

## December 17, 2024 - We Wish You Christmas

Program notes by J. Michael Allsen

This engaging holiday program showcases three fine singers: sopranos Emily Spencer and Sarah Smith, and mezzo-soprano Claire Penneau. It also features a chamber ensemble of Arizona Philharmonic players. This program has been created for the Arizona Philharmonic by an artistic team led by Emily Spencer. All of the music has been arranged or transcribed specially for this concert by Mathew Lanning, a former Prescott native and composer now residing in Boston.

### PROGRAM

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#### WE WILL TELL THE HOLY STORY

TRADITIONAL CATALAN

*Fum, Fum, Fum*

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#### THE FORETOLD MOTHER

FRANZ BIEBL

*Ave Maria*

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

*Bogoroditse devo* from the *All-Night Vigil*

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#### COME AND SEE

TRADITIONAL BLACK SPIRITUAL

*Rise Up Shepherds, And Follow*

TRADITIONAL PROVENÇAL

*Bring a Torch, Jeannette Isabella*

TRADITIONAL ENGLISH

*What Child is This? (Greensleeves)*

ROSETTI / HOLST

*In the Bleak Midwinter*

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

*Vaterland, in deinen Gauen* from *Festgesang*  
(*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*)

TOMÁS LUIS DE VICTORIA

*O magnum mysterium*

**INTERMISSION**

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**STORIES AND SYMBOLS**

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Excerpts from *The Nutcracker, Op.71**Miniature Overture**March**Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy**Russian Dance: Trepak**Waltz of the Flowers*

TRADITIONAL ENGLISH

*The Holly and the Ivy*

LEONTOVYCH/WILHOUSKY

*Carol of the Bells*

PRAETORIUS / SCHOENBERG

*Weinachtsmusik (Lo How a Rose E'er Blooming)*

HECTOR BERLIOZ

*The Shepherd's Farewell from L'enfance du Christ*

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**ALL IS CALM, ALL IS BRIGHT**

ADOLPHE ADAM

*O Holy Night*

HERBERT HOWELLS

*Sing Lullaby*

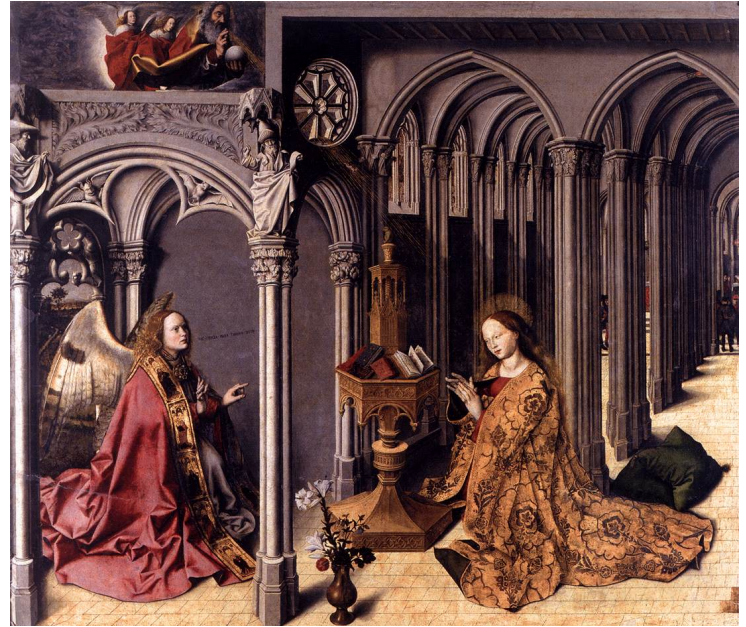
FRANZ GRUBER

*Silent Night*

Our opener is the traditional Catalan carol ***Fum, Fum, Fum***. This song, punctuated by the refrain “*Fum, fum, fum,*” dates from the 16th or 17th century. There are many interpretations of what the refrain means. *Fum* literally means “smoke” in Catalan, so it may refer to smoke from the chimneys of Bethlehem seen by the shepherds. Another source suggests that it is the sound of a cradle rocking. It might also imitate the sound of a musical instrument: the strumming of a guitar, the playing of a fiddle, striking a drum, or even ringing a bell. Whatever it means, *Fum, Fum, Fum* is an exuberant, danceable celebration of the birth of the Baby Jesus!

The next two works take their texts from the Annunciation story in the Book of Luke: the Angel Gabriel’s visit to Mary with the news of her miraculous conception. Born in Bavaria, **Franz Biebl** studied at the conservatory in Munich, and by 1939, he was teaching at the leading

conservatory in Salzburg, the Mozarteum. However, in 1943 he was drafted into the German army and he would eventually spend two years as a prisoner of war in the United States. After returning initially to Salzburg, Biebl spent the last decades of his career in the small Bavarian city of Fürstenfeldbruck, where he worked as a church musician and directed the town's civic chorus. Biebl composed his most famous work, *Ave Maria*, in 1959, and it was published in 1964. The work began to be heard in America during the 1970s, and it was particularly popularized in the 1980s by the all-male *a cappella* choir Chanticleer. (Chanticleer eventually recorded it on a very successful Christmas album in 1990.)



Biebl initially composed *Ave Maria* for a seven-part men's chorus, with three solo parts and a larger four-part choir; in the arrangement heard here, our three soloists sing the solo parts, and the choir is covered by instruments. Though it is known as the *Ave Maria*, this work actually sets a version of a larger devotional prayer, the *Angelus*, which includes three repeats of the familiar *Ave Maria* text. In Biebl's version the verses of the *Angelus* are sung by the soloists in unaccompanied plainchant and the first half of the *Ave Maria* is sung as a lush refrain. After the third refrain, Biebl completes the *Ave Maria* prayer (beginning with *Sancta Maria, mater Dei*). This is a truly magical moment, as the emotional inertia of the repeating refrains is suddenly released, before the piece ends with a prayerful *Amen*.

Russian pianist and composer **Sergei Rachmaninoff** is of course known today mostly for his orchestral and piano music, but he also wrote a sizeable number of choral pieces, particularly early in his career. Among these were two large multi-movement sacred works—the *Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom* (1910) and the *All-Night Vigil* (or *Vespers*, 1915)—which stand as some of the finest music ever composed for the Russian Orthodox liturgy. Though Rachmaninoff had stopped attending church by January 1915, when he wrote the *All-Night Vigil*, he has clearly inspired by the project, completing all fifteen movements in less than two weeks. Like the *Ave Maria*, the fifth movement of the *Vigil*, ***Bogoroditse Devo*** (Rejoice, O Mother of God) is drawn from the Annunciation story. Rachmaninoff's setting is calm and ethereal, set in rich Russian Orthodox harmonies.



The next set of works centers on the gathering of people and animals in the manger, to adore and stand in wonder at the of the newborn Jesus. The set opens with the lively ***Rise Up Shepherd, and Follow***, part of the huge repertoire of Black spirituals. The earliest of these originated before the Civil War, as the informal sacred music of enslaved Africans. *Rise Up Shepherd, and Follow*, which probably originated in the 1870s or 1880s (it first appeared in print in 1891), is a joyful “jubilee” spiritual. It addresses the shepherds with a refrain directing them to rise up and hurry to see the baby Jesus. The 14th-century Provençal tune of ***Bring a Torch Jeannette Isabella*** was actually a “carol” in the original Medieval French sense of the word: a lively song that accompanied dancing. It may have been connected to the ancient Provençal tradition of erecting and dancing around an elaborate *crèche*, or nativity scene, to honor the Baby Jesus. French poet and playwright Émile Blémont published a French text to accompany the tune in 1901, and it was translated into English in 1909 by the British church musician Edward Cuthbert Nunn. The lovely melody ***Greensleeves*** seems to have originated in 16th century England, though it has never been clear who composed it. One story, however, credits this song to none other than King Henry VIII, who supposedly wrote it for his lover and second wife Ann Boleyn. It’s a great story...but there is no evidence that it is true, though Henry was, in fact, an accomplished composer. In 1871, Sir John Stainer adapted this tune to set a Christmas hymn by William Chatterton Dix, ***What Child Is This***.



Sometime before 1872, the English poet **Christina Rossetti** wrote her ***In the Bleak Midwinter***, intending it for the American literary magazine *Scribner’s Monthly*. It was never published during her lifetime, however, and the Christmas poem—destined to become one of her most enduring popular works—did not appear in print until 1904. Rossetti’s poem has received attractive settings by the English composer and choirmaster Harold Darke (1909), English clergyman Harold Strong (1916), and the American Stephen Paulus (1973), but the most familiar version is a setting written by **Gustav Holst** in 1906—prepared for *The English Hymnal* (a complete renovation of the Anglican hymnal overseen by Holst’s friend Ralph Vaughan Williams).

In 1840, **Felix Mendelssohn** was working as a conductor in Leipzig, and composed a short cantata, his ***Festgesang*** (*Festival Song*) for a civic festival honoring the 400th anniversary of Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press. It was performed in Leipzig's market Square on June 24, 1840 by chorus of 200 men, accompanied by 16 trumpets, 20 trombones, and timpani. We present the second movement, ***Vaterland, in deinen Gauen*** here. If this section of a fairly obscure Mendelssohn cantata sounds familiar, it is because, in 1855, English organist William Cummings adapted it to set a Christmas text by the great 18th-century hymn-writer Charles Wesley: *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*.



This section of our program closes with a pair of works from the 16th century. **Tomás Luis de Victoria** was Spain's greatest late Renaissance composer. As a teenager, he received a grant from King Philip II that allowed him to study in Rome. While in Rome, Victoria was ordained as a priest, and earned a reputation as one of Rome's finest organists. He also began to publish his sacred works, displaying his command of the Counter-Reformation style pioneered by Palestrina and others in Rome. He returned to Spain in 1587 and worked for the Spanish royal family until his death in 1611. His motet ***O magnum mysterium*** was published in Rome in 1572. The text is a Latin chant for the Christmas Matins (dawn) service. Victoria's setting includes both intense imitative counterpoint and much simpler texture, all in the service of setting this text in a clear and expressive way. (Listen, for example, to how he dramatically sets off the words *O Beata Virgo* [O Blessed Virgin].) It ends with a lively, almost dancelike *Alleluia*. *Verbum caro factum es / Y la Virgen le dezía*, is an anonymous Spanish *villancico* from around 1556. *Villancicos* were typically lighthearted secular pieces, with dancelike rhythms matching the poetic rhythm of the text, but there were also many sacred *villancicos* as well. In this lively piece celebrating the birth of Christ, the refrains include a quotation of a bit of Latin chant from the Christmas Matins service.



After intermission, we have a set of works exploring stories and symbols associated with the Christmas season, beginning with excerpts from **Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky's** beloved ballet, ***The Nutcracker***. This was written for the Christmas season of 1892. and despite its enduring fame, Tchaikovsky 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 about every detail of phrasing. Thankfully, Tchaikovsky's musical instincts prevailed, and he created a score full of wonderfully evocative music. Here we include five excerpts, beginning with the *Minature Overture*. This is the perfect opening to the ballet—delicate and ultralight music from the upper strings and woodwinds to set the stage for this fairytale story. Clara receives the gift of a Nutcracker and dreams that it comes to life, along with all of the home's dolls and toys. The military-sounding but light *March* accompanies the valiant Nutcracker and an army of toy soldiers as they battle with the Mouse King. In the end, it is Clara who defeats this rodent ruler by throwing her slipper at him...clearly heard in the final bar! The famous *Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy*, featuring the delicate sound of the celeste, comes from Act II, as the fairy ushers Clara and the Nutcracker, now transformed into a Prince, into a great hall for a celebratory banquet. The lively *Russian Dance: Trepak*—one of the entertainments at the banquet scene—is a complete contrast: a vigorous Russian folk dance adapted for several high-kicking dancers. The banquet concludes with the *Waltz of the Flowers*. Beginning as a magical harp solo, this number is a series of lush waltz themes for full orchestra.



*The Holly and the Ivy* is a traditional English carol that first appeared in its modern version in an 1871 collection published by Henry Bramley and Sir John Stainer. The carol dates from at least the 15th century, and the association of holly and ivy—plants that stay green and alive even during the coldest weather—with the celebration of the winter solstice is much earlier than that, dating to pre-Christian England. The familiar *Carol of the Bells*, was written in 1916 by the Ukrainian composer **Mykola Dmytrovich Leontovych** for a Christmas concert by students at the University of Kiev. The bell carol, originally part of a choral work titled *Schedryk*, was inspired by the traditional Ukrainian legend that all of the bells on earth rang of their own accord to announce the birth of Christ. The most familiar version of this work in this country is a 1936 adaptation with English words by **Peter J. Wilhousky**—a tintinnabular sound portrait of the pealing of bells of all sizes!

Though he is known today as a leader in the early 20th century *avant garde* and a pioneer in atonal and twelve-tone styles, **Arnold Schoenberg** was also a skilled arranger. In 1921, he completed a short chamber work titled *Weinachtsmusik* (*Christmas Music*), originally written for two violins, cello, harmonium (a small organ), and piano. It was probably written for a private gathering in December of that year. It



It starts as a straightforward setting of Michael Praetorius's early 17th-century chorale *Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen* (*Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming*), but then transforms the melody in dense counterpoint. Schoenberg also works in references to Franz Gruber's *Stille Nacht* (*Silent Night*).

The final work in the set comes from **Hector Berlioz**. In 1850 he conducted a short cantata called *La Fuite en Egypte* (*The Flight into Egypt*) in Paris, a work, which told the story of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus fleeing to Egypt to escape the soldiers of King Herod. The composer was a certain unknown church musician named "Pierre Ducré." The fact that this was a pseudonym for Berlioz himself was a very open secret in Paris. Encouraged by the enthusiastic response to *La Fuite*, he expanded the work into a huge, three-part oratorio called *L'enfance du Christ* (*The Childhood of Christ*), presenting the new work (now under his own name) in 1854. In the style of his operas, the action in *L'Enfance* does not take place as a narrative, but rather in a series of dramatic *tableaux*. *The Shepherds' Farewell*, drawn from the end of Part II, is a chorus of shepherds saying a fond goodbye to the Holy Family as they go into exile. Its style is distinctly old-fashioned for Berlioz, hearkening back to the more pastoral movements of Handel's *Messiah* or Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*.



Our program ends with a trio of peaceful works. Though he was respected in his day as composer of operas and ballet scores (including the well-known *Giselle*) **Adolphe Adam** is known to American audiences almost exclusively for his Christmas carol *Cantique de Noël*.

Written in 1847 as a setting of a two-verse Christmas poem by Mary Cappeaux, this carol was later adapted by J. S. Wright as the gentle three-verse English carol, *O Holy Night*. Englishman **Herbert Howells** was a composer, teacher, and one of the finest organists in Britain. As a composer, Howells worked primarily in the Anglican church, producing a large repertoire of fine service works, hymns, and carols. He also worked as an editor of early English music, and his works often recall the music of the Renaissance in their style and approach. One of these is his *Sing Lullaby*, written between 1918-1920 as one of his *Three Carol-Anthems*. The text was written by a contemporary poet (F. W. Harvey), but it clearly recalls form and language of 15th-century English carols. Howells sets it with an insistent refrain on "Sing lullaby," and gentle, flowing counterpoint. *Silent Night* was written in 1818 by the organist **Franz Gruber** and Rev.



Josef Mohr for a Christmas Eve service at the tiny church they served in the 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.

## Texts and Translations

### **Biebl, *Ave Maria***

chant: *Angelus Domini  
nuntiavit Mariae et concepit  
de Spiritu Sancto.*

*Ave Maria, gratia plena,  
Dominus tecum,  
benedicta tu in mulieribus,  
et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus.*

chant: *Maria dixit:  
Ecce ancilla Domini  
fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.*

*Ave Maria, gratia plena...*

chant: *Et verbum caro factum est  
et habitavit in nobis.*

*Ave Maria, gratia plena...*

*Sancta Maria, mater Dei,  
ora pro nobis peccatoribus.  
Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis  
nunc et in hora mortis nostrae.  
Amen.*

The Angel of the Lord  
announced to Mary and she conceived  
by the Holy Spirit.

Hail Mary, full of grace,  
the Lord is with you,  
you are blessed among women, and  
blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.

Mary said:  
Behold the handmaiden of the Lord;  
Do to me according to your word.

Hail Mary, full of grace...

*And the Word was made flesh  
and dwelt among us*

Hail Mary, full of grace...

Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
pray for us sinners.  
Holy Mary, pray for us,  
now and in our hour of death.  
Amen.

### **Rachmaninoff, *Bogoroditse Devo***

*Bogoroditse Devo, raduisya,  
Blagodatnaya Mariye  
Gospod s ytoboyu.  
Blagoslovenna y v zhenakh,  
i blagosloven plod chreva tvoyevo,  
yako spasa rodila yesi dush nashikh.*

Rejoice, O mother of God,  
Virgin Mary, full of grace  
God is with you.  
Blessed are you among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of your womb,  
For you have borne the savior of our souls.



**Victoria, *O magnum mysterium***

*O magnum mysterium  
et admirabile sacramentum,  
ut animalia viderent  
Dominum natum,  
jacentem in praesepio.  
O Beata Virgo  
cuius viscera meruerunt  
portare Dominum Christum.  
Alleluia.*

O great mystery,  
and wondrous sacrament,  
that animals should be the first to behold  
the newborn Lord  
lying in a Manger.  
O Blessed Virgin,  
whose womb was worthy  
to bear the Lord Christ.  
Alleluia.

**Anonymous, *Verbum caro factum es / Y la Virgen le decía***

*Verbum caro factum est  
porque todos os salvéis.*

The Word was made flesh  
for the salvation of us all.

*Y la Virgen le decía:  
vida de la vida mia,  
hijo mio, ¿qué os haría,  
que no tengo en qué os echéis?*

And the Virgin spoke to Him:  
life of my life,  
my son, what shall I do,  
having nothing in which to dress you?

*Verbum caro factum est  
porque todos os salvéis.*

The Word was made flesh  
for the salvation of us all.

*O riquezas temporales,  
¿No daréis unos pañales  
A Jesu que entre animals  
Es nascido según véis?*

O you, the rich of this world,  
will you not give a swaddling cloth  
to Jesus, born amidst the beasts  
as you may clearly see?

*Verbum caro factum est  
porque todos os salvéis.*

The Word was made flesh  
for the salvation of us all.

## VOCALISTS

### **Sarah Smith, *soprano***

Sarah Smith, soprano, has called Arizona home for over a decade, performing as a concert soloist and chorister in all music styles. Hailing from the Midwest, Sarah attained a Bachelor of Music from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and after graduating with a Master of Music from ASU in 2010 she made her professional debut in Arizona as a concert soloist with the Phoenix Symphony. Sarah's 2023 highlights include performing "Gabriel" (soprano soloist) in Arizona Musicfest's performance of Haydn's Creation; and singing as a featured soprano soloist with Arizona Bach Festival. In 2022, Sarah was the soprano Soloist in Mozart's Vesperae Solennes de Confessore with Concerts on the Desert in Scottsdale, and soprano soloist in performances of Brahms Ein Deutsches Requiem with the Arizona Philharmonic and North Valley Chorale and Orchestra. She held the role of "Cinderella" in Sondheim's Into the Woods at Desert Stages Theater in Scottsdale in 2021; and was the soprano soloist in Carl Orff's Carmina Burana with the Symphony of the Southwest at Mesa Arts Center in 2019.



With a deep passion for choral repertoire Sarah has participated as a chorister in many all-professional vocal ensembles including The Phoenix Chorale, Quartz Vocal Ensemble, Solis Camerata and Arizona Opera Chorus; and has served as soprano section leader for the Arizona Musicfest Chorus, North Valley Chorale, Arizona Masterworks Chorale, and the St. Barnabas Choir.

Sarah has served as a music educator in a variety of roles throughout her career and is currently taking a sabbatical from music instruction while she pursues other business endeavors. Previously, Sarah has taught K-5 General Music and Art at Great Hearts Academy in Central Phoenix and was Children's Choir Director at Saint Barnabas Episcopal Church in Scottsdale, Sarah also served as adjunct professor of Music and Voice at Paradise Valley Community College, Mesa Community College, and Central Arizona College, and managed a private vocal studio for all ages.

**Emily Spencer, *soprano***

At age 18, Emily Spencer was selected by a panel of judges that included opera stars William Warfield and Blanche Thebom to perform in the Rosa Ponselle Foundation's Annual Winners Showcase Concert in Baltimore, MD. This cemented her desire to pursue classical vocal studies, which led to her completion of a Vocal Performance and Pedagogy degree from Brigham Young University. She later went on to complete a Master of Arts degree in Choral Conducting and Pedagogy at the University of Iowa. Upon graduation, she co-founded and directed the Tri-State Choral Society of Sinsinawa, WI. Ms. Spencer also served as a soprano section Principal with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra.



Ms. Spencer's solo concert credits include Caldara's Stabat Mater, J.S. Bach's St. John Passion, Magnificat, and Jesu, meine Freude, BWV 227, Handel's Messiah, Haydn's Lord Nelson Mass and Mass in Time of War, Mozart's Vesperae solennes de confessore, Brahms' Neue Liebeslieder, Britten's Ceremony of Carols, and Forrest's Requiem for the Living. She was the recipient of a scholarship to study with opera coach Timothy Shaindlin, who has served on the music staffs of the Metropolitan Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago. She also studied with Jamie Johns, Associate Musical Director of The Phantom of the Opera National Tour. Ms. Spencer is an inaugural member of the Prescott-based professional 12-voice ensemble Quartz. She resides in Prescott, AZ with her husband and five children.

**Claire Penneau, *mezzo-soprano***

Claire Penneau has most recently toured Germany as featured soloist in the Schumann Liederfest. She has performed solo and ensemble work throughout Europe. Locally, she actively performs as a soloist in concerts and recitals. Recent operatic roles include: as Fiordiligi in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, as The Mother in Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors* Phoenix Opera; as Third Lady in *Die Zauberflöte* and as Mimi in a mini production of Puccini's *La Bohème* with Three Oaks Opera.

Ms. Penneau has sung as soloist with the Arizona Bach Festival, Phoenix Opera, Musica Nova, Canticum Novum, Solis Camerata, Arizona Musicfest, San Tan Performing Arts, North Valley Chorale and many others. She teaches music and also holds a private voice studio.



## MUSICIANS

### **Mathew Lanning**

Mathew Lanning is an internationally-performed award-winning composer, pianist, and organist based in Boston, MA. He is a candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the New England Conservatory under Michael Gandolfi.

Mathew's works have been praised highly by professional composers and audiences alike. Since publishing his first work at the age of 14, he has completed numerous concert-length orchestral works, including an abundance of symphonies, symphonic suites and orchestral poems, and other short orchestra, chamber, and solo works.

His music has been performed by orchestras, professional chamber groups, and soloists around the United States, including Transient Canvas and Grammy-nominated Imani Winds. He has studied at programs at the Boston Conservatory and the Curtis Institute of Music. Additionally, Mathew serves as an intern to Orange Mountain Music, assisting in the production of concerts involving world-renowned artists such as Philip Glass, Dennis Russel Davies, Maki Namekawa, and William Bolcom at venues like Carnegie Hall and the Morgan Library.

Mathew's future career plans include finishing his Doctorate studies with the goal of a career as a composer and professor of music.



### **French Horn**

Karen Teplik, French Horn – chair sponsored by RoJean Madsen

### **Tru Trumpet & Flugelhorn mpet**

Joshua Haake

### **Timpani & Percussion**

Maria Flurry, Principal – chair sponsored by Jon & Christena Cavaletto

### **Piano**

James D'León

**Violin I**

Katherine McLin, Concertmaster

**Cello**

Ruth Wilde, Principal – chair sponsored by Barbara Metz