

Stanford Medicine Holiday Concert

Stanford Medicine Chorus

Minseung Choi, MUSIC DIRECTOR AND CONDUCTOR

Stanford Medicine Orchestra

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WITH

Debra Fong, VIOLIN

Christopher Costanza, CELLO

BING CONCERT HALL

DECEMBER 4, 2024, 6:30 PM

Program Notes

By Hilary Teplitz and Kenneth Duda, members of Stanford Medicine Chorus

This Is My Song

Text: Lloyd Stone

Music: Jean Sibelius, arr. Ira B. Wilson

We begin our concert with this iconic piece. Ira B. Wilson brought together the hymn-like section of Finnish Composer Jean Sibelius's *Finlandia* (1899-1900) and a poem penned in 1934 by a 22-year-old American poet, Lloyd Stone. Composed during a time of political unrest, *Finlandia* is a symphonic tone poem and veiled protest against tsarist Russian censorship of the press. Amid its sweeping and defiant passages, the quieter hymn offers a moment of profound peace and hope. Sibelius later reworked this section into a stand-alone piece, and it has long been a source of national pride and an unofficial national anthem in Finland.

The hymn-like section of Sibelius' *Finlandia* demonstrates disciplined voice leading in the style of classical four-part harmony, reminiscent of the contrapuntal craftsmanship found in Bach chorales. Each voice moves independently yet harmoniously, adhering to the principles of smooth melodic motion and harmonic clarity. This peaceful interplay mirrors the poem's vision of many nations coming together as one humanity. Rooted in the structure of a Baroque chorale, the music transcends its religious origins, embracing a Romantic spirit of emotional expression and secular universality. Its lush harmonies and sweeping melody elevate the hymn-like form into a steadfast call for unity and peace, embodying a patriotism that extends beyond borders to embrace the shared beauty of the world: "But other lands have sunlight, too, and clover / And skies are everywhere as blue as mine."

The song closes by returning to its spiritual roots, invoking "the God of all the nations" to protect and guide humanity. Together, the music and poem remind us of the power of hope and harmony to inspire a vision of a world united in peace.

Text

This is my song, O God of all the nations.
A song of peace for lands afar and mine.
This is my home, the country where my heart is;
Here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine;
But other hearts in other lands are beating
With hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.

My country's skies are bluer than the ocean.
And sunlight beams on clover leaf and pine;
But other lands have sunlight, too, and clover,
And skies are everywhere as blue as mine.
O hear my song. O God of all the nations,
A song of peace for their land and for mine.

In This Place

Text and Music: Will Todd

This song of renewal by English composer Will Todd sounds a note of inner reflection. Reaching toward the sacred in this richly harmonic piece, Todd sees his setting “build[ing] towards the final soaring phrase ‘I will fly with angels.’” As a chorus, we embrace this theme of transformation by focusing on the warmth and balance of the harmonies, allowing the piece’s reflective and meditative qualities to shine through. The complex chords demand a careful blend, while the dynamic swells invite us to express the emotional journey of the text, culminating in the transcendent final phrase.

This stirring piece was commissioned in 2014 for the Durham School’s 600th anniversary. Todd, who attended the school on a full music scholarship, honors his alma mater’s centuries-old history and the legacy of that place in his and so many others’ lives. With its soaring melodies and deeply evocative harmonies, *In This Place* serves as a poignant tribute to the power of renewal, reflection, and the sacred connection we find in the places that shape us.

Text

In this place I have been made new;
I have been gifted jewels beyond price.
In this place greater dreams are given.
I am made everlasting.

In this place I am light,
In this place, in your sight
I am made everlasting.

In your love, starting and ending;
I will be carried softly to heaven.
In your love I am given beauty.
I am made everlasting.

You give the strength for me to hold,
You are the hope that shines like gold.
In this place I am new.
In your love I am true.

I will fly with angels to this place,
And be made everlasting.

Sing, My Child

Text and Music: Sarah Quartel

Sing, My Child explores the radiant fullness of the here and now. Originally commissioned for a mass choir of 700 singers, this song is an exuberant celebration of everyday life. Canadian composer Sarah Quartel exults in the joy, beauty, and struggle of being, with a brimming optimism and an unshakeable exhortation to “sing for the promise of each new morning,” while trusting oneself to “hear your voice” and find strength when “troubles come.”

The music matches this uplifting message with a buoyant energy and vibrant harmonies. From its lilting rhythms to its shining layers of sound, the piece radiates warmth and vitality, inviting both singers and listeners to share in its message of hope. The dynamic interplay between the chorus and orchestra enhances its celebratory spirit, with the orchestra adding depth and texture to the rhythmic drive. This joyful collaboration creates a rousing anthem that leaves a lasting impression of strength, resilience, and gratitude.

Text

Sing for the promise in each new morning.
Sing for the hope in a new day dawning.
All around is beauty bright!
Wake in the morning and sing, my child.

Dance in the joy of the day unfolding.
Dance as you work, and dance as you're learning.
All around is beauty bright!
Take in the day and dance, my child.

But when troubles come
and worry is all that can be found,
Gather your strength and hear your voice,
Sing, my child.

Laugh in the cool and the fresh of the ev'ning.
Laugh in your triumph, laugh in succeeding.
All around is beauty bright!
Rest in the ev'ning and laugh, my child.
Peace, peace, peace, peace, peace...

But when troubles come
and worry is all that can be found,
Gather your strength and hear your voice,
Sing, my child. Dance, my child. Laugh, my child.

Peace, my child, oh, peace, my child.

En La Macarenita (In the Macarenita)

Text: Anonymous

Music: Traditional Andalusian, arr. Bob Chilcott

Bob Chilcott brings a delightful setting of a traditional Andalusian folk song to life with *En La Macarenita*. This lively song, set in Macarena (a town near Seville, Spain) tells the story of a torero who feels life's good fortune in his good cape, good hat, and good fun. He also describes a girl who brings him cold water that "burns" his soul, an image rich with passion and allure. The song is often interpreted as a flirtatious exchange, with the torero and the girl playfully wooing each other, or even the start of a life-long romance in some popular English translations.

Chilcott's arrangement is infused with rhythmic vitality and infectious energy, capturing the playful spirit of the text. Syncopated rhythms, bright harmonies, and dynamic contrasts evoke the liveliness of a Spanish fiesta. Our choir leaned into these vibrant elements, emphasizing crisp articulation and an animated delivery to bring the story to life. The addition of a percussionist adds an authentic flair, grounding the piece in its Andalusian roots and driving its irresistible momentum. Together, these elements create a vivid celebration of charm, humor, and romance.

Text

En la Macarenita me dieron agua,
más fría que la nieve en una talla.

In the Macarenita, they gave me water,
colder than snow.

La Macarena
Buena capa, buen sombrero,
buena moña "pa un" torero.

The Macarena.
A good coat, a good hat,
A good ribbon for a bullfighter.

Yo no se aquella agüita lo que tenía,
que me abrasaba el alma estando fría.

I don't know what that little water had,
that it burned my soul while being cold.

La Macarena ...

The Macarena ...

Me la dio una mocita de filigrana,
la más fina y "pulía" de "toa" Triana.

gave to me a beautiful girl,
the finest and most polished of all Triana.

La Macarena ...

The Macarena ...

Unclouded Day

Text: Josiah Kelley Atwood

Music: Josiah Kelley Atwood, arr. Shawn Kirchner

With its bright banjo tune and bluegrass vocal style, this American folk piece is the third movement of Shawn Kirchner's *Heavenly Home: Three American Songs*. Hailed as an "enduring gospel classic," the song heralds the vision of a better place, a glittering city "that is made of gold" and "the tree of life in eternal bloom."

Kirchner's arrangement infuses the traditional hymn with exuberance and energy, building from a gentle opening to a thrilling climax. The dynamic crescendos and rhythmic vitality capture the excitement of the text's promise, while the interplay of voices evokes the spontaneity and joy of a bluegrass gathering. Our approach emphasizes the communal spirit of the piece, channeling its driving momentum and joyful harmonies to convey both its fervent hope and jubilant celebration.

The piece, Kirchner writes, was written by itinerant preacher Josia Kelley Atwood who penned the original hymn after a late-night horseback ride "under a striking vision of a sky: he saw a rainbow against a dark cloud which covered half the sky, while the other half was perfectly clear" — a vivid metaphor for the promise of a better, unclouded day.

Text

O, they tell me of a home far beyond the skies,
They tell me of a home far away.
And they tell me of a home where no storm clouds rise.
O, they tell me of an unclouded day.

O, they tell me of a home where my friends have gone,
They tell me of a land far away.
Where the tree of life in eternal bloom
Sheds its fragrance through the unclouded day.

O, they tell me of a King in His beauty there,
They tell me that mine eyes shall behold
Where He sits on a throne that is bright as the sun,
In the city that is made of gold.

Refrain:

O, the land of cloudless days.
O, the land of an unclouded sky.
O, they tell me of a home where no storm clouds rise.
O, they tell me of an unclouded day.

O Nata Lux (O Light Born)

Text: Anonymous

Music: Morten Lauridsen

This piece enters the ether with a delicate setting of a tenth-century sacred Latin text. *O Nata Lux* serves as the centerpiece to acclaimed composer Morten Lauridsen's *Lux Aeterna*, a five-part choral cycle bound by a recurring motif of light. The text of "O Nata Lux" is a hymn for the Transfiguration of Christ, invoking Jesus as "the light of light," and reflecting themes of divine illumination and spiritual transcendence.

Lauridsen's setting unfolds with luminous simplicity, weaving radiant harmonies that seem to shimmer and glow. The piece opens with unaccompanied voices in close intervals, creating a sense of intimacy and stillness, before blooming into thick, cascading chords. Our choir approached this ethereal work with a focus on tonal purity and balance, allowing the seamless voice-leading and intricate dynamics to shine. The gentle crescendos and finely tuned phrasing invite the listener into a timeless, contemplative space—a reverent meditation on the sacred mystery of light.

Text

O nata lux de lumine,
Jesu redemptor saeculi,
dignare clemens supplicum
laudes preces que sumere.

Qui carne quondam contegi
dignatus es pro perditis.
Nos membra confer effici
tui beati corporis.

O Light born of Light,
Jesus, redeemer of the world,
with kindness deign to receive
the praise and prayer of suppliants.

You who once deigned to be clothed in flesh
for the sake of the lost,
grant us to be made members
of your blessed body.

Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas

Text: Hugh Martin

Music: Ralph Blane, arr. Molly Ijames

Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas is a timeless holiday standard that celebrates friends and looks with hope toward a better year ahead. First sung by Judy Garland in the 1944 movie *Meet Me in St. Louis*, and updated a decade later for Frank Sinatra, this song quickly became a Christmas classic, beloved for its blend of heartfelt nostalgia and quiet optimism.

In 2012, Molly Ijames put a sweet and jazzy twist on this song with her choral arrangement that highlights the song's emotional complexity. Blending its gentle melancholy (the capricious fates, our troubles) with cheer (the lightness of our hearts, beloved friends), Ijames builds a quietly rousing optimism before settling back down to a wistful wish for what is to come.

Our interpretation emphasizes the balance between intimacy and warmth, allowing the close harmonies and nuanced dynamics to evoke the song's bittersweet charm. The soft ebb and flow of the music mirrors the wistful hopefulness of the text, creating a performance that invites the listener to reflect on both the challenges and comforts of the season.

Text

Have yourself a merry little Christmas
Let your heart be light
Next year all our troubles will be out of sight

Have yourself a merry little Christmas
Make the Yuletide gay
Next year all our troubles will be miles away

Once again, as in olden days
Happy golden days of yore
Faithful friends who are dear to us
Will be near to us once more

Someday soon, we all will be together
If the fates allow
Until then, we'll have to muddle through somehow

So have yourself a merry little Christmas now

Ma'oz Tzur (מְעוֹז צוּר, *Rock of Ages*)

Text: Liturgical

Music: Benedetto Marcello, arr. Hugo Chaim Adler

We continue our holiday celebration with the popular Hanukkah song, *Ma'oz Tzur*, widely known in English as *The Rock of Ages*. The text is a piyyut, or Jewish liturgical poem, written in the twelfth or thirteenth century to celebrate Hanukkah, a festival of lights commemorating the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 165 B.C.E.

While the most common melody for this poem comes from a fifteenth-century German folk song, tonight we present Benedetto Giacomo Marcello's polished setting from the 1720s. Marcello based his version on a melody sung by Italian Jews living in Venice at the time, capturing a unique blend of Jewish and Baroque musical traditions. His transcription of this song and numerous other Jewish melodies are some of "the earliest extant Jewish musical notations of any kind."

Marcello's setting pairs the traditional melody with Baroque ornamentation and a refined harmonic texture. The music carries a stately dignity, balancing reverence for its liturgical roots with the sophistication of Marcello's era. Our performance highlights this interplay, with careful attention to phrasing and dynamics to bring out the blend of historical authenticity and Baroque elegance. This unique arrangement offers a glimpse into the rich cultural and musical exchanges that defined Venice in Marcello's time.

Text

מְעוֹז צוּר יְשׁוּעָתִי
לְךָ נֶאֱחָה לְשִׁבְחֵךְ
תִּכּוֹן בַּיִת תִּפְלֵתִי
וְשָׁם תּוֹדָה נִזְבַּח.

Maoz tzur y'shuati
l'cha naeh l'shabeach
Tikon beit t'filati
v'sham todah n'zabeach.

Rock of Ages let our song,
Praise thy saving power;
Thou amidst the raging foes,
Wast our sheltering tower.

לַעֲת תִּכְיִן מִטְּבַח
מִצָּר הַמְּנַבֵּחַ.
אֶז אֶגְמֹר בְּשִׁיר מִזְמוֹר
חֲנֻכַּת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ.

L'eit tachin matbeach
mitzar hamnabeach
Az egmor b'shir mizmor
chanukat hamizbeach.

Furiously they assailed us,
But Thine arm availed us
And Thy word broke their sword,
When our own strength failed us.

Los Peces en el Río (The Fish in the River)

Text: Anonymous

Music: Villancico, arr. Alfredo Carrión

One of the most popular Christmas carols across the Spanish-speaking world, *Los Peces en el Río* (*The Fish in the River*), is either a quirky, yet strikingly intimate, song of a mother and child or a deeply symbolic one. The simple, lively text describes how the fish in a river begin drinking to celebrate the birth of Jesus, while the Virgin Mary goes about her daily activities, combing her hair, washing diapers, and tending to her baby. On one level, it offers a wonderfully intimate peek into a quiet, domestic moment of motherhood, contrasted with the exuberant joy of nature in the background. On another level, a more symbolic reading suggests that the fish represent Jesus's followers, while the references to gold, silver, rosemary, and curtains carry deeper Christian symbolism.

Dating back to the 16th century, the song is a *villancico*, a traditional poetic and musical form prevalent in Spain from the 15th to 18th centuries. Villancicos combine folk and sacred elements, bridging everyday life and religious themes in a uniquely vibrant way.

Musically, this arrangement by Alfredo Carrión captures the infectious energy and rhythmic vitality of the carol, blending its folkloric charm with layered harmonies that bring depth to the joyful text. Our performance emphasizes the lively tempo and dance-like quality of the piece, with careful attention to the interplay between the buoyant rhythms and lyrical lines. The song's dynamic contrasts and playful spirit invite both singers and listeners into a jubilant celebration of the Nativity.

Text

Refrain:

Pero mira cómo beben los peces en el río,
pero mira cómo beben por ver al Dios nacido,
beben y beben y vuelven a beber
los peces en el río por ver a Dios nacer.

Refrain:

But look how the fish in the river drink,
but look how they drink to see God born,
they drink and drink and drink again,
the fish in the river, to see God born.

La Virgen se está peinando,
entre cortina y cortina,
los cabellos son de oro,
y el peine de plata fina.

The Virgin is combing her hair,
between the curtains,
her hair is made of gold,
and the comb of fine silver.

La Virgen va caminando,
va caminando solita,
y no lleva más compañía
que el Niño que está en la cuna.

The Virgin is walking,
she is walking alone,
and she has no company
except the Child who is in the cradle.

La Virgen lava pañales
y los tiende en el romero;
los pajaritos cantan
y el agua se va riendo.

The Virgin washes diapers
and hangs them on the rosemary;
the little birds sing
and the water is laughing.

Somerset Wassail

Text: Anonymous

Music: Traditional English, arr. Brian Kay

We close our concert with the revelry of Brian Kay's rousing arrangement of a Twelfth Night Somerset wassail. With pagan roots, wassailing is a lively centuries-old English tradition in which people gather in orchards—or go door to door (the origins of modern-day caroling)—singing merry folk-tunes, drinking cider, and toasting to good health, on the twelfth night of Christmas (January 5 or 17, depending on the calendar). Like most wassails, this one is lively, with jolly, good-hearted lyrics celebrating the joys of the season.

While there are many variations of wassailing tunes and lyrics from different regions of England, Kay's arrangement of the Somerset Wassail is notable for its energetic interplay between voices and its dynamic contrasts, capturing the spirit of a lively gathering. The arrangement alternates between resonant harmonies and rhythmic, driving passages, evoking the communal warmth and exuberance of wassailing traditions. Our performance highlights these contrasts with a playful energy, leaning into the joyous call-and-response style that makes this piece such a crowd-pleaser.

And for the curious, the “girt dog” (or great dog) in verse four may be a reference to a landscape figure in the shape of a large dog that covers a large area of Langport, a town in Somerset. Its “burnt tail” may allude to a village located in the tail of the figure that Viking invaders burned in the 9th century—a whimsical historical nod amidst the merriment of the song.

Text

Wassail, and wassail, all over the town
The cup, it is white, and our ale, it is brown
The cup, it is made of the good ashen tree
And so is the malt of the best barley.

O master and missus, are you all within?
Pray open the door and let us come in
O master and missus, a-sitting by the fire
Pray think upon poor travelers, a-traveling in the mire.

O where is the maid with the silver-headed pin
To open the door and let us come in?
O master and missus, it is our desire
A good loaf and cheese, and a toast by the fire.

The girt dog of Langport, he burnt his long tail
And this is the night we go singing wassail
O master and missus, now we must be gone
God bless all in this house till we do come again.

Refrain:

For it's your wassail, and it's our wassail,
And it's joy be to you, and a jolly wassail.