

December 19, 2026

7:30 pm

“Holiday Collection with Handel’s Messiah”

La Crosse Symphony Orchestra

A Christmas Festival

Leroy Anderson (1908 – 1975)

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Lewis H. Redner (1831 – 1908)

Stille Nacht

Louis F. "Chip" Davis, Jr., arr. (1947 -)

Calvin Custer, arr. (1939 - 1998)

Hanukkah Festival Overture

Lucas Richman (1964 -)

‘Twas the Night Before Christmas’ – ‘Santa Claus Symphony’ For Narrator and Orchestra

William Henry Fry (1813 – 1864)

“A Visit from St. Nicholas”

Clement Clarke Moore, (1779 – 1863)

Alexander Platt, arr. (1965 -)

Dr. Michael Wodzak, Narrator

Sleigh Ride

Leroy Anderson (1908 – 1975)

INTERMISSION

MESSIAH – an oratorio – from Parts, 1, 2, and 3

G. F. Handel (1685 – 1759)

Chorus - And the glory of the Lord

Chorus - And he shall purify

Recit - Behold, a virgin shall conceive

Air and Chorus - O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion

Chorus - For unto us a child is born

Recits - There were shepherds abiding in the field etc.

Chorus - Glory to God

Recit - Then shall the eyes of the blind

Duet - He shall feed his flock

Chorus - Lift up your heads, O ye gates

Air - I know that my redeemer liveth

Chorus - His yoke is easy

Chorus - Amen

Chorus - Hallelujah Chorus (the audience is invited to stand and sing)

2026 Symphony Chorus

Alexandra Burch, Soprano, and Theodora Ivanova Nestorova, Mezzo-Soprano

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**“Holiday Collection with Handel’s Messiah”
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A Christmas Festival

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

Leroy Anderson’s music has long been recognized for its imaginative brilliance and superb craftsmanship. He composed short light concert pieces, many of which were introduced by the Boston Pops Orchestra under the Arthur Fiedler, music director of the Pops. Fiedler frequently encouraged Anderson to write original works for the Pops.

John Williams, composer and Laureate Conductor of the Boston Pops Orchestra said of him, “Leroy Anderson is one of the great American masters of light orchestral music. Though we have performed his works countless times over the years at the Boston Pops, his music remains forever as young and fresh as the very first day on which it was composed.”

“At age eleven, he began piano studies at the New England Conservatory,” reads *Leroy Anderson at the Piano – Complete Works for Solo Piano – Centennial Edition*. “His musical interests included the double bass, trombone, tuba, organ, arranging and conducting. He studied double bass with Gaston Dufresne of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.”

“In 1925, Anderson entered Harvard University, where he studied musical harmony with Walter Piston. At Harvard University Graduate School, he continued studying with Piston and Georges Enescu earning a Master of Arts in Music degree in 1930. When he was in his last year as an undergraduate, he became the director of the Harvard University Band.

“The care and dedication that Anderson brought to the writing of his symphonic works extended to the piano solo editions of his music,” continues *Leroy Anderson at the Piano – Complete Works for Solo Piano – Centennial Edition*. “He made each of the piano transcriptions of his orchestral pieces in this album. His music captures the imagination of millions of people around the world with its memorable, optimistic melodies, and impeccably crafted orchestrations. Though Anderson is best known for his many popular short pieces, he also composed a piano concerto.”



Leroy Anderson

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Lewis H. Redner (b. Philadelphia, PA, December 15, 1831; d. Atlantic City, NJ, August 29, 1908)

The text 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. Three years later, he wrote the poem *O Little Town of Bethlehem* for his church, and his organist, Lewis Redner, added the music. The music and words make up one of the most beloved Christmas songs.



Lewis H. Redner

“Stille Nacht”

Louis F. “Chip” Davis, Jr. (b. Hamler, Ohio, September 5, 1947)

Calvin Custer, arr. (b. July 15, 1939; d. April 21, 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, including by the New Age music group Mannheim Steamroller.

Silent night, holy night

All is calm, all is bright

Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child

Holy Infant so tender and mild

Sleep in heavenly peace

Sleep in heavenly peace

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.

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.

Mannheim Steamroller has sold more than twenty million copies of their four holiday albums. Davis, founder and president of American Gramophone, a record company, lives with his wife and children near Omaha, Nebraska.



Chip Davis

Hanukkah Festival Overture

Lucas Richman (b. January 31, 1964)

The score calls for three flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, one tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings.

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. In 2026, Hanukkah begins on Friday, December 4 at sundown and ends at nightfall on Saturday, December 12.

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), 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

'Twas the Night Before Christmas – 'Santa Claus Symphony' For Narrator and Orchestra

William Henry Fry (b. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, August 10, 1813; d. Saint Croix, US Virgin Islands, December 21, 1864)

"A Visit from St. Nicholas"

Clement Clarke Moore (b. New York City, New York, July 15, 1779; d. Newport, Rhode Island, July 10, 1863)

Alexander Platt, arr. (b. New York City, New York, April 7, 1965)

Dr. Michael Wodzak, Narrator

The *Santa Claus Symphony* written in 1853 by American composer William Henry Fry is a trailblazing, single-movement Romantic programmatic piece.

Maestro Alexander Platt arranged this popular localized arrangement of the symphony for narrator and orchestra, pairing it with Clement Clarke Moore's classic poem, *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*.

A newfangled version of a true Victorian curiosity: the *Santa Claus Symphony*, or *Christmas Symphony*, by the composer, music critic, and advocate William Henry Fry, premiered in New York City on Christmas Eve by what was then a rival virtuoso orchestra to the New York Philharmonic.

The *Santa Claus Symphony* is a single movement, lasting here 26 minutes, that is a loosely constructed series of episodes, a story told by the orchestra, used here quite strikingly by Fry, who was largely self-taught.

The composer himself supplied audiences that evening with a careful synopsis of his symphonic poem:

A trumpet announces the Savior's birth, and angels take up the chorus. Some of the angels fall away in anger, but the rest end in harmony. Down on Earth, it's a Christmas Eve party with family and dancing. The brass warns of an impending snowstorm. The dancing resumes but is quieter as partygoers leave for home. Sleep descends on the household, and we hear the Lord's Prayer in syllabic cadence on the upper strings. The soprano saxophone, in what is probably the first-ever use of the newly invented instrument in any symphonic work anywhere, plays "Rock-a-by baby." Muted strings mimic the baby's breathing. Out in the snowstorm, a lost traveler is depicted in a rare double bass solo.

Then, Santa Claus enters as a high bassoon, in his horse-drawn sleigh. You can hear him slide down the chimney accompanied by flutes. Plucked strings are the toys being dropped into stockings. The children are still asleep; Santa leaves to the sound of hooves and bells receding into the distance. Extremely high violins portray a chorus of angels singing the familiar "Adeste fideles." The sun rises on Christmas Day. The house awakens to the sounds of "Get up!" on the French horn and "Little Bo-peep" on the trumpets. Children play, the beginning reappears, as does "Adeste fideles," and the Symphony closes in a hymn of praise.

William Henry Fry was born in 1813 in Philadelphia. Fry had a short but busy and productive life – not only a composer, he was a music, art, and political correspondent for several American newspapers, and he also lectured on the history of music. No doubt, given his music critic role, he would have heard many pieces, and, as a composer, would have been open to and influenced by several of his contemporaries. Berlioz is aurally suggested (a bit of research finds Fry and Berlioz met), and Fry must also have had a liking for the lighter things of musical life, Offenbach for example.

Clement Clarke Moore was an American writer, scholar, and real estate developer. He is best known as author of the Christmas poem “A Visit from St. Nicholas,” which first named each of Santa Claus’s reindeer. This poem, “A Visit from St. Nicholas,” later became widely known by its opening line, “’Twas the Night Before Christmas.”

Moore received a Bachelor of Arts from Columbia College as valedictorian of the class of 1798, a Master of Arts in 1801, and an honorary Doctor of Laws (LLD) in 1829.

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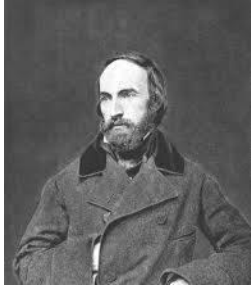
www.classicalsource.com/cd/william-henry-fry-santa-claus-symphony/

Below Maestro Alexander Platt states his ideas about the work:

I’ve honestly loved this curious bit of musical Americana ever since the first commercial recording of it was produced at the end of the last century; and yet, the work, for all its charm, presented significant challenges for live performance. First, was the apparent overblown orchestration, far too grandiose and exotic for its own good, and then an overuse of repetition of the musical material, robbing the work of its essential success as the musical equivalent of a tasty Christmas pudding.

I soon also realized that the work seemed to cry out for spoken narration; then I suddenly remembered that far better-known Victorian Christmas work, Clement Clarke Moore’s poem “A Visit from St. Nicholas”, published in 1823 and universally known of course as ‘Twas the Night Before Christmas, its opening line. With some careful editing of the instrumental ballast as well as an equal pruning-back of the thematic material, a meticulous setting of Moore’s poetry to William Henry Fry’s music began to take shape, as much-needed work for narrator and symphonic ensemble.

There are also several places where Moore’s poetry is expanded out, to fill the needs of both the occasion and the music; the resulting handful of lines, penned by a devoted student of the era, might be difficult for the audience to deduce, but such is the point. Hopefully, the result is the musical equivalent of a Victorian Christmas-card from Olde New-York, a snow-globe of a Santa-Claus symphony for speaker and orchestra.



William Henry Fry



Clement C. Moore



Alexander Platt

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. Leonard Slatkin, former conductor of the St. Louis Symphony and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra writes, “It’s very clear that the impact of Mr. Anderson’s music, both when it was written and in today’s frantic world, is impossible to measure.”

Sleigh Ride is a popular light orchestral piece which Anderson finished in February 1948. 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 song has become a Christmas standard.

“This Christmas season standard conveys a vivid picture of a crisp winter day on a snowy country road, complete with trotting horse, whip, and sleighbells,” reads *Leroy Anderson at the Piano – Complete Works for Solo Piano – Centennial Edition*. “Anderson recalled composing this piece: ‘*Sleigh Ride* was one of the first things I wrote when I got out of the Army. *Sleigh Ride*, I remember, was simply an idea and it was a pictorial thing.’”



Leroy Anderson

INTERMISSION

MESSIAH – an oratorio – from Parts 1, 2, and 3

G. F. Handel (b. Halle, Germany, March 5, 1685; d. Westminster, London, United Kingdom, April 14, 1759)

Chorus - And the glory of the Lord

Chorus - And he shall purify

Recit - Behold, a virgin shall conceive

Air and Chorus - O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion

Chorus - For unto us a child is born

Recits - There were shepherds abiding in the field etc.

Chorus - Glory to God

Recit - Then shall the eyes of the blind

Duet - He shall feed his flock

Chorus - Lift up your heads, O ye gates

Air - I know that my redeemer liveth

Chorus - His yoke is easy

Chorus - Amen

Chorus - Hallelujah Chorus (the audience is invited to stand and sing)

2026 Symphony Chorus

Alexandra Burch, Soprano, and Theodora Ivanova Nestorova, Mezzo-Soprano

The Messiah – First Part (Christmas)

“The Christmas Story is a simple thing,” writes David Kossoff in *The Christmas Story in Masterpieces*. “Humble parents, a baby, a stable, cattle in attendance – its very simplicity is moving. Yet, the story provides a construction to the glory of God. The birth of a baby to poor parents in a stable has inspired so many artists and musicians across so many years. It is no accident that often the best work of an artist or musician is found in his Bible work.

“It is, after all, such a marvelous story. Think of the things that lend it color. Shepherds on a quiet hillside who were told of the birth by a whole multitude of angels, in song. They were also told to go see for themselves and to spread the word. A great star appeared in the sky to welcome that baby; and learned astrologers working independently, in three different countries far away, found matching signs and omens that set them journeying to meet the new baby, bearing priceless gifts.

“Yes, it is a marvelous story,” continues Kasso. “How undiluted is the Christmas Story!”

About The Messiah

George Frederick Handel, a German-British Baroque composer was well-known for his operas, oratorios, concerti grossi, and organ concerti. Born in Halle, Germany, he spent his early life in Hamburg and Italy studying with Johann Praetorius (a composer who wrote an oratorio entitled “David”) and Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow (a composer who taught fugues and canons), before settling in London where he spent most of his career.

“Oratorios may be secular or sacred and are not used as church music in a liturgical sense, but rather they are performed as concert music,” writes James McCray in his book *Church Choir Director’s Guide to Success*. “Their full extended length of over two hours prohibits complete use in a worship service. They give strong visibility to accomplished singers and to the chorus. Oratorios also have a story which creates audience interest and offer opportunities for local or professional soloists.”

“Each December, people flock to churches and concert halls to hear Handel’s scripture-based oratorio, with its glittering succession of choruses, recitatives, and arias,” writes Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim in the *New York Times* on December 20, 2024. “Handel’s work was written for a professional setting.”

Handel's music forms one of the peaks of the "high baroque" style, bringing Italian opera to its highest development, creating the genres of English oratorio and organ concerto, and introducing a new style into English church music. He is consistently recognized as one of the greatest composers of his age. The *Messiah*, Handel’s most successful and best-known oratorio, was composed in 1741 in twenty-four days. It was first performed at a concert given for charitable purposes at Dublin, Ireland in 1742 with Handel conducting the performance.

Later, composer and conductor Max Spicker revised the *Messiah* for music publishers G. Schirmer and Carl Fischer. This edition of Handel’s original work was widely used for many years, from the early to mid-20th century and beyond. Their edition was arranged for a four-part chorus of mixed voices – soprano, alto, tenor, and bass soli – and piano.

In introductory notes to the choral work, Spicker stated that revisions have been a fixture in many performances for decades. In his vocal score Spicker writes, “According to the historical evidence, Handel knew that the Dublin orchestral and choral resources were by no means on a par with those of London and was markedly influenced by this circumstance in the composition of his work. In his choruses he did not go beyond four-part writing, and kept his orchestra within the most modest limits, so that no instrument except violin and trumpet plays a solo part.”

The oratorio will be performed tonight in the full 19th century orchestration by Ebenezer Prout. Prout arranged a complete edition of the *Messiah* for full orchestra and included the conductor score and parts which are being used. Prout’s 1902 edition of Handel's *Messiah* is a historically significant version as it has updated expression marks, phrasing, and articulation to suit the late-Victorian and early-20th-century taste, differing from strictly musicological editions. Prout, who lived from 1835-1909, was an English musical theorist, writer, music teacher, and composer.

Handel, beginning in 1743, brought out the *Messiah* every year in London with great applause. This work is exalted over time and place and remains eternal. The *Messiah* appears more directly to our sense and feeling.

According to more historical evidence, Handel permitted his singers to employ cadences in the areas of his oratorios. Yet, he invariably insisted that they should not be mere embellishments serving simply for outward display of vocal effect but calculated to promote the melodic flow and declamatory expression. They must, consequently, possess musical meaning and value.



George Frideric Handel