

44<sup>th</sup> Season  
*Peninsula Cantare*

**Dr. Jeffrey Benson, Artistic Director**



*Deck the Halls*

Saturday, Dec. 13 2014, 7:30 pm  
Covenant Presbyterian Church, Palo Alto



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# Program

O Come Emmanuel arr. Alice Parker (b. 1925)  
Alexandra Perdeu, harp

What Sweeter Music John Rutter (b. 1945)

Shepherd's Pipe Carol John Rutter

Audience Sing: Deck the Halls arr. John Purifoy  
(see page 8 for words)

Gabriel's Message arr. Stephen Paulus (1949-2014)

I wonder as I wander arr. Troy Robertson (b. 1978)

Audience Sing: Hark, the Herald Angels Sing arr. David Willcocks  
(see page 8 for words)

Carols and Lullabies: Conrad Susa (b. 1935)

Christmas in the Southwest

Alexandra Perdeu, harp

Steve Lin, guitar

Nick Matthieson, marimba and vibraphone

I. ¡Oh, mi Belén! (*Biscayan*)

II. El Desembre Congelat (*Catalonian*)

III. Alegría (*Puerto Rican*)

Sara Scibetta, Deborah Bennett, Andrew Hathaway, Cody Scott, soloists

IV. A la Nanita Nana (*Spanish*)

V. Las Posadas (*Spanish*)

VI. Campana sobre Campana (*Andalucian*)

VII. En Belén Tocan a Fuego (*Castilian*)

Toby Goldberg, Cody Scott, soloists

VIII. El Noi de la Mare (*Catalonian*)

Sharon Rice, Paula Ondricek, Ruth Wilkins, Ron Hodges, quartet

IX. Chiquirriquitín (*Andalucian*)

X. El Rorro (*Mexican*)

# Program Notes

## **O Come Emmanuel, arr. Alice Parker**

Parker's setting of this traditional Advent carol is a simple reminder of contrast between the quiet stillness and the eager anticipation of the coming of Christmas. Parker has spent her entire life dedicated to choral music and always tries to capture the essence of the original melody in her arrangements.

## **What Sweeter Music & Shepherd's Pipe Carol, John Rutter**

British composer John Rutter is renowned for his exciting and accessible Christmas carols. In addition to composing and arranging, Rutter is founder and conductor of the professional choir, The Cambridge Singers, and his music and recordings are heard around the globe. The two carols you will hear tonight are both original to Rutter and are strophic. You will hear the choir depicting the story of the shepherds piping the good news of the baby's birth, as well as the choir's celebration through music.

## **Gabriel's Message, arr. Stephen Paulus**

### **I wonder as I wander, arr. Troy Robertson**

These two traditional carols, set for mixed choir and harp, both depict the mystery surrounding the Christmas story. They are in minor mode and while *Gabriel's Message* tells the traditional story, *I wonder as I wander* offers a more introspective look at the life the baby Jesus will have. The melody of this carol also offers a rather unique perspective: it does not end on the tonic. It can be argued that perhaps the melody remains unresolved and unsettled because the author knows what will eventually happen to the new-born child.

— Dr. Jeffrey Benson

## **Carols and Lullabies, Conrad Susa**

*Carols and Lullabies: Christmas in the Southwest* was commissioned by and dedicated to Philip Brunelle and the Plymouth Music Series of Minnesota (now *VocalEssence*). The first performance was given on December 6, 1992 and the piece is widely performed across the country. In discussing the work, Susa writes: "Philip Brunelle suggested I write him a companion to Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols*. To a composer, this tempting offer was another way of asking "How's about writing us a hit?" After several years of me writing in doubt, a friend, Gary Holt,

showed me a collection of traditional Spanish carols he had sung as a boy in Arizona. Excited, I juggled them around to form a narrative. I noted their many connections with Renaissance music along with their homey, artful simplicity. Finally, the overriding image of a Southwestern piñata party for the new baby led me to add guitar and marimba to Britten's harp and to compose connective music and totally re-conceive the carols."

While all of the texts are in Spanish, the historical, regional, and dialectal variations are numerous: Castilian, Biscayan, Catalanian, Andalucian, Mexican, and Puerto Rican. Variety is also common in performing these languages. Conductors often opt for presenting some of the carols (or portions thereof) in English, as is the case this evening. The texts provided below are English translations by Conrad Susa and Paul Guttry.

### **I. ¡Oh, mi Belén!** (Oh, My Bethlehem!)

This quiet lullaby opens with alto and eventually tenor *solis*, perhaps representing the voices of Mary and Joseph as they travel on their way toward Bethlehem. But the lyric also holds the possibility that we all are the pilgrims being guided by the holy light. Especially the surprising B major chord at the end of the movement suggests that the pilgrimage is far from complete, but rather is just beginning.

*Oh, my Bethlehem!*  
*Your beloved hour has arrived!*  
*The light you shine so unceasingly*  
*Is like a beacon that guides us*  
*On our way, night and day.*  
*Oh, my Bethlehem!*

### **II. El Desembre Congelat** (In Frozen December)

A tune now found in many church hymnals with the title words "Cold December Flies Away," this is a lively Catalán carol juxtaposing winter's cold with springtime fecundity and darkness with light. Its three verses may be an implicit anticipation of the soon-to-be three members of the new Holy Family.

*In frozen December, our confusion vanishes.*  
*April is crowned with flowers, and all the world adores.*  
*For in this garden, love bears a divine flower.*  
*It's a beautiful rose, fruitful and fragrant.*

*The first Father made the dark night,  
So that sleep might calm our troubled eyes.  
But on this midnight, a sun shines without end.  
With its beautiful light, heaven itself falls in love.*

*May blooms here, though far away.  
A lily white and gentle, of rarest fragrance  
Which all the world will enjoy forever.  
All His Sweetness! The fragrance!—And our great good fortune!*

### **III. *Alegría*** (Joy)

Extended passages in a minor key (C# minor) open this carol. After the minor-key introduction—the first prominent use of a minor key in the Susa collection—the joyful refrain is made all the more effective when it enters in bright A and E major chords, their exuberance reinforced by the fact that these keys are highly idiomatic for the guitar.

*Walking slowly unto Bethlehem,  
Holy Mary and her husband,  
Traveling with them, though in secret,  
Is the Savior of all nations.*

*Joy and pleasure! For the Virgin passes by us with her husband to  
Bethlehem.*

*When to Bethlehem they had travelled,  
They were searching for a haven.  
All the innkeepers refused them,  
Dressed so poor and heavy laden.*

*As they see Mary and Joseph,  
All the songbirds of the forest  
Serenade them with their singing;  
Precious gifts come from the poorest.*

### **IV. *A la Nanita Nana*** (Composer's note: "the title phrase, . . . a cooing sound from mother to baby, . . . has no translatable meaning.")

This gentle lullaby is a counterpart to "Balulalow" in the Britten carols that helped inspire Susa.

*A la nanita nana, nanita ea,  
 Blessed be my child Jesus! Now you must sleep!  
 Crystal fountain resounding clearly and brightly,  
 Nightingale in the forest, weeping so sweetly,  
 Hush! Now the child is sleeping, laid in a cradle.  
 A la nanita nana, nanita ea bandito sea, nanita ea.*

### **V. Las Posadas** (The Inns)

The *Posada* is an important custom in Spanish-speaking countries in which during the period December 16-24 candlelight processions travel from house to house, the visitors singing the parts of Mary and Joseph seeking shelter and the householders singing the parts of the innkeeper, at first with the “no vacancy” message but eventually with the welcome. Susa’s setting of this carol, mainly for male voices, emphasizes the role and viewpoint of Joseph (as well, perhaps, as of the assumed-male innkeepers), as the earthly father of the newborn infant—who paradoxically is also Joseph’s “Father, . . . God, . . . and Savior.”

*Shall I have them open the stable before you?  
 Shall I bring the shepherds to praise and adore you?  
 Hush, hush now, my darling; see the boy is almost sleeping.  
 My beloved Father, my God and my Savior,  
 Happily you sleep through the harshness of winter.  
 Hush, hush now, my darling; see the boy is almost sleeping.*

### **VI. Campana sobre Campana** (Bell after Bell) (sung in English)

The voices in this exuberant piece clearly imitate bells ringing out the news of the birth. Even the earliest of Christmas legends depicted the shepherds as bringing their own humble gifts to the Christ child, paralleling the wealthier gifts of the Magi. In this charming carol the gifts are cheese, wine, and butter.

*Bell after bell is heard, gathering all who are able!  
 Come to the window and hear the word, you’ll see a child in a cradle.  
 Ding, dong! Oh, ring the bells of Bethlehem,  
 What are the angels singing, what news do they bring?  
 Now that all your flock is gathered, tell me shepherd, what’s the matter?  
 We shall carry to the manger cheese and wine and sweetest butter.  
 Stars in the heavens are shining, shepherd, where will you go tonight?  
 Quickly run to the baby. Watch him slumber so sweetly.*

## VII. *En Belén Tocan A Fuego* (There's a Fire in Bethlehem)

The most poetically striking of the carols in the collection, brimming with surprising imagery, and made even more joyful by infectious dance rhythms.

*There's a fire in Bethlehem,  
In the stable see the flames!  
For they say that born of a Virgin  
From heaven to earth He came!*

*Fish in the river are glistening and dancing,  
Dancing and leaping to celebrate his birthday.*

*In Bethlehem's humble stable  
There's a lovely white carnation,  
It will grow into a purple Lily.  
Greet the Savior of the nations!*

*Virgin Mary, by the river  
Hangs the swaddling clothes of Jesus,  
All the birds around her are singing  
And the river flows rejoicing!*

## VIII. *El Noi de la Mare* (The Child of the Mother)

This tender carol is the most homophonic in the collection. The humble images convey an arresting irony: the poor gifts to a poor Christ Child are still those he “richly deserves.”

*What shall we give to the Child of the Mother?  
What can we bring that will give him delight?  
Bring to him raisins in kingly abundance,  
Bring him the off'rings he richly deserves.*

**IX. *Chiquirriquitín.*** (Composer's note: The title word is probably a variant of *chiquero*, meaning “stable,” manger,” or “sty,” thus, *Ay del chiquirriquitín* probably means “Oh, in the manger!”)

Much of the charm of this carol lies in the contrast between the lively, almost sound-effect-like “chiquirriquitín” refrains and the much more stately, declamatory, homophonic verses.

*In the manger! He is laid in a manger bed.  
Follow us to the manger. Find them all through the doorway,  
There in the stable, Mary Joseph, and Jesus, their holy baby.  
Ox and mule are His guardians sleeping beside Him,  
In the poorest of stables humbly abiding.*

**X. *El Rorro*.** (Composer's note: *El Rorro* means "the baby," but is not used in the text of the song. *A la ruru* is another nonsense sound to lull the baby to sleep.)

Offering further information about the transition from the preceding carol into *El Rorro*, Conrad Susa adds, "In an often overlooked detail in the Christmas story, the New Baby bawls loudly as the shepherds leave in the final bars of *Chiquirriquitn*. (You may hear him in your mind.) His parents now must dandle and soothe him to sleep. Tired themselves, they drift off as the angels hover about them in protective adoration." Like previous movements, this lullaby charmingly surprises with its imagery.

*A La ruru, my precious baby, please go to sleep now, my tiny Jesus.  
The buzzing bee and elephants that lumber;  
    be silent now, do not disturb His slumber.  
Come, oh night of blessing, night of great rejoicing.  
We gather to bless the sweet and holy Virgin.  
Choirs in heaven, raise your voices now to praise Him,  
Sing for joy the blessings that this night has given!*

In a beautifully fitting ending not only to this carol but to the entire collection, the chorus sings "Oo," "ah!," and finally a dying-away hum, growing progressively quieter and moving through interpretive indications in the score such as "calmly flowing," "full of wonder and love," and "spaciously, mysteriously." Some listeners may think this almost inaudible, minor-key ending to be anticlimactic. Yet Susa's parallel to the ending of the Britten "There Is No Rose" carol is deliberate. Both composers clearly understand the theological and musical power of near-silence in the presence of a cosmic mystery like the Incarnation.

Notes on *Carols and Lullabies* written by Bill Pasch

# Audience Carol Sing

## Deck the Halls

Deck the halls with boughs of holly

*Fa la la la la la la la la*

'Tis the season to be jolly

Don we now our gay apparel

Troll the ancient Yuletide carol

Fast away the old year passes

*Fa la la la la la la la la*

Hail the new, ye lads and lasses

Sing we joyous all together

Heedless of the wind and weather

## Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Hark! the herald angels sing,

"Glory to the new born King,

peace on earth, and mercy mild,

God and sinners reconciled!"

Joyful, all ye nations rise,

join the triumph of the skies;

with th' angelic host proclaim,

"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"

Hark! the herald angels sing,

"Glory to the new born King!"

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!

Hail the Sun of Righteousness!

Light and life to all he brings,

risen with healing in his wings.

Mild he lays his glory by,

born that we no more may die,

born to raise us from the earth,

born to give us second birth.

Hark! the herald angels sing,

"Glory to the new born King!"



## Dr. Jeffrey Benson Artistic Director

Jeffrey Benson is thrilled to conduct his debut concert with Peninsula Cantare as their newly appointed Artistic Director. Benson currently serves as Director of Choral Activities at San José State University. *The Washington Post* hails his choirs for singing “with an exquisite blend, subtlety of phrasing, confident musicianship and fully supported tone...that

would be the envy of some professional ensembles.”

Dr. Benson has served as cover conductor for the Grammy award-winning Washington Chorus, where he helped to prepare the ensemble for Maestros Julian Wachner, Leonard Slatkin and Marvin Hamlisch. In 2006, Benson was invited to *La Universidad Americana* in Managua, Nicaragua to assist the university in forming the first *a cappella* choir at the institution.

Choirs under his direction have performed on multiple state and regional conferences of ACDA and NAFME and have toured throughout the United States and Europe, including invited performances at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, The White House and Washington National Cathedral. Recently Dr. Benson’s choirs have been invited to perform with the Rolling Stones, Andrea Bocelli, the Los Angeles Festival Orchestra and the Skywalker Orchestra. In 2006, the Woodlawn Chamber Singers under Dr. Benson’s direction were the only high school choir invited to sing on the National Conference of Chorus America in Washington, DC.

Dr. Benson is an active member of the National Association for Music Education, the American Choral Directors Association, and the National Collegiate Choral Organization, where he currently serves as California National Board Representative. In 2002, ACDA recognized Benson with the first annual Colleen Kirk Award for his outstanding achievement as a young conductor.

A former member of the Choir of Men and Boys at Washington National Cathedral, Dr. Benson is an active singer and a frequent guest conductor and clinician. Benson will conduct several honor choirs on both coasts including appearances at Carnegie Hall and in Europe in 2014-15. Santa Barbara Music Publishing recently released one of Dr. Benson's folksong arrangements under the Charlene Archibeque Choral Series.

Benson received his Masters degree and his Doctorate in Choral Conducting/Music Education from The Florida State University and his Bachelors degree in Music Education from New York University.

# Acknowledgements

## Contributors

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Bellini Foundation

Jay and Vicki Jayswal

## Program

Bob Peterson

## Website

Ron Hodges

Emery Gordon

## Our next concert



*Peninsula Cantare*  
Echoes of Love  
Saturday April 18, 2015 7:30 pm  
Covenant Presbyterian Church

# *Peninsula Cantare*

Dr. Jeffrey Benson, Artistic Director  
Devyn Noriel, Accompanist

## **Soprano**

Arlie Aguirre  
Pamela Eaken  
Shirley Fitzgerald  
Toby Goldberg  
Inna Gitman  
Vicki Hanson  
Christine M. Niccoli  
Sharon Rice  
Lenore Wilkas  
Nancy Winningham  
Lisa Shepherd

## **Alto**

Deborah Bennett  
Connie Buchanan  
Ellen Hill  
Victoria Jayswal  
Kay Johnson  
Miriam Kaplan  
Emily McChristian  
Marilyn Michaelson  
Laura Natta  
Paula Ondricek  
Robyn Peters  
Sara Scibetta

## **Tenor**

Larry Baer  
John Buchanan  
Max Capestany  
Daniel Goldberg  
Cody Scott  
Ruth Wilkins  
Andrew Wilson

## **Bass**

Nathan Bergson-Michelson  
Andrew Hathaway  
Ronald Hodges  
Robert Janssen  
Alex Wilkas

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