

**December 16, 2023**

7:30 pm

**“125 Strong: A Holiday Celebration”**

La Crosse Symphony Orchestra

In collaboration with

Emily Birsan, soprano; Matt Curtis, tenor; Matthew Boehler, bass  
And a special LSO Anniversary Chorus led by Prof. James Wilson

**Christmas Overture**

*Nigel Hess (b. 1953)*

**“O Little Town of Bethlehem”**

*Lewis H. Redner (1831-1908) – arr. Leroy Robertson*

**“The Christmas Song”**

*Melvin Howard Tormé (b. 1925 - 1999), arr. Bob Lowden*

**Hanukkah Festival Overture**

*Lucas Richman (b. 1964)*

**Sleigh Ride**

*Leroy Anderson (1908-1975)*

**We Three Kings for Violin and Orchestra (Aaron Schwartz, violin)**

*Matthew Riley (b. 1982)*

**Chip Davis / Mannheim Steamroller**

*Louis F. “Chip” Davis, Jr. (b. 1947); Calvin Custer (1939 - 1998)*

“Stille Nacht”

“Deck the Halls”

**INTERMISSION**

**Messe Solennelle (St. Cecilia Mass)**

*Charles Gounod (1818-1893)*

I. Kyrie

II. Gloria

III. Sanctus

IV. Agnus Dei

Emily Birsan, soprano; Matt Curtis, tenor; Matthew Boehler, bass  
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**A Holiday Sing-Along**

*John Finnegan (1926-2007) / Jeff Tyzik (b. 1951)*

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**Christmas Overture**

***Nigel Hess (b. Somerset, United Kingdom, July 22, 1953)***

This work was commissioned by John Rutter and given the first performance by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at the Royal Albert Hall. Nigel Hess studied music at Cambridge University and has since worked extensively as a composer and conductor in television, theater, film, and the concert hall. He was invited to arrange and direct the music for Her Majesty the Queen’s private 90<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration at Windsor Castle. He recently received an Honorary Fellowship from St. Catharine’s College, Cambridge. Hess is the great nephew of British pianist Dame Myra Hess.



***Nigel Hess***

**“O Little Town of Bethlehem”**

***Lewis H. Redner (b. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, December 15, 1831; d. Atlantic City, New Jersey, August 29, 1908) – arr. Leroy Robertson***

The text to this carol was written by Phillips Brooks (1835-1893), an Episcopal priest, then rector of Church of the Holy Trinity, Philadelphia, and later of Trinity Church, Boston. He was inspired by visiting the village of Bethlehem in 1865, writing the poem, “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” for his church. His organist, Lewis Redner, added the music. The music and words make up one of the most beloved Christmas songs.



***Lewis Redner***

## **"The Christmas Song"**

**Melvin Howard Tormé (b. Chicago, Illinois, September 13, 1925; d. Los Angeles, California, June 5, 1999); arr. Bob Lowden**

Melvin Howard Tormé wrote songs and musical arrangements and later was awarded the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. The writer of more than 250 songs, several of which became jazz standards, he also frequently wrote the arrangements for the songs he sang. Moreover, he often collaborated with Bob Wells, and the best known Tormé-Wells song is "The Christmas Song" (1946), referred to by its opening line "Chestnuts roasting on an open fire." Calvin Custer made numerous arrangements of his works for orchestra, many of which were performed by the Boston Pops Orchestra.



**Melvin Tormé**

## **Hanukkah Festival Overture**

**Lucas Richman (b. January 31, 1964)**

*Hanukkah Festival Overture*, composed by Lucas Richman, is a piece based on the traditional tunes that mark the celebration of the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, also known as the Festival of Lights. The festival is observed by lighting one candle each day on a nine-branch candelabrum, called a menorah. One branch is typically placed above or below the others and its candle is used to light the other eight candles. Hanukkah is celebrated with a series of rituals that are performed every day throughout the eight-day holiday. This year, 2023, Hanukkah begins the evening of Thursday, December 7, and ends sundown on Friday, December 15.

The overture incorporates six specific tunes that speak either of the miracle of the oil that burned seven days longer than expected or that illustrate the manner in which the holiday is celebrated today. The Pacific Symphony Orchestra commissioned this work in 1994. On his website, ([lucasrichman.com](http://lucasrichman.com)), Richman describes the work: "A rousing piece based on the traditional tunes that mark the celebration of the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah. This work has been performed by over 300 orchestras since 1994."



**Lucas Richman**

## **“Sleigh Ride”**

**Leroy Anderson (b. Cambridge, Massachusetts, June 29, 1908; d. Woodbury, Connecticut, May 18, 1975)**

Leroy Anderson was an American composer of short, light concert pieces, many of which were introduced by the Boston Pops Orchestra under the direction of Arthur Fiedler – including this work. The American film composer John Williams described Anderson as "one of the great American masters of light orchestral music."

Anderson studied piano at the New England Conservatory, and in 1925 he entered Harvard University, where he studied musical harmony with Professor Walter Piston, an American composer who taught many well-known composers and conductors including Leonard Bernstein and Samuel Adler. At Harvard University Graduate School, Anderson continued studying with Piston and with Romanian violinist and composer Georges Enescu, earning a Master of Arts in Music degree in 1930.

Harry Ellis Dickson writes in his book, *Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops*, "The discovery of Leroy Anderson was one of the greatest influences upon the success of Fiedler and the Boston Pops." He continues, "Anderson came to Fiedler as a fresh, penniless graduate of Harvard with a piece called *Fiddle-Fiddle*." Fiedler loved the work. This was the beginning of Leroy's rise to fortune as a composer of light classical music.

"Sleigh Ride" is a popular light holiday orchestral piece. Anderson finished the composition in February 1948. An instrumental work, it was first recorded in 1949 by Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops Orchestra and issued on a red vinyl record. Over the years, the work has become a Christmas standard.



**Leroy Anderson**

## **“We Three Kings:” for Violin and Orchestra – Aaron Schwartz, violin**

**Matthew Riley (b. 1982)**

This exciting, beautiful, and cinematic arrangement of a Christmas classic showcases a violin soloist with piano and string orchestra. It is a thrilling work for any holiday program! Matthew (Matt) Riley is an award-winning composer and arranger based in Minneapolis where he lives with his wife and three children. Riley's wide body of work includes original compositions for radio and TV commercials, scores and orchestrations for TV shows, scores for multiple documentary films, and hundreds of arrangements and orchestrations of songs for churches and recording artists.

Riley writes about his philosophy of music, "I want to move and inspire audiences and musicians alike with my music. My mission in life is to share things that I find beautiful, sad, awe-inspiring, euphoric, and sublime with the world."

## **Davis/Custer: (Mannheim Steamroller)**

**Louis F. "Chip" Davis, Jr. (b. Hamler, Ohio, September 5, 1947); Calvin Custer (b. 1939-1998)**

Chip Davis began piano lessons at the age of four, going on to study music at the University of Michigan's School of Music, specializing in bassoon and percussion. After graduation, he performed with the Norman Luboff Choir, one of the leading choral groups which toured from 1963 to 1987, and recorded more than seventy-five albums.

Davis, now a Grammy Award-winning composer and musician, is credited with introducing what has become known as New Age music more than twenty-five years ago. He is the creator and leading member of *Mannheim Steamroller*, which has sold more than twenty million copies of their four holiday albums - and is founder and president of American Gramophone, a record company. He lives with his wife and children near Omaha, Nebraska.

### **"Stille Nacht"**

**Louis F. "Chip" Davis, Jr. (b. Hamler, Ohio, September 5, 1947); Calvin Custer (b. 1939 - 1998)**

*Silent Night* (German: *Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht*) is a popular Christmas carol, composed in 1818 by Franz Xaver Gruber to lyrics by Joseph Mohr in a small town near Salzburg, Austria. The song was declared an intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO in 2011 and has been recorded and arranged for every music genre. This work was published and presented by Mannheim Steamroller. One of Mannheim Steamroller's most popular carols, its unique effects of this Christmas standard make it an ideal centerpiece for the Holidays. Davis was awarded his 19th Gold Record in 2010. The Recording Industry Association of America has also awarded Davis four Multi-Platinum and eight Platinum records. Davis' arrangement of *Stille Nacht* was adapted for orchestra and concert use by Calvin Custer.

### **"Deck the Halls"**

**Louis F. "Chip" Davis, Jr. (b. Hamler, Ohio, September 5, 1947)**

Mannheim Steamroller was among the pioneers of neoclassical electronic music, emerging as one of the driving forces behind the new age phenomenon. Davis worked with classical adaptations he'd composed earlier, and soon began recording what he dubbed "18th century classical rock" -- classical music performed on electric bass and synthesizers. He titled the resulting album *Fresh Aire*. In 1984, Davis issued *Mannheim Steamroller Christmas*, which sold over five million copies on the strength of a Top 40 Adult Contemporary rendition of "Deck the Halls." With 19 gold records and many more platinum and multi-platinum certifications to his credit, Davis' Mannheim Steamroller (along with U2, Jay-Z, and the Beach Boys) is one of the most decorated artists in the entire recording industry. Davis has also written five children's books and continues to produce music.



**Chip Davis**

**INTERMISSION**

## Messe Solennelle (St. Cecilia Mass)

Charles Gounod (b. Paris, France, June 17, 1818; d. Paris, France, October 18, 1893)

- I. Kyrie. *Moderato, quasi Andantino*
- II. Gloria. *Larghetto*
- III. Sanctus. *Andante*
- IV. Agnus Dei. *Andante moderato*

**Emily Birsan, soprano; Matt Curtis, tenor; Matthew Boehler, bass  
And a special LSO Anniversary Chorus led by Prof. James Wilson**

*The score calls for three flutes with piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, four bassoons, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, timpani and percussion, harp, organ, and strings.*

**St. Cecilia Mass** is the name used today for the *Solemn Mass in G Major* by Charles Gounod, composed in 1855 and scored for three soloists, mixed choir, orchestra and organ. The official name is *Messe solennelle en l'honneur de Sainte-Cécile*, in homage of St. Cecilia, the patron saint of music.

The Order of Mass is slightly extended. In the **Gloria**, the prayer *miserere nobis* (have mercy on us) is intensified by an added *Domine Jesu* (Lord Jesus). The mass has an instrumental offertory. In the **Agnus Dei**, the soloists sing between the three invocations the text "*Domine, non sum dignus ut intres sub tectum meum, sed tantum dic verbo, et sanabitur anima mea*" (Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say a word and I shall be healed), sung once by the tenor, once by the soprano. The movement ends with an added *Amen*.

The vocal parts of the mass are performed by three soloists (soprano, tenor, and bass) and a choir of four parts, sometimes with divided tenor and bass. The soloists act mostly as an ensemble, without arias. Gounod scored the mass for a large orchestra.

Gounod, whose full name was Charles-François Gounod, composed a large amount of church music, many songs, and popular short pieces including his *Ave Maria* (an elaboration of a Bach piece). He also wrote operas and is most famous as the composer of *Faust* and *Romeo et Juliette*.

Born in Paris into an artistic and musical family, he started studying piano with his mother, a talented pianist. While still at school, Gounod studied music privately with Anton Reicha – who had been a friend of Beethoven and was described by a contemporary as "the greatest teacher then living." In 1836 Gounod entered the Conservatoire de Paris. During his time at the Conservatoire, he also encountered Hector Berlioz. (LSO patrons have heard music by Berlioz at the LSO concerts.) Gounod later said that Berlioz and his music were among the greatest emotional influences of his youth.

While at the Conservatoire (and on his third attempt), he won France's most prestigious musical prize, the Prix de Rome. The Prix brought the winner two years' subsidized study at the French Institute in Rome. His studies also took him to Italy, Austria and then Germany, where he met Felix Mendelssohn, whose advocacy of the music of Bach was an early influence on him. Gounod was deeply religious, and after his return to Paris, he briefly considered becoming a priest. He composed prolifically, writing church music, songs, orchestral music, and operas.

Gounod moved to England, later returning to France. His absence, and the appearance of younger French composers, meant that he was no longer at the forefront of French musical life, although he remained a respected figure. He died at his house near Paris at the age of 75. A state funeral was held at L'église de la Madeleine, Paris, on October 27, 1893. Among the pallbearers was the future French President Raymond Poincaré. Gabriel Fauré conducted the music, which at Gounod's wish was entirely vocal, with no organ or orchestral accompaniment.

His influence on later French composers was considerable. In Gounod's music there is a strand of romantic sentiment that is continued in the operas of Jules Massenet and other composers; there is also a strand of classical restraint and elegance that influenced Fauré. Claude Debussy wrote that Gounod represented the essential French sensibility of his time.



**Charles Gounod**

### **A Holiday Sing-Along**

***John Finnegan (b. August 18, 1926, Salem, Massachusetts; d. January 2, 2007, Milford, Massachusetts) / Jeff Tyzik (b.1951)***

John Finnegan received his bachelor's and master's degrees in Music from Harvard University and went on to Boston University for additional studies. He attended the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood. Finnegan also played in the Springfield Symphony Orchestra. His orchestral and band arrangements include more than twenty-five scores for the Harvard University Band and for several band publications. A highlight of Finnegan's career was guest conducting the Boston Pops Orchestra at the twenty-fifth reunion of his Harvard class.

This work is a traditional Christmas sing-along for orchestra and audience - a delightful way to start the holiday season. With all the holiday carols many of us remember learning in our childhood, the sing-a-long is sure to be enjoyable when harmonizing with everyone. "Rock of Ages" is a new addition this year. Join in the merriment – a copy of the words of this sing-along is provided!

- *Jingle Bells*
- *Joy to the World*
- *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*
- *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*
- *Silent Night*
- *Mizeh Hidlik ("Who kindled these lights?")*
- *Deck the Halls*
- *O Come, All Ye Faithful*



