

CHEER

MONDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2005 – 7:30 PM
MEANY HALL

ORCHESTRA SEATTLE and the SEATTLE CHAMBER SINGERS
George Shangrow, conductor

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

A Ceremony of Carols, Opus 28

Procession
Wolcum Yole!
There is no Rose
That yongë child – Laurie Medill, soloist
Balulalow
As dew in Aprille
This little Babe – Jessica Robins, soloist
Interlude
In Freezing Winter Night – Jessica Robins & Laurie Medill, soloists
Spring Carol – Jessica Robins & Nancy Shasteen, soloists
Deo Gracias
Recession

| | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| The Twelve Days of Christmas – please sing along | arr. Robert Kechley |
| The Teddy Bears' Picnic | arr. Robert Kechley |
| O Come, All Ye Faithful – please sing along | arr. David Willcocks |
| A Bayreuth Christmas | Robert Kechley |
| Christmas Favorites | arr. Bruce Chase |
| Jingle Bells – please sing along | arr. Robert Kechley |
| – Intermission – | |
| Christmas Day | Gustav Holst |
| God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen – please sing along | arr. David Willcocks |
| O Holy Night – sung by Stephen Wall | arr. Robert Kechley |
| The First Noël – please sing along | arr. David Willcocks & Robert Kechley |
| Christmas Fugue | Robert Kechley |
| Hark! The Herald Angels Sing – please sing along | arr. David Willcocks |
| Lo! How a Rose E'er Blooming | Praetorius/Robert Kechley |
| Jingle Bells – please sing along | arr. Robert Kechley |
| Sleigh Ride | Leroy Anderson |

Please disconnect signal watches, pagers and cellular telephones. Thank you.
Use of cameras and recording equipment is not permitted in the concert hall.

Please join us in the following Carols:

The Twelve Days of Christmas

On the first day of Christmas
My true love gave to me:
A partridge in a pear tree.

On the second day of Christmas
My true love gave to me:
Two turtle doves and
A partridge in a pear tree.

On the third day of Christmas
My true love gave to me
Three French hens, two turtle doves,
A partridge in a pear tree.

Fourth day: four calling birds

Fifth day: five gold rings

Sixth day: six geese a-laying

Seventh day: seven swans a-swimming

Eighth day: eight maids a-milking

Ninth day: nine pipers piping

Tenth day: ten drummers drumming

Eleventh day: eleven ladies dancing

Twelfth day: twelve lords a-leaping.

O Come, All Ye Faithful

O come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold him
Born the King of Angels:
O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him,
Christ the Lord!

Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above;
Glory to God in the highest:
O come...

Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
Born this happy morning,
Jesu, to thee be glory giv'n;
Word of the Father,
Now in flesh appearing:
O come...

Jingle Bells

Dashing through the snow
In a one horse open sleigh,
O'er the fields we go,
Laughing all the way;
Bells on bobtail ring,
Making spirits bright;
What fun it is to ride and sing
A sleighing song tonight!
Jingle Bells! Jingle Bells! Jingle all the way!
Oh, what fun it is to ride in a one-horse open sleigh!
Jingle Bells! Jingle Bells! Jingle all the way!
Oh, what fun it is to ride in a one-horse open sleigh!

Day or two ago
I thought I'd take a ride,
And soon Miss Fanny Bright
Was seated by my side.
The horse was lean and lank,
Misfortune seem'd his lot,
He got into a drifted bank,
And we, we got up sot.
Jingle Bells! ...

Now the ground is white,
Go it while you're young;
Take the girls tonight,
And sing this sleighing song;
Just get a bobtailed nag,
Two forty for his speed,
Then hitch him to an open sleigh,
And crack! You'll take the lead.
Jingle Bells! ...

God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen

God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay,
For Jesus Christ our Saviour
Was born upon this day,
To save us all from Satan's power
When we were gone astray:
O tidings of comfort and joy.

From god our heav'nly Father
A blessed angel came,
And unto certain shepherds
Brought tidings of the same,
How that in Bethlehem was born
The Son of God by name:
O tidings of comfort and joy.

Now to the Lord sing praises,
All you within this place,
And with true love and brotherhood
Each other now embrace;
This holy tide of Christmas
All others doth deface
O tidings of comfort and joy.

The First Nowell

The first Nowell the angel did say
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they
lay;
In fields where they lay, keeping their sheep,
On a cold winter's night that was so deep:
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
Born is the King of Israel!

They looked up and saw a star,
Shining in the East, beyond them far;
And to the earth it gave great light,
And so it continued both day and night:
Nowell...

And by the light of that same star,
Three wise men came from country far;
To seek for a king was their intent,
And to follow that star wherever it went:
Nowell...

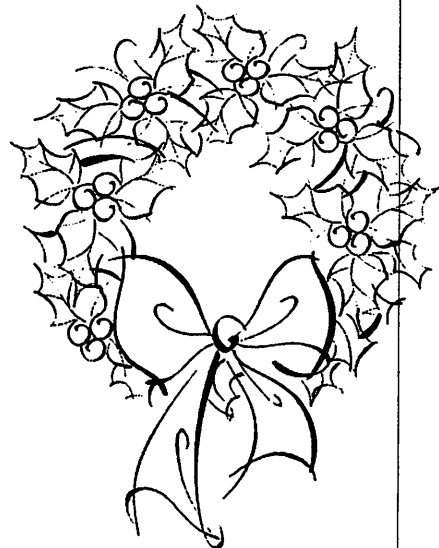
Then let us all with one accord
Sing praises to our heav'nly Lord,

That hath made hev'n and earth of naught,
And with his blood mankind hath bought:
Nowell...

Hark! the Herald Angels Sing

Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled:
Joyful all ye nations rise,
Join the triumph of the skies,
With th'angelic host proclaim,
Christ is born in Bethlehem.
Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King.

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
Risen with healing in his wings;
Mild he lays his glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King.



GUSTAV HOLST

Christmas Day: Choral Fantasy on Old Carols

Gustav Holst was an influential music teacher and an outstandingly original composer noted for the excellence of his orchestration. His works combine an international flavor based on the styles of Maurice Ravel, Igor Stravinsky, and others; English Romanticism and folk music; and a deep interest in Hindu literature and philosophy. He was born in 1874 into a very musical family and practiced piano daily under his pianist father's strict supervision. He later took up the trombone, realizing that a nerve inflammation in his right arm made becoming a solo pianist impossible, and perhaps hoping that playing a brass instrument would help to strengthen his weak lungs. In his teens he conducted village choirs near his hometown of Cheltenham, and joined the Royal College of Music in 1893 as a composition pupil of the famous British composer, Charles Stanford. Here he met his lifelong friend and fellow folk music enthusiast, Ralph Vaughan Williams (the folk songs Vaughan Williams collected exerted a significant influence on Holst's music). He paid for his room and board at the college by playing his trombone, and joined an opera company and later an orchestra as a trombonist, experiences which strongly influenced his band and orchestral compositions. In 1903, Holst began teaching, and two years later he became Director of Music at St. Paul's Girls' School, Hammersmith, the only teaching position that he kept throughout his life. Combining teaching with composition was exhausting, but Holst nonetheless became a celebrated and prolific composer, producing works for stage, orchestra, band, and smaller instrumental ensembles. The bulk of his musical output was vocal, however; even his most famous orchestral work, *The Planets*, concludes with a wordless chorus. Holst's health was always fragile, and he died in 1934 at the age of 59 following an operation meant to cure an ulcer.

Like his music, Holst's personality combined contrasting elements. He was friendly and gregarious (his friends said that he set "a terrifically high standard of being companionable," and was always exceeding it) but he was also at times quite solitary and remote. He was perceptive and business-like but could also be rather naive in both life and music. He was a practical realist but he was also a visionary. He possessed a strong logical clarity of expression, but also demonstrated a capacity to create highly complex contrapuntal forms, and his was an irrational, romantic creativity. Holst was not influenced by fluctuating public tastes or fleeting musical fads, and in fact was wary of the popularity he achieved, commenting: "If nobody likes your work, you have to go on just for the sake of the work, and you are in no danger of letting the public make you repeat yourself."

Christmas Day: Choral Fantasy on Old Carols, for chorus and orchestra, was composed in 1910. The work combines the carols "Good Christian Men, Rejoice," "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen," "Come, Ye Lofty, Come, Ye Lowly," and "The First Nowell." Sometimes one carol tune is sung alone; sometimes a single tune is sung in four-part harmony; and sometimes two carol tunes are sung simultaneously. The structure of the work and the texts of the carols remind one of the story of the angels bringing the good news of Jesus' birth to the shepherds on Christmas night and then singing God's praises, as told by St. Luke: "And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.' When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, 'Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.'" *Christmas Day* begins with a single unaccompanied line as if a single angel were bringing us "News! News!" and bidding us rejoice; it gradually builds in volume, texture, and excitement as the heavenly host praises God, encourages us to join them and to come and see the newborn King, brings us tidings of comfort and joy, and finally summarizes for us the story of the angels and the shepherds. The piece ends quietly as the angels go away from us into heaven, leaving us with the reminder that we rejoice because "Christ was born to save!"

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

A Ceremony of Carols, Op. 28

The son of a dentist and an amateur singer and the youngest of four children, Edward Benjamin Britten was born on the feast day of St. Cecilia, the patron saint of music, in 1913. He studied piano and then viola, and began a life of continuing musical composition at the age of five. When he was six, he wrote a play called "The Royal Fality" [sic] about Prince John, the fifth son of George V, who died in 1919 at the age of 13. The boy would compose before breakfast and then go to school, where he enjoyed mathematics and captained the cricket team. In his teens he became a private pupil of composer Frank Bridge, who provided the young Britten with a solid technical foundation upon which to construct his highly creative compositions. Britten entered the Royal College of Music in London at the age of 17, studying piano and composition and taking several prizes for his works. At 20, he completed the significant choral work, "A Boy Was Born," at a rehearsal for a broadcast performance of which he met tenor Peter Pears, with whom he developed a life-long personal and professional relationship.

Between 1935 and the beginning of World War II, Britten wrote music for documentary films produced by the General Post Office Film Unit, for BBC Radio, and for London's small theaters. Overcoming television's peculiar challenges supplied him with the tools he needed for the composition of some 15 operas over the course of his career.

Because they were conscientious objectors, Britten and Pears sailed for North America in the spring of 1939. Upon returning to England in 1942, Britten faced a conscientious objectors' tribunal and was exempted from military service. During the early 1940s, he produced a number of important works, including the *Hymn to St. Cecilia*, *A Ceremony of Carols*, *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo*, *Serenade* (for tenor, horn, and strings), *Rejoice in the Lamb*, and the *Festival Te Deum*. The outstanding opera, *Peter Grimes*, was

completed in 1945. Britten continued to compose operas, and wrote many works for the Aldeburgh Festival, founded by him and Pears in 1948. Britten received many awards and honors over the next 28 years, being appointed a Companion of Honour in 1952, and being named to the Order of Merit in 1965. He was awarded a life peerage in 1976, the year of his death, the first musician to be so honored. Despite his many accolades, Britten remained modest: "People sometimes seem to think that, with a number of works now lying behind, one must be bursting with confidence," he observed "It is not so at all. I haven't achieved the simplicity I should like in my music, and I am enormously aware that I haven't yet come up to the technical standards Bridge set me."

On March 16, 1942, Benjamin Britten and his life-long companion, tenor Peter Pears, boarded a Swedish cargo vessel, the MS *Axel Johnson*, for their return to Britain after spending three highly successful years in the United States. Before beginning its crossing of the open Atlantic, the ship stopped at Halifax, Nova Scotia. Here Britten purchased a collection of poems in Old English dating from the 14th through 16th centuries entitled *The English Galaxy of Shorter Poems*, and was inspired to compose music for a set of seven Christmas carols. Britten's situation during the ocean crossing was rather less than ideal! Some of his music manuscripts, on which he had intended to work during the month-long voyage, had been confiscated by customs agents as possibly containing secret coded information; he had an unfulfilled commission for a harp concerto from one Edna Phillips, and was trying to study two harp manuals which Ms Phillips had given him; he considered the crew "witless recruits;" and Peter Pears described his cabin as "miserable . . . very near the huge provisions Ice box, and the smell & heat were intolerable, & it was difficult for [Britten] as people seemed to whistle up & down the corridor all day." Britten needed to find some way to "alleviate the boredom," as he wrote to a friend, and probably also to distract his mind from his unpleasant surroundings and from the possibility of the ship's being sunk by one of Hitler's U-boat wolf packs searching for prey. Thus he wrote the first version of *A Ceremony of Carols*.

After his safe return to England, Britten added the "Hodie" ("On this day") plainchant "Procession" and "Recession" to frame the set of carols (the idea of using an appropriate plainsong melody—in this case, one sung at evening worship on Christmas day—came from the broadcaster and critic Alec Robertson). He also used the music of one number that he had discarded for a new carol, "Wolcum Yole," and added the "Spring Carol" to the set. In this form, that is, without the carol "That yonge child" and a harp interlude, a variation based on the "Hodie" plainsong, that were added before the work's publication in 1943, *A Ceremony of Carols*, for treble voices and harp, received its first performance in the Library of Norwich Castle on December 5, 1942, sung by the women's voices of the Fleet St. Choir under the direction of T. B. Lawrence. The final version of the work was premiered by the Morriston Boys' Choir, conducted by the composer, at the Wigmore Hall in London on Dec. 4, 1943.

The *Ceremony of Carols* might be viewed as based structurally on the framework of the famous English service of "Lessons and Carols for Christmas." This service usually opens with the choir processing into the church, continues with nine seasonally appropriate Bible readings alternating with musical selections that relate to or comment upon the texts, and closes with a recessional. Here again one is reminded of the angel's announcement of Jesus' birth to the shepherds, the heavenly hosts' singing of praises to God, and the departure of the angels into heaven. Britten's work consists of the nine carols without the lessons, together with the framing plainsong procession and recession, and an unaccompanied harp interlude that provides a space for meditation. The texts do not provide a narration of the Christmas story, but emphasize various aspects of the liturgical seasons from December through March: the feasts and martyrs, the Blessed Virgin Mary and her singing to her Child, and the nature and theological meanings of the Christ Child's birth.

The work as a whole might also be thought of as a multifaceted crystalline Christmas ornament with surfaces of contrasting color, mood, and texture: The three-part chorus sometimes sings in unison ("Hodie"), in solemn harmonic recitation ("There is no rose"), in echoing close canon ("This little babe"), in "heterophony" in which plain and decorated versions of the same melodic line are heard at the same time ("In freezing winter night"), and in excited chatter and jubilant ejaculations ("Deo Gracias").

The listener can look at this ornament from different angles and in different lights: One can focus on the Christmas-bell-like effects: the chiming of the four-noted repeated figure in the harp's lower register and the shimmering harmonics in the "Interlude," together with the repeated use of the five-note scale reminiscent of the Balinese gamelan (percussion orchestra) to which Britten had been introduced during his stay in America in the early 1940s; the ringing harp figures in "Wolcum Yole!" and "Deo Gratias;" and the deep-throated pealing in the accompaniment of "There is no Rose."

Turn the ornament around and consider Britten's incorporation into his composition of the reverberant properties of the acoustic space in which it might be performed. A large cathedral church's acoustic would enhance the sonorities of the harp (possibly chosen by Britten to accompany the voices because of his concerto-commission-related harp study). The canonic writing for the voices, especially in "This little babe," would be particularly dramatic in a lively acoustic that would amplify and multiply each part.

Turn the ornament again, and examine the composer's expertise in creating melodic lines that fit the word-rhythms of the texts and in painting musical pictures to illustrate those texts. For "In freezing winter night," Britten blends elements of ancient modal and modern major and minor tonalities into a timeless, shivering space, and causes the voices singing in canon to haunt one another through the harmonic night like fluttering ghosts. He uses very close canon to produce the effect of waves of pursuing armies breaking over the field of battle in "This little babe." In "Balulalow," the rocking, shifting rhythmic accents bring to mind the motion of the Holy Mother's body as she soothes her child with her lullaby.

So hold this glittering musical ornament up to the light of your aural imagination. Join us in celebrating, in this work, the wonders of the season when Christ is born, salvation appears, angels and archangels are singing, and heaven and earth meet "in little space!"

Notes by Lorelette Knowles

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| Jason Hershey | Jim Lurie | OBOE | David Cole |
| Manchung Ho | Katherine McWilliams* | Brent Hages* | Ansgar Duemchen |
| Emmy Hoech | Håkan Olsson | John Dimond | Janet Young |
| Fritz Klein* | Robert Shangrow | | |
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| Theo Schaad | | Judith Lawrence* | |
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| Kenna Smith-Shangrow | Steve Messick | Barney Blough | Dan Oie* |
| | Chris Simison | Renee Chmelar | Aaron Voros |
| | | Don Crevie | * <i>principal</i> |
| | | Laurie Heidt* | ** <i>concertmaste</i> |

A Bayreuth Christmas

Combinations of tunes:

Tristan and Isolde with *White Christmas*; *Frosty the Snowman* with *Siegfried Idyll*, *Love's Redemption*, *White Christmas*, *Brunhilde*, *Wotan's Spear*; *We Thrie Kings* with *Dresden Amen*, *Valhala*, *Ukrainian Bell Carol*, *Ride of the Walküre*, *Siegfried*, *Siegfried's Hero Theme*; *O Come, All Ye Faithful* with *Siegfried's Hero theme*; *Jingle Bells* with "Fate" *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* with *Valhala*, *Tristan and Isolde*, *White Christmas*, *Love's Redemption*.

Christmas Fugue

Up On the Housetop, Bring a Torch, Jeanette Isabella, O Christmas Tree, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, *From the Composer*, Robert Kechley:

The original thought that drove me to create this work combining Wagner's motifs with Christmas carols came primarily from a love for the work of Wagner. I thought particularly appropriate the use of *Siegfried Idyll* in this context because it was indeed premiered on Christmas morning in 1870 as a surprise for Wagner's wife whose birthday fell on that day. Also the matching up of the chromatic tune of *White Christmas* with the harmonies of *Tristan and Isolde* was just too good to pass up. Another obvious one that just had to be used was the *Ride of the Walküre* with the *Ukrainian Bell Carol*. The other themes are from *The Ring*, and *Parsifal*.

Christmas Fugue shows just how versatile these Christmas melodies can be. As with any fugue, the object is to pass the themes back and forth from player to player and then cut them up and combine them in various ways. It's a wonderful game for composer, player and listener to follow along the journey of discovering how the themes can bounce off each other.

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