

SELECTED PROGRAM NOTES

Quincy Symphony Chorus

Heaven's Light

December 6, 2025

Our Christmas selections are tied together by joyous bells and a variety of instruments. Two handbell choirs join the Symphony Chorus for festive works such as *Ring Those Christmas Bells* and *Bell Carol of the Kings*. Other instrumental accompaniments include brass choir, harp, winds and percussion. Many thanks to the bell choirs of First Union Congregational Church and Salem United Church of Christ.

Daniel Pinkham's **Christmas Cantata** honors the composer's commitment to the ancient music of the church while keeping it relevant. A premiere composer of the mid-20th century, Pinkham studied at Harvard with Aaron Copland, at Tanglewood with Samuel Barber, and in Paris with Nadia Boulanger before joining the New England Conservatory faculty and establishing its early music performance program. Christmas or Nativity cantatas use scriptural elements of angel and shepherd songs responding to Jesus' birth. They use chorus and soloists, and often include children's chorus and trumpets, sometimes adding chorales or contemporary music. For his Christmas Cantata, Pinkham uses three texts from the *Liber Usualis*, the compendium of Gregorian chant used in the Roman Catholic church. Echoes of ancient truths have fresh expression in this *sinfonia sacra*. CM

Our performance includes two of Stephen Paulus's **Three Nativity Carols**: 1. *The Holly and the Ivy*, and 2. *This Endris Night*. Stephen Paulus received his Ph.D. in Composition from the University of Minnesota in 1978, and was active in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area throughout his career. He composed in many genres, including opera, orchestral, choral, and solo works. He was the recipient of Guggenheim and National Endowment of the Arts fellowships. The *Three Nativity Carols* was composed for the Dale Warland Singers, a highly successful and critically acclaimed 40-person choral group based in Minneapolis-St. Paul. The Warland Singers were noted for featuring twentieth-century composers in their repertoire. They gave their farewell concert in May, 2004.

The idea of associating Holly and Ivy together goes back into pagan antiquity. Holly represented masculinity, while ivy stood for femininity. The text of *This Endris Night* comes from the 15th century. The word "endris" refers to "the other night," or the "night before last." Paulus' setting of *Three Nativity Carols* includes harp and an oboe obligato. LW

What Child Is This? is arranged by Melodie Tunney, a founding member of the Grammy Award nominated group, "First Call." Together with her husband Dick, they are unparalleled in writing contemporary Christian music. However, this arrangement instead taps into the sixteenth-century melody of "Greensleeves," with the text, "What Child Is This?" written in the 19th century by William C. Dix. Tunney's arrangement features a background with singers on the neutral syllable "Doo," together with other interesting vocal effects. LW

Christmas is Coming reminds us that this joyous holiday combines profound meaning with simple pleasures of the people. Composer Joel Raney grew up in a rural Alabama Baptist gospel tradition but won honors in composition at Julliard. He writes for films and television; he tours with Broadway shows; but, he also provides simple and heartfelt anthems for church choirs as editor of Hope Publishing. This piece rings in the season literally with a handbell ostinato peal to imitate swinging church tower bells. The bells fall silent for the reverential Advent carol *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* before returning with their joyous rhythmic peal for the finale. Both handbells and the peal bells in English church towers are swinging bells, which means that the entire bell moves and engages the clapper as it meets it. Ropes pull the peal (or change) bell, but the ringer's arm swings the handbell. Peals are complex patterns of shifting ostinatos (short, repeated note sequences) which require extensive team practice to pull. Often, change ringers practice with handbells to master their patterns yet save their strength. CM

Ring Those Christmas Bells celebrates the glory of bells as the toll of time, the peal patterns that unite a community, and the jingling chime of this merry season. However, handbells also come forward here to show their prowess as carriers of melody while the chorus marks measures in rhythmic harmony. CM

Bell Carol of the Kings pairs a traditional Ukrainian Christmas carol with a 19th-century Epiphany carol, using a single tolling bell to evoke sounds of the East. Russian Orthodox bells of enormous size hung from towers that would have collapsed if the bells had swung. They did not. Ropes attached to their clappers pulled the strike ball to the bell, producing the loudest instrumental sound in the world until the invention of electronic devices. Orthodox traditions celebrate Christmas on Epiphany, or 12th Night, so perhaps this carol pairing is logical. CM

Deo Gloria is Nebraska composer Boyd Bacon's modern response to the words of the ancient angels' song that has inspired such wonderful Christmas music: Glory to God in the Highest. Bacon holds both a professorship at Nebraska Wesleyan University and choral directorship at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Lincoln. In a similar pairing, this anthem expresses both academic choral precision and spiritual jubilation. CM

In The Bleak Midwinter was originally composed as an anthem in 1905. Holst is best known for his orchestral and choral extravaganza, *The Planets*. For the text of "In the Bleak Midwinter" Holst chose a poem by Christina Rossetti (1830-1894), the preeminent woman Victorian poet, whose fervent faith is reflected in the text. She wrote the lyrics in response to a request from Scribner's Monthly for a Christmas poem. The verses of the text address 1) Physical circumstances of the incarnation in Bethlehem; 2) Contrasts Christ's first and second coming; 3) Christ's birth amid simple surroundings in a humble stable, watched by beasts of burden; 4) Contrast between the corporeal angels attendant at Christ's birth and Mary's ability to render Jesus physical affection; 5) Introspection on a personal gift to the baby Jesus—giving him your heart. Holst also did a congregational hymn-tune setting of this text, titled "Cranham," which was written for *The English Hymnal* of 1906. It has become one of the best-loved hymns of the Anglican Church. LW

Allen Pote's **Christmas Gloria** was commissioned by First UMC in Maryville, TN for choirs, brass, and organ. The piece opens with a driving rhythm of dotted eighth-sixteenth-eighth, and this rhythm reappears frequently throughout. A middle section switches from D major to D minor, but the joyful Glorias soon reappear and lead to a glorious climax. Pote was director of Music in churches in Texas and Florida for twenty-two years, and later was a full-time composer living in Pensacola, Florida. In 1999 he was commissioned to compose an overture for the Pensacola Symphony Orchestra observing the city tricentennial celebration. Both he and his wife were recognized for their community work with young musicians. LW

The Angels and the Shepherds, arranged by Stephen Paulus for the Dale Warland Singers, joins an octave of handbells with other melody instruments to enhance this Bohemian carol of the Angels' glorious tidings of the Christ Child's birth. CM

Angels From the Realms of Glory brings the hymn anthem tradition to its zenith in Dan Forrest's arrangement, also published in 2014. The 19th century Anglican hymn by Montgomery and Smart sought to offer the praises of humankind...shepherds, sages, Saints...in a grandeur of glory. Forrest's arrangement starts from a mysterious rustling of angel wings and builds to the universal declaration "worship Christ, the newborn King." CM

Our selected notes were compiled in years past by Dr. Carol Mathieson and Dr. Lavern Wagner.

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