

NOTES

O, Come All Ye Faithful

“O, Come All Ye Faithful” summons people everywhere to come to Bethlehem to adore—in the truest sense of prayer and worship—the “King of Angels” and “the newborn King.” For years, the author of “O, Come All Ye Faithful” was misidentified, with attributions ranging from an unknown cleric living in the Middle Ages, to Saint Bonaventure, to an English composer and Portuguese lyricist. It wasn’t until 1841 when Frederick Oakley, an Anglican priest who converted to Catholicism, translated the original lyrics into English, that credit for composing “Adeste Fideles” was correctly awarded to John Francis Wade. A skilled musician, professional calligrapher, and English Catholic priest, Wade fled from persecution in England and settled in France, where he was responsible for researching and preserving historical church music. In the process, Wade reintroduced forgotten songs and wrote new hymns, to include “Adeste Fideles.”

Excerpts from The Nutcracker Suite

A true Christmas heritage, Tchaikovsky’s ballet *The Nutcracker* has captivated audiences worldwide for more than a century. The pieces played today — “March,” “Trepak,” and “Waltz of Flowers”—offer a sampling of melodies from the work, inviting us to enter the magical world of the fairy tale.

When *The Nutcracker* was first presented in Russia in 1892, few could have predicted that the ballet would become a perennial holiday favorite. One year earlier Tchaikovsky accepted a commission from the director of the Imperial Theater of Saint Petersburg—which regularly created performing arts programs to entertain the czar—to compose music for a ballet based on the story “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King.” The original story was

written in 1819 by German author E.T.A. Hoffman; the ballet is based on the 1844 adaptation by French author Alexandre Dumas. Tchaikovsky presented *The Nutcracker Suite, Op.71a*, featuring eight selections from the ballet, in March 1892 to generate enthusiasm for the ballet. *The Nutcracker* premiered in December of that year at Saint Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre to generally poor reviews. Tchaikovsky's score, however, was much better received, recognized by most critics for its beauty and inspirational melodies. The 1954 version choreographed for New York City Ballet by George Balanchine popularized the ballet, and it soon became a Christmas holiday tradition in the United States.

Night of Silence

“Night of Silence,” written by Daniel Kantor is a quodlibet, the term used for a partner song that can be sung simultaneously with another song. The partner song to this contemporary work is “Silent Night,” giving the piece a “sense of nostalgia and a connection with our past and a connection with our tradition,” in the words of its author.

Kantor drew from winters in northern Wisconsin, where he grew up, to compose the richly poetic text, which can be interpreted as an expression of Advent longing. Kantor completed “Night of Silence” in December 1981, during his junior year at the College of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. One year later “Night of Silence” was performed for the first time in public at the college's Advent Lessons and Carols. Since then, “Night of Silence” has been performed by singers, orchestras, and choral ensembles worldwide.

Silent Night

A perfect storm of people and circumstances in Obendorf, Austria on Christmas Eve 1818 gave birth to the world's most widely loved Christmas song, “Silent Night.” With a rusted organ threatening chances of having

music for the Christmas Eve service at St. Nicholas Church, assistant pastor Joseph Mohr devised a makeshift solution. That afternoon Mohr took text he had written earlier about the birth of the Christ Child to the church organist, Franz Xaver Gruber. Mohr asked Gruber to set the lyrics to music that would be suitable for their two voices, the church choir, and a guitar. At midnight mass, with Mohr accompanying the singing on a guitar, “*Stille Nacht*” was performed for the first time.

Two decades after “*Stille Nacht*” was sung in Obendorf on Christmas eve, the Rainers, a singing family from Austria introduced the song to United States audiences, performing at the Alexander Hamilton monument outside of New York City’s Trinity Church. “*Stille Nacht*” was translated into English in 1863. Seven years later, the translation saw its first printing in the *Sunday School Hymnal* published by Rev. Dr. Charles L. Hutchins, rector of Grace Church in Medford, Massachusetts. “*Stille Nacht*” has since been translated into dozens of languages. In 2011, UNESCO declared the song an intangible cultural heritage.

Christmas Day

“Christmas Day,” written by English composer Gustav Holst, is a medley of four carols. Holst used three familiar carols for the piece: “Good Christian Men, Rejoice,” “God Rest You, Merry Gentlemen,” and “The First Nowell,” which he layered with a traditional, but little-known melody from Brittany titled, “Come Ye Loftly, Come Ye Lowly.”

Holst worked in a number of academic positions to supplement his family’s income and to allow him to continue his composing career. Between 1907 and 1924, Holst was Director of Music at Morley College. When he wrote “Christmas Day: Choral Fantasy on Old Carols” in 1910 it was for a performance by his Morley College students. Nine years later, Holst would

compose the orchestral suite, “The Planets,” his masterpiece and most popular work.

Extra Credit Reading: Gustav Holst came from a musical family. Holst’s parents were both pianists, and although Gustav was taught to play piano at an early age, a nerve problem in one arm ultimately prevented the young man from pursuing a career as a pianist. Holst’s great grandfather, Matthias, born in Latvia in 1769, was a composer and pianist. He served as a professional musician attached to the Imperial court in St. Petersburg, but in 1799 left Russia with his young family and settled in London.

Rockin’ Jerusalem

“Rockin’ Jerusalem,” arranged by composer and conductor André J. Thomas, is a mingled sense of “celebration, anticipation, freedom, and hope.” The syncopated rhythms and gospel harmonies of the song musically demonstrate that no matter what life brings you, you can always hear the archangels singing and the bells ringing.

Children, Go Where I Send Thee

“Children, Go Where I Send Thee” is a traditional African-American spiritual. Though the song bears different titles and variations, the central theme conveyed by the words “Children, Go Where I Send Thee” remains the same. It is reminiscent of Jesus telling his disciples to go out and preach the “good news” into different cities and towns.

“Children, Go Where I Send Thee” is a cumulative song, meaning that each verse builds on the former (similar to “The Twelve Days of Christmas.”) The number in each verse contains a Biblical meaning. In the version we are using today by Elizabeth Alexander, most references are clearly stated (for example, “Two for Joseph and Mary,” “Three for the three old wise men”).

Other references are less obvious and open to different interpretations. For example, “Nine for the nine who saw the sign” has been interpreted as the prophets who foretold the birth of Jesus, the nine choirs of angels, and other meanings drawn from the Bible. Originally, the song’s scriptural references masked another purpose, which was to give slaves the ability to count numbers, something normally forbidden by their owners.

The Dream Isaiah Saw

Twenty years ago, just a few months after the September 11, 2001 attacks, “The Dream Isaiah Saw” was performed for the first time at a church in the Pittsburgh area. The tragic events influenced how the composer, Glenn L. Rudolph, finished the work he had begun that summer, which he dedicated to those who perished in tragedy.

Earlier in the year the Bach Choir had commissioned five new works for its Christmas concert, looking to perform songs outside the standard holiday repertoire and establish some new traditions. A requirement for the composers was to write music for a brass sextet instead of the more common quintet, since the concert was held in collaboration with the Pittsburgh Symphony Brass. Rudolph set his song to the hymn *Lions and Oxen Will Feed in the Hay*, written by Thomas H. Troeger in 1994. Troeger had drawn inspiration from Isaiah chapter 11, lines six through nine. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the words of Troeger’s hymn that describe Isaiah’s dream of a peaceable kingdom took on particular meaning.

Sleigh Ride

The seasonal favorite “Sleigh Ride,” easily recognizable by its upbeat melody, jingling sleigh bells, clip-clops, and horse whinny, traces its beginnings to a heat wave and drought in Connecticut in summer 1946. Following his release from active duty in the U.S. Army, Leroy

Anderson was staying in a cottage in Woodbury with his family, where he began composing several tunes, including “Sleigh Ride.” Anderson completed the orchestral piece in Brooklyn in February 1948, following one of the snowiest winters on record in New York City.

“Sleigh Ride” received its premiere in May 1948 with the Boston Pops Orchestra. Mitchell Parish, a Jewish immigrant from Lithuania, added lyrics in 1950. While the composition still ranks as one of the 10 most popular pieces of Christmas music worldwide, the words make no reference to Christmas. Leroy Anderson’s original instrumental version scored for orchestra is the most performed and popular of all the song’s versions.

Extra Credit Reading: Leroy Anderson, the unrivaled master of light orchestral pieces, was also a talented linguist, fluent in nine languages. Born to Swedish immigrants in 1908, Anderson studied toward a Ph.D. degree in German and Scandinavian at Harvard University while working as a music tutor at Radcliffe College. His language proficiency earned him a U.S. Army assignment to Iceland during World War II, where he wrote an Icelandic grammar book for the army. In 1945, Anderson was sent to the Pentagon as chief of the Scandinavian Desk of Military Intelligence. He declined an offer to serve as U.S. military attaché to Sweden, finally deciding to make composing his full-time profession.

We Need a Little Christmas

“We Need a Little Christmas” originated in the 1966 Broadway musical *Mame*. It’s the 1920s and times are hard. Auntie Mame Dennis has just lost her fortune in the 1929 Wall Street Crash, leaving her no way to provide for her self-made family—young nephew Patrick and two household servants. To brighten the mood, the eternally optimistic Mame decides it’s time to go into full-blown Christmas decorating mode and open the presents, even

though it hasn't yet snowed a single flurry. The song reminds us that even in life's darkest hours, it's possible to relieve some stress and share a sense of optimism, if only for a few moments.

White Christmas

White Christmas, which centers on a group of entertainers determined to spread some Christmas joy and save a failing Vermont inn, is considered one of the most beloved Christmas movies of all time. With songs by Irving Berlin and a title song that's loved for its sentimentality and sense of nostalgia, the movie has mass audience appeal. Three songs from *White Christmas* are presented in today's concert.

"Count Your Blessings" came about from Berlin's personal struggles with insomnia. Heeding the advice of his doctor, Berlin penned the song around 1952 and later incorporated it into *White Christmas*. The song was first sung by Eddie Fisher at a gala banquet and dedicated to President Eisenhower, who Berlin called "our greatest blessing."

In the film, "Sisters" is sung first by the show-biz sister act, and then by the entertainers played by Bing Crosby and Danny Kaye. Crosby's and Kaye's act wasn't originally part of the film, but their comedic performance amused the director and he worked it into the movie.

It may surprise some to learn that the titular track "White Christmas" did not originate with the movie. In fact, Bing Crosby introduced it on his radio show on December 25, 1941—13 years before the release of the movie. Pearl Harbor had been attacked just three weeks earlier, and the song's lyrics that spoke of longing for Christmases "just like the ones I used to know" resonated with listeners, as well as with servicemen and women stationed far from home. The song's popularity soared with its release as a single the

following summer coupled with its appearance in another Irving Berlin movie, *Holiday Inn*, winning the Academy Award for Best Song in 1942.

Building on its success with *Holiday Inn*, Paramount Pictures set out to produce another movie musical whose centerpiece was the most popular Christmas pop song of all time. In 1954, *White Christmas* debuted on the big screen, quickly becoming a holiday classic.

Extra Credit Reading: Though a successful songwriter, the early years of Irving Berlin's career were marked by personal tragedy. His three-week-old son, Irving, Jr. died on Christmas Day 1928. Berlin and his wife visited their baby's grave every year on December 25. The song "White Christmas" may have been Berlin's way of responding to his son's death.

Mary Had a Baby

"Mary Had a Baby," a well-known African-American spiritual, most likely originated on the island of St. Helena, located off the South Carolina coast. The spiritual is believed to date from the early 18th century, when it was probably sung at religious revival camp meetings.

"Mary Had a Baby" uses a "call and response" technique that was originally created to unify the African-American congregation in worship. The call, "Mary had a baby," celebrates the mother. The response, "Oh my Lord!", celebrates her newborn child. The text recalls the basic elements of Christ's birth: a baby is born, his mother names him, and places him in a crib. The description could have applied to the birth of one of the slave's children. But Christ's birth is a birth unlike any other. "Oh my Lord!" expresses a range of emotions—awe, appreciation, reverence, and gratitude—not only for Christ and his birth, but for the miracle of birth itself.

The original spiritual has been set by multiple composer arrangers, each of whom has offered their own approach to arranging the spiritual. In the arrangement performed today, Roland Carter captures the importance of Mary bearing a son and naming Him, treating each name with varying degrees of musical nuance. “He is called King Jesus, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Mighty God, Prince of Peace,” but “I’ll call Him Jesus.”

’Twas the Night Before Christmas

The story of “The Night Before Christmas” goes something like this. It’s Christmastime, 1822. Clement Clarke Moore, a university professor and Biblical scholar who lives in New York City with his wife and six young children, goes on a shopping trip. At the request of his daughter and inspired by the snowy winter wonderland he traveled through during his excursion, Moore writes “A Visit from St. Nicholas,” which he reads to his family later that evening. A friend who was visiting the Moore family during the poem’s first reading submits it, with no name attached, to the editor of *The Troy Sentinel*, who publishes it on December 23rd the following year. “A Visit from St. Nicholas” then appears in other New York newspapers, published anonymously each time. Moore’s name was not associated with the poem until 1837, when it was published in the *New York Book of Poetry*.

The setting of the poem performed today was composed by Hollywood composer-arranger Ken Darby and arranged by Harry Simeone. In 1943, this arrangement became a million-selling recording featuring Fred Waring and The Pennsylvanians.

I'll Be Home for Christmas

The ballad “I’ll Be Home for Christmas,” shares some common links with “White Christmas.” Both are Christmas standards recorded during World War II and steeped in the sentiment of that era. Both are closely associated with entertainer Bing Crosby, who struck holiday gold with “I’ll Be Home for Christmas” just one year after recording “White Christmas.”

First released in October 1943, “I’ll Be Home for Christmas” was written by lyricist Kim Gannon and composer Walter Kent. Initially, the song was intended for soldiers stationed overseas during World War II who longed to be home. Beloved by soldiers and their families alike, “I’ll Be Home for Christmas” became the most requested song at Christmas U.S.O. shows. The widely read military publication “Yank” said that with the song Crosby “accomplished more for military morale than anyone else of that era.”

Over the decades, the holiday classic has adapted to express longing of those from all walks of life who are kept apart from their loved ones during the Yuletide season. Miles—or COVID-19—may prevent families and friends from physically being together and embracing to celebrate Christmas, but memories of family traditions and anticipation for future holidays (and now, technology) form at least a virtual connection.

Extra Credit Reading: Military officials in the U.K. had a different opinion regarding the effect of “I’ll Be Home for Christmas” on the troops’ morale, fearing that it would deflate, rather than boost, the soldiers’ spirits. As a result of their urging, the BBC banned the song from its playlist for the duration of the war.

Joy to the World

It remains something of a mystery as to how “Joy to the World” came to be a Christmas carol, since the words are based on Old Testament scripture and speak more about Christ’s second coming than they do the first. Hymnist and clergyman Isaac Watts published the verses in 1719 in a collection of poems, each of which was based on a psalm. In penning the verses, Watts drew inspiration from a phrase in Psalm 98: “Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise.”

As a young man in Southampton, England, Watts viewed the church music of his day to be monotonous and uninspiring, prompting his father to challenge him to create something better. That call to action resulted in Watts composing more than 600 hymns, among them “Joy to the World!” It would take more than a century, however, before Lowell Mason, a Boston music educator and prolific hymn writer, composed the music that would eventually accompany Watts’s poem. A passionate student of the music of composer George Frideric Händel, Mason drew inspiration from two songs of Messiah to compose his instrumental piece “Antioch.” Three more years passed before Mason would find, in Watts’s “Modern Psalmist” songbook, words to link to the “Antioch” melody. In 1911, a Christmas release by Elise Stevenson and the Trinity Choir marked the first time that “Joy to the World!” appeared on a popular music playlist. An Old Testament psalm, songs from Händel’s Messiah, two brilliant hymn writers living in different countries and eras, a long passage of time, and more: it required the piecing together of all these elements to produce one of the most joyful and uplifting Christmas carols ever written.