

## **Program Overview – In Silence and Celebration**

By observing the dual aspects of the Christmas season—both the silence and the celebration—this program uses a variety of musical sounds and texts to allow these disparate but paired elements to evoke contrasting and complementary responses in us.

The birth of a child necessitates quiet time for rest and recuperation by the mother and adjustment to a world of sensory experiences for the child. Sleep, silence, and quiet reflection at the miracle of birth are natural and expected. At the same time, the extraordinary and overwhelming joy of new life is, of necessity, soon greeted with celebration, gifts, and visits.

We know it was the same at Christ's birth. We remember how Mary took quiet time for contemplation by keeping "all these things, reflecting on them in her heart" (Lk. 2:19); and that the celebration began with singing angels and visiting shepherds, culminating in gifts from kings!

Having recently come through a long period of silence in our own society due to Covid-19, we now seek to celebrate the return to a semblance of normalcy, especially with our singing. Christmas presents us the perfect moment to reflect on our own recent experience, the singular gift of Christ to our world, and the deep and abiding presence of the Lord in our lives. It is all these things, in addition to the customary commemoration of Christ's birth, that we celebrate in these concerts.

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To introduce the concert, we begin from a posture of silence, as Christ's descent to earth "demands our full homage." We offer the familiar Advent hymn, *Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*, arranged by Fred Gramann.

The first section— **The Mother**—seeks to acknowledge and honor the human woman whose critical role in salvation is undeniable. We present the *Ave Maria* from Rheinbergers' *Nine Advent Motets*, a Romantic, but liturgical rendering of the Hail Mary. Then, the lilting tune of the Basque carol, *The Angel Gabriel*, conveys the entire story of the Annunciation as well as Mary's *fiat* in strophic form, and is deftly arranged for choir by Paul W. Lohman. These pieces are followed by the lush, Romantic motet, *Virga Jesse*, by Anton Bruckner. The text (from the Gradual for the Feast of the Annunciation) defines Jesus's lineage as coming from David's line and also offers a reconciling view of the incarnation.

**The Birth** demonstrates both the silent and celebratory aspects of Christmas. Jonathan Adams's *Hodie Christus natus est* puts an exciting 21st century sound to the announcement of Christ's birth, using elements of chant, but in changing and unusual meters. Next, a brand new setting of *Silent Night* by Michael John Trotta provides us a new perspective on the silence of that night. Last in this section, *My Lord Has Come* by Will Todd, is an intimate but profound meditation on our own relationship to Christ's coming.

We present the joyful **Hymn**, *See Amid the Winter's Snow*, after our **Offering**.

**The Celebration** begins with a bit of merriment by reprising a Caritas favorite with William Billings' *A Virgin Unspotted*. Next, a somewhat obscure carol on a luminous poem by G.K. Chesterton, *A Christmas Carol* (also known as *The Christ Child Lay on Mary's Lap*) is given extraordinary treatment by arranger Tim Laurio. He sets the tune mostly in 5/8 time taking advantage of rhythmic accents and syncopation,

creating a driving and exciting work. Matthew Colloton's *The Holly and the Ivy*, presents the tune in a more familiar way, with men's voices providing vocal accompaniment through much of it. The use of the final text of the refrain as its coda ("Oh sweet singing in the choir") intensifies our gratitude.

What celebration is complete without a feast? Our feast is laid out in the 15th century English song, *The Boar's Head Carol*. It derives from the ancient tradition of [sacrificing](#) a [boar](#) and presenting its head at a [Yuletide](#) feast. The macaronic text, a mixture of English and Latin, is set in two distinct characters which can be likened to a drinking song and an early madrigal. As arranged by Grant Cochran, this carol exudes playfulness and festivity. We conclude with *Masters In This Hall*, a carol set to a French dance tune composed more than 150 years earlier. William Averitt's arrangement conveys both the exuberant dance-like character and the incredible joy of announcing Christ's birth through song: "Nowell, sing we clear!"

Program notes by Barbara Sanderman, © 2021.