



Ensemble Altera Presents

We Watch & Welcome

FEMININE VOICES AT CHRISTMAS

Directed by Christopher Lowrey

SUNDAY, 5 DECEMBER, 2021 | 2:30PM

Blessed Sacrament Church

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A Note From The Director

Even as the world limps back to something we can recognize as normal, I notice a kind of instability in our public life, whether in the realm of politics, education, in our neighborhood groups, right down to the way we socialize and consume entertainment. I've never been a reactionary: I know some changes are inevitable and healthy and even when they frustrate us, they can offer a pathway renewal and reaffirmation. For one thing, the tremendous disruption of the last nineteen months cleared a fortuitous flightpath for Ensemble Altera. It's now on its way to becoming something I always dreamed it could be: a fully professional chamber choir to rival the best in the world, right here in Rhode Island. At the same time, I sense a need to ratify certain indisposable values as a community, to find a plausible narrative around which we can unite. When I look over my own terrain, I am committed to celebrating neglected voices and catalyzing new connections between artists. For this project, I scoured the catalogues and chose a feast of works by women. Wary that tokenism in all its forms can be counterproductive, I was determined to program truly excellent music. We need contributions of the highest calibre representative of a wider range of the human experience if classical music is to truly thrive in our century. Alongside this work, Altera is committed to widening our proverbial tent to embrace the finest talent our country has to offer. This winter season we engage no fewer than nine new artists, many of whom are enjoying some of their first opportunities in the professional world of music. We are also forming a new partnership with Blessed Sacrament School to present education concerts, where students can encounter our sometimes remote music in an informal way, get to see us musicians as human beings, and dare to ask questions. As our organization matures, my hope is to convene annual summer training programs for the brightest young musicians right across the country, to inspire them to achieve more than they imagined.

As all this worthy endeavor continues I remain laser focused on our uncompromising artistic standards. In an era of smartphone attention spans, dopamine-fried brains flit from five-minute "tiktoperas" to social media memes to clickbait headlines. In my bones I know that the quality of what we do must outlast the news cycle, and transcend fashionable ideas. Just as we lately have rediscovered the value of slow food, or meditation practice, I think we are becoming increasingly aware that the cacophony of digital stimulation is burning us out and slowly driving us mad. I'm confident we will adapt by learning how to tune out the superficial noise and tune in to something authentic. Recent reports that employees will never return to the office betray a kind of exuberance for new ideas without thinking them through. It is easy to lose sight of our deeply social and interdependent nature. If the isolation of this period has taught me anything, it is how more can be said in a minute of physical presence than in hours of zoom meetings, how the lower half of one's face is essential in decoding emotion, and that the only antidote to an already atomising and balkanizing country is more time together - in an office, at a concert, going for a walk - not less. We risk losing this essential component of our nature at our own peril. It is my desire to continue to facilitate this coming together and partaking in a shared culture, casting as wide and open-minded a net as possible, always with an eye on a healthy boldness and balance in our ambitions. We hope you will join and support us as we continue to grow and keep our sights fixed on the future.

The hundreds of strands that come together for a concert like ours require a village, and so I must thank first and foremost my brother from another mother, Michael Garrepy, for his abundant patience in the face of my incessant ranting and his help in always strategizing the best course; Olivia Kleyla for her beautiful artwork and social media and marketing; Signe Lindberg for her steady hand on Altera's tiller; Charlie Oliver, whose computer monitor is no doubt permanently burned in with spreadsheet lines; Tim Harbold for his excelsior work on rights management for our performances and recordings; Gregory King for his marketing and communications prowess; Jared Kornblatt for taming my program notes; Brad Kleyla for producing beautiful audio of our performances; and last but not least my parents Donna and Michael for fighting my corner and supporting this extraordinary experiment in every way they can.

Yours in music,
Christopher Lowrey

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Program

O viridissima, virga

Hildegard von Bingen (c. 1098-1179)

I sing of a Maiden

Ian Shaw (b. 1960)

Welcome Joy and Welcome Sorrow

Imogen Holst (1907-1984)

No. 1 'Welcome Joy and Welcome Sorrow'

No. 4 'Shed no Tear'

Audivi vocem de caelo

John Sheppard (c. 1515-1558)

Ave Maria

Cecilia McDowall (b. 1951)

Ave Maria from 'Three Latin Motets'

Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

Magnificat from 'St Paul's Service'

Joanna Marsh (b. 1970)

'O Maria' from 'Sacri Musicali Affetti'

Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677)

Jesus Christ the Apple Tree

Elizabeth Poston (1905-1987)

Ballade fantastique pour harpe

Henriette Renié (1875-1956)

Ceremony of Carols

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

i. Procession

ii. Wolcum Yole!

iii. There is no Rose

iv a. That Yongë Child

iv b. Balulalow

v. As Dew in Aprille

vi. This Little Babe

vii. Interlude

viii. In Freezing Winter Night

ix. Spring Carol

x. Adam lay i-bounden

xi. Recession

Deck the Hall

trad., arr. by John Rutter (b. 1945)

Silent Night

Traditional, arranged by Michael Garrepy (b. 1990)

Tomorrow Shall be My Dancing Day

trad., arr. by John Rutter

Program Notes

Feminine voices have long possessed the power to enchant, seduce, ennoble, and overpower. From the Sirens to Scheherazade to Salome, from witches to Wollstonecraft, the feminine voice, spoken, sung, or written, has for millennia been coded both as subordinate to the masculine, but also as threatening to male power. In a captivating song, an entrancing poem, a compelling story, or, most dangerously of all, in sustained rhetorical argument, long thought to be the exclusive province of educated men, women could wrest back some of their agency, at first haltingly and temporarily, and in recent years with sustaining and surprising force. And yet, relics of this ancient and defining dialectic remain with us, passed down from the medievals through the moderns. Nowhere can this heritage be observed as searingly as in classical music, where the feminine voice is both enduringly disempowered - see the astonishing lack of female conductors, composers, and stage directors - and inversely, continually fetishized. And yet, it's no coincidence that the 'divo' has never stirred our cultural imagination quite like the diva, or that the unbroken voices of boys and castrati (as well as their spiritual heirs, countertenors) activates and excites some ancient recesses of our collective unconscious. The theme for our program coalesces around this pockmarked though perfectable inheritance, tracing a map of historical exceptions that prove the rule, and exploring the terrain of emerging feminine voices of today. An adventure for sure that I hope will not fully betray the comforts of Christmas, I have interspersed works by no fewer than seven women with music - such as *Ceremony of Carols* - perhaps better known to us, entirely for treble choir. I hope this makes for scintillating dialogue between the then and now, the here and there, the forgotten and remembered, and opens our minds and hearts to both the power and the embrace of the enthralling feminine voice.

When we think of exceptional feminine voices in the history of music no composer cuts a greater figure than **Saint Hildegard of Bingen** (c.1098-1179). A German Benedictine abbess who became Mother Superior of her order, Hildegard was so ahead of her time she should be considered the forerunner of the archetypal Renaissance man: the Medieval woman. A writer, philosopher, dramatist, mystic, visionary, medical theorist and practitioner during the High Middle Ages, she was also a prolific composer of sacred plainchant, and uniquely wrote both the melodies of these chants as well as their texts. More of her music survives than of any other composer in the middle ages, and she is the most recorded known composer of the entire medieval period. Hildegard's seventy-odd musical compositions, published as the '*Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Revelations*' are all monophonic sacred vocal works, but they are chants with a twist. Full of brilliant poetic images, they feature wide-ranging ornamented melodies and surprising melodies, creating a mood that many scholars refer to as the 'ecstatic'. *O viridissima Virga* is a salutation to the Virgin Mary - a recurring theme for music written by and for women which we will encounter throughout the program - and is one of the few surviving chants by Hildegard in the mixolydian mode. Its poetic imagery paints the Virgin Mother in familiar tropes of natural viridity: the fresh green branch (from which the Christ child blossoms) lavished by windy gusts (*ventoso flabro*), sunlight's warmth (*calor solis*).

Another composer casting a long shadow over the reception of the 'feminine' voice in sacred, and indeed dramatic music is **Benjamin Britten**. Many will recognize his efforts to elevate the status of the boy soprano and the countertenor from the ranks of the choir stall to the concert hall and opera

stage. Britten seems to have wasted no opportunity to devise starry vehicles for these voices: Miles in *Turn of the Screw*, Oberon and the boy fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the Voice of Apollo in *Death in Venice*, the canticles *Abraham & Isaac* and *Journey of the Magi*, the oratorio *St. Nicholas* (featuring the revived 'pickled boys'), choral works for treble choir including among many such examples *A Boy was Born* (his first choral work), *Friday Afternoons*, *Children's Crusade* and most prominently of all, *Ceremony of Carols*. The influence of *Ceremony of Carols* cannot be overstated. It is a work so cherished and revered, it single-handedly sprouted a cottage industry of composition for treble choir and harp, a practice that echoes down to our time. One such example in this lineage is *I Sing of Maiden* by **Ian Shaw** (b. 1960), which sets the same text as the fifth movement of *Ceremony*, and serves as a kind of loving commentary on or extension of Britten's own musical ideas. Unlike Britten's setting, the choral scoring is reduced to a single soprano line, but that melody is spun out in fascinating directions, full of whimsical intervallic leaps and cheeky harmonic kinks.

Perhaps less well appreciated was Britten's streak as a mentor to younger musicians and composers. One such fascinating partnership emerged between Britten and Gustav Holst's daughter **Imogen Holst** (1907-1984). The pair had the good fortune to meet at Dartington Hall in Devonshire, England, where Holst served as director of music during Britten's and his partner Peter Pear's many trips to give recitals there. Their collaboration yielded several commissions from Holst for Britten's own Aldeburgh Festival, including in 1951 *Welcome Joy & Welcome Sorrow*, a setting of six poems by John Keats, self consciously modeled on Britten's *Ceremony of Carols*; and a year later an invitation to orchestrate Britten's *Rejoice in the Lamb*, itself containing prominent solos for treble ("For I will consider my cat Geoffrey") and countertenor ("For the mouse is a creature of great personal valour"). The cycle evokes the rhythms of the natural world, and the first and last movements depict moments that felt appropriate for the turning of the calendar.

Hopefully the reader will have noticed by now that the treble choir seems to have been the "instrument" of choice for many composers down the ages to personify, glorify, and sanctify Mary the mother of Jesus, and by extension, it often served as a channel through which to depict and comment on the nativity story. One early illustration of this is *Audivi vocem de caelo* by **John Sheppard** (c.1515-1558), a unique example of a bass-less double gimmell device (two equal treble parts over two equal "mean" or alto parts) popular in English polyphony of the late 16th century. The text, typical of Advent (but also used at the Feast of All Saints) parabolizes the coming of the bridegroom (read: messiah) at an untold hour of the night. The theme of many such stories was to make preparations for times of great importance and moment. In our case, the coming wedding feast is a time of celebration and coming together meant to symbolize the feast of the Nativity.

What text could better distill the fascination with and reverence for the figure of Mary, mother of God, than the *Ave Maria* ('Hail Mary')? Appearing initially as a salutation to the Virgin by the Archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation, the verse has undergone many beautiful variations and consolidations, arriving to many in the modern era as a recitational prayer. Treble-rich settings of the Ave Maria abound (along with other marian texts such as *Ave Regina Caelorum*, *Ave Maris Stella*, *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, *Salve Regina* and *Tota Pulchra es Maria*), with hundreds of examples from the late middle ages through to today. One 21st-century example is the plaintive upper-voices

setting by **Cecilia McDowall** (b. 1951). Vocal writing has occupied a central position in McDowall's compositional catalogue, music that has been described as constantly tweaking the ear with her "range of spicy rhythms and colours" (Gramophone Magazine). Her setting of the *Ave Maria* harkens to some of these Renaissance settings, centering around the spikiest of F-sharp modal centers. A haunting yet humble supplication to the Virgin, it embraces chains of unfurling suspensions and embellished chant-like lines. We pair McDowall's treatment of the text with a refulgent double-choir version by Imogen's father, **Gustav Holst** (1874–1934). It's difficult to picture the latter-day towering figure of Holst as a penniless 20-something, fresh out of his studies at the Royal College of Music, touring with an opera orchestra as a trombonist, as he penned this soaring and radiant work. Unsurprisingly it quickly attracted the attention of critics who could detect the influences of his teacher, Charles Villiers Stanford (his *Beati quorum via* its stylistic brethren), but also marked Holst's a distinctive emerging voice.

Joanna Marsh (b. 1970), who divides her time between England and Dubai, was among the first of the University of Cambridge's female organ scholars (at Sidney Sussex College). It was during her time in post that she cultivated an enduring fascination with the music of Elizabethan composers such as Weelkes and Byrd. The canticles of the *St Paul's Service*, premiered in 2007 by Nova Aurora under countertenor Patrick Craig, are peppered with the idioms of church and court music of the late 16th and early 17th centuries, recalling the keyboard figurations, dance rhythms, and gestures of the viol consort, all prominent features of the Tudor musical lexicon. The *Magnificat*, traditionally the first of the two canticles sung in the Anglican service of Evensong, the Vespers service in Catholic and Lutheran practice, and Matins in the Eastern Orthodox Church (Ode of the Theotokos), is known familiarly as the "Song of Mary". The text is derived from the Gospel of Luke, during the visitation of Mary to her pregnant cousin Elizabeth (the child who will become John the Baptist). Upon hearing Mary's greeting, the child stirs in her womb, to which Elizabeth responds with much of what will form the second half of the *Ave Maria*. Mary responds in kind with the text of what develops into what we recognize as the *Magnificat*.

The reputation enjoyed by **Barbara Strozzi** (1619–1677) in dramatic music (secular cantatas, madrigals, etc.) is well established, but her credentials as a composer of sacred music were long neglected. It was only with the relatively recent rediscovery of a single volume of her sacred music, *Sacri Musicali Affetti*, that her bona fides in this terrain have been burnished. Without the essential patronage of the church, Strozzi was forced to scrape together her own means to publish eight volumes (rumours persist that her gainful employment took the form of the oldest profession), and from under the weight of these prejudices it has taken centuries for her reputation to be justly restored. *O Maria* is Baroque poetic and vocal writing at its most transcendent apogee. Strozzi paints the textual references by turns with billowing rapture and rollicking piety.

Jesus Christ the Apple Tree is the best known of a relatively short list of compositions by **Elizabeth Poston** (1905–1987). It started life in her *Children's Song Book* and then burst off the page to prominence at the 1967 *Carols for Kings* service (the annual truncated television version of the *Nine Lessons & Carols* service broadcast on radio around the world) and hasn't looked back. Inspired by the words of a New England poem that she happened upon while travelling here, she set the text to an arresting melody in what could be described as a spare and sincere style inflected by American

folk tradition, notably shape-note singing. Of the composition she wrote “the Spirit bloweth where it listeth. I wrote it down immediately and inevitably, almost without thinking, on the nearest scrap to hand at the time, which happened to be a garage bill.”

Henriette Renie (1875-1956) was a French harpist, composer, arranger, and influential pedagogue, one of the few women composers richly decorated during her own time. Her recordings were bestsellers and she was lavished with many prizes including France’s highest honor, the *Légion d’honneur* (Legion of Honor). Her treatise on harp instruction, *Méthode complète de harpe*, is still used by aspiring students around the world. The *Ballade Fantastique*, a fantasy inspired by Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Tell-Tale Heart*, at first glance would seem a stranger on this program, but I was bewitched by its prodigious palette of colors when I first heard it under the hands of Hannah Cope Johnson. I instantly knew it would offer the perfect foil, a *remise en bouche* to break up any holiday treacle congealing in our ears. It is a *tour de force* of harp writing and demonstrates a fuller imaginative range of sonorities to savor.

Despite his palpable fondness for the sonorities of the boy soprano, the *Ceremony of Carols* by **Benjamin Britten** (1913-1976) was initially conceived as, in his own words, “7 Christmas Carols for women’s voices and Harp! Very sweet and chockfull of charm!” Few might know that the original core of the work was premiered by the women of the choir of Fleet Street, at Norwich Castle in East Anglia, and featured the soprano Margaret Ritchie and harpist Gwendolen Mason. The genesis and evolution of *Ceremony* was a winding one. While touring the United States with his partner Peter Pears, Britten was marooned as Great Britain entered the war in September 1939. Despite his ardent pacifism and conscientious objection to Britain’s war footing, he nevertheless remained homesick throughout his American stay until he was finally able to make the return journey by boat to Europe in March 1942. Having had many of his manuscripts confiscated by customs officials prior to the crossing, he furiously sketched out from memory several half-completed and finished works including the famous *Hymn to St. Cecilia* (patron saint of music, with whom Britten shared a birthday), his clarinet concerto for Benny Goodman, and a setting of several medieval and renaissance texts from an anthology of poems he had acquired in Halifax, Nova Scotia (this is a clearly a theme for travelling composers) for treble voices and harp, the first draft of what would become *Ceremony of Carols*. Following the premiere of the initial seven movements, Britten framed the piece by a processional and recessional (with optional harp accompaniment) of the Vespers antiphon for Christmas day, *Hodie Christus natus est* (“Today Christ is born”) to which he affixed a convincing sounding echoing Alleluia. A year after the premiere, the haunting mezzo solo *That yongë child* was appended along with the Interlude for the harp, which quotes and develops on the antiphon. By this stage several performances of *Ceremony* had been given by boy choirs and it is evident in Britten’s letters – and the fact that the Welsh boys of Morryston School were chosen to record the work on Decca – that it was quickly becoming his preferred sound: “I think the little boys were enchanting – the occasional roughness was easily outweighed by their freshness and naivety – something very special.” Regardless of whether *Ceremony of Carols* is offered by women, boys, or even for mixed choir as in Julius Harrison’s celebrated mixed-voices arrangement, it continues to delight, enchant, lull, awake, and transport the listener. From the youthful exuberance of ‘*Wolcome Yole*’ (“Welcome, Yule”) to the soporific delicateness of the ‘*Balulalow*’, from the martial

muscularity of 'This Little Babe' to the hypnotic reverie of *'In Freezing Winter Night'*, from the blooming dance of the *'Spring Carol'* to the machined angularity of *'Adam lay i-bounden'*, the cycle is a kaleidoscope of hues, textures, rhythms, language, and harmonic and melodic invention. Above all it is the rare piece of music full of evergreen exuberance, appealing equally to performer and audience alike. Then, as now, a "pleasure it is to hear, i-wis (surely)".

We close the program with a triptych of traditional carols, two by the king of Christmas music himself, **John Rutter** (b. 1945). If there is a composer, living or dead, who has written and arranged more Christmas music for choirs, from original compositions like *What Sweeter Music* and *There is a Flower* to tasteful arrangements of classics like *O Holy Night*, *I Wonder as I Wander*, and *We Wish You a Merry Christmas*, they are unknown to me. Rutter's arrangement of *Deck the Hall* restores the lyrics and tune from the first known printing in "Welsh Melodies with Welsh and English Poetry, Vol. 2", compiled by Thomas Oliphant and published in 1862 (NB: there seems to have been only one 'hall'). *Tomorrow Shall be my Dancing Day* likely has its origins in the late middle ages, as it makes reference to the mystery, miracle, and morality plays that occupied such a central part in medieval community life. First published in William B. Sandys' "Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern" in 1833, the carol tells the life story of Jesus in his own voice. The "true love" with whom Jesus dances is usually understood to be the Church, often depicted as his bride. In this device, known as *vox christi*, Christ declares all that he has done for the church and the faithful. Local organist, composer, and singer **Michael Garrepy** (b. 1990) has become something of a specialist in arrangements of the piece (I believe this is his fourth), and I knew it would be know trouble for him to cook one up for our high voices and harp to round out the program.

Texts and Translations

1.

O viridissima virga, ave, que in ventoso flabro sciscitationis sanctorum prodisti. Cum venit tempus quod tu floruisti in ramis tuis, ave, ave fuit tibi, quia calor solis in te sudavit sicut odor balsami. Nam in te floruit pulcher flos qui odorem dedit omnibus aromatibus que arida erant. Et illa apparuerunt omnia in viriditate plena.

O branch of freshest green, O hail! Within the windy gusts of saints upon a quest you swayed and sprouted forth. When it was time, you blossomed in your boughs—“Hail, hail!” you heard, for in you seeped the sunlight’s warmth like balsam’s sweet perfume. For in you bloomed so beautiful a flower, whose fragrance awakened all the spices from their dried-out stupor. They all appeared in full viridity.

2.

I sing of a maiden that is makeless;¹
King of all kings to her son she ches.²
He came all so still where his mother was,
As dew in April that falleth on the grass.
He came all so still to his mother’s bower,
As dew in April that falleth on the flower.
He came all so still where his mother lay,
As dew in April that falleth on the spray.
Mother and maiden was never none but she;
Well may such a lady God’s mother be.

3a.

Welcome joy, and welcome sorrow, Lethe’s³
weed and Hermes’⁴feather; come to-day, and
come to-morrow, I do love you both together!

¹ matchless

² chose

³ One of the five rivers of the Greek underworld

⁴ Greek messenger god, herald, trickster

Nightshade with the woodbine kissing; serpents
in red roses hissing; Cleopatra regal-dress’d
with the aspic at her breast;
dancing music, music sad, both together, sane
and mad; muses bright and muses pale;

sombre Saturn⁵, Momus⁶hale; laugh and
sigh, and laugh again.

3b.

Shed no tear! oh, shed no tear! The flower will
bloom another year. Weep no more! oh, weep no
more! Young buds sleep in the root’s white core.
Dry your eyes! oh, dry your eyes!
For I was taught in Paradise to ease my breast
of melodies,— shed no tear.

4.

Audivi vocem de caelo venientem: venite omnes
virgines sapientissime; oleum recondite in vasis
vestris dum sponsus advenerit. Media nocte
clamor factus est: ecce sponsus venit.

*I heard a voice coming from heaven: come all
wisest virgins; fill your vessels with oil, for the
bridegroom is coming. In the middle of the night
there was a cry: behold the bridegroom comes.*

5 & 6.

Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum.
Benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus
fructus ventris tui, Iesus. Sancta Maria, Mater
Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc et in hora
mortis nostrae. Amen.

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with
thee. Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,*

⁵ Greek god of wealth and plenty

⁶ Greek god of satire and mockery

*pray for us sinners,
now and in the hour of our death. Amen.*

7.
My soul doth magnify the Lord; and my spirit
hath rejoiced in God my Saviour, For he hath
regarded: the lowliness of his handmaiden.
For behold from henceforth: all generations
shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath
magnified me: and holy is his Name.
And his mercy is on them that fear him
throughout all generations. He hath shewed
strength with his arm: he hath scatter'd the
proud in the imagination of their hearts. He
hath put down the mighty from their seat: and
hath exalted the humble and meek. He hath
filled the hungry with good things: and the rich
he hath sent empty away. He rememb'ring his
mercy hath holpen his servant Israel: As he
promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his
seed forever. Glory be to the Father, and to the
Son; and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the
beginning, is now, and ever shall be; world
without end, Amen.

8.
O Maria, quam pulchra es, quam suavis, quam
decora. Tegit terram sicut nebula, lumen ortum
indeficiens, flamma ignis, Arca federis,
inter spinas ortum liliun, tronum Siion in
Altissimis in columna nubis positum. O Maria..

*O Mary, how beautiful you are, how sweet, how
comely. She enfolds earth as a cloud, a light risen
that never fails, a flame, a fire, the Ark of the
Covenant, a lily grown among the thorns, the
throne of Zion placed on high in a pillar of cloud.
O Maria...*

9.
The tree of life my soul hath seen, laden
with fruit and always green; The trees of
nature

fruitless be, Compared with Christ the
Apple Tree.

His beauty doth all things excel, By faith I
know but ne'er can tell the glory which I now
can see, In Jesus Christ the Appletree.

For happiness I long have sought, and pleasure
dearly I have bought; I missed of all but now I
see 'Tis found in Christ the appletree.
I'm weary with my former toil – here I will sit
and rest awhile, Under the shadow I will be,
Of Jesus Christ the Appletree.

This fruit doth make my soul to thrive, It keeps
my dying faith alive; Which makes my soul in
haste to be with Jesus Christ the Appletree.

10.

i.

Hodie Christus natus est, hodie Salvator
apparuit: hodie in terra canunt Angeli,
laetantur Archangeli: hodie exsultant justi,
dicentes: Gloria in excelsis Deo. Alleluia!

*Today is Christ born; today the Savior has
appeared; today the Angels sing,
the Archangels rejoice; today the righteous
rejoice, saying: Glory to God in the highest.
Alleluia!*

ii.

Wolcum, Wolcum, Wolcum be thou hevenè king,
Wolcum Yole! Wolcum, born in one morning,
Wolcum for whom we sall sing! Wolcum be ye,
Stevene and Jon, Wolcum, Innocentes every one,
Wolcum, Thomas marter one, Wolcum be ye,
good Newe Yere,
Wolcum, Twelfth Day both in fere, Wolcum,
seintes lefe and dare⁷, Wolcum Yole, Wolcum
Yole, Wolcum! Candelmesse, Quene of Bliss,

⁷ saints left and dear

Wolcum bothe to more and lesse. Wolcum,
Wolcum, Wolcum be ye that are here, Wolcum
Yole, Wolcum alle and make good cheer.
Wolcum alle another yere, Wolcum Yole.
Wolcum!

iii.

There is no rose of such vertu as is the rose that
bare Jesu. Alleluia, Alleluia, for in this rose
contenèd was Heaven and earth in litel space,
res miranda⁸, res miranda. By that rose we may
well see there be one God in persons three,
pares forma⁹, pares forma. The aungels sungen
the shepherds to: Gloria in excelsis, gloria in
excelsis Deo! Gaudeamus¹⁰, gaudeamus. Leave
we all this werldly mirth, and follow we this
joyful birth. Transeamus¹¹, transeamus,
transeamus. Alleluia, res miranda, pares forma,
gaudeamus, transeamus.

iv a.

That yongë child when it gan weep¹²with song
she lulled him asleep: That was so sweet a
melody it passèd alle minstrelsy. The
nightingalë sang also: Her song is hoarse and
nought thereto: Whoso attendeth to her song
And leaveth the first then doth he wrong.

iv b.

O my deare hert, young Jesu sweit, prepare thy
creddil in my spreit, and I sall rock thee to my
hert, and never mair from thee depart. But I sall
praise thee evermoir¹³with sangës sweit unto
thy gloir; The knees of my hert sall I bow, And
sing that richt¹⁴Balulalow¹⁵!

⁸ miraculous thing

⁹ in the parent's image

¹⁰ we rejoice

¹¹ we follow

¹² began to weep

¹³ evermore

¹⁴ right

¹⁵ lullaby

v. *See 2.*

vi.

This little Babe so few days old, is come to
rifle¹⁶ Satan's fold¹⁷; all hell doth at his
presence quake, though he himself for cold¹⁸do
shake; For in

this weak unarmèd wise¹⁹the gates of hell he
will surprise. With tears he fights and wins the
field, his naked breast stands for a shield; his
battering shot are babish cries, his arrows looks
of weeping eyes, his martial ensigns Cold and
Need, and feeble Flesh his warrior's steed. His
camp is pitchèd in a stall, his bulwark but a
broken wall; the crib his trench, haystalks his
stakes; of shepherds he his muster²⁰makes;
And thus, as sure his foe to wound, the angels'
trumps alarum sound. My soul, with Christ join
thou in fight; stick to the tents that he hath
pight²¹within his crib is surest ward²²; this
little Babe will be thy guard. If thou wilt foil thy
foes with joy; then flit not from this heavenly

Boy!
viii.

Behold, a silly²³tender babe, in freezing winter
night, in homely manger trembling lies. Alas, a
piteous sight! The inns are full; no man will
yield this little pilgrim bed. But forced he is
with silly beasts in crib to shroud his head. This
stable is a Prince's court, this crib his chair of
State; the beasts are parcel of his pomp, the
wooden dish his plate. The persons in that poor
attire his royal liveries wear; the Prince himself
is come from heav'n; this pomp is prizèd there.

¹⁶ plunder

¹⁷ realm

¹⁸ in cold

¹⁹ manner

²⁰ troops

²¹ set

²² protection

²³ humble

With joy approach, O Christian wight²⁴, do
homage to thy King, and highly praise his
humble pomp, wich he from Heav'n doth bring.

ix.

Pleasure it is to hear iwis²⁵the Birdès sing,
the deer in the dale, the sheep in the vale,
the corn springing. God's purvayance For
sustenance. It is for man. Then we always to
him give praise, and thank him than.

x.

Deo gracias! Deo gracias! Adam lay i-bounden,
bounden in a bond; four thousand winter
thought he not too long. Deo gracias! Deo
gracias! And all was for an appil, an appil that
he tok, As clerkès finden written in their book.
Deo gracias! Deo gracias! Ne had the appil takè
ben, the appil takè ben Ne haddè never our lady
a ben hevenè quene. Blessèd be the time that
appil takè was. Therefore we moun singen. Deo
gracias!

xi. *See 10, i.*

11.

Deck the hall with boughs of
holly, Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!
'Tis the season to be jolly,
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!
Fill the meadcup, drain the
barrel, Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!
Troul the ancient Christmas
carol, Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!

See the flowing bowl before us,
Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!
Strike the harp and join the
chorus. Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!
Follow me in merry measure,

Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!

While I sing of beauty's
treasure, Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la,
la, la!

Fast away the old year passes,

Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!

Hail the new, ye lads and lasses!

Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!

Laughing, qua ng all together,

Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!

Heedless of the wind and
weather, Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la,
la!

12.

Silent night, holy night!

All is calm, all is bright.

Round yon Virgin, Mother and
Child. Holy infant so tender and
mild,

Sleep in heavenly peace,

Sleep in heavenly peace

Silent night, holy night!

Shepherds quake at the sight.

Glories stream from heaven afar

Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia,

Christ the Savior is born!

Christ the Savior is born

Silent night, holy night!

Son of God love's pure light.

Radiant beams from Thy holy face

With dawn of redeeming grace,

Jesus Lord, at Thy birth

Jesus Lord, at Thy birth.

²⁴ creature

²⁵ truly

13.

Tomorrow shall be my dancing day; I would
my true love did so chance to see the legend of
my play, to call my true love to my dance;

Chorus (sung after each verse)

Sing, oh! my love, oh! my love, my love, my
love, This have I done for my true love.

Then was I born of a virgin pure, of her I took
fleshly substance. Thus was I knit to man's
nature to call my true love to my dance.

In a manger laid, and wrapped I was, so very
poor, this was my chance betwixt an ox and a
silly poor ass to call my true love to my dance.



Ensemble Altera was founded to be the beating heart of professional choral music in Providence, communities throughout Rhode Island, and beyond. Led by internationally celebrated countertenor Christopher Lowrey, Ensemble Altera is fast developing into a leading American chamber choir dedicated to bringing thoughtful, engaging, and relevant programs of music to in-person and digital audiences at home and around the world. The group is versatile, working on multiple scales, in a wide range of idioms, across the full range of medieval to modern to music being written today. Over the past few years, Ensemble Altera has presented concerts both in person in Rhode Island and virtually to audiences around the world. Most recently, Ensemble Altera produced “We Remember,” a musical journey of healing and reflection in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Presented both live in Providence and streamed in 4K globally, the performance received rave reviews from audience and community members. The performance included the world premiere of a newly commissioned piece by American composer Daniel Gledhill and the premiere of a new work by Rhode Island-based composer and ensemble member Michael Garrepy.



Founder and Artistic Director **Christopher Lowrey** was born and raised in Johnston, RI, and trained at Brown University, the University of Cambridge, where he sang under Stephen Layton with Trinity College Choir, and the Royal College of Music. In addition to conducting, he enjoys a dynamic international solo career as a countertenor, working at some of the world’s leading opera houses and concert platforms, including the Royal Opera House, the Philharmonie de Paris, The London Symphony Orchestra. Next season he makes his debut at Teatro Real in Madrid and the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

A Utah native, **Hannah Cope Johnson** began studying the harp when she was five years old. She earned her B.M. with technique master Nicole Brady at Brigham Young University in Provo, UT; and most recently, she obtained her M.Msc at New England Conservatory, under the tutelage of the renowned Jessica Zhou of Boston Symphony Orchestra. While in school, Hannah was recognized early on for her precision and quickly became one of the premiere studio harpists in the Mountain West, regularly recording for Right on Cue



Services. In addition to her work as a recording artist, she traveled as principal harpist on international orchestra tours to Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Hannah is also the primary harpist for Harvest Arts, a touring chamber music company. In New England, Hannah has performed with numerous orchestras and ensembles including Boston Symphony Orchestra, Lexington Symphony, Boston Philharmonic, Atlantic Symphony Orchestra, and Plymouth Philharmonic. She was recently featured as a guest artist on Boston Chamber Music Society's 2021-2022 season.



Email List

To learn more about all our exciting artistic activities, both in-person and digital, be sure to sign up for our newsletter at www.ensemblealtera.com

Donations

Please consider making a gift in support of Ensemble Altera. Ticket sales only cover about 10% of our costs, and our donors make it possible to bring this incredible music to audiences here in Providence and around the world. To make a gift today, please visit ensemblealtera.com/donate. Ensemble Altera is a 501(c)3 tax exempt organization, and all gifts are fully deductible.

Thank You

Deepest thanks to Father Charles Grondin, Brother Roger Chingas, and the entire staff and community of Blessed Sacrament Church for welcoming us into their space. It is always an honor and privilege to be servants of this music in such a space. Heartfelt thanks also to our many generous donors, to our trusty Board of Directors, to our Development Consultant and mistress of all trades, Signe Lindberg, to media, graphic design, and fashion guru Olivia Kleyla, to our resident audio wizard Brad Kleyla, and to artistic advisor Michael Garrepy in all his many roles.

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