

BYRD ENSEMBLE

www.byrdensemble.com | 4722 Fautleroy Way SW #123, Seattle, WA 98116

CEREMONY OF CAROLS

November 29, 2025, at 8pm
Holy Rosary Catholic Church
4139 42nd Ave SW, Seattle, WA

Sunday, November 30, 2025, at 3pm
Trinity Parish Church
609 8th Ave, Seattle, WA

Program

Anonymous	Angelus ad Virginem
Benjamin Britten (1913—1977)	A Hymn to the Virgin (1930)
Kenneth Leighton (1929—1988)	Lully, lulla, thou little tiny child (1956)
Gustav Holst (1874—1934)	Four Old English Carols (1907)
Thomas Tallis (1505—1585)	"Gloria" from <i>Missa Puer natus est nobis</i>

Intermission

Benjamin Britten (1913—1977)	A Ceremony of Carols (1942)
William Byrd (1540—1623)	Lulla, Lullaby
Robert Pearsall (1795—1856)	In dulci jubilo (1837)

IT IS ALWAYS AN HONOR to usher in the holiday season with you. Our annual Christmas program, always scheduled right after Thanksgiving and now in its 18th year, is our most-attended program of the season. We have the honor and responsibility of kicking off your holiday season, and for me that means striking the right tone.

Christmas concerts can come in many moods. Last year our German Christmas program with brass struck a celebratory tone. This weekend we present a more reflective program.

Old-world nostalgia is what we're serving. Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols* and Holst's *Four Old English Carols* anchor the program with settings of medieval carols and texts. Alongside these classics are two Renaissance pieces by English Renaissance masters Thomas Tallis and William Byrd.

We hope this program brings you a moment of peace at the start of your Christmas season.

BYRD ENSEMBLE

Artistic Director
Markdavin Obenza

Soprano
Julia Baker
Ruth Schauble
Margaret Obenza

Alto
Sarra S. Doyle
Erica Dunkle
Sophia Nash

Tenor
Orrin Doyle
Joshua Haberman
Sam Faustine

Bass
Scott Fikse
Clayton Moser
Willimark Obenza

Harp
Elizabeth Landis

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BYRD ENSEMBLE



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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Opening the program is *Angelus ad Virginem*, a medieval carol that tells the story of the Archangel Gabriel's visit to the Virgin Mary. The text contains both Latin and the Middle English text with the same melody.

Considered to be the most significant British composer of the 20th century, **Benjamin Britten** (1913–1976) composed 16 operas and masterpieces and is responsible for the revitalization of English opera. Britten composed *A Hymn to the Virgin* (1930) when he was only 16 years old and was ill. This tiny masterpiece is one of his most well-known and beloved choral pieces. Set for two choirs (solo quartet and semi chorus) in dialogue, a young Britten brings a dramatic and emotional effect to the anonymous medieval text dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The work is in a macaronic structure, the mixing of languages: Middle English in the main chorus and Latin in the semi-chorus.

The centerpiece of the program is Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols* (1942), a collection of short pieces based on carols written in the 15th and 16th centuries. Britten wrote *A Ceremony of Carols* while on a transatlantic voyage

from the United States to England. While stopped in Nova Scotia, Britten obtained a copy of "The English Galaxy of Shorter Poems," a set of lyrical poems in Middle English, where he found the text for the work.

With its popularity among children's choirs, it may be surprising to some that *A Ceremony of Carols* was originally conceived for a female choir. The Fleet Street Choir (women's choir) gave the first performance of the initial seven movements in 1942. It was only after hearing several memorable performances of the work by a Welsh boys' choir that Britten stated his preference for boys' voices. Originally Britten composed seven movements out of the eleven as a set of unrelated songs. In 1943 he decided to unify the work through the addition of four movements: "Procession" and "Recession," which frame the cycle, based on the antiphon chant from the Christmas Eve Vespers; "That yongë child" for solo soprano and harp; and the new "Interlude" for solo harp.

With this cycle, Britten saw a chance to write music that would blossom in a church or cathedral. The canonic writing of "This little Babe" creates an exciting effect.

Three voices sing the same melody a beat apart, resulting in an echo effect reminiscent of a reverberant cathedral. "In freezing winter night" also uses canonic writing, but more to create an atmosphere. At the center of A Ceremony lies the "Interlude" for solo harp, also based on plainchant. The "Interlude" has a bell-like quality which is also heard in "Wolcum Yole!" and "Adam lay i-bounden." Britten was not alone in his fascination with bells—both Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky, influenced by music from the Russian Orthodox Church, professed a lifelong fascination with bells.

Kenneth Leighton (1929—1988), the most recent composer on the program, comes from the English tradition represented by Vaughan Williams, Finzi, Howells, and Walton. Leighton composed his most popular carol *Lully, lulla, thou little tiny child*—a setting of the Coventry Carol—in 1948 as a 19-year-old Oxford student. The text describes the Massacre of the Innocents, when the ruler of Judea, Herod, ordered the execution of all male infants of Bethlehem, with hopes of killing the child claimed by the Magi to be the "King of the Jews." Leighton creates a dark mood through repetitive instances of "Lully, lulla" that does not commit itself to a major or minor tonality—all of this underneath a haunting soprano solo that soars above the choir.

Vaughan Williams described his colleague **Gustav Holst** (1874—1934) as "the greatest influence on my music." Holst also had a strong influence on the music of William Walton and Benjamin Britten. Holst, a composer for the people, believed that it was the composer's duty to provide music for practical purposes—festivals, ceremonies, hymns, or Christmas carols. *Four Old English Carols* (1907) demonstrates Holst's concern for economy. He sets the four traditional carols modestly and without too much musical complication that would obscure the simplicity of each carol.

Concluding the first half is English Renaissance composer **Thomas Tallis's** (1505—1585) "Gloria" from *Missa Puer natus est nobis*, based on the Christmas chant *Puer natus est*. Tallis wrote this substantial mass for the visit of Philip II of Spain to England in 1554, when he married Queen Mary. Philip was in the country on Christmas Day and English Catholics were hoping that Mary would give birth to a son and heir, giving *Puer natus est nobis* double relevance. Unlike Tallis's typical florid works at the time, he composed the mass in the Flemish style with dense harmony and texture in one of the most elaborate mass settings in the 16th century.

Pupil of Tallis **William Byrd's** (1540—1623) *Lulla, Lullaby* is a religious madrigal on the Slaughter of the Innocents. The Virgin Mary sings a lullaby to the Christ Child, whose crying foreshadows Herod's cruelty. Byrd uses somber melodies and dissonance to convey the deep sorrow and contrast between innocence and tragedy.

Robert Pearsall (1795—1856), an English barrister and composer who lived much of his life in Germany and Switzerland, is best known for his arrangement of the medieval carol *In dulci jubilo* (1837). Pearsall created a macaronic translation, retaining the original Latin phrases (in praesepio, Alpha es et O!) and substituting English for the medieval German text. His polyphonic arrangement, scored for double choir (SATB/SATB), is admired for its rich, Romantic harmony and vibrant contrasts, lending a stately, grand quality to the joyful, traditional German tune.

-Markdavin Obenza

ABOUT THE BYRD ENSEMBLE

Described as "pure and radiant" (Gramophone), "immensely impressive" (Early Music Review), and "rich, full-voiced, and perfectly blended" (Early Music America), the Byrd Ensemble has been internationally acclaimed for its performances and recordings of chamber vocal music, particularly Renaissance polyphony. John Rutter describes the ensemble as "a fine group that has achieved an enviable standard of tuning, blend, and ensemble." Founded in 2004, the Byrd Ensemble, directed by Markdavin Obenza, is a professional ensemble made up of 10 to 12 singers. The ensemble presents a subscription series in Seattle, and it tours across the United States and internationally.

The Byrd Ensemble is represented by Artist Manager Marianne LaCrosse of Suono Artist Management (marianne@suonoartistmanagement.com).

ABOUT ELIZABETH LANDIS

Elizabeth Landis serves as the principal harpist of Symphony Tacoma and Northwest Sinfonietta, among others. She has performed professionally with the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, Seattle Opera, Columbus Symphony Orchestra, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Jacksonville Symphony, Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra, Tallahassee Symphony, Oakland Symphony, and more. She is an educator at the Seattle Youth Symphony Orchestra's Marrowstone Music Festival.

TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

Angelus ad Virginem

Angelus ad Virginem
subintrans in conclave
Virginis formidinem
demulcens inquit: < < Ave! > >
Ave, Regina virginum,
caeli terraeque Dominum
conciplies et paries intacta
salutem hominum,
tu porta caeli facta
medela criminum.

Anonymous

Gabriel, from heaven's king
Sent to the maiden sweet,
Brought to her blissful tiding
And fair 'gan her to greet.
'Hail be thou, full of grace aright!
For so God's Son, the heaven's light,
Loves man, that He and take
Flesh of thee, maiden bright,
Mankind free for to make
Of sin and devil's might.'

A Hymn to the Virgin (1930)

Of one that is so fair and bright,
velut maris stella, (like a star of the sea)
Brighter than the day is light,
parens et puella. (mother and maiden)
I cry to thee, thou see to me,
Lady, pray thy Son for me, *Tam pia*, (such a virtuous one)
That I may come to thee. *Maria!* (Mary)

All this world was forlorn
Eva peccatrice, (through Eve, the sinner)
Till our Lord was y-born
de te genetrice. (of thee, the mother)
With ave it went away
darkest night, and comes the day *salutis*: (of salvation)
The well springeth out of thee *virtutis*. (of virtue)

Benjamin Britten (1913—1977)

Lady, flow'r of everything,
rosa sine spina, (rose without thorn)
Thou bare Jesu, heaven's King,
gratia divina: (by divine grace)
Of all that bear'st the prize,
Lady, queen of paradise, *Electa*: (chosen one)
Maid mild, mother *es effecta*. (you are made)

Lully, lulla, thou little tiny child (1956)

Lully, Lulla, thou little tiny child,
By, by, lully, lullay,
Lully, thou little tiny child, lully, lulla,
lullay.

O sisters too, how may we do,
For to preserve this day?
This poor youngling, for whom we
sing, by, by, lully, lullay!

Kenneth Leighton (1929—1988)

Herod the king, in his raging,
Charg'd he hath this day
His men of might, in his own sight,
All children young to slay,

That woe is me, poor child, for thee!
And ever mourn and say,
For thy parting nor say nor sing,
By, by, lully, lullay.

Four Old English Carols (1907)

1. A Babe is Born

A babe is born all of a May, In the salvation of us.
There came three kings out of the East,
To worship the King so high.
Sing to the new-born King, Hallelujah!

2. Now Let Us Sing

Now let us sing, now let us play,
With good cheer and joy,
For the King of kings, our Lord Jesus,
Is born in a poor dwelling.
Sing we all to Christ!
The Lord God is born, the Lord God is born!

Gustav Holst (1874—1934)

3. Jesu, Thou the Virgin-born

Jesu, thou the Virgin-born,
Thou the Son of God most high,
Grant us grace to turn to thee,
And to love thee faithfully.
Lord, have mercy!
Christ, have mercy!
Lord, have mercy!

4. The Saviour of the World is Born

The Saviour of the world is born,
Sing to him, praise him,
For the great love that he hath shown,
He brings us salvation.
I pray you all, and bid you all,
That ye pray with me.

"Gloria" from *Missa Puer natus est nobis*

Gloria in excelsis Deo.
Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.
Laudamus te. Benedicimus te.
Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.
Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam.

Domine Deus, Rex caelestis,
Deus Pater omnipotens.
Domine Fili unigenite,
Jesu Christe. Domine Deus,
Agnus Dei, Filius Patris.

Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.
Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem
nostram.
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere nobis.

Quoniam tu solus Sanctus.
Tu solus Dominus. Tu solus Altissimus,
Jesu Christe. Cum Sancto Spiritu,
in gloria Dei Patris. Amen.

Thomas Tallis (1505—1585)

Glory be to God on high.
And on Earth peace to men of good will.
We praise you. We bless you.
We worship you. We glorify you.
We give thanks to you for your great glory.

Lord God, heavenly King,
God the Father almighty.
Lord, the only-begotten Son,
Jesus Christ. Lord God,
Lamb of God, Son of the Father.

You who take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.
You who take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer.
You who sit at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One.
You alone are the Lord.
You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ.
With the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Intermission

A Ceremony of Carols (1942)

Britten

I. Procession and XI. Recession

Hodie Christus natus est,
Today Christ is born;
Hodie Salvator apparuit,
Today the Saviour has appeared;
Hodie intera canunt angeli,
Today the angels sing,
Laetantur archangeli,
The archangels rejoice,
Hodie exsultant justi dicentes,
Today the righteous rejoice, saying:
Gloria in excelsis deo. Alleluia!
Glory be to God in the highest.
- *Vespers for Christmas Day Trad.*

II. Wolcum Yole!

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 everyone.
Wolcum, Thomas marter one.
Wolcum, be ye, Good Newe Yere.
Wolcum, seintes lefe and dere,
Wolcum Yole! Wolcum!
Candelmesse, Quene of bliss.
Wolcum bothe to more and lesse.
Wolcum be ye that are here. Wolcum Yole!
Wolcum alle and make good cheer.
Wolcum alle another yere. Wolcum Yole! Wolcum!
- 14th Century Anon.

III. There is no Rose

There is no rose of such vertu
As is the rose that bare Jesu. *Alleluia.*
For in this rose containèd was
Heaven and Earth in litel space, *Res miranda.*
By that rose we may well see
There be one God in persons three, *Pares forma.*
The angels sungen the shepherds to:
Gloria in excelsis Deo. Gaudeamus.
Leave we all this werldly mirth,
And follow we this joyful birth. *Transeamus.*
- 14th century Anon.

IVa. That yongë child (Solo: Sarra Doyle)

That yongë child when it gan weep
With 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.
- 14th century Anon.

IVb. Balulalow (Solo: Margaret Obenza)

O my dere 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 evermoir
With sanges sweit unto thy gloir;
The knees of my hert sall I bow,
And sing that richt Balulalow.
- James, John and Robert Wedderburn (1548), 1561

V. A dew in Aprille

I sing of a maiden that is makèles:
King of all kings to her son she ches.
He came al so stille there his moder was,
As dew in Aprille that falleth on the grass.
He came al so stille to his moder bour,
As dew in Aprille that falleth on the flour.
He came al so stille there his moder lay,
As dew in Aprille that falleth on the spray.
Moder and mayden was never none but she;
Well may such a lady Goddes moder be.
- Circa 1400 Anon.

VI. This little Babe

This little Babe so few days old is come to rifle Satan's fold;
All hell doth at his presence quake though he himself for cold do
shake; For in this weak unarmèd wise the 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, haystacks his stakes; of shepherds he his
muster makes; And thus, as sure his foe to wound, the angels'
trump alarum sound.

My soul, with Christ join thou in fight, stick to the tents that he
hath pight. Within his crib is surest ward, this little Babe will be thy
guard. If thou wilt foil thy foes with joy, then flit not from this
heavenly Boy.

- Robert Southwell (c.1561-95)

VII. Interlude (Harp solo)

A Ceremony of Carols (1942) *continued*

VIII. In Freezing Winter Night

(Solo: Ruth Schauble, Margaret Obenza)

Behold, a silly tender 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 beast, in crib to shroud his head.
This stable is a Prince's court, this crib his chair of State;
The beast are parcel of his pomp, this 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.
With joy approach o Christian wight,
do homage to thy King;
And highly praise his humble pomp,
wich he from Heav'n doth bring.
- Robert Southwell

IX. Spring Carol

(Solo: Ruth Schauble, Sophia Nash)

Pleasure it is to hear iwis, the Birdès sing.
The deer in the dale, the sheep in the vale, the corn springing.
God's purvayance for sustenance, it is for man, it is for man.
Then we always to give him praise, and thank him than.
- William Cornish (14?-1523)

X. Deo Gracias

Deo gracias! Deo gracias!
Adam lay ibounden, bounden in a bond;
For thousand winter, thought he not too long.
Deo gracias! Deo gracias!
And all was for an appil, and 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! Deo gracias!
- 15th Century Anon.

Lulla, Lullaby

Lulla, lullaby, my sweet little baby,
My dear pretty baby, byebye, lully, lullaby.
Sweet baby, cease thy weeping,
Be you all in keeping;
Lullay, lullay, lully, lullay, my dear pretty baby.

What ails my baby weeping,
Now Jesus is a-sleeping,
And that the heavens are not breaking,
With their sweet singing?
Lullay, lullay, lully, lullay, my dear pretty baby.

William Byrd (1540—1623)

And when my sweet baby and I are parted,
A cruel death will go through my heart,
For to hear the angels call him hence,
Thus to die in his own innocence.
Lullay, lullay, lully, lullay, my dear pretty baby.

Lulla, lullaby, my sweet little baby,
My dear pretty baby, byebye, lully, lullaby.
But sweet baby, cease thy weeping,
For thy sake I may be keeping,
Lullay, lullay, lully, lullay, my dear pretty baby.

In dulci jubilo (1837)

In dulci jubilo (In sweet rejoicing)
Let us our homage shew:
Our heart's joy reclineth *In praesepio*; (*in a manger*)
And like a bright star shineth
Matris in gremio, (*in the mother's lap*)
Alpha es et O! (*Thou art Alpha & Omega*)

O Jesu parvule, (*O tiny Jesus*) I yearn for thee alway!
Hear me, I beseech Thee, *O puer optime*; (*O best of boys*)
My prayer let it reach Thee,
O princeps gloriae. (*Prince of glory*)
Trahe me post te. (*Draw me unto thee*)

Robert Pearsall (1795—1856)

O patris caritas! O Nati lenitas!
(*O father's caring! O newborn's mildness!*)
Deeply were we stained. *Per nostra crimina*: (*by our crimes*)
But Thou for us hast gained *Coelorum gaudia*, (*heavenly joy*)
O that we were there!

Ubi sunt gaudia, (*where be joys*)
Where, if that they be not there?
There are Angels singing *Nova cantica*; (*new songs*)
There the bells are ringing *In Regis curia*. (*at the king's court*)
O that we were there!

UPCOMING CONCERTS



Sat. Dec 6 at 5pm
Readings and Carols
with Seattle Girls Choir

Seattle First Baptist Church
1111 Harvard Ave, Seattle

Seattle Girls Choir is proud to present Readings & Carols, featuring Cantamus and Allegra alongside the Byrd Ensemble. This one-hour program consists of nine seasonal readings, each paired with a traditional carol performed by the choir, as well as a few carols sung together with the audience.



Fri. Dec 19 at 8pm
TUDOR CHOIR:
Christmas in a Wintry World

Holy Rosary Catholic Church
4139 42nd Ave SW, Seattle

Frosty wind. Snow on snow. Wild wood and green holly.
Tidings of comfort. Tidings of joy.

The Tudor Choir, directed by Doug Fullington, is joined by violinist Michael Jinsoo Lim for a holiday concert of traditional carols and warm seasonal fare.

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Dear Byrdies,

One of my favorite things is hearing from first-time listeners of Renaissance music how moving this music is to them. We identify with that. It's that very feeling that drew so many of us to this music: the sense of awe and wonder, that feeling of being transported somewhere else...

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Thank you for your support!

Markdavin Obenza, Artistic Director

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