



## Mendelssohn Chorus of Philadelphia

Dominick DiOrio, Artistic Director & Conductor

Andrew Kotylo, organ

Ting Ting Wong, piano

The Timberdale Brass

# A Feast of Carols

### ***Toccata-Gigue on the Sussex Carol***

George Baker (b. 1951)

Andrew Kotylo, organ

### ***Hear, O Israel***

Res Isenberg (b. 1987)

Amanda Davis, soprano (2:00)

Caroline Fitch, soprano (5:00)

### ***Keep Your Lamps!***

arr. André Thomas (b. 1952)

Elizabeth Beavers, conductor

James Lamb, percussion

### **\* Hymn: O Come, All Ye Faithful**

John Francis Wade (1711-1786)

### ***Me zeh hidlik***

arr. Bob Chilcott (b. 1955)

Bailey Dean, conductor

Allison Levine, alto (2:00)

Shahara Benson, alto (5:00)

### ***A Spotless Rose***

Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

Heather Mitchell, conductor

Erik Potteiger, baritone

### **\* Hymn: See Amid the Winter's Snow**

John Goss (1800-1880)

arr. David Willcocks (1919-2015)

Maya Kociba, soprano (2:00)

Natalie McQuiston, soprano (5:00)

### ***The Christmas Song***

Mel Tormé (1925-1999)

arr. S. Cramer/Darin Kelly

The Timberdale Brass

### ***A Hymn to the Virgin***

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Elizabeth Beavers, conductor

Sophia Santiago, soprano

Jennifer Rafferty, alto

D'quan Tyson, tenor

Erik Stenswold, bass

### ***Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day***

John Gardner (1917-2011)

Caroline Fitch & James Lamb, percussion

### ***Hallelujah Chorus from Messiah***

Georg Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

arr. The Canadian Brass

Heather Mitchell, conductor

### ***Four Postcard Carols***

Dominick DiOrio (b. 1984)

world premiere

### ***Hear ye all, 'neath starry dome***

commissioned by Kathy Haas and dedicated to her husband, Robert Haas.

### ***The Cherry Blossom Carol***

commissioned by Roseanna McCleary and dedicated to her aunt, Koko Hagino

Michael Carson, bass (2:00)

Lilah Gosman, soprano (5:00)

### ***A life, here blessed, will e'er resound***

commissioned by Jim Light and dedicated to his wife Lauren in honor of their marriage, Jan, 7, 2023

### ***Love awakens all to kindness***

commissioned by Tara Durham and dedicated to her husband, Floyd Bennett III

### **\* Hymn: Angels We Have Heard on High**

arr. Edward Shippen Barnes (1887-1958)



Use this QR code to access a full e-program with complete program notes, texts, performer biographies, staff lists and donor lists.

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### ***Joy to the World***

arr. Bill Wolaver (b.1958)

Ting Ting Wong, piano

### **\* Hymn: *There's a Wideness in God's Mercy***

Calvin Hampton (1938-1984)

### ***Carol of the Stranger***

Abbie Betinis (b. 1980)

Heather Mitchell, conductor

Sophia Santiago, soprano

### ***Magnificat***

Marques L. A. Garrett

*world premiere*

### ***Sure on this shining night***

Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943)

### **\* Hymn: *Silent Night***

Franz Xaver Gruber (1787-1863)

### **\* Hymn: *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing***

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

arr. William Cummings (1831-1915)

*You are cordially invited  
to a reception in the parish hall  
following the 5:00 performance.*

## **Hymn Texts**

### **See amid the winter's snow**

See amid the winter's snow,  
Born for us on earth below;  
See the tender Lamb appears,  
Promis'd from eternal years:  
(refrain)

*Hail, thou everblessed morn;  
Hail, redemption's happy dawn;  
Sing through all Jerusalem,  
Christ is born in Bethlehem.*

Lo within a manger lies  
He who built the starry skies:  
He who, throned in height sublime,  
Sits amid the cherubim.  
(refrain)

Say, ye holy shepherds, say  
What your joyful news today;  
Wherefore have ye left your sheep  
On the lonely mountain steep?  
(refrain)

As we watched at dead of night,  
Lo, we saw a wondrous light;  
Angels singing "Peace on earth"  
Told us of the Saviour's birth:  
(refrain)

Sacred infant, all divine,  
What a tender love was thine,  
Thus to come from highest bliss,  
Down to such a world as this:  
(refrain)

Teach, O teach us, Holy Child,  
By thy face so meek and mild,  
Teach us to resemble thee,  
In thy sweet humility:  
(refrain)

– Edward Caswall

### **There's a Wideness in God's Mercy**

There's a wideness in God's mercy  
Like the wideness of the sea;  
There's a kindness in his justice  
Which is more than liberty.  
There is plentiful redemption  
In the blood that has been shed:  
There is joy for all the members  
In the sorrows of the Head.

For the love of God is broader  
Than the measures of our mind,  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.  
If our love were but more simple  
We should take him at his word,  
And our lives would be all sunshine  
In the sweetness of our Lord.

Fearful souls, why will you scatter  
Like a crowd of frightened sheep?  
Foolish hearts, why will you wander  
From a love so true and deep?  
There is welcome for the sinner  
and more graces for the good;  
There is mercy with the Savior,  
There is healing in his blood.

– Frederick Faber

### **Hymnbook numbers for hymns:**

No. 83, *O Come, All ye Faithful*

No. 96, *Angels We Have Heard on High*

No. 111, *Silent Night*

No. 87, *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*

## Program Notes (excerpts)

The concert opens with George Baker's brilliant *Toccata-Gigue on the Sussex Carol*. Baker (b. 1951) is a virtuoso organist who began winning prestigious competitions at age 18, an acclaimed recording artist with two Grand Prix du Disque awards, and a highly respected composer and teacher. More amazingly, he accomplished all this while maintaining a 30-year practice as a dermatologist. The *Toccata-Gigue* was written in 2008 and revised in 2019. *The Sussex Carol* is a traditional English Christmas song which dates back at least to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Vaughan Williams collected the version most commonly used today in 1904, gave it its name, and featured it prominently in his 1912 *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*.

Philadelphia-born composer Rex Isenberg (b. 1987) is best known for his choral writing, especially sacred Jewish music, where he combines traditional texts with a contemporary idiom. His joyful and exuberant *Hear, O Israel* is an English-language setting of the Shema Yisrael, a prayer whose three scriptural passages contain the essence of the Jewish faith. The text also resonates with those of the Christian faith – when Jesus is asked what is the greatest commandment, he quotes from the Shema.

For someone who wrote a critically acclaimed book on performance practice of African-American spirituals, it took André Thomas (b. 1952) a while to warm to that genre. He particularly considered the use of dialect to be degrading and a perpetuation of stereotypes. His ideas changed when he met Jester Hairston, a noted arranger and conductor of spirituals, who was guest conducting Thomas's college choir. Hairston explained how dialect represented sounds not occurring in African languages and the important role spirituals had in the lives of enslaved people. Nevertheless, Thomas rarely uses dialect in his own spiritual settings, contenting himself with some idiomatic grammar, as in *Keep Your Lamps!* The text refers to the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids from the Gospel of Matthew. Bridesmaids were sent to greet the bridegroom with lighted lamps, and when his arrival was delayed, only the wise ones, who had brought along extra oil, were there to greet him and be admitted to the reception. Like many spirituals, it speaks obliquely of a yearning for freedom and a journey of deliverance.

Bob Chilcott (b. 1955) has spent a lifetime immersed in choral music, beginning as a chorister and soloist in the Choir of King's College and later as a member of the King's Singers. He conducted the chorus at the Royal College of Music and is Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC Singers. He began composing in 1997, and his extensive catalog contains choral and vocal music of all genres, from children's songs to opera, as well as instrumental and orchestral compositions. *Mizneh hidlik* is a children's Chanukah song, one of three Israeli folksong settings he composed in 1984. The text was written by Levin Kipnis (1894-1990), an award-winning and prolific writer of children's stories, poetry, and theatre, who emigrated from Ukraine to what was then Palestine (and part of the Ottoman Empire) in 1913. The tune has been ascribed to several different composers and is supposed to be derived from an old Polish Hassidic melody.

Herbert Howells (1891-1983) belonged to what was shaping up to be an extraordinary generation of English composers until so many voices were stilled in World War I. Howells spent the war years undergoing a debilitating but unexpectedly successful experimental radiotherapy treatment for an autoimmune thyroid disease. During his recovery, he assisted in a project to assemble a compilation of Latin Tudor music, and his immersion in music of the English Renaissance informed his own compositional style. *A Spotless Rose* was one of three carol anthems written in 1919 and remains one of his most popular works. The anonymous 14<sup>th</sup> century German text, with a singing translation by the remarkable Catherine Winkworth, is based on the medieval trope of Mary as the rose in winter. Howells' long, sinuous lines suggest both the viny plant bearing the rose and the blowing of the winter wind. Parallel chords create a harmonic ambiguity, slipping between major and minor, modal and tonal, and frequent changes in meter both accommodate the text and propel the music forward. Howells extends the final cadence, allowing the music to travel from A minor to E major through a wonderfully idiosyncratic harmonic pathway.

Edward Caswall (1814-1878) was Anglican minister who converted to Roman Catholicism and became a priest. He was a prolific and highly regarded hymnist, essayist and translator. *See amid the winter's snow* was published as *A Hymn for Christmas* in his 1858 collection *The Masque of Mary*. John Goss (1800-1880), professor of harmony at the Royal Academy of Music, organist at St. Paul's Cathedral, and an esteemed composer of vocal music, wrote the setting in 1871 for inclusion in *Christmas Carols New and Old*, compiled by his student John Stainer. Sir David Willcocks' 1961 arrangement retains Goss's melody for the verses and his harmonization of the refrain, but adds an imaginative organ accompaniment and a lushly harmonized descant. Willcocks (1919-2015), a noted organist, composer, conductor and editor, is best known as the long-time director of the Choir of King's College, Cambridge and the Bach Choir of London.

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) was a precocious composer, writing music down as soon as he was taught notation at 5 years old and composing prolifically throughout his childhood. (Britten would later mine these juvenilia for his 1934 *Simple Symphony*.) He composed *A Hymn to the Virgin* when he was 16, away at boarding school and confined to the infirmary. The text that tempted him was an anonymous poem from about 1300 he had found in the Oxford Book of English Verse. It is a macaronic poem, with each English line of text answered with a line in Latin. Britten sets this for a double chorus, with the Latin text given to a smaller ensemble or quartet. It was premiered in 1931, and although it was revised slightly for publication, it already shows Britten's remarkable skill at setting text. The poetry itself is remarkably

sophisticated, with a clever rhyming scheme and word plays – ave (Mary) is Eva (Eve) reversed, just as through Mary the sin of Eve was reversed.

***Tomorrow shall be my dancing day*** first appeared in print in 1833, but the text dates back at least to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In it, Jesus recounts the details of his life using the dance as a metaphor for his mission of salvation. The repeated invitation to join the dance may have been literal – the word carol originally meant a festive circle dance accompanied by song. John Gardner (1917-2011) was a prolific composer in many genres, but is best known for his choral and vocal music. He succeeded Gustav Holst and Herbert Howells as Director of Music at St. Paul's Girls' School and wrote this energetic, syncopated setting of *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day* for the girls' choir in 1965.

This is the second installment of Dominick DiOrio's charming ***Postcard Carols***. These are commissioned pieces with both the text and music personalized by DiOrio to reflect not only the holiday season but also the dedication provided by the commissioner. They have become a popular fundraiser for Mendelssohn Chorus, with the commissioning fee going entirely to support the organization's singers and music. The carol and dedication are printed on a large-sized postcard for presentation, hence the name, and are performed at these holiday concerts. While DiOrio is an award-winning composer, he has relished the novel opportunity to provide the lyrics as well, which can sometimes take him far afield from traditional content. *The Cherry Blossom Carol*, for example, was written for a Japanese dedicatee. The title refers to *Sakura*, the iconic Japanese cherry blossoms, along the shores of the Yamazaki River, and each verse is cleverly written in *haiku*.

***Joy to the World*** is a paraphrase of Psalm 98, written in 1719 by the prolific hymnist Isaac Watts, and is typically sung to an 1848 arrangement of a traditional melody by the American composer and pedagogue Lowell Mason. This virtuosic piano arrangement was written by Bill Wolaver, a Nashville-based jazz pianist, composer, songwriter, and arranger. He is also pianist-composer-arranger for the Annie Moses Band, a uniquely versatile crossover ensemble composed of his five children, all Juilliard-trained musicians.

Frederick Faber (1814-1863), an Anglican vicar turned Catholic priest, missed the richness of Anglican hymnology and was determined to remedy that. He wrote over 150 hymns with beautifully crafted texts designed to facilitate congregational singing, including his 1862 ***There's a Wideness in God's Mercy***. This beautiful setting was written in 1977 by Calvin Hampton (1938-1984), an exceptional and highly individual organist and a prolific composer of hymns. This setting may be unfamiliar to some, but it has made its way into a number of hymnals.

Award-winning composer Abbie Betinis is the third generation of Burt Family Carol composers. In the 1920s, Rev. Bates Burt began the tradition of writing a Christmas carol each year and sending it as a greeting card to friends and family. He handed down the tradition to his son Alfred, a jazz trumpeter and arranger, who wrote 15 carols before his untimely death in 1954. Through his Hollywood connections a commercial recording of his carols was released and enjoyed enormous popularity, and his carols have been covered by singers from Nat King Cole to James Taylor to Julie Andrews. In 2001, Betinis, Alfred's great niece, picked up the tradition. Her 2013 ***Carol of the Stranger*** is set in the style of a folk carol, with a text by poet Michael Dennis Browne.

Marques L. A. Garrett (he/him) is Associate Professor of Choral Studies at the University of North Texas. He is an accomplished vocalist (performing as both a baritone and counter-tenor) and acclaimed composer of choral and vocal music of all genres. He regularly serves as a choral clinician and guest conductor for festival and honor choirs throughout the country. Garrett is an active researcher with published articles and presentations on the non-idiomatic choral music of Black composers. His ***Magnificat*** was commissioned by Mendelssohn Chorus with funding in part from the Alan Harler New Ventures Fund. The *Magnificat* is Mary's reply to her cousin Elizabeth's fulsome greeting from the Gospel of Luke. It makes an interesting prayer, starting out with Mary's statements of humility but soon veering into social justice – God confounds the proud, dethrones the mighty and raises the humble, feeds the hungry but sends the rich away. Garrett's Latin setting features the opening text as a brilliant choral fanfare which will return in different variations that divide the text into smaller sections of related content.

Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943) is one of the most frequently performed and recorded American choral composers, known for his long, flowing musical lines, luscious harmonies, and wonderful choice of text. He served on the faculty of the University of Southern California's Thornton School of Music for 52 years, including chairing the composition department and founding the advanced studies in film scoring program. He was composer-in-residence for the Los Angeles Master Chorale and the recipient of many awards including the National Medal of Arts. His 2005 ***Sure on This Shining Night*** was commissioned by the American Choral Directors Association. The text is an excerpt from James Agee's poem *Description of Elysium*. Lauridsen has a great admiration for the great Broadway musical composers, and the piece's long, sinuous lines are meant to reflect what he considers the best of that musical tradition.

– Michael Moore