

Program Notes (written by our ringers)

“We Need a Little Christmas”

“We Need a Little Christmas” reminds us that the holiday spirit isn't something that can be bought or manufactured. It's something that comes from within, a conscious choice to embrace love, generosity, and hope. And sometimes, all it takes is a song to spark that transformation.

This musical number is so much more than just a catchy tune. It is a reminder that when the world feels bleak, a little bit of Christmas – a little bit of hope, love, and togetherness – can make all the difference. It's a message that resonates just as powerfully today as it did in 1966 when Mame first hit the stage. (Rebecca Erickson)

Haul out the holly Put up the tree before my spirit falls again Fill up the stocking I may be rushing things, but deck the halls again now For we need a little Christmas .Right this very minute. Candles in the window Carols at the spinet Yes, we need a little Christmas Right this very minute (Mame)

“Carol of the Bells”

The air crackles with anticipation. It's December, and the familiar, enchanting melody of “Carol of the Bells” fills our homes, stores, and hearts.

Our story of Carol of the Bells begins in Kyiv, Ukraine, in December 1916 with a performance of this Ukrainian Christmas Carol-a testament woven with Ukraine's rich musical heritage and enduring spirit. Following World War I, Ukraine was fighting for its independence. Amidst this struggle in 1919, the Ukrainian National Chorus embarked on a concert tour across Europe to not only share their culture but to garner support for their fledgling nation.

Carol of the Bells became a powerful ambassador, captivating audiences with its unique sound. Today, as Ukraine faces new challenges, the story of “Carol of the Bells” resonates more powerfully than ever.

It serves as a poignant reminder of Ukraine's rich cultural heritage, its unwavering spirit, and its enduring connection to the world. Each time we hear those familiar notes, let us remember the song's origin, and the people who continue to fight for their freedom and identity.

When the carol premiered in the United States in 1922 American ears were instantly smitten with the carol

becoming a favorite in the American Christmas tradition. Today as we celebrate this holiday season, let “Carol of the Bells”

be more than just a festive tune. Let it be a symbol of hope, resilience, and the enduring power of music to connect us across

cultures and continents. May the bells of “Carol of the Bells” ring out with a message of peace, unity, and hope for a brighter future for Ukraine and the world. (Kathleen Olson)

Hark! How the bells, sweet silver bells All seem to say, "Throw cares away"

*Christmas is here, bringing good cheer To young and old, meek and the bold
Ding, dong, ding, dong, that is their song With joyful ring, all caroling..... (Carol of the Bells)*

“Believe from Polar Express”

As the air grows colder and the nights grow longer, we find ourselves in a season of magic, memory, and wonder. But there's a certain kind of magic that doesn't come from sleigh bells or glowing lights. It comes from within. It's the whisper in your heart that reminds you to hope, to dream, and to believe. (Jennifer Lohman)

*Children, sleeping. Snow is softly falling. Dreams are calling, Like bells in the distance.
We were dreamers, Not so long ago. But one by one, we all had to grow up and just believe
(Believe)*

“Snowfall”

The first flakes of snow began to fall just as twilight painted the sky in hues of lavender and rose. Each flake a tiny masterpiece. The world was transformed into a Winter Wonderland, a scene straight out of a fairytale.

It was Christmas Eve, and a hush had fallen over the land, a serene silence broken only by the gentle whisper of the wind through the snow-laden branches of the fir trees. A blanket of white transformed the familiar landscape into a breathtaking panorama. (Robyn Keyport)

“Sleigh Ride”

The snow falls softly, a silent blanket draping the world in white. Imagine yourself nestled in a horse-drawn sleigh, the crisp winter air tingling your cheeks. A thick, woolen blanket warms you and your favorite person as you embark on a magical journey.

This winter, find your own sleigh ride moment. Whether it's a quiet evening by the fire, a walk in the snow, or simply spending time with loved ones, embrace the cozy magic of the season. (Jean Fjelsted)

“A Dash Through the Snow in 7/8 Time”

Wait up—something has gone wrong with our sleigh.... Hopefully we can get it fixed soon... "A Dash Through the Snow in 7/8" is a variation of the traditional "Dashing Through the Snow". (Jingle Bells)... EXCEPT this version is written in a time meter of 7/8 which makes it feel like the horse has 5 legs or the sleigh has 3 runners....nothing feels like a smooth, quiet sleigh ride through new fallen snow.

And so on we go with the sleigh ride, albeit a little bumpier than expected. But the twinkling lights of the Christmas trees, the frosty air, and the shared laughter make it a magical evening. Perhaps the imperfect rhythm of the music is a reminder that even in unexpected moments, joy can be found. Enjoy the adventure! (LuAnn Roiger)

“Jingle Bells” (all sing)

“Hey, I think the sleigh is fixed!” We can continue on our way.

How about singing Jingle Bells as we continue our journey. (Tyler Behny)

Intermission Q&A offering

“Carol of the Drum”

Carol of the Drum was written in 1941 and inspired by a traditional Czech lullaby, with the drum part being added later by the composer. In the 1950's, it was popularized as the beloved Christmas carol known as The Little Drummer Boy.

Published in 1941, the carol initially carried a more subdued tone, reflecting the anxieties of a world at war. This drummer, however, is not simply a military character; he is a young drummer marching onwards to attend the birth of Jesus Christ, bringing music as his gift.

This arrangement captures the simplicity of the original melody, but it's more than your average “pa-rum-pa-pum-pum.” Its captivating harmonies, variety of bell techniques and, of course, the drum, all take us on a journey from darkness to exuberant joy to breathtaking tenderness. (Maria Gathje)

“Breath of Heaven”

When I first heard this arrangement of Breath of Heaven, it was not what I expected as it has never been a particular favorite of mine. To me this arrangement imagines Mary's thoughts and prayers as she approaches the birth of the Christ Child. The music expresses the struggle Mary must have had when she found out she was pregnant and had to travel and give birth in a barn and I am sure she was not totally happy and content with this decision. After all—Who would be? She prays....she argues.....poor Joseph. But underneath I am sure God is talking to her and like the rest of us, we do not always listen right away.

This Christmas, I encourage you to listen to familiar carols with fresh ears. Consider the perspectives of those involved – Mary, Joseph, the shepherds – and let their stories resonate with your own journey of faith. You might be surprised at what you discover. (Marilee Anderson)

“Joy to the World” (all sing)

"Joy to the World" has a message of hope and redemption. The carol's accessibility and uplifting melody made it an uplifting hymn that transcends denominational lines, becoming a truly ecumenical hymn. Let's sing (Tyler Behny)

“Angels We Have Heard on High”

The first strains of "Angels We Have Heard On High" always transport me back to childhood Christmases. The grand sanctuary of our church, adorned with wreaths and twinkling lights, filled with the hopeful voices of the congregation. That soaring melody, especially the “Gloria in excelsis Deo!”, was more than just a song; it was a window into a sacred story.

In my youthful imagination, I wasn't just a listener; I was part of that angelic chorus. My voice, joining countless others, lifted in praise and adoration. It wasn't just a song; it was an act of worship, a participation in the divine moment. It was an acknowledgement of the profound gift of Christ's birth.

Today, when I hear "Angels We Have Heard On High", I am filled with the same sense of wonder and joy I felt as a child. It's more than just a carol; it's an invitation to remember the true meaning of Christmas, to celebrate the birth of Christ, and to join the chorus of angels in proclaiming, "Gloria in excelsis Deo!"

With the help and artistic creation of Manheim Steamroller, let this music fill your heart with joy and guide your spirit to the light of the newborn King and infuse us with a modern energy that resonates across generations. (Joy Wetterlund)

“Angels We Have Heard on High” (all sing)

Let's sing along to that glorious chorus of this awesome carol proclaiming “Gloria in excelsis Deo! (Tyler Behny)

“God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen”

"God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" is a classic English Christmas carol, conveying "tidings of comfort and joy" with a familiar melody and message of salvation. While the original tune is in a traditional minor key, it has inspired hundreds of arrangements over the centuries. This modern interpretation, arranged for handbells by Benjamin A. Tucker, takes a playful turn with an unexpected jazzy swing section that adds a joyful twist to this beloved holiday standard. We bet your toes will be tapping in time with ours. And if you want to add a few finger snaps, be our guest. (Cynthia Clanton)

“Wizards in Winter”

No Christmas concert would be complete without, of course, Wizards! For our final piece we will be rocking out on Wizards in Winter! This high energy rocking out song by the Trans Siberian Orchestra has been arranged for handbells – might we say with some of our own enhancements - naturally! Picture a group of wizards celebrating and having a wild time. Imagine them decked out in pointy hats and shimmering robes, throwing the most epic winter solstice bash EVER!

I am sure the piece would be on their party list. Hopefully you will have as much fun listening to it as we do playing it!!! Get ready to be spellbound. (Aaron Penn)

“We Wish You a Merry Christmas” (Let's Sing) (Marilee)

*We wish you a Merry Christmas
We wish you a Merry Christmas
We wish you a Merry Christmas
And a Happy New Year*

*Good Tidings We Bring
To you and your kin
Good tidings for Christmas
And Happy New Year!*