

Season 2008-2009

The Philadelphia Orchestra

Thursday, December 18, at 7:00

Friday, December 19, at 7:00

Saturday, December 20, at 7:00

The Glorious Sound of Christmas

Danail Rachev Conductor

The Philadelphia Singers Chorale

David Hayes Music Director

Mendelssohn/arr. Harris "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing"

Redner/arr. Harris "O Little Town of Bethlehem"

Murray/arr. Harris "Away in a Manger"

Traditional/arr. Harris "Angels We Have Heard on High"

Traditional/arr. Harris "God Rest Ye, Merry Gentlemen"

Vaughan Williams/arr. Greaves Fantasia on "Greensleeves"

Traditional/arr. Harris "Good King Wenceslas"

Tchaikovsky from *The Nutcracker*, Op. 71:

I. Russian Dance

II. Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy

III. Dance of the Reed Flutes

IV. Waltz of the Flowers

Intermission

Program continued

Mason/arr. Harris "Joy to the World"

Wade/arr. Harris "O Come, All Ye Faithful"

Gruber/arr. Harris "Silent Night"

Traditional/arr. Harris "The First Nowell"

Schubert/arr. Harris "Ave Maria," D. 839

Bach/arr. Cailliet "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring," from Cantata No. 147

Handel Pastoral Symphony, from *Messiah*

Handel "Hallelujah" Chorus, from *Messiah*

This program runs approximately 2 hours.

Danail Rachev was appointed assistant conductor of The Philadelphia Orchestra, beginning in the 2008-09 season. This season also includes Mr. Rachev's debuts with the Fort Wayne Philharmonic, the Eugene Symphony, and the Eastern Connecticut Symphony.

Mr. Rachev comes to Philadelphia from the Dallas Symphony, where he had been assistant conductor since the 2005-06 season, leading classical concerts, pops programs, and family concerts, as well as school and outreach programs. In the 2007-08 season, Mr. Rachev also led concerts with the Baltimore Symphony, the City Music Cleveland Chamber Orchestra, and the Camerata Winds in Dallas, of which he is also artistic director.

From 2002 to 2005 Mr. Rachev served as conductor of the Juilliard PreCollege Symphony, and in the 2002-03 season he was the first ever conducting fellow of the New World Symphony, where he studied with Michael Tilson Thomas and worked alongside him on many occasions. Mr. Rachev's debut and subsequent appearances in numerous subscription, family, and chamber music concerts were met with consistent critical acclaim.

Mr. Rachev's other positions have included cover conductor of the Saint Louis Symphony, guest conductor of Baltimore's Opera Vivente, assistant conductor of the Columbia Orchestra; and assistant conductor of the Baltimore Opera Company for productions of Strauss's *Elektra*, Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, and Rossini's *La Cenerentola*. In his native Bulgaria, Mr. Rachev has worked with several ensembles including the Russe State Opera, where he led performances of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*.

During the summer of 2002, Mr. Rachev was chosen to participate in both the American Academy of Conducting at the Aspen Music Festival and the National Conducting Institute in Washington, D.C. The latter culminated in his debut with the National Symphony.

Mr. Rachev was born in Shumen, Bulgaria, and trained at the State Musical Academy in Sofia, where he received degrees in orchestral and choral conducting. He moved to the United States to study at the Peabody Conservatory on a full scholarship and graduated in 2001. His conducting teachers have included Gustav Meier, Michael Tilson Thomas, Vassil Kazandjiev, David Zinman, and Leonard Slatkin. Mr. Rachev currently resides in Philadelphia with his wife, Elizabeth.

Founded in 1972, and now under the leadership of David Hayes, the Philadelphia Singers is a professional chorus that engages and inspires a broad range of audiences in the Philadelphia region with compelling concert experiences featuring performances of choral masterpieces and contemporary works.

For 36 years, the Philadelphia Singers has upheld its mission to enrich the broader community through embodying the highest standards of classical musicianship and providing a platform for its musicians to serve the community in a variety of formats. The Philadelphia Singers performs regularly with leading national and local performing arts organizations including The Philadelphia Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, the Curtis Institute of Music, the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, Kimmel Center Presents, and the Mannes Orchestra.

The Philadelphia Singers' 2008-09 season includes a four-concert subscription series featuring collaborations with *Tempesta di Mare* and the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society. In June 2009, the Philadelphia Singers will perform Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* and choruses from John Adams's opera *The Death of Klinghoffer* on the keynote concert of the 32nd Annual Chorus America Conference.

The Philadelphia Singers Chorale was founded in 1991 as the symphonic chorus of the Philadelphia Singers. The Chorale is composed of professional singers and talented volunteers. In its role as resident chorus of The Philadelphia Orchestra, the Chorale appears with the Orchestra in all its choral subscription concerts, as well as annual performances of Handel's *Messiah*.

David Hayes was appointed music director of the Philadelphia Singers in 1992. A staff conductor at the Curtis Institute of Music, he is also director of orchestral and conducting studies at New York's Mannes School of Music. Mr. Hayes is also a cover conductor for The Philadelphia Orchestra.

The Music

Christmas music comes from every corner. Classical musicians have written yuletide scores for oratorios, church services, and ballets, while carols have been penned by pastors, royalty, and that most prolific of composers, Anonymous.

And yet, these diverse pieces share a common sensibility of hope that swings between deep longing and expectant joy. In 1962 The Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy released an LP called *The Glorious Sound of Christmas*. With its rich arrangements, many by Arthur Harris, it set the standard for orchestral takes on Christmas and became a perennial bestseller. Transferred to CD in 1991, the album has continued to be one of the most popular collections of holiday fare ever released. This concert includes many of the carol arrangements from *The Glorious Sound of Christmas*.

Christmas carols did not enjoy the mass popularity they have today until the 19th century, when the form veritably exploded. Carols were made from almost anything. Tunes were fit to words the tunes were never intended to accompany. One of the greatest examples of this is a melody Mendelssohn wrote in 1840 for a cantata unrelated to Christmas. In 1861 a London versifier named Charles Wesley wrote a lyric about the angels singing the glory of the birth of Jesus, and that same year, publisher William H. Cummings fit Mendelssohn's tune to Wesley's words and came up with "**Hark! the Herald Angels Sing.**"

The origin of "**O Little Town of Bethlehem**" could hardly be less dramatic. Phillips Brooks, Rector of Philadelphia's Holy Trinity Church, traveled to Bethlehem in 1865 and was astounded to find the location of his Savior's birth a sleepy little village. He wrote the first lines: "O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie. Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by." Then he returned to Philadelphia and finished the rest. Three years later, he asked the church's organist, Sunday School teacher Lewis Redner, to set his poem to music. Redner later recalled:

As Christmas of 1868 approached, Mr. Brooks told me that he had written a simple little carol for the Sunday-school service, and he asked me to write the tune to it. . . . We were to practice it the following Sunday. Mr. Brooks came to me on Friday, and said, "Redner, have you ground out that music yet to 'O Little Town of Bethlehem?'" I replied, "No," but that he should have it by Sunday. On the Saturday night previous my brain was all confused about the tune. . . . But I was roused from sleep late in the night hearing an angel-strain whispering in my ear, and seizing a piece of music paper I jotted down the treble of the tune as we now have it, and on Sunday morning before going to church I filled in the harmony. Neither Mr. Brooks nor I ever thought the carol or the music to it would live beyond that Christmas of 1868.

"**Away in a Manger**" is sung to two different tunes: one is popular in the United States, the other in England. The tune we hear tonight is by the poem's author, James R. Murray, who wrote the words in 1885, followed by the melody two years later.

The centuries-old traditional French carol "Les Anges dans nos campagnes" (The Angels in the Countryside) was turned into the English "**Angels We Have Heard on High**" in 1860

by Bishop James Chadwick. It has gone on to be one of the most widely performed carols in either language.

The traditional carol "**God Rest Ye, Merry Gentlemen**" may date back as far as the 15th century. But its real popularity started with its appearance in *Gilbert and Sandys Christmas Carols* (1833), edited by William B. Sandys, a prime source for the flood of Christmas carols in 19th-century England. The song is mentioned in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*.

Ralph Vaughan Williams's familiar **Fantasia on "Greensleeves"** showed up originally as two different folk songs in his 1913 opera *Sir John in Love*, a take on Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In 1934 Ralph Greaves arranged the passages as a brief work for flute, harp, and strings. The flute and harp begin things with a dreamy introduction, the strings intone the rich melody, and suddenly, things shift from the 3/4 meter of the title tune to a more intense 4/4. The tune itself, one of the most tender in the history of Western music, may have been composed by one of history's most notorious lady-killers. "Greensleeves" was written in or prior to 1580, the year the text was entered in the Stationers' Register of London as "A New Northern Ditty of the Lady Green-Sleeves." The person registering the poem was Richard Jones, its printer, not its author. Who wrote it? Nobody knows for sure. But one theory has it that the song originated with no less than King Henry VIII, who was, in fact, an accomplished musician, and was fond of writing songs. Short of discovering a signed manuscript in the Tower of London, we shall never know. In any case, in the 19th century, "Greensleeves" became the melody of the Christmas carol "What Child is This?"

Another example of the 19th century's cobbling together of Christmas carols is "**Good King Wenceslas**," which made its first appearance in 1853. The tune is a 13th-century hymn to spring called "Tempus adest floridum." John Mason Neale, Warden of Sackville College, East Grinstead, Sussex, chose this melody for his original poem about the historical King Wenceslas. The carol became instantly popular. (The "Feast of Stephen," incidentally, is not on Christmas Day, but on the second day of the traditional 12-day celebration, Dec. 26.)

The Nutcracker began as a moderately popular Russian ballet in 1892, when choreographer Marius Petipa teamed with Tchaikovsky to make a ballet on a story by E.T.A. Hoffmann. The story was about a little girl whose mysterious Uncle Drosselmeyer gives her a Christmas present of an elaborate nutcracker shaped liked a prince. Through magic, or the little girl's imagination, the Nutcracker-Prince eventually comes to life. The ballet was slow to catch on in Russia. It made its way to Western Europe in the 1930s, and received its American premiere in San Francisco in 1944. Then in 1954 the great Russian choreographer George Balanchine created a *Nutcracker* for his New York City Ballet. This one caught on. The music had already been made familiar by the popularity of *The Nutcracker Suite*, a collection of excerpts from the score. Once Americans caught on to the fact that a ballet went with the music, *The Nutcracker* swept the country as the December phenomenon it is.

"**Joy to the World**" first appeared in composer Lowell Mason's *Modern Psalmist* in 1839. The words, by Isaac Watts, had already been used with other tunes, but Mason's version paired their bright vision of deathless hope to a radiant melody that opens with a descending major scale and ends with an octave leap and a sturdy major-key cadence. More optimistic

music could barely be imagined. Mason indicated he'd adapted his tune from music by Handel, and though he didn't specify which Handel, pieces suggesting "Joy to the World" include one of Handel's organ concertos and a passage from "Comfort Ye" from *The Messiah*.

In 1743 the English-born Roman Catholic musician John Francis Wade wrote "Adeste fidelis," a Latin ode to the birth of Jesus. Published in 1760, it became a popular yuletide song, even more so after its lyric was translated by Frederick Oakeley in 1841 as "**O Come, All Ye Faithful.**" For a time, it was thought that Wade adapted his words from a centuries-old text, but recent scholarship shows the words originated with him. The music, also, is most likely by Wade, though it may have been composed by another Englishman, John Reading.

Austrian pastor Joseph Mohr wrote the words of what we know as "**Silent Night**" in 1816. Two years later, on Christmas Eve, he asked his friend, schoolteacher Franz Gruber, to set them to music for Midnight Mass. Gruber did so in a few hours, and that night the two men and the choir at St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf sang "Stille Nacht! Heilige Nacht!" for the first time. The hymn took years to catch on, both in the original German and in translation, and when it finally did, Mohr was dead and Gruber was discredited as its composer. People thought Haydn or Mozart must have written the beautiful melody. Only when Gruber submitted the original, signed manuscript for inspection was he at last listed as the composer of one of the most beloved of Christmas carols.

"**The First Nowell**" dates back to the 17th century and is probably Cornish in origin. The anonymous hymn was a favorite for years before it was finally collected in various 19th-century hymnals, most notably *Gilbert and Sandys Christmas Carols* (1833). Little else is known about it.

The traditional Latin prayer to the Virgin Mary, "**Ave Maria,**" has been set to music countless times over the centuries, but no single setting has achieved greater popularity than that of Franz Schubert. The long-lined vocal melody over the gentle triplet figures in the accompaniment is familiar at everything from weddings to, of all things, certain video games. But its lyrical content makes it especially right for Christmas.

Composed in 1716 in Weimar, J.S. Bach's Cantata No. 147 utilized an original text by local poet Salomo Franck. This first version was an Advent cantata, intended for use in the weeks prior to Christmas. In 1723, newly arrived at Leipzig and eager to impress, Bach revived the work and reshaped it as a cantata for the Feast of the Visitation of Mary. This meant adding recitatives concerning the announcement by Archangel Gabriel to Mary of her impending virgin birth. He also added "**Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring,**" using the sixth and 16th verses of a 1661 hymn text by Martin Jahn, set to a 1642 melody by Johann Schop. Bach's way with setting chorale tunes is nowhere more beautifully exemplified than here. To the simple and plangent melody Bach adds a flowing line in gentle triplets that envelops the melody and lifts it. The accompaniment is now as famous—or more famous—than the chorale tune itself, and is even to be found as a cell-phone ring option.

No Christmas would be complete without music from Handel's *Messiah*, and yet the oratorio was actually composed for Easter. The piece tells the entire story of Jesus, from birth to death and resurrection. So, while the **Pastoral Symphony** is indeed a yuletide depiction of shepherds watching their flocks at the Nativity, the "**Hallelujah**" **Chorus** was originally intended to commemorate the crucifixion. At the work's premiere in Dublin in 1742, the King of England stood at the sound of the latter, beginning a tradition that lasts to this day.

—Kenneth LaFave

Program notes commissioned by The Philadelphia Orchestra © 2008 Kenneth LaFave.

GENERAL TERMS

Air: A tune or melody

Aria: An accompanied solo song (often in ternary form), usually in an opera or oratorio

BWV: The thematic catalogue of all the works of J.S. Bach. The initials stand for *Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis* (Bach-Works-Catalogue).

Cadence: The conclusion to a phrase, movement, or piece based on a recognizable melodic formula, harmonic progression, or dissonance resolution

Cantata: A multi-movement vocal piece consisting of arias, recitatives, ensembles, and choruses and based on a continuous narrative text

Carol: A traditional song for the celebration of Christmas

Chorale: A hymn tune of the German Protestant Church, or one similar in style

Chord: The simultaneous sounding of three or more tones

Chromatic: Relating to tones foreign to a given key (scale) or chord

Concerto: A composition for solo instrument, usually with orchestral accompaniment

Counterpoint: A term that describes the combination of simultaneously sounding musical lines

D.: Abbreviation for Deutsch, the chronological list of all the works of Schubert made by Otto Erich Deutsch

Dissonance: A combination of two or more tones requiring resolution

Fantasia: A term adopted in the Renaissance for an instrumental composition whose form and invention "spring solely from the fantasy and skill of the author who created it"

Ländler: A dance similar to a slow waltz

Legato: Smooth, even, without any break between notes

Octave: The interval between any two notes that are seven diatonic (non-chromatic) scale degrees apart. Two notes an octave apart are different only in their relative registers (e.g. c-c'; d-d').

Op.: Abbreviation for opus, a term used to indicate the chronological position of a composition within a composer's output. Opus numbers are not always reliable because they are often applied in the order of publication rather than composition.

Oratorio: Large scale dramatic composition originating in the 17th century with text usually based on religious subjects. Oratorios are performed by choruses and solo voices with an instrumental accompaniment, and are similar to operas but without costumes, scenery and actions.

Pastorale: An instrumental piece imitating in style and instrumentation rural and idyllic scenes

Recitative: Declamatory singing, free in tempo and rhythm

Scale: The series of tones which form (a) any major or minor key or (b) the chromatic scale of successive semi-tonic steps

Treble: A high vocal or instrumental part

Waltz: The most popular ballroom dance of the 19th century; its origins are obscure, but are bound up with the history of other triple-time dances, such as the German *ländler* of the 18th century.