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Song *for* Snow

A Bel Canto Christmas

Special Guest Artistic Director

Joel Tranquilla

Cello

Emily Kennedy

Organ & Piano

Thomas Gonder



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Bel Canto is grateful to have the opportunity to make music on the traditional lands of the Wolastoqiyik people.



Acknowledgements

*As always, we are grateful to
Christ Church Cathedral
for the beautiful, welcoming space and being
such an important voice in the choir's
performance.*

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*This concert is also made possible in part
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Welcome!

When I was ten years old, I came to a performance by the American Boychoir here at Christ Church Cathedral. Before they sang their last song, the conductor asked if there were any boys who would be interested in auditioning for the choir. With my mother's support and thanks to my excellent teachers, Norma Ferguson and Maureen Steeves, my audition was successful, and I learned at a young age what it meant to be a professional musician. It was an extraordinary experience and, in many ways, it shaped who I am today. The Boychoir Christmas concerts were particularly memorable, and as a result, the Willcocks carol arrangements have been a staple on my holiday playlist ever since.

It has been a privilege to serve as Guest Artistic Director of the Bel Canto Singers and a great joy to connect (and reconnect) with these excellent musicians. We've chosen a wide variety of holiday repertoire, and I certainly hope there's something on the program for everyone. Benjamin Britten and Andrew Balfour have each set texts which reflect on Mary and the Christmas rose (a theme later picked up by Craig Hella Johnson). Jonathan Dove's *Seek Him That Maketh The Seven Stars* will feature our excellent collaborator, Thomas Gonder at the organ. Sarah Quartel's multi-movement work tells the story of a snowy Canadian day, with texts from Sara Teasdale, Melville Cane, and Lucy Maud Montgomery. For this and a few other pieces, we're delighted to be joined by cellist, Emily Kennedy. Other highlights on the program include works by African American composers, Florence Price and Rosephanye Powell, and you'll have the chance to join the chorus for a number of sing-alongs!

Thank you for being with us today. On behalf of the whole choir, we wish you a very happy Christmas!

- Joel Tranquilla

SET I

A fanciful, simultaneous quodlibet (your peculiar music term of the day) that plays with both melody and meter – interweaving eight well-known carols into a musical conversation between the sections. Listen for them as they enter in this delightful Christmas mashup.



Your turn! Harmonies can be found in the blue hymnal (in the pews; please share)
Common Praise (Blue Book) #126

An unmistakable Britten-blend of devotional text and modern composition. A pedal-point ostinato (a repeating, single note rhythmic pattern) from the lower voices is decorated with a waltz-like, hypnotic melody in parallel thirds from the sopranos and altos.

Balfour's fascination with medieval polyphony is layered in with his venturesome love of shimmering overtones and "natural" sounds in this devotional piece full of tone colour and space. Singing what comes out of Balfour's brain can be almost transcendental, but it takes a lot of practice.

i. Wexford Carol

Text: 15th Century Irish Carol
First Transcribed: William Flood
Arr. Joel Tranquilla

ii. Once in Royal David's City

Text: Cecil Frances Alexander
Music: Henry John Gauntlett

iii. Rosa Mystica (I)

[from *Ad majorem Dei gloriam*]
Text: Gerard Manley Hopkins
Music: Benjamin Britten

iv. Rosa Mystica (II)

Text: 15th Century English Carol
Music: Andrew Balfour

Harlem Renaissance poet Countee Cullen paints stark contrast between the joy of the Nativity and earthly human suffering. Against this, Powell's repeated rhythmic litany of "Christus Natus Est" ("Christ is born!") is an insistent shout of hope into a landscape of despair. Hope wins in the end, with a final, optimistic Picardy third.



Your turn! Harmonies can be found in the blue hymnal (in the pews; please share)
Common Praise (Blue Book) #118

Gjeilo's fitting testament to the awe, reverence and mystery surrounding the legend of Christ's birth. Signature modal shifts and complex harmonies underneath the melodic counterpart of a solo cello create a contemplative, pulsing atmosphere.

Strap in: powerful choral arrangements, soaring melodies, dramatic shifts in both key and meter – and the organ accompaniment is superb. This sweeping work is based on a biblical reference to the Pleiades, and the whole thing is like a soundtrack for Carl Sagan's "Cosmos Ship Of The Imagination."



v. Christus Natus Est

Text: Countee Cullen
Music: Rosephanye Powell

vi. O Come, All Ye Faithful

Attributed to: John Francis Wade
Translated by: Frederick Oakley
Arr. David Willcocks

vii. Serenity (O Magnum Mysterium)

Text: Responsories for the Matins of Christmas, c. 10th Century
Music: Oja Gjeilo

Cello: Emily Kennedy

viii. Seek Him That Maketh The Seven Stars

Text: Amos 5:8; Psalm 139
Music: Jonathan Dove

Organ: Thomas Gonder
Soprano: Mélanie Dupuis

ix. Go, Tell It On The Mountain

Text: American Spiritual, c.1850
Arr: Shawn Kirchner

Your turn! Shawn Kirchner's romp through this classic ear worm has a touch of jazz, a bundle of colour, and a ton of gospel energy.

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SET II

Quartel's precocious brush vividly paints its way from cold, sidereal anticipation, to the contemplative stillness at the end of an identifiably Canadian winter day.

Words are printed on your lyrics sheet - they're worth having on hand.



Your turn! *Sing out, but not too enthusiastically - a lot of us have to drive home.*

A delicate, surprisingly understated word painting, coloring in the childlike wonder at a blanket of new fallen snow. You'll find yourself wishing there was more.

Scrooge's revelatory awakening to chiming bells on Christmas morning is joyfully trumpeted out in this quintessentially festive a cappella piece with the imagery of an English madrigal, and the exuberance of a Dickensian-era drinking song.

x. A Winter Day

Text: Sara Teasdale,
Lucy Maud Montgomery, Melville Cane
Music: Sarah Quartel

Cello: Emily Kennedy

1. Timid Star
2. A Winter Dawn
3. Into Morning
4. A Winter Day
5. Snow Toward Evening

xi. Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!

Text: Sammy Cahn
Music: Jule Styne

xii. Song For Snow

Text: Elizabeth Coatsworth
Music: Florence Price

xiii. Glorious, Glorious

Text: Charles Dickens: A Christmas Carol
Music: Dale Trumbore



Your turn! *Don't pretend you don't know it. We need you to keep the melody going while the choir mucks about with all of the jazzy chords and stuff.*

Craig Hella Johnson has taken a talent show standard and combined it with Praetorius' 1609 setting of the German carol "Es ist ein Ros entsprungen" to produce something quite unique. The two pieces are blended in a call-and-answer style, allowing the melodies and texts to comment on each other, and emphasize the underlying theme of love and hope.

xv. Have Yourself

A Merry Little Christmas
Hugh Martin & Ralph Blane

xiv. Lo, How A Rose / The Rose

The Rose: Words and music by
Amanda McBroom (1978)
Lo, How A Rose E'er Blooming:
Michael Praetorius (1609)
Arr. Craig Hella Johnson

Alto: Taylor MacDonald
Cello: Emily Kennedy
Cello Arrangement: Steven Peacock

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