCloud. <https://soundcloud.com/tom-trenney/i-will-make-a-way>.

²² "Isaiah 43: 19-20, 2 Corinthians 5:17" Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV). Biblica, Inc., 1973.

trade phrases with the sopranos and altos. The piece picks up a livelier pace as it progresses and the rhythm develops into a more complicated pattern. At this point in the piece, 2 Corinthians 5:17 takes the spotlight. Regardless of one's background: race, gender, sexual orientation, political affiliation, heritage, nationality, education, age, or any other aspect of identity—the gospel of Christ is for anyone and everyone. No one is excluded from the idea of becoming a completely new person, with a new life.²³ The piece then grows to a blossoming crescendo as the references to nature return in the joyful key of D major, with the choir continually singing the title of the piece, "I Will Make A Way!".



²³"What Does 2 Corinthians 5:17 Mean?" *Verse of the Day*, Knowing Jesus.
<https://dailyverse.knowing-jesus.com/2-corinthians-5-17>.

“O Day of Peace”

C.H. Hubert, orch. Edward Elgar, adapt. John Ferguson

“O Day of Peace” was composed by C.H. Hubert, orchestrated by Sir Edward Elgar, and adapted by John Ferguson. This piece takes the lyrics of Carl P. Daw Jr. and presents them in a moving format. Daw was asked to compose a text based on the theme of peace that could be used with the song “Jerusalem” by C.H. Hubert to include in *The Hymnal 1982*. Daw thought of this hymn as encompassing “two aspects of peace: *pax*, an understanding of peace based on cessation of conflict, and *shalom*, the condition of living abundantly in harmony and mutual goodwill.”²⁴ He did not disappoint as the hymn details the day that peace will come and that any hate in our hearts will be released. Daw was influenced by *Turning to Christ* by Urban T. Holmes III when writing his composition. Daw was said to have been “drawn to Isaiah 11:6-8, and the heart of the hymn” because the hymn focused on “the peaceable kingdom, paradise regained.”²⁵ Isaiah 11:6-8 states:

*The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling[a] together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra’s den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest.*²⁶

Elgar’s orchestration of Hubert’s “Jerusalem” gives the piece more depth as the strings, winds, and brass all swell in opposing motion, drawing out the emotions of the piece. The brass plays powerfully as they move toward the end of the piece, pushing the ensemble to become fuller and louder. Despite the strength that comes from singers and instrumentalists alike, there is a gentleness that originates from the hope that is so deeply ingrained and expressed in this piece. The orchestra and singers grow together to the end, with the text “then enemies shall learn to love, all creatures find

²⁴ Daw Jr., Carl. “History of Hymns: ‘O Day of Peace That Dimly Shines.’” Discipleship Ministries. The United Methodist Church, June 17, 2013. <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-o-day-of-peace-that-dimly-shines>.

²⁵ Daw Jr., Carl. “History of Hymns: ‘O Day of Peace That Dimly Shines.’” Discipleship Ministries. The United Methodist Church, June 17, 2013. <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-o-day-of-peace-that-dimly-shines>.

²⁶ “Isaiah 11:6-8” Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV). Biblica, Inc., 1973.

their true accord. The hope of peace shall be fulfilled, for all the earth shall know the Lord."²⁷



²⁷Daw Jr., Carl P. "O Day of Peace That Dimly Shines." Hymnary.org. The Hymn Society.
<https://hymnary.org/text/o-day-of-peace-that-dimly-shines>.

“Earth Strike Up Your Music”

Jessica French, text from Christina Rossetti

With text from Christina Rossetti's 1893 poem “Christmas Eve”, Jessica French's piece “Earth Strike Up Your Music” makes sure to paint a vivid picture of dark and light duality, and of the hope brought in by a savior. This piece was commissioned by the American Guild of Organists through their Publishing Award for Choral Composition. The piece premiered at the St. James Cathedral in Seattle, Washington in July of 2022, making it the newest piece on this year's program. The AGO Publishing Award focuses on choral pieces “in which the organ plays a distinctive and significant role” (AGO, 2022). For this performance however, the Cantorei Choir will be singing accompanied by St. Olaf Orchestra with a special orchestral score written by the composer.

Rossetti's poem is full of ironies and contradictions, such as darkness being “brighter than the blazing noon,” or chillness being “warmer than the heat of June.” This is heightened by the composition through several unpredictable harmonies and key changes. According to another program note written by French, “To illustrate the contrast between darkness and light, I set the words “darker” and “chillness” in the lower voices and the words “brighter” and “warmer” in the upper voices”. It begins somber and austere, with the choir sighing the opening lyrics. Suddenly, the first spark of light flickers as more voices join in and sing about the beauty and the hope that is brought by the humility of the birth of Jesus. The voice sections trade off the melody and display the viscosity and color of the lyrics, with the full choir joining in tenderly at the return of the lyrics “for Christmas bringeth Jesus”. James E. Bobb, conductor of the Cantorei Choir, likened the piece to a flame, which no matter what angle one looks at it from, it is flickering and alive.

Halfway through the piece, the choir rapidly enters the final breakthrough into the rousing and opulent encouragement for earth to be glad and to “...strike up your music,” at the coming joy. It is an invitation to celebrate hope after the looming turmoil of the first half. To end, as French explains it in her own program note, “the piece gradually recedes both dynamically and melodically, reflecting the lowly nature of ‘Jesus, brought for us so low,’” Opposed to how weary and anxious the choir first

enters in the piece, they exit in a different, gentle and quiet manner, reflecting on the humble joy brought in by light on Christmas day.²⁸



²⁸ Sources Referenced: "AGO/ECS Publishing Award in Choral Composition - American Guild of Organists." American Guild of Organists -, September 30, 2022. <https://www.agohq.org/agoecs-publishing-award-in-choral-composition/>.

"Hodie Christus Natus Est"

Kelly-Marie Murphy

*Today is Christ born;
today the Savior has appeared;
today the Angels sing,
the Archangels rejoice;
today the righteous rejoice, saying:
Glory to God in the highest. Alleluia!*



"Hodie Christus Natus Est" or "Today is Christ Born" is a Gregorian chant typically sung around Christmas. This iteration of "Hodie Christus Natus Est" was written by Kelly-Marie Murphy in 2018. Murphy has a PhD in Composition from the University of Leeds, England, and her pieces have been broadcast by radio in over 22 countries. Murphy's version of "Hodie Christus Natus Est" first premiered in December of 2017, sung by the Elektra Women's Chorus. This piece incorporates a captivating soprano/alto melody that celebrates the birth of Christ, capturing the moment in the manger where Jesus was born. In response to this theme, Dr. Therees Hibbard said, "I love having our sound depict that moment".

The work can be performed with either harp or piano accompaniment. Dr. Therees Hibbard selected harp for this piece because it was originally written for harp and was first performed by the Elektra Women's Chorus with a harp. She said, "I wanted to do something that [had a lot of] treble sounds, exciting, powerful, but beautiful [...] It has such great momentum, and in Orchestra Hall, those overtones are going to lift us right off the stage [...] those invisible wings will show just for a second".

The first sung notes in the piece are reminiscent of angels hovering above the hay where baby Jesus slept. Joined moments later by the rest of the choir, the sopranos create a twinkling breeze while the altos gently rock baby Jesus in their arms. The whole choir comes together at the climax of the song to declare, "Alleluia! Glory to God! Alleluia!"²⁹.

²⁹ <https://kellymariemurphy.com/hodie-christus-natus-est/>



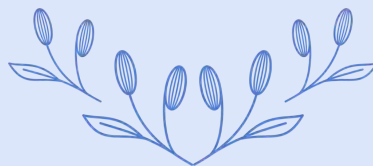
“This Little Light of Mine”

arr. Moses G. Hogan

In his arrangement of the beloved African American spiritual, celebrated composer and arranger Moses G. Hogan Jr. clings to the essence of a quiet soul heard loud and clear through his music. A conservatory pianist by training, Hogan’s true passion remained arranging traditional African American spirituals, breathing new life into them in a way that was simultaneously “tricky, eloquent, and unpredictable,” as a Los Angeles Times reporter wrote in a review in 1999. “This Little Light of Mine” is no exception. A favorite of old and young alike for its lighter, livelier renditions, Hogan has recast this spiritual into a seemingly quiet, reflective joy.

Hogan hones in on the promotion of the solo voice for a good portion of the piece, and has the choir set the wistful yet hopeful tones through a capella vocal soundscaping. The shaping of the first verse evokes the image of the treacherous walk that one must take through the world in order to light the way for others. However, Hogan ushers in a greater sense of hope and purpose with the second verse. By the third verse, the entire choir swells with jubilation: reserved at first, then filling the space with the spirit of unbridled joy and hope.

Hogan evokes the traditions of call and response and ring shout that are so central to the development of African American spirituals through the natural overlaps and blending of passionate exclamation points scattered throughout the choral voice parts. Listen for the push and pull of the music as the choir draws you in with shortened phrasing and enunciated words that emphasize the message of the final verses, and let yourself fall into the journey of the song that conveys a mysterious peace within as you follow along, however the spirit should lead you.³⁰



³⁰ Sources Referenced: Archives. 2003. “Moses G. Hogan, 45; Arranged Spirituals, Led His Own Chorale.” Los Angeles Times. February 14, 2003. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2003-feb-14-me-passings14.1-story.html>. “Moses Hogan and His Music - Amistad Research Center.” n.d. <https://amistadresearch.wordpress.com/2010/03/12/moses-hogan-and-his-music/>.

“Carol of the Bells”

Mykola Leontovych, arr. Peter J. Wilhousky

Mykola Leontovych (1877-1921),³¹ also referred to as “The Ukrainian Bach,” was a Ukrainian composer who specialized in a capella choral music. Leontovych was born in the Podolia province of the Russian Empire, which is now a part of modern day Ukraine. Leontovych was trained as a priest in the Kamianets-Podilskyi Theological Seminary before studying music at the Saint Petersburg Court Capella. Once Ukraine gained independence from Russia in 1917, Leontovych moved to Kyiv where he worked at the Kyiv Conservatory and the Mykola Lysenko Institute of Music and Drama. Leontovych had a strong connection to the Eastern Orthodox Ukrainian Church and is the composer of the first liturgy written in the vernacular and in the modern Ukrainian language.

Leontovych’s most familiar work is *Shchedryk*, known as “Carol of the Bells” in the English language. “Carol of the Bells” was commissioned by Oleksander Koshyts, the conductor of the Ukrainian Republic Choir, in 1914. Koshyts asked Leontovych to compose a work based on traditional Ukrainian folk tunes. Leontovych subsequently wrote *Shchedryk* based on four notes he had found in an anthology of Ukrainian music. Today, “Carol of the Bells” has become one of the world’s most recognizable Christmas carols. Leontovych regularly incorporates stylistic and technical devices such as expressive harmony, contrasting vocal parts, layering of voices, and echoing into his compositions, which can certainly be observed in “Carol of the Bells”.³² This version of Mykola Leontovych’s “Carol of the Bells” was arranged by Peter J. Wilhousky (1902-1978), an American composer of Ukrainian descent.³³ “Carol of the Bells” ties into the Christmas Festival theme of “Promise of Peace” by drawing attention to a beautiful Ukrainian folk song composed and arranged by Ukrainian musicians, a poignant contrast to the devastation wrought in Ukraine by the ongoing war.

³¹ “Mykola Leontovych,” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 8 Nov. 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mykola_Leontovych.

³² Almond, B.J. (December 13, 2004). “Carol of the Bells' Wasn't Originally a Christmas Song”; Peresunko T. 100 years of Ukraine's cultural diplomacy: European mission of Ukrainian Republican Chapel (1919-1921)/Kyiv-Mohyla Humanity Journal, vol 5. 2019. - C. 69-89. Rice University via EurekaAlert! Retrieved November 8, 2022.

³³ Carol of the Bells Archived 2012-03-28 at the Wayback Machine, Sean Spurr, Carols.co.

"Carol of the Bells" begins lightly in moderately slow tempo. The song starts with soprano voices quietly singing the melody before gradually adding in alto, tenor, and bass parts in a crescendoing polyphonic round alluding to ringing bells. The first chorus is hit by all voices at a loud dynamic, and then becomes quieter almost instantly. The second verse and chorus almost exactly mirror that of the first verse and chorus. The ending of the second chorus is sung only by tenors, and the tune slows and fades into nothingness. To end the song, the soprano and alto voices sing one more series of bell rings, and the bass voices end the song with one low bell toll.



“Sir Christémas” (Ave Rex)

arr. William Mathias

Commissioned by the Cardiff Polyphonic Choir, “Sir Christémas” (Ave Rex) was arranged by Welsh composer William Mathias (1934-1992) in 1971. The premiere took place on December 6th, 1970 in Llandaff Cathedral, Cardiff, Wales under the direction of Roy Bohana.³⁴

“Sir Christémas” (Ave Rex) is a traditional British carol, the lyrics and melody of which were originally penned by an unknown composer. However, the first known record of the piece can be found in the Ritson Manuscript dating back to 1510.³⁵ At the time when he created this arrangement, Mathias was employed as a Professor of Music at Bangor University in Wales.³⁶ Matthias arranged the piece for a four-part choir with organ accompaniment, with the option of adding a small orchestral ensemble to the work.

“Sir Christémas” (Ave Rex) tells the story of the birth of Jesus as a merry and lively announcement heard around the world. The piece is being told from the perspective of the angels in Heaven as they beckon all to “come near” and witness the miracle of Jesus. London-based publisher John Camden Hotten described the work’s religious allusions to “mark the age of hearty hospitality and honest enjoyment—before (English) Puritanism came into fashion [in the 1530s]”³⁷. In a conversation with the conductor of the piece, Dr. Therees Hibbard describes “Sir Christémas” as “the true atmosphere of the magic and joy of the Christmas season. Each voice part has its own chance to shine as they take turns throughout the piece. It’s a fun, light-hearted song with a modern musical twist from the composer.”³⁸

³⁴ “Reports.” *The Musical Times*, vol. 111, no. 1524, 1970, pp. 186–89. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/956774>.

³⁵ “Sir Christémas.” Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, December 3, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_Christ%C3%A8mas.

³⁶ Rhiannon, Mathias. “William Mathias (1934-92) by His Daughter, Rhiannon.” OUPblog. Oxford University Press, July 9, 2014. <https://blog.oup.com/2014/07/william-mathias-1934-1992/>.

³⁷ John Hotten Camden, Edited by Joshua Silvester. *A Garland Of Christmas Carols, Ancient And Modern. Including Some Never Before Given In Any Collection*. Internet Archive, London, J.C. Hotten, 1 Jan. 1861, pg. 165, <https://archive.org/details/garlandofchristm00hottrich/page/164/mode/2up>.

³⁸ Paraphrased quote taken from Therees Tkach Hibbard, Visiting Associate Professor of Music - Voice, Choral Conducting and Choral Literature; Conductor, Manitou Singers and Chamber Singers

The piece opens with clashing chords from the organ while the choirs praise the proclamation of the angels: "No-well, no-well" as the accented notes bring out the animated style of all the musicians. The audience should listen for the contrast of the sections as the choirs sing phrases in French, first sung by the tenors and basses and are later joined by all voice parts– which roughly translates to: "God protect you, fair lords ... Drink well by all the company".

Another thing to note is the lack of dynamic changes throughout the piece - the dynamic is forte until the final "no-wells" reach a fortissimo as the work ends with an exuberant shout. "Sir Christémas" (Ave Rex) demonstrates the cheerful energy that is felt throughout the air during the holiday season, reflected in the joyful temperament of the massed ensembles.



Overture to *The Nutcracker Suite*

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, arr. Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington and Billy Strayhorn

In 1939, the jazz pianist, bandleader, and composer Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington first collaborated with fellow pianist, composer and arranger Billy Strayhorn. By this point in the 1930s, Ellington's public persona as a celebrity amongst music listeners and an icon within the African American community had become fully realized.³⁹ Yet, through partnering with Strayhorn—an architect of many jazz hits who was innately familiar with classical music—Ellington expanded his musical legacy.⁴⁰ The duo's synergy developed over 28 years; Strayhorn composed Ellington's iconic calling card, "Take the A Train," and was often described as Ellington's creative "alter ego."⁴¹ Their creative fusion persisted through the spring of 1960, when Strayhorn began jazzing up a version of Tchaikovsky's seasonal staple, *The Nutcracker Suite*.⁴² At the time, Strayhorn was struggling with "periods of isolation and delay unless he found a particular musical project inspiring." Working on *The Nutcracker Suite* served as a "reparative and creative outlet" for Strayhorn, while the suite's form and historical linkage to dance/programmatic expression fit within Ellington's "Jazz idiom." The composing duo manifested their musical interpretation through rearranging and "reorchestrating" the famous ballet, which was subsequently recorded by "Ellington's 16-man orchestra" in the summer of 1960.⁴³ The reimagined Overture sets a relaxed, familiar mood for the suite, emanating the original's elegance while showcasing the jazz orchestra's distinctive soundscape.⁴⁴

Strayhorn considered the task of adapting Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite* for orchestra to be challenging, remarking, "it's always a struggle...to present the music of

³⁹ Andrew Berish, "Survival, Adaptation, and Experimentation: Duke Ellington and His Orchestra in the 1930s," in *The Cambridge Companion to Duke Ellington*, ed. Edward Green (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 106–20. doi:10.1017/CCO9781139021357.011.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Schwartz, "Big Band and Beethoven," Oregon Symphony, 2018, accessed November 11, 2022, <https://www.orsymphony.org/concerts-tickets/program-notes/1819/big-band-and-beethoven/>

⁴¹ Ibid, "Billy Strayhorn, Duke's Jazz Man, Dies at 51." Bay State Banner (1965-1979), Jun 10, 1967. <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/billy-strayhorn-dukes-jazz-man-dies-at-51/docview/371356579/se-2>.

⁴² Lisa Barg, "Queer Encounters in the Music of Billy Strayhorn," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 66, no. 3 (2013): 794. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jams.2013.66.3.771>.

⁴³ Ibid, 797; Kerry Clawson, "Orchestra offers cool jazz twist to holiday favorite with Ellington's 'Nutcracker Suite,'" *Akron Beacon Journal*, last modified November 6, 2022, <https://www.beaconjournal.com/story/entertainment/arts/2022/11/06/akron-symphony-to-perform-exciting-jazz-twist-on-nutcracker-favorite/69599265007/>

⁴⁴ Katherine Baber, "Ellington Nutcracker Suite," Redlands Symphony, accessed November 11, 2022, <https://www.redlandssymphony.com/pieces/ellington-nutcracker-suite>

someone of the stature of...Tchaikovsky and adapting it to our flavor without distorting him.”⁴⁵ For Strayhorn, undertaking the anachronistic arrangement of the suite tied him empathetically to Tchaikovsky; both were gay men, and for Strayhorn, “such deep investments in artistic pursuits provided both refuge and compensatory pleasure” amidst oppressive social conditions.⁴⁶ Ellington and Strayhorn brought “charm and sophistication” to their adaptation, while still maintaining humorous and familial elements through their “reorchestration” of the suite’s dance titles.⁴⁷ Changing the titles of the original suite—for example, “Sugar Plum Fairy” morphed into “Sugar Rum Cherry”—transformed the once imperial Russian commodities into popular American holiday products. Musically, the duo’s introduction of the ballet to an American context is evident from the Overture’s outset. Its medium swing suggests “alternative domestic images of family and community” while transporting Tchaikovsky to an urban, cosmopolitan space—New York, New York.⁴⁸

The *Nutcracker Suite*’s Overture kicks off with a thumping walking bass line. Listen for its fall into the rhythm section’s pocket before swinging into the recognizably romantic opening melody (which still exudes the big band sound of Harlem’s Cotton Club).⁴⁹ The theme, crackling like a wood-burning fireplace, simmers into a cooler saxophone feature before the orchestra rises back to the familiar opening material. A wailing, muted trombone interjects at the piece’s midpoint; this sets the stage for a yearning theme introduced via the violins and trumpets, which tastefully transitions into a smooth trumpet solo. Trailing the trumpet, the orchestra restates its cry before rich jazz harmonies ebb into a full, big-band-esque soundscape. Swinging scales float further downwind—literally, passing between woodwinds while the brass bid farewell. The overture ends with a bold, final burst led by the low brass, a notable divergence from the 1892 Overture’s delicate departure with upper strings and winds. Reenvisioned for a modern American audience, enjoy this twentieth-century take on Tchaikovsky’s cozy Christmastime classic.

⁴⁵ Barg, “Queer Encounters in the Music of Billy Strayhorn,” 796.
https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jams.2013.66.3.771?sid=primo&seq=26#metadata_info_tab_contents

⁴⁶ Ibid, 795-796.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 797.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 799.

⁴⁹ Clawson, “Orchestra offers cool jazz twist to holiday favorite with Ellington’s ‘Nutcracker Suite,’”

<https://www.beaconjournal.com/story/entertainment/arts/2022/11/06/akron-symphony-to-perform-exciting-jazz-twist-on-nutcracker-favorite/69599265007/>

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“Carol of the Stranger”

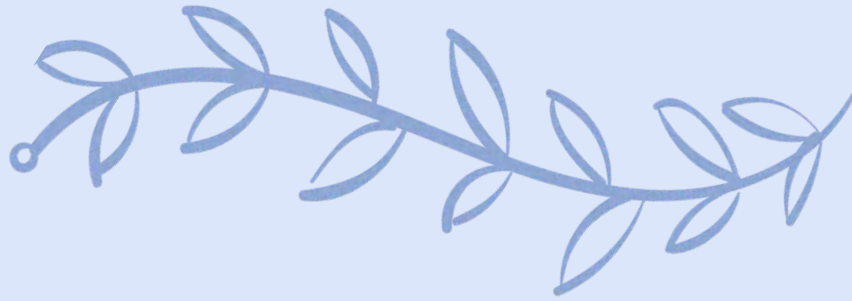
Abbie Betinis

St. Olaf alumna Abbie Betinis has been carrying on a family tradition of composing a new carol for each Christmas since graduating with her degree in music composition in 2001. This tradition was started by her great-grandfather, Rev. Bates G. Burt (1878-1948), and carried on by her great-uncle Alfred Burt (1920-1954). Betinis takes a new step in the tradition by collaborating closely with the lyricist for this particular piece. Michael Dennis Browne, Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Minnesota, worked with Betinis to ‘build’ this piece from poetry into carol. In an interview with Classical MPR at the carol’s world premiere in 2013, he explained, “I have described writing for music as building a boat, not a house, so the music comes and lifts it.” Browne notes that without the music, the words are “like a boat on the sand,” devoid of its truest ability to live and thrive.

In the same interview, Betinis adds her own reflection on the words found in the poem. “What I love,” she notes, “is that from verse to verse, our circle widens; and that can be the human heart. It can be the home. It can be our circle of friends to welcome the stranger in. It is such a great sentiment at Christmas, and that really spoke to me.” She also described the process of working with a living poet on a “living, breathing poem” to be “mysterious”: a sentiment that Betinis paints throughout her music in strokes that blend lightness of spirit with a renewed joviality.

“Carol of the Stranger” expresses the true power of the mysterious feeling of unbridled joy that the story of Christmas brings out in all of us. I encourage you to listen for the transition of the music from a singular voice that proclaims mirthful delight in buoyant rhythm as it moves towards the telling of a sacred mystery. Betinis structures the soundscape to reflect an awestruck sense of wonder at Christmas, transporting you into a faraway land lost long ago while urging you forward to engage everyone you meet in a promise of growing hearts, minds, and souls. The dance-like motion of the notes alludes to celebrations spread far and wide, while the blend of all voices together indicates a telling of something that we as humans may perhaps never name or understand truly, but can feel pulsing through each note. The sound that hangs in

the stillness of air widens our capacity to love the stranger and the world around us, pulling us into the joy of welcoming a stranger in our own lives.⁵⁰



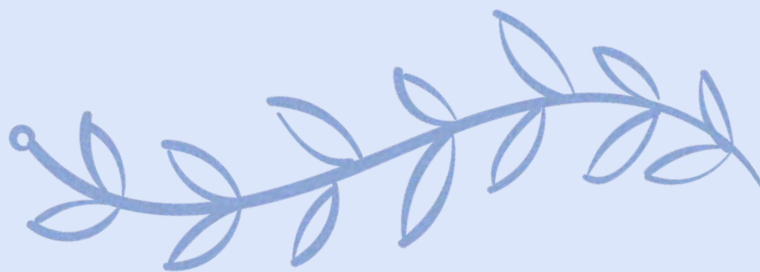
⁵⁰ Sources Referenced: "Abbie Betinis Premieres 'Carol of the Stranger.'" December 12th, 2013. Accessed November 10, 2022. <https://www.yourclassical.org/story/2013/12/20/abbie-betinis-premieres-carol-of-the-stranger>. "Three Generations of Burt Family Carols." n.d. Accessed November 10, 2022. https://www.abbiebetinis.com/writings_burtcarols.html.

"It Came Upon the Midnight Clear"

arr. Charles Forsberg

Originally crafted as a five-stanza poem in 1849, it is said that "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" was not originally intended to be for Christmas. Rather, it was crafted as Massachusetts pastor Edmund Sear's response to the state of the world in 1849. Sear's phrases reflect his personal sorrowful sentiments during this period in time. The Mexican-American War had only just come to a close and violent uprisings were underway throughout Europe, painting a picture of the world as full of blood and strife.⁵¹

In 1950, Sear's poem was set to the tune of "Carol" by American composer Richard Stolls Willis, a former student of Felix Mendelssohn. In Europe, however, Sear's same poem was set to the tune "Noel," by Arthur Sullivan.⁵² The poem, in combination with the Carol tune, quickly caught on as a staple in American Christmas repertoire. The strings bring in this familiar tune, allowing it to drift and settle into the room before the winds and brass join, deepening the sound and adding a warmth the strings are unable to create alone. The choirs accompany the instrumentalists with the age-old lyrics, creating an aura of Christmas spirit. As you enjoy this piece, I encourage you to listen to the way in which the tune and lyrics provide a light of hope in an imperfect world.



⁵¹ Mark Woods, "It Came upon the Midnight Clear: The Story behind the Hymn," It came upon the midnight clear: The story behind the hymn (Christian Today, December 23, 2015), <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/it-came-upon-the-midnight-clear-the-story-behind-the-hymn/72948.htm>.

⁵² Peter Hughes, "Edmund Hamilton Sears," Dictionary of Unitarian & Universalist Biography, April 24, 2002, <https://uudb.org/articles/edmundhamiltonsears.html>.

III. “Whoso Offereth Praise” from *Psalm 50*

F. Melius Christiansen

F. Melius Christiansen founded the St. Olaf Choir in 1912.⁵³ After a groundbreaking tour through Norway in 1913 and an extremely successful domestic tour in 1920, the St. Olaf Choir gained an international reputation as one of the best mixed choirs in North America. In 1922, Christiansen was tasked with writing a piece to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the formation of the choir.⁵⁴

Around the same time in August of 1921, Christiansen’s wife, Edith, and their ten year-old son, Carl, were driving in downtown Minneapolis when they were struck by a streetcar.⁵⁵ Their car caught on fire, and both were severely burned.⁵⁶ Edith Christiansen would eventually recover. Carl died the next day.⁵⁷

Christiansen spent several months mourning. Those who knew him described him as becoming “hard and bitter”.⁵⁸ For a period of time he refused to meet with the choir, instead attempting to find solace in composing. It was under these circumstances, grieving the death of his son while reconciling this with his devotion to God, that Christiansen composed Psalm 50.⁵⁹

The piece consists of three movements. The first movement is the longest and is comparatively dark and chaotic. It speaks of God’s judgment coming to earth as a tempestuous fire to devour sinners. Salvation is reserved for the saints, defined in the psalm as those who have made covenants with God through sacrifice. The second movement is more tranquil. It opens with the text, “Offer unto God the sacrifice of thanksgiving.” This sacrificial focus during the first two movements is notable given Christiansen’s extreme loss at this time. This movement also features the phrase, “And

⁵³Armstrong, Anton. “The Christiansen Tradition in Sacred Choral Music.” *Word & World*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1 July 1992.; And; Armstrong, Anton. “The Musical Legacy of F. Melius Christiansen.” *The Choral Journal*, vol. 37, no. 4, 1996, pp. 9-14.

⁵⁴ Bergmann, Leola Marjorie Nelson. *F. Melius Christiansen: Study of His Life and Work as a Norwegian-American Contribution to American Culture*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1942.

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid; see also Toliver. (2011). *Selected larger choral works of F. Melius Christiansen (1871-1955)*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” This phrase is symbolic of Christiansen calling upon God in his own “time of trouble” while mourning his son. Neither of these movements will be performed today, but they provide meaningful context to the third movement.

Psalm 50’s third movement, heard here, is a joyous triumphant fugue. Christiansen uses the phrase “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth God” as the text for most of the piece, with two notable exceptions. Directly after the first section, the words, “Who showed the salvation of our God,” were added by former St. Olaf Choir director Kenneth Jennings, and replace a line from the beginning of the psalm, “and called the earth from the rising of the sun.”⁶⁰ Towards the end of the movement, one can hear the Lutheran doxology proclaimed from the bassline: “Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Praise Him all creatures here below! Praise Him above the Heavenly host! Praise Father Son and Holy Ghost!” The words were written by English cleric Thomas Kenn and are sung to the melody of “Old Hundredth,” a setting of the 100th Psalm composed by Louis Bourgeois in the early sixteenth century.⁶¹

The purpose of the third movement is to offer praise and glory to God. This is by no means a unique idea, however its derivative is unique. Psalm 50 is Christiansen’s journey toward reconciliation with his God after extreme loss. It is extremely powerful for Christiansen to find solace and strength in God after losing his child. In the third movement Christiansen completes his journey, “glorifieth God.”



⁶⁰ Interview with Dr. Anton Armstrong

⁶¹ Sources Referenced: Aune, Gregory J. “The Choral Methodology and Philosophy of F. Melius Christiansen: The Tradition Continues.” *The Choral Journal*, vol. 37, no. 4, 1996, pp. 15-17.
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“Final Movement (unnamed)” from *Dona Nobis Pacem*

Ralph Vaughan Williams

The final movement of Ralph Vaughan Williams' cantata *Dona Nobis Pacem* (in English, Grant Us Peace), bears no name. It cries out for peace in a world living in the valley between two wars. Vaughan Williams composed the cantata in 1934, when new conflicts loomed on the horizon as a broken and beaten world struggled to recover financially, structurally, and emotionally from the First World War. The text is a synthesis of texts from the Bible and the *Dona Nobis Pacem* prayer. It reads as though Vaughan Williams took all his favorite verses about peace and mashed them together, including Isaiah 4:2, Leviticus 26:6, Psalms 85:10, Psalms 118:19, Isaiah 66:18-19, Isaiah 66:22, Luke 2:14, and ending with the Latin *Dona Nobis Pacem*. Vaughan Williams, though an agnostic himself, enjoyed the aesthetics of Anglicanism, so this assortment of contextless verses provides a strange immersion in the Biblical language without real internalization of its meaning, allowing the listener to bathe in a swamp of magnificence.

Vaughan Williams complicates grandiose, straightforward melodic and harmonic movement with a halting rhythmic structure that can make the listener feel a bit lost sometimes. Each part joins in one at a time to create a lovely warm mess of a sound until both the full chorus and the orchestra break into a joyful frenzy of pleasant, round melodic sounds. After the text from Luke, the orchestra melts into a sweet backdrop for the soprano soloist who sings the *Dona Nobis Pacem*. The piece ends on a hopeful plea for a peaceful world, a plea that remains unanswered still.⁶²

⁶² Sources referenced: <http://www.sfchoral.org/site/ralph-vaughan-williams-dona-nobis-pacem/>
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dona_nobis_pacem_\(Vaughan_Williams\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dona_nobis_pacem_(Vaughan_Williams))

“Hark the Herald Angels Sing”

arr. John Ferguson

This Christmas classic was brought into creation in a roundabout way over more than a century. The text of the piece originates from the Bible verse of Luke 2:14, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors,” where a chorus of angels sang God’s praises. Charles Wesley originally penned the text of “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” as “Hark! How All the Welkin Rings” in 1739. Wesley was an English hymn writer and Methodist leader who wrote over 6,000 hymns. The text passed through at least two other writers; George Whietfield in 1753 and then in 1760 Martin Madan. Whitefield was a student of Wesley’s who eventually worked alongside him and adapted the hymn text into what it is today. Whitefield’s most known change was the addition of the phrase “newborn King.”

The hymn’s music comes from a piece called “Festgesang,” an 1840 composition by Felix Mendelssohn that celebrates the 400th anniversary of Johannes Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press. Mendelssohn was born on February 3, 1809 in Germany and was a very prominent figure of the early Romantic era. Mendelssohn’s most well known works include *Overture to a Midsummer Night’s Dream* of 1826, *Italian Symphony* of 1833, the oratorio *Elijah* of 1846, among many others. He started composing at a young age and continued to produce timeless works until the tragic death of his sister which was soon followed by his own death in 1847.

William Hayman Cummings brought together the words of Wesley and Whitefield with the music from the second movement of Mendelssohn’s piece in 1855 at a performance by Waltham Abbey’s choir with Cummings on the organ. John Ferguson, the arranger for this version, is a well known organist, composer, author, and conductor from Ohio who worked here at St. Olaf for 29 years as a church and organ music professor as well as Cantorei’s conductor. “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” is a joyous hymn that depicts the good news of Jesus’ birth on Christmas day. It is a Christmas classic that embalms joy and good spirits each year through joyous lyrics of celebration.⁶³

⁶³ Sources referenced: Hawn, C Michael. “History of Hymns: ‘Hark! the Herald Angels Sing.’” *Discipleship Ministries*, 10 Dec. 2014, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-hark-the-herald-angels-sing>.



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“Stay With Us (Captive and Free)”

Egil Hovland

Written by Norwegian composer Egil Hovland, “Stay With Us (Captive and Free)” has long been a staple in the Lutheran choral repertoire. One of the most noted church composers in Norwegian history, Hovland’s extensive portfolio includes two symphonies and a concerto for trumpet and strings. He is most well remembered, however, for his contributions to the world of church music, including “Stay With Us”.⁶⁴ This particular arrangement, attributed to former St. Olaf Professor of Organ and Church Music John Ferguson and our own Anton Armstrong, premiered at St. Olaf in November 1999 and also appeared at that year’s Christmas Festival.⁶⁵

The lyrics to this piece are, in large, inspired by Luke 24:29: “But they urged him strongly, ‘Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.’ So he went in to stay with them.” This plea for Jesus to stay with the Apostles is reflected not only in the title of the piece, but also numerous times throughout, most notably in the repeated line, “Stay with us Lord Jesus, Stay with us.” The song, like the biblical verse, is a call to God, requesting his presence in our lives here on Earth.

The piece traditionally begins with an organ introduction, which for this Christmas Festival has been handed over to the orchestra’s string section. However, the piece still keeps its hymn-like quality. The first chorus maintains a sweet, angelic quality resting in the higher octaves. Be sure to pay special attention to the way in which the refrain “Stay with us” moves through the performers like a wave as each choral section comes in, one after another. The wave ebbs and flows throughout the remainder of the piece, finally settling as the strings close the piece, just as they began.



⁶⁴ “Artist - Egil Hovland,” GIA Publications - Sacred choral music, hymnals, recordings and education materials, Roman Catholic, Christian, accessed November 12, 2022, <https://giamusic.com/store/artists/egil-hovland>.

⁶⁵ “Stay with Us,” Augsburg Fortress, accessed November 12, 2022, <https://www.augsburgfortress.org/store/product/3639/Stay-With-Us>.

“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 1910.⁶⁶ F.M. Christiansen originally set the tune to Norwegian text and later published it in English for the St. Olaf Choral 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.⁶⁷

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 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.



Christmas Festival Dress Rehearsal, 1989⁶⁸

“Beautiful Savior” is a familiar hymn across the United States, 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 the music.⁶⁹ “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

⁶⁶ <https://wp.stolaf.edu/stolaf-choir/frequently-asked-questions/>

⁶⁷ Shaw, Joseph M. *The St. Olaf Choir: a Narrative* Northfield, Minn: St. Olaf College, 1997.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Shaw, Joseph M. *The St. Olaf Choir: a Narrative* Northfield, Minn: St. Olaf College, 1997.

wonderful bonding for everyone". "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.

