

From Conductor Marie Bucoy-Calavan

When we think about the holiday season, the first thoughts through our heads may be of candy canes, Christmas trees, spectacular light displays, and, of course, the release of seasonal coffee flavors. Our minds might even go to the stressful parts: buying gifts on time, the hustle and bustle of department stores, and traffic getting to and from family homes. Regardless, the idea of "home" is at the root of all the emotions the holiday season brings. What makes us feel like it's truly the holidays is the sentimental feeling of being with family and loved ones, harkening back to childhood Christmas traditions, and feeling warmth, love, and belonging. This evening's program invites us to explore what makes us feel at "home" during Christmas.

The first portion of the program calls you, our audience, to join us on a musical journey to find "home" as we open with Mack Wilberg's grand "O Come, All Ye Faithful." Suppose you have yet to feel the Christmas spirit this season. In that case, the key change in the middle of this work, ushered in by the French horn's epic and triumphant call of the melodic line, will bring you quickly into the spirit with a rush of emotion. Composer Elaine Hagenberg presents the familiar "O Come, Emmanuel" text but sets it to a hauntingly beautiful new melody, showing that what is considered "standard" can always be explored in a fresh and appealing way. In another fresh reimagining of a classic carol, arranger Craig Courtney took a carol initially composed in 1857 to be sung in a small circle of friends and family and turned it into something royal and majestic with stirring brass fanfares. From modern reimaginings to wholly original work, Carlos Cordero's "Pastores" is a gentle piece written in a voice nostalgic for the composer's Venezuelan home at Christmas time. Listen for the piano accompaniment, as it is written in the style of the Venezuelan guitar-like instrument, the cuatro. The orchestra then takes us from Venezuela to our friends "across the pond" in England. In his "Fantasia on Greensleeves," we celebrate our collaboration with the British Embassy Washington through his serene and pastoral setting of the "Greensleeves" folk tune, which has now become recognized during the holiday season as "What Child is This?"

Most poignant in our musical journey to find "home" is the piece "Away and in Danger." The piece is a thought-provoking transformation of the carol "Away in a Manger," shining a compassionate light on today's global refugee crisis. The powerful words in this expressive rendering ask us to pause and remember that as we search for the feeling of "home" during Christmas, many refugee children have no literal home to go to. We then end this "journey to find home" with a world premiere of a commissioned work by the inimitable composer, Dominick DiOrio. "A Home is Found at Christmas" encapsulates our journey, reminding us that the feeling of home is not a location but all the things that remind us of what is truly important in our lives underneath the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Christmas gives us time to pause and revel in the feeling of home.

From Conductor Marie Bucoy-Calavan

The second half of our concert explores all the stories, carols, and movies that evoke that special Christmas feeling, that feeling of being at home with our loved ones. “The First Noel,” one of our two sing-alongs by widely known British arranger and composer David Willcocks, is the very first of these Christmas stories, the original tale of the holiday. A slightly more modern story, many people have made watching the ballet “The Nutcracker” by Piotr Tchaikovsky a part of their holiday traditions. The ‘March’ plays during a lively party scene, which includes dancing, games, and merriment, all sentiments of the holiday season. Even more than ballet, watching Christmas movies has become a household tradition in many people's homes. The melody of “Somewhere in My Memory,” the title song from the classic holiday movie “Home Alone,” immediately pulls at heartstrings and brings everyone to the Christmas spirit. And, entering its twentieth year since its release, most millennials have found the humor of the movie “Elf,” a light-hearted way to get into the Christmas spirit. While the movie is mainly known for its hilarity, the score is an unsung hero for its ability to appeal to everyone's sentimental side. And, of course, you cannot walk into a department store during the holiday season without hearing the classic whip-crack of “Sleigh Ride.” Finally, ending our voyage through Christmas stories and movies is the quintessential and timeless carol from the 1954 movie “White Christmas.” The arrangement by Randol Alan Bass is beautifully lush in color as if Bing Crosby and Rosemary Clooney were to join in and sing.

The overall hope in this musical search for “home” is that you have felt at home with us on this divine evening here with the Choral Arts Family. Often, the beauty of the familiar helps us reach this feeling. We end this evening with stunning arrangements of three customarily “most loved” Christmas carols that will hopefully allow you to bask in the feeling of being home at Christmas. The Choral Arts Chorus is featured in Molly Ijames's a cappella arrangement of “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas,” with warm and inviting harmonies. Dan Forrest's arrangement of “Silent Night” proves that a carol considered simple can take you through a complex emotional journey. Lastly, we end this divine night with the striking and stunning “O Holy Night,” arranged by Gary Fry. The final dramatic statements of the carol's title will have you feeling a sense of triumph at our collective journey to find home.