

Come Celebrate

Welcome to “Come Celebrate”, this year’s biennial festive season concert from **Serendipity: the choir**. We are sure there is much to enjoy in today’s programme, which ventures all over the world.

However, starting from home is always best; whilst the majority of Christmas carols are traditionally drawn from Europe, there *are* Australian compositions. Most famous are those composed by William James with texts by John Wheeler, and today we present two – *The Silver Stars* and *The Three Drivers*. Both songs make much of the Australian night sky – something villagers in the Highlands are privileged to see (at least, when there’s no mist!). Also presented today is *Morning Song for the Christ Child* by the late Peter Sculthorpe, with words by Roger Covell. A piece of wonderful simplicity, yet strangely difficult to sing, it conjures up a uniquely Australian picture of that first Christmas morning.

Today we have the honour to present not one or two but three works that are always rated highly in any chorister’s selection of the most beautiful works to sing. Whilst none are especially about Christmas, who needs to justify why we are presenting these when they are all indescribably lovely? Almost a Christmas piece, Peter Cornelius’ *The Three Kings* is an Epiphany carol which uses the German chorale “How brightly shines the morning star” in seven sumptuous parts over which is laid a counter melody to melt the heart.

Similarly heart-melting is Gabriel Fauré’s *Cantique de Jean Racine*, a prayer for blessing – but to sing or hear this work is a blessing in itself! Also drawing on the French choral tradition, although a generation or two later, is Maurice Duruflé’s *Ubi Caritas*. Taking the Latin hymn that prays for a loving community in Christ, Duruflé realises that idea musically by taking the plainchant melody, and building around it an harmonious sound-world that lifts the melody to even greater heights.

Traditional carols can often have a new lease of life by receiving a modern reworking – these are not to be feared, as the end result is often spectacular. If you don’t believe us, try these four examples! Taking a 14th century Latin hymn, translating it into English and adding an energetic rhythm to a mediæval-style melody gives us *A Child Is Born in Bethlehem* by Philip Stopford, originally written for the Nave Choir of Chester Cathedral. Stopford also wrote a new version of *Lully, Lulla, Lullay*, the carol usually associated with Holy Innocents’ Day (traditionally, December 28) and which takes familiar words from the 15th century Pageant of Shearmen and Tailors. From the pen of Andrew Carter – surely a man to rival John Rutter as the king of carol arrangements! – comes *Good Day, Sir Christemas*, which sets a mediæval text to a complicated 5/4 tempo – one to keep you on your toes. (And us on ours!)

But arguably the most spectacular reworking is *Pat-a-Pan Salsa*, where the traditional Burgundian carol has been transported to South America. The result? ¡Ay caramba! From South America, we travel all over the world on a whistle-stop musical tour! Venturing across the Atlantic from South America we begin with the Zulu folk song *Jabula Jesu*, a work that combines the African love of polyrhythms and ostinati (short repeated phrases) that build into a rich and hearty celebration.

Moving northwards to Israel, we present *Hanerot Halalu*, a more introspective work written for the Jewish celebration of Hanukkah which occurs traditionally around this time. From further northwards, and into the colder climes of Ukraine comes *Sleigh Bells*, a traditional folk tune that captures the idea of riding in a sleigh, a winter pastime inextricably entwined with the Christmas season. Even further northwest, from the Isle of Man comes *Oikan Ayns Bethlehem*, a work that echoes a Celtic background, yet with a simplicity and beauty that remains distinctly Manx.

Moving ever westwards we arrive at the Deep South of the USA, to sing a traditional spiritual arranged by that master of the genre, Moses Hogan. Regular *Serendipity* concertgoers will be no strangers to Hogan's works (for we love them!) and *Ain't That Good News* is sure to become a favourite with you too.

Finally, heading south and back to South America, we have the Venezuelan folk carol *Cantemos*. Featuring an alternation between triplet and normal quaver beats (think Bernstein's "America" from *West Side Story*), this pattern is uniquely Latin-American and is well captured in this lyrical work.

No Christmas concert is complete with the "big sing" works, and today we have two. First is *Fanfare and March on "Gloria"* by Patti Drennan, a work that takes the traditional Latin text found in Mass settings and turns it into a work of pure celebration. There's only one response to that, and that is "Hallelujah"! The most famous example is, of course, that taken from Handel's *Messiah*, and we present it for you today. Oddly, while *Messiah* is now overwhelmingly considered a work for Advent or Christmas-tide, it was originally written for performance in the weeks leading up to Easter. No matter – it's a great way to celebrate!

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Repertoire

Fanfare and March on "Gloria"	Drennan
Oikan Ayns	Bethlehem Manx carol - Singh
Jabula Jesu	Zulu folksong arr.Hatfield
Morning Song for the Christ Child	Sculthorpe
A Child Is Born in Bethlehem	Stopford
The Silver Stars	Australian carol - James
The Three Drovers	Australian carol - James
The Three Kings	Cornelius arr.Atkins
Ain't That Good News	trad. spiritual arr.Hogan
Hallelujah!	Händel
Ubi Caritas	Durufié
Cantemos	Venezualan carol arr.Porterfield
Good Day, Sir Cristemas	Carter
Cantique de Jean Raçine	Fauré ed.Rutter
Sleigh Bells	Ukrainian folksong arr.Rentz
Lully, Lulla, Lullay	Stopford
Hanerot Halalu	trad.Hanukkah song arr.Mayo
Pat-a-Pan Salsa	trad.Burgundian carol arr.Fettke & Grassi