

NOË! NOË!

GIOVANNI PIERLUIGI DA PALESTRINA (C. 1525 – 1594)

Alma Redemptoris Mater

This year's *Noë! Noë!* begins with a work by probably the best-known and most influential musical figure of the Renaissance period, Palestrina. Named after the town of his birth, near Rome, Palestrina is mostly remembered for his sublime examples of Renaissance polyphony. Polyphony, literally meaning *many sounds*, is a type of musical texture where all the voices participate in the music simultaneously and independently. In this case, there are four "voices": one violin and three sackbuts. Sackbuts are an ancient forerunner to the trombone, featuring the distinctive sliding mechanism which is used to adjust the pitch of the notes produced. While many sizes of sackbuts exist, this trio comprises an alto, tenor and bass sackbut, which makes it ideal for accompanying the Baroque violin. The original text of this work is a prayer to the Virgin Mary, the "open gateway to heaven and star of the sea".

GIOVANNI PIERLUIGI DA PALESTRINA (C. 1525 – 1594)

Kyrie from Missa Gabriel Archangelus

Palestrina's stunning Renaissance polyphony continues with this *Kyrie eleison*, a prayer which translates as "Lord, have mercy". It is both a prayer sung to give thanksgiving and to ask for mercy from God, and is the traditional opening movement of a choral mass. As a musical setting of the liturgy, masses are usually in Latin, as is the case for Palestrina's many examples. The composer wrote at least one hundred masses, and this one is named for the archangel Gabriel, who announced Mary's pregnancy to her. It was first published in 1554 as part of Palestrina's first book of masses. This book was the first book of masses by an Italian composer, as most of the prominent composers of the day were from France, the Low Countries and Iberia. As another example of Renaissance polyphony, all four voices (soprano, alto, tenor and bass) have roughly equal prominence in the music, although the ear may be drawn to a certain voice at particular times: balancing these moments is one of Palestrina's greatest skills.

ALEXANDRE DESPLAT (1961 –)

My Love is Always Here

Alexandre Desplat is a French film composer who has emerged as one of the world's most renowned in recent years. He has been nominated for eight Academy Awards, and took home the Oscar for Best Original Score for his soundtrack to the film *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014). His most famous works also include the

scores to *The Queen* (2006), *The King's Speech* (2010), *Godzilla* (2014) and *The Imitation Game* (2015). This particular work comes from the soundtrack to *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 1* (2010), the seventh and penultimate film in the smash-hit fantasy series based on the novels by J. K. Rowling. It is a hymn for four-part choir, written for the scene in which Harry Potter visits the town of his birth and discovers the cemetery where his late parents are buried.

*O sleep, sweet babe, though the snow is cold and deep around,
Just sleep, dear babe, through the wind's so keen and icy sound.
Oh hush, sweet babe, there is nothing you should fear,
Just hush, dear babe, for my love is always here.
And I will hold you, safe in my arms,
So no evil can touch you, you can come to no harm.
Wake now, dear babe, now the night is nearly through,
Wake now, sweet babe, there's a world that's waiting here for you.*

TRADITIONAL

Once in Royal David's City

This Christmas carol is one of the most popular in the repertoire, and its worldwide fame is largely due to its place as the traditional opening to the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols service at King's College, Cambridge. This service, which is broadcast live across the world, celebrates its 100th anniversary this year, and *Once in Royal David's City* is customarily the hymn sung as the choir processes in. Its text is a poem by the Irish poet Cecil Frances Alexander, who published it as part of the 1848 book *Hymns for Little Children*. It was soon after discovered by the English organist Henry Gauntlett, who set the poem to the tune it is now famous for today.

ORLANDO GIBBONS (1583 – 1625)

Magnificat from Short Service

Gibbons had an esteemed musical life. He was born in Oxford, and became a young singer at King's College, Cambridge, where he went on to attend the university as a sizar, a student who received assistance in the form of meals or lodging. He was then appointed by King James I as organist of the Chapel Royal, and was also organist at Westminster Abbey. He wrote two major settings of Evensong, the traditional Anglican tradition of afternoon or evening prayer featuring choir, and this particular work comes from the setting known as the *Short Service*. It is a *Magnificat*, one of the most ancient Christian hymns which honours the Virgin Mary.



ORLANDO DI LASSO (1532 – 1594)

Matona Mia Cara

Di Lasso was a hugely famous and admired musician in his day, and is considered one of the most influential musicians of the sixteenth century. He was born in modern-day Belgium, and at the age of twelve began a life of extensive travel – through Italy, Sicily, France, England and Bavaria. Although he was an incredibly prolific and versatile composer, his works are all written for voices. The text to this song is rather tongue-in-cheek, and boasts of the singer’s love-making skills with a range of untranslatable jokes, puns and double entendres. This version is an instrumental one crafted by the Brandenburg.

TRADITIONAL, arr. John Rutter

Deck the Hall

As with many famous Christmas carols, the melody of *Deck the Hall* is an ancient one which was originally paired with a different text. The melody is Welsh, and dates back to at least the sixteenth century, but it was first published in 1794, where it was set to the text *Nos galan*, meaning “New Year’s Eve” is Welsh. The melody was set to its now well-known English text *Deck the Hall* by the Scottish musician Thomas Oliphant, and first appeared in this form in 1862, as part of a volume called *Welsh Melodies*. The famous *fa la la la la* passage originates with the original Welsh version, and probably derives from even earlier medieval songs. This particular version is a lively and imaginative arrangement by the famed English choral composer John Rutter, one of whose original works also appears later in the program.

DAVID FOSTER (1949 –) & LINDA THOMPSON-JENNER (1950 –), arr. Alex Palmer

My Grown-up Christmas List

This touching Christmas song was first released in 1990 by American singer Natalie Cole, daughter of the famous musician Nat King Cole. Although it received little fanfare at the time, it has since been covered by a host of musical icons, including Kelly Clarkson, Barbara Streisand, Michael Bublé and Aretha Franklin. Its most famous rendition is probably the cover by popular American Christian music sweetheart Amy Grant, released in 1992. The composer, David Foster, is particularly noted for his work writing and producing Christmas songs and albums. He formed, with his third wife Linda Thompson-Jenner, a formidable songwriting team, which also wrote the smash hit “I Have Nothing” for the great Whitney Houston. The song eschews the materialism and superficiality sometimes associated with Christmas, and instead calls for a different kind of Christmas wish.



TRADITIONAL & FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809 – 1847), arr. Alex Palmer

Medley (Good King Wenceslas, Hark! The Herald Angels Sing)

This instrumental medley is the combination of two beloved Christmas favourites. *Good King Wenceslas* takes a tune which dates back to at least the thirteenth century, but which was first published in the 1582 song book *Piae Cantiones*, an invaluable collection of medieval music. *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* has also appeared in many forms over the years, but the tune most commonly associated with the text is by Felix Mendelssohn. This number combines the two works into a festive instrumental piece which primarily features the sackbuts. The final iteration of *Good King Wenceslas* features “division” – a stylistic technique common in the Renaissance period whereby single notes of a melodic line are divided in shorter, faster notes to create an exciting and ornamented effect.

JOHN RUTTER (1945 –)

Nativity Carol

John Rutter has been described as “the most celebrated and successful composer of carols alive today”, and he is certainly among the best-known of the late twentieth century. He studied music at the University of Cambridge, and went on to found the famed Cambridge Singers and serve as director of music at Clare College, Cambridge. He has since written settings of almost every iconic Christmas carol, as well as a host of original compositions. Rutter himself wrote the words as well as the music of this work, simply titled *Nativity Carol*. He takes traditional Christmas topics and sets them imaginatively: for the verse about the virgin mother, the women of the choir take the lead; for the verse introducing the wise men and the shepherds, the men of the choir take a more prominent vocal part; and to paint the universal love of Christ, all the voices come together in unison.

TRADITIONAL, arr. Alex Palmer

The Twelve Days of Christmas

The beloved carol *The Twelve Days of Christmas* is thought to be French in origin, but the version popular today was English composer Frederic Austen’s 1909 setting of a rhyme first published in England in 1780, with a traditional folk melody as its basis. The carol is what is known as a cumulative song – meaning that each verse builds upon the previous verse. In this case, there are twelve verses, each of which adds a new item to the list of gifts given by “my true love”. This version is a new one specially commissioned by Paul Dyer for these performances. It features a new text by comedian Mark Humphries, known for SBS2’s *The Feed* and ABC2’s *The Roast*, and a new arrangement by composer and arranger Alex Palmer.



GABRIEL FAURÉ (1845 – 1924)

Cantique de Jean Racine

Gabriel Fauré was a French composer whose style has been described as linking Romanticism and modernism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a child, he took piano lessons from fellow Frenchman Camille Saint-Saëns, who encouraged the young Fauré to pursue composition. This work was written when he was just nineteen years old, and was in fact an entry into a school composition competition, in which it was awarded first prize. It takes its name from the author of its text, Jean Racine, who was an esteemed playwright of the seventeenth century. It has become a staple of the choral repertoire for its poignant harmonies and sweeping melodic lines.

OLA GJEILO (1978 –)

The Ground: Pleni Sunt Caeli from Sunrise Mass

Ola Gjeilo is a Norwegian composer who studied composition at the Juilliard School and is now based in New York City. He has emerged as a formidable choral composer in recent years, and his works are highly regarded for their flowing melodies and organic feel. He cites the famed American choral composer Eric Whitacre as an influence, and describes himself as a “populist” composer, saying that he wants his music to “reach out to... and hopefully touch as many people as possible”. Gjeilo has become a favourite of the Brandenburg in recent years, and the choir’s accuracy and sensitivity is well-suited to the composer’s choral works.

CLAUDE-MICHEL SCHÖNBERG (1944 –), arr. Alex Palmer

My Prayer (Bring Him Home) from Les Misérables

Les Misérables is one of the most successful musicals of all time, and is the longest-running musical on the West End in history, having played over thirteen thousand performances there, as well as more than six thousand on Broadway. It won the Tony Award for Best Musical, Best Book of a Musical, Best Original Score, and a host of others in 1987, and has been a worldwide phenomenon ever since. It is based on the novel of the same name by Victor Hugo, and tells the story of Jean Valjean, a French peasant who has recently been released from jail after stealing a loaf of bread for his starving nephew. In this number, Valjean prays to God to protect Marius, a student revolutionary who has become entangled in the violence of early nineteenth-century Paris.

IRVING BERLIN (1888 – 1989), arr. Alex Palmer

White Christmas

The great Irving Berlin was an American composer and songwriter who wrote hundreds of songs throughout his long and illustrious life. He arrived in New York City at the age of five, along with his family who were most likely fleeing violent anti-Semitic sentiment in his native Russia. The song *White Christmas* was penned for the 1942 film *Holiday Inn*, and its rendition by Bing Crosby is often considered the best-selling single of all time. It netted the songwriter the 1942 Oscar for Best Original Song, an award which Berlin awkwardly announced himself the winner of. One version of its origin is that Berlin wrote the song in sunny California, and it is certainly a nostalgic take on the winter wonderland fantasy not often seen there, or in Australia. This version brings Joel Parris and the men of the choir together for a playful rendition of the classic song.

ALEX PALMER (1992 –)

All Nearness Pauses, While a Star Can Grow

Alex Palmer is a young Sydney-based composer who has collaborated extensively with the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra. Like Orlando Gibbons and John Rutter before him, he studied music at the University of Cambridge, as well as at Berklee College of Music. This work, composed specially for the Brandenburg Choir, is his first composition performed by the group, and is a setting of a poem by the avant-garde American poet E. E. Cummings (1894 – 1962). Cummings is known for his wildly unique works that are beloved for their free structures, meandering stories, broken syntax and unusual imagery. The poem loosely tells the story of the birth of a star, and paints a surreal image of the moon, stars and sky.

*all nearness pauses, while a star can grow
all distance breathes a final dream of bells;
perfectly outlined against afterglow
are all amazing and the peaceful hills
(not where not here but neither's blue
most both)*

*and history immeasurably is
wealthier by a single sweet day's death:
as not imagined secrecies comprise
goldenly huge whole the upfloating moon.*

*Times a strange fellow;
more he gives than takes
(and he takes all) nor any marvel finds
quite disappearance but some keener
makes losing, gaining
—love! if a world ends*

more than all worlds begin to (see?) begin



ADOLPHE ADAM (1803 – 1856), arr. Alex Palmer

Cantique de Noël (O Holy Night)

This carol, known in English as *O Holy Night*, is a setting by Adolphe Adam of a text by the French poet Placide Cappeau. Cappeau was an abolitionist, and his poem, titled *Minuit, chrétiens* (“Midnight, Christians”), likens the redemption of Jesus to freedom from slavery. Cappeau asked his friend Adam, who was in fact Jewish, to set the text to music, and it premiered in 1847 to great acclaim. When Cappeau left the church due to his socialist beliefs, the church leadership banned the carol, but its great popularity ensured its continued performance throughout France. Sometime around 1855, the American abolitionist John Sullivan Dwight heard the carol and, inspired, penned the English version famous today. It is also believed to be the second song ever broadcast on radio, when Canadian inventor Reginald Fessenden played the piece in an experimental AM radio program on Christmas Eve of 1906 (he broadcast Handel’s *Ombra ma fui* shortly before it, which takes the first prize). The Brandenburg’s performance brings together the choir, orchestra and tenor Joel Parnis, singing the original French.

FRANZ XAVER GRUBER (1787 – 1863)

Stille Nacht (Silent Night)

This beloved carol is a true Christmas favourite, and in fitting fashion, it was first performed on Christmas Eve in 1818. The composer, Franz Xaver Gruber, was the organist at the parish church in the town of Oberndorf, in modern-day Austria. He set the music to a text written by the local priest Father Joseph Mohr, and since that time a host of tales have spread about the carol and its rise to fame. While the original manuscript has been lost, it seems that the song was originally written for Gruber and Mohr themselves, with the accompaniment of a lone guitar and the parish choir. This led to speculation that the church organ may have been broken, but the only evidence for this seems to be a visit of an organ builder to repair the instrument some weeks later. The story then goes that the repairman took a copy of the music back to his hometown, where a travelling musical family heard the song and began touring it across northern Europe. It was an immediate favourite of King Frederick William IV of Prussia upon hearing it in 1834, and by 1839 it had been performed in New York City. The current English version dates to 1859, and since that time, its popularity has only grown. The church where it was first performed is now known as the *Stille-Nacht-Kapelle* (Silent Night Chapel).

*Stille Nacht! Heilige Nacht!
Alles schläft; einsam wacht
Nur das traute hoch heilige Paar.
Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar,
Schlafe in himmlischer Ruh!*

*Douce nuit! Sainte nuit!
Dans les cieux, l’astre luit.
Le mystère annoncé s’accomplit.
Cet enfant sur la paille endormi,
C’est l’amour infini!*

*Silent night! Holy night!
Son of God, love’s pure light.
Radiant beams from Thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace.
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth!*

Silent night! Holy night!
Everything sleeps, only awake is
The holy betrothed couple.
Lovely boy with curly hair,
Sleep in heavenly peace!

Silent night! Holy night!
In the heavens, the star shines.
The foretold mystery is coming to pass.
This child asleep on the straw,
Is the infinite love!

ANONYMOUS, arr. David Willcocks

O Come, All Ye Faithful

O Come, All Ye Faithful is the traditional finale to the Brandenburg’s *Noël! Noël!* performances, and this year is no exception. The hymn has been attributed to various composers, and while the earliest manuscript of the work bears the name of King John IV of Portugal (1604 – 1656), it is likely that the tune is even older. The text was originally written in Latin as *Adeste fideles*, and has been translated into various languages countless times. The most famous English translation, which closes this performance today, was written by the English priest Frederick Oakeley in 1841, and has become a ubiquitous part of Christmas celebrations ever since.