



## PROGRAM NOTES – DECEMBER 2024

### **Eternal Father, Strong to Save**

Claude Thomas Smith (1932-1987) was known as an exceptional composer, educator, conductor, and clinician. After playing in the 371st U.S. Army Band during the Korean War and subsequently completing his college studies at the University of Kansas, he directed school instrumental music programs in Nebraska and Missouri. For the last ten years of his life, Smith resided in Kansas City, Missouri, where he conducted a church choir and consulted and composed for two music publishing houses.

“Eternal Father, Strong to Save” was written for the 50th anniversary of the United States Navy Band and premiered in 1975 at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Michael Burch-Pesses describes it as “a superbly crafted theme and variations on the Navy Hymn; this work contains not only the challenging rhythmic intensity and harmonic tension so characteristic of Smith’s compositions, but also one of the most beautiful and well-known horn quartets in modern band literature. Although Smith accepted no fee for this commission, it has become one of his best-loved and most widely-performed works.”

### **A Christmas Medley**

Karen Street studied music in the United Kingdom at Bath University, the Welsh College of Music and Drama, and the Guildhall School of Music. Her performing credits include the Royal Shakespeare Company, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, the BBC Philharmonic, the Matrix Ensemble, Ice Breaker and many West End productions. Karen has recorded with the Fairer Sax, Ute Lemper, Tim Garland's Lammas and Mike Westbrook.

Street first started composing at school and for the local music festival. When she began teaching the saxophone, she realized how limited the saxophone repertoire was at that level. Karen wrote a set of easy pieces for saxophone and piano which was published by Boosey and Hawkes, and is now on the Associated Board syllabus. There was also a lack of music for saxophone ensemble so Boosey and Hawkes approached her to write three ensemble books; two of which were written under the name of the Fairer Sax, the all-female quartet of which she was a member.

She has since written all kinds of music for the saxophone from solo studies to saxophone choirs. She co-runs and plays accordion and tenor saxophone in the saxophone ensemble Saxtet, whose members are noted for writing their own compositions.

“A Christmas Medley” is a well crafted and entertaining medley of six Christmas favorites. The medley includes: “Deck the Halls,” “Away in a Manger,” “Jingle Bells,” “We Three Kings,” “Silent Night,” and “We Wish You A Merry Christmas.”



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### **Carnival**

“Carnival” is also by Karen Street, and as the title suggests, it has a carnival atmosphere, with a reggae feel and interesting changes in time signature, which in turn create an interesting melody. There are opportunities for improvisation in the alto and tenor parts.

### **Juba Dance (from “Symphony No. 1 in E Minor”)**

Florence Price (1887-1953) made history as the first African-American woman to have a symphony performed by a major American orchestra. Her “Symphony No. 1 in E Minor” was completed in 1932 and premiered by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1933. The “Juba Dance: Allegro” is the third movement from that Symphony. The Juba, originating in Haiti and Africa, features a two-cross step that is danced in a circle. The dance was accompanied by hand-clapping, singing, and drums. Enslaved individuals introduced the Juba into the southern colonies, later influencing hambone and ragtime. After the Stono Rebellion in 1739, plantation owners restricted drum use due to fears of secret communication. Consequently, the enslaved utilized their bodies as musical instruments, with “Pattin’ juba” referring to the cross-rhythms and angular syncopations produced through body percussion. Florence Price aimed to elevate the African American folk dance into concert halls by boldly replacing the traditional minuet/scherzo with the Juba in each of her three surviving symphonies.

### **Be Thou My Vision**

David Gillingham bases his reverent and powerful work on the hymn tune “Be Thou My Vision” (also known as the Irish ballad *Slane*), with its eternal message of faith and hope. It goes far beyond being an arrangement of a familiar hymn tune, as Gillingham gives moments of real drama in the shimmering tonal colors provided by the woodwinds and the glorious brass lines that break through like dazzling sunlight through the clouds.



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### Fanfare for the Festival of Lights

“Fanfare for the Festival of Lights” weaves two traditional Hanukkah melodies into a colorful, rousing celebration. “Ma’oz Tzur,” translated, means “rock of ages,” and hints at the strength of faith felt by the Jewish people when reflecting on the story of Hanukkah. In contrast, “The Dreidel Song” leans into a more playful side of the Hanukkah holiday, referencing a song about an often-played children’s game.

Composer Evan VanDoren writes, “As a young Jewish musician growing up in the United States, I performed an untold number of Christmas selections around this holiday season. Truthfully, I enjoyed them all! The concert band repertoire includes a wealth of masterfully crafted selections composed and arranged from melodies and concepts tied to the Christmas holiday. However, there are decidedly fewer opportunities for Jewish musicians to perform music derived from their own cultural and religious heritage.

“My hope is that through creating this brief work, Jewish musicians will have the opportunity to perform music from their background, while all musicians join together in a musical celebration of the joy and awe of the holiday season!”

### Concert Suite from “The Polar Express”

*The Polar Express* is a 2004 American computer-animated adventure film based on the 1985 children’s book of the same name by Chris Van Allsburg. Co-written, co-produced and directed by Robert Zemeckis, the film features human characters animated using live-action motion capture animation.

The film tells the story of a young boy who, on Christmas Eve, sees a mysterious train bound for the North Pole stop outside his window and is invited aboard by its conductor. The boy joins several other children as they embark on a journey to visit Santa Claus preparing for Christmas. The film stars Tom Hanks, with Daryl Sabara, Nona Gaye, Jimmy Bennett and Eddie Deezen.

The blockbuster Alan Silvestri and Glen Ballard film score has been masterfully scored for symphonic band by Jerry Brubaker. This medley from the popular children’s movie includes *Believe*, *The Polar Express*, *When Christmas Comes to Town* and *Spirit of the Season*. The song *Believe* was nominated for Best Original Song at the 77th Academy Awards and won a Grammy in 2006.



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### Elsa's Procession to the Cathedral

Born in 1813, Richard Wagner was the ninth and last child of Carl Friedrich Wagner. The senior Wagner passed away when Richard was six years old. Richard's mother and the rest of the family moved in with a friend of his father, actor and playwright Ludwig Geyer. Geyer and Wagner's mother were reportedly married within a year.

Wagner had a great interest in German Mythology and Medieval Romantic literature. One of these was the Epic tale of Lohengrin, a Knight of the Holy Grail. The opera Lohengrin was composed from 1845 to 1848, when Wagner was 35 years old.

In the opera, the people of the Brabant are divided by quarrels and political infighting; also, a devious hostile power left over from the region's pagan past is seeking to subvert the prevailing monotheistic government and to return Brabant to pagan rule. A mysterious knight, sent by God and possessing superhuman charisma and fighting ability, arrives to unite and strengthen the people, and to defend the innocent noblewoman Elsa from a false accusation of murder, but he imposes two conditions: the people must follow him without knowing his identity (Elsa in particular must never ask his name, or his heritage, or his origin), and Elsa must marry the knight. The conspirators attempt to undermine her faith in her rescuer, to create doubt among the people, and to force him to leave. Elsa is warned to not fall in love so hastily. Although Elsa obviously has doubts, she says she must trust in the knight, who has been sent by God to save her.

As Act II begins, Elsa and her attendants prepare for her wedding, and as the wedding party approaches the cathedral, they are interrupted when Ortund, a pagan witch, rushes forward and declares that the knight can never be part of the nobility when they don't know his name, or where he comes from. The King orders Ortund to make way. Before Elsa and the knight can enter the Cathedral, Telramund, Ortund's husband and a highly skilled knight himself, blocks them. Elsa is now visibly shaken by the interruptions and wild accusations. She pulls herself together, and again says she must trust in God, and maintain her belief in the knight's love for her. The King now forces Telramund back. With her hand still shaking slightly, Elsa places it into the hand of the unnamed knight, whom we later learn to be Lohengrin, Knight of the Grail. She holds her head up, and enters the Cathedral with the knight, finishing Elsa's Processional and Act II of the three-act opera.

In the operatic presentation, a large double chorus (representing the people of Antwerp) adds its song of praise to that of the orchestra for "Elsa's Procession to the Cathedral." It is in this music from the opera that we find Richard Wagner first striking out with those intense musical thoughts which were to culminate in *Tristan*, operas of "The Ring" and *Parsifal*. In this transcription, Lucien Cailliet has succeeded in building into the instrumental framework of the modern band a true representation of all that Wagner so eloquently describes with orchestra and chorus.



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### Suite from “The Nutcracker”

- I. March
- II. Dance of the Sugarplum Fairy
- III. Arabian Dance
- IV. Chinese Dance
- V. Dance of the Toy Flutes
- IV. Russian Dance (Trépak)

The dainty and bewitching “Nutcracker Suite” was written for the Russian Imperial Opera, and first performed in 1892. It is based on the Hoffman fairy tale of the little girl, who, having indulged herself with Christmas goodies, dreams on Christmas night that she again sees the tree lighted in all its splendor, while all the toys and dolls are in revelry, led by “NutCracker, the Prince of Fairyland.” The ballet met with such success that Tchaikovsky decided to use the most popular numbers and arrange a suite.

### A Rhapsody on Christmas Carols

“A Rhapsody of Christmas Carols,” originally commissioned by the United States Marine Band, features many holiday favorites, including In Dulci Jubilo, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, We Three Kings, Greensleeves/What Child Is This?, Joy To The World, Away In A Manger, Deck The Halls, and Angels We Have Heard On High. What makes this particular medley noteworthy is each tune features a different instrumental section of the band, and there are solo opportunities in each section of the ensemble.