

December 15, 17 & 18, 2022
A Nutcracker Christmas Celebration
Program notes by J. Michael Allsen

Arizona Philharmonic and Margot Fonteyn Academy of Ballet are proud and excited to present to you our first collaboration, A Nutcracker Christmas Celebration.

This afternoon's performance begins with the voices of young girls: Voci Sorella from Yavapai Youth Choirs. They will be joined in the second half by the Una Voce Women's Choir. The remainder of this program is taken up by two ballets danced by guests of the Margot Fonteyn Academy of Ballet and members of Lessons by Lexe dance studio. The first is a tribute to the ballet *Le Patineurs* (The Skaters), a lighthearted and lively ice skating party, danced to music by Giacomo Meyerbeer. We close with selections from the most beloved of all ballets, *The Nutcracker*, with its colorful and expressive score by Tchaikovsky.

This production has been a long time in planning and execution. Margot Fonteyn Academy of Ballet is an international organization, drawing students and dancers from across the world. Arizona Philharmonic is a regional professional orchestra, drawing musicians from across the southwest. Voci Sorella, Una Voce, and Lessons by Lexe are local, drawing youth and adults from within our community. Each group contributes their magic to create the beautiful experience unfolding here, in Prescott.

Arizona Philharmonic wishes to offer a special thank you to Ken Ludden, Artistic Director of Margot Fonteyn Academy of Ballet. Long before the Academy's fall reopening in its new home in Prescott, he imagined what you are about to see and hear. We are grateful for his vision and honored to help realize it.

PROGRAM

ACT I

- *Noel Nouvelet* (arr. Michael McGlynn) with Voci Sorella
- *Pat-a-Pan* (arr. Kirke Mechem) with Voci Sorella
- *Il est né le divin enfant* (arr. John Rutter) with Voci Sorella
- *Skaters Holiday* (by Giacomo Meyerbeer)
An homage to Sir Frederick Ashton, to the music of Les Patineurs with dancers Cassidy Blake, Chloe Fitchette, Kaishi Fugita, Lungani Gwala, Alix Henning, Mataji Prevolnik

INTERMISSION

ACT II

- *O Come All Ye Faithful* (arr. Dan Forrest) with Una Voce
- *Ding Dong Merrily on High* (arr. Kirke Mechem) with Voci Sorella
- *Silent Night* (arr. Dan Forrest) with Voci Sorella

“The Nutcracker Suite” (by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky)

- *Overture*
Narration by Ken Ludden
- *Snow Scene*
Tricia Albertson and Eric Trope
- *Spanish*
Anbi Ono
- *Arabian*
Mao Hayashi
- *Chinese*
Kanade Yamamura
- *Reed Flutes “Danse des mirlitons”*
Ako Omiya
- *Trepak (traditional Ukrainian dance) “Danse des Bouffons”*
Lungani Gwala
- *Mother Ginger “La mere Gigogne et les polichinelles”*
Kanami Yaginuma
- *Waltz of the Flowers “Grand Ballabile”*
Kio Sagae
- *Grand Pas de Deux*
“Adage” – Tricia Albertson and Eric Trope
“Male Variation” – Eric Trope
“Sugar Plum Fairy Variation” – Tricia Albertson
“Coda” – Tricia Albertson and Eric Trope
- *Finale*
Full Ensemble

NOTES

***Noël nouvelet* (arr. Michael McGlynn) with Voci Sorella**

We open with a set of three selections sung by Voci Sorella. The French carol *Noël nouvelet* dates from the 15th century. The word *noël*—now used in French as a term for Christmas itself—has been used as a joyful acclamation in French poetry since the 13th century.

In the 15th century the *noël* became a particularly popular French genre of poetry associated with the Nativity, with hundreds of *noëls* assembled in large collections. A few of these, including *Noël nouvelet*, have survived with their original melodies. **Michael McGlynn's** delicate 2008 a capella arrangement preserves the medieval mystery of this lovely carol.

***Pat-a-Pan* (arr. Kirke Mechem) with Voci Sorella**

Kansas-born **Kirke Mechem (b. 1925)** is a prolific composer of music in all genres, from operas—including his acclaimed *Tartuffe*—to orchestral and chamber works. He is best known, however, for his well-crafted and often witty choral music—Mechem has been lauded as the “dean of American choral composers.”

In 1964, he was serving as composer-in-residence at the San Francisco College for Women, now part of San Francisco State University. His *Seven Joys of Christmas* was written that year for the College's Chamber Singers. It was his intent to set carols that might not be particularly popular, but which could be utilized to express the many shades of joy in this season. He also chose traditional holiday music that gave this work an international flavor. The fourth movement, titled *The Joy of Children* is a sweet version of *Patapan*. This carol, published in about 1700 by the Burgundian lawyer and multitalented writer Bernard de la Monnoye (1641-1728), is a wonderful picture of children making a joyful noise on Christmas day.

***Il est né le divin enfant* (arr. John Rutter) with Voci Sorella**

Englishman **John Rutter (b. 1945)** is celebrated as both a choral conductor and as a composer of choral works, from small anthems to settings of the *Gloria*, *Magnificat*, and *Requiem*. Rutter has explained that Christmas music has “always occupied a special place in my affections, ever since I sang in my first Christmas Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols as a nervous ten-year-old boy soprano. For me, and I suspect for most of the other members of the Highgate Junior School Choir, it was the high point of our singing year, diligently rehearsed and eagerly anticipated for weeks beforehand. Later, my voice changed and I turned from singing to composition, but I never forgot those early Highgate carol services...”

Il est né, le divin enfant is an anonymous French carol first printed in the 1860s, but which is probably much older. Many French carols were set to folk melodies or popular songs, and in this case, a joyous poem to the baby Jesus is sung to an old hunting song from Normandy. Rutter's 1969 setting, written for a chorus of children's voices, maintains the pastoral style and childlike joy of the original carol.

***Skaters Holiday* (by Giacomo Meyerbeer)**

The first half concludes with a ballet, *Les Patineurs*, which uses music by **Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864)**. Meyerbeer was phenomenally successful in his time, but was a particularly important figure in the history of French opera, a field he dominated completely in the middle of the 19th century. In particular, he established the form of French “grand opera”—enormous works, often four hours or more in length, and extending over five acts. One invariable expectation of French opera composers at the time was that operas *must* include an extended ballet scene, whether or not it made any sense in the plot! Ballets typically occurred in the third act, partly as a concession to fashionable Parisians of the day, who never arrived before the end of the second act...and who would have been incensed if they missed the ballet. These scenes sometimes served as pure comic relief. Meyerbeer’s grand opera *Le Prophète* (1848), for example, had an unrelentingly serious plot set against the background of Dutch religious upheaval in the early 16th century. It is based upon the life of the Anabaptist leader John of Leiden. John was able to establish a religious state in the city of Münster, proclaiming himself “King of New Jerusalem,” before his eventual downfall and death by torture. Its Act III ballet, however, features a group of bumptious Dutch peasants enjoying a skating party on a frozen river. This ballet also featured a new invention that was all the rage in Paris at the time: roller skates!

In 1936, British composer **Constant Lambert**, who was music director of the Vic-Wells Ballet in London, assembled an eight-movement score that incorporated all of Meyerbeer’s skating music from *Le Prophète*, adaptations of a few additional numbers from that opera and a waltz from Meyerbeer’s 1853 comic opera *L’Étoile du Nord*. (The version of Lambert’s score heard here was reorchestrated for a smaller orchestra in 2020 by Tadeusz Biernacki, music director of the Winnipeg Royal Ballet.) Choreographer Sir Frederick Ashton created the ballet for the Vic-Wells Ballet: no roller skates this time, but many of the ballet’s moves are translated into ballet from traditional moves used in skating. The ballet premiered on February 16, 1937, and proved to be a lasting success, remaining in the repertoire ballet companies around the world down to the present day.

The plot of *Les Patineurs* centers around a skating party with a constantly-changing cast of characters in colorful costumes: lighthearted music and dance with frequent flashes of humor. Presented here, is a homage to Sir Fredrick Ashton’s choreography. The opening movement (*Entree and Pas Seul*) opens with a waltz, a duo for the low strings and piccolo, as the background for a dance by MFAB students. The sequence ends with a more sprightly galop. The *Variation*, opening with brass fanfare, backs a duo of young men, who are obviously on the ice to show off! The *Pas de Deux*, however, is pure romance: a long lyrical melody on horn, and later oboe, supported by the harp. This accompanies pairs of graceful dancers. The *Ensemble* is a series of waltzes for the company, backed by the dancers from the opening. Next two women take the stage in a lively polonaise (*Pas de trois*). *Pas de patineuses* features a pair of dignified young men, skating effortlessly together until they both end up slipping. They quickly recover their poise in hopes that no one was watching. The *Ensemble* that follows features acrobatic leaps by the men and daring spins by the women. *Les Patineurs* ends with an extended *Galop finale*, an exuberant showcase for the entire company.

***O Come All Ye Faithful* (arr. Dan Forrest) with Una Voce**

Following intermission, Una Voce Women’s Chorus takes the stage. The origin of the familiar ***O Come, All Ye Faithful*** (*Adeste fidelis*) was long a mystery. It was known from at least the middle of the 18th century in both its original Latin and was in English translations. The hymn was attributed to medieval poets, various Portuguese and English writers—and even Handel—but the true author was not discovered until the 1940s: an 18th-century English Catholic named **John Francis Wade (1711-1786)**.

Wade fled religious persecution in England and spent most of his career in Flanders and France, selling Catholic service books. His Latin hymn *Adeste fidelis* was written sometime in the early 1740s. There have been many English translations, but the familiar words heard here were written by Francis Oakley in 1906 for *The English Hymnal*. The version heard here was published by South Carolina-based composer and arranger Dan Forrest in 2015. Forrest’s arrangement moves from a quiet, expectant opening to a truly “joyful and triumphant” final verse.

***Ding Dong Merrily on High* (arr. Kirke Mechem) with Voci Sorella**

When hymn-writer **George Ratcliffe Woodward** wrote the words to ***Ding Dong! Merrily on High*** in 1924, he reached back to a much earlier time the melody. It was originally a tune included in a 16th-century dance manual, Thionot Arbeau’s *Orchesographie* (1588) intended to be played with a circle-dance called the bransle. Here Voci Sorella present another movement drawn from **Kirke Mechem’s** *Seven Joys of Christmas: The Joy of Bells*: a joyful, tintinnabular setting of this exuberant song.

***Silent Night* (arr. Dan Forrest) with Voci Sorella**

No Christmas program would be complete without ***Silent Night***. This most popular of all Christmas songs was written in 1818 by the organist **Franz Gruber (1787-1863)** and Rev. Josef Mohr for a Christmas Eve service at the tiny church they served in village of Oberndorf, Austria.

This gentle piece, part of the long tradition of lullabies to the baby Jesus, came to the attention of two touring German singing families, the Rainer Family, and the Strasser Sisters—who popularized the song across Germany. *Silent Night* was eventually published in over 150 languages, and remains one of the most beloved Christmas hymns.

Together, the girls of Voci Sorella and women of Una Voce sing *Silent Night* in a 2020 arrangement by **Dan Forrest**, accompanied by piano and strings. After an atmospheric introduction, the treble voices lay out the song in an unhurried, almost dreamy way, reaching a subdued peak before a hushed ending.

***“The Nutcracker Suite”* (by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky)**

The three great ballet scores of **Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)** include some of the finest ballet music ever written: *Swan Lake* (1876), *The Sleeping Beauty* (1889), and ***The Nutcracker*** (1892). *Nutcracker* is of course the best-known of his ballets. Composed for a performance in St. Petersburg during the Christmas season of 1892, it remains a staple of the ballet repertoire, and his suite of movements from the ballet is one of the most popular concert works in the orchestral

repertoire. Tchaikovsky, however, was convinced at the time that he had written a flop. He didn't particularly like the E.T.A. Hoffmann story that was selected as the basis for the ballet, and fought with the original choreographer, Marcus Petipa, about every detail of phrasing. Thankfully, his musical instincts prevailed, and he created a score full of wonderfully evocative music.

This ever-popular ballet begins with the *Miniature Overture*, the perfect opening: delicate and ultralight music from the upper strings and woodwinds to set the stage for this fairytale story, told through the eyes of a young girl, Clara. The full ballet opens on Christmas Eve at the home of Clara's godfather Drosselmeyer, a toymaker (and—of course!—a magician). Clara receives the Nutcracker as a Christmas gift from her godfather. Later, in a dream, she sees an invasion of mice in Drosselmeyer's parlor. Toy soldiers, lead by the brave Nutcracker, valiantly march to defend the parlor. The battle ends when Clara throws her shoe at the Mouse King, distracting him and allowing the Nutcracker to defeat him.

This past fall, Margot Fonteyn Academy of Ballet formally reopened its doors to students from across the world, after relocating to Prescott from Peekskill, New York. For this first collaboration between Arizona Philharmonic and Margot Fonteyn Academy of Ballet, we are presenting the solo and *pas de deux* highlights of *Nutcracker*, featuring invited international ballet guests.

The sections of the ballet presented here begin with the magical *Snow Scene* pas de deux that ends Act I. In Act II, the Sugar Plum Fairy welcomes the audience to the Land of Sweets, to be entertained by a series of "characteristic dances," some of them representing sweets and refreshments from around the world. (Tchaikovsky clearly used this section as an opportunity to bring in a fascinating variety of musical influences.) The *Spanish Dance: Chocolate* is set in a lively Spanish rhythm, and is led by a jaunty trumpet solo. The *Arabian Dance: Coffee* is languid and exotic, with slow, sinuous lines from the violins and solo woodwinds played above a pulsing background from the low strings. The *Chinese Dance: Tea* features a lovely pseudo-oriental melody for flute and piccolo. The *Dance of the Reed-Pipes* is a dainty flute duet. This is followed by a lively *Ukrainian Dance (Trepak)*, a wild Ukrainian folk dance showcasing spectacular male jumps and technique. Following is the *Bon Bon*, a fun and light-hearted solo. The grand *Waltz of the Flowers* comes at the end of the banquet's entertainment. After an enchanting harp cadenza sets a magical mood, horns introduce the first of a series of lilting waltz themes, alternately delicate and forceful.

The dramatic climax of Act II comes when the Sugar Plum Fairy and her cavalier, join for the *Grand pas de deux*. This is Tchaikovsky at his Romantic best: music that rises gradually to an enormous emotional peak. The brief *Variation of the Cavalier* is a forceful tarantella, and the famous *Variation of the Sugar Plum Fairy* features the delicate sound of the celeste. The *Coda Generale* is a series of waltzes danced as a farewell by the entire company.