



SYMPHONY CHOIR
OF CAPE TOWN

Oratorio de Noël

Conducted by Levi Alexander

Saturday 3
December

7.30PM

Lutheran Church
Strand Street

**This concert is dedicated to the memory of
Kathy Collins who was a faithful member
of our choir for many years**

**Christmas Concert “Cantique de Noël”
Music Director’s Programme Note**

In an increasingly secularised society, Christmastide has become a time for excess expense and misdirected merry-making. This programme, through its music and text, beckons the listener to begin a journey, a journey to a more tender and deeply moving Nativity story. The music and ambience encourages all to gather together in a huddle, hush their voices, and shed the light of a flickering lamp on the Infant in the manger. Just as the angels, lowly shepherds and noble pilgrims gathered in the stable in great anticipation of new beginnings, so we gather here this evening, to uplift our souls with this most glorious Nativity story and find renewed joy and energy to embrace the full beauty of life.

The opening Carol and Marian Hymn summarises the nativity tale and the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah. It tells of an infant child of a royal bloodline, described here as a spotless rose, who is rooted in the Tree of Jesse, a symbolic device that depicts the descent of Jesus from Jesse of Bethlehem, the father of King David.

The Ceremony of Carols is a compilation of beautiful reflective texts. It emphasises the infancy of the Christ-child in its tender accompaniment by the harp. The sixth movement is particularly evocative, “This little Babe so few days old, is come to rifle Satan's fold”. Incredible poetry and wonderfully exciting musical interpretation by Britten in the very close knit canonic entries cast one's mind to a most thrilling medieval battle with its archery battalions.

The Christmas Oratorio is an intimate and tender setting of the nativity. A most gorgeous work that strips Christmastide of its secular thrill and draws the listener's heart to awe and wonder.

The Symphony Choir of Cape Town wishes you a most glorious Christmastide, filled with love, hope, and joy. May you rest well, enjoy the time with family and friends and be re-energised for a new year which holds much promise.

Levi Alexander - Music Director of the Symphony Choir of Cape Town

PROGRAMME

Michael Praetorius: Es ist ein Ros entsprungen – Choir

Benjamin Britten: A Ceremony of Carols – Choir and soloists

O Come All ye Faithful – Choir and audience

***** INTERVAL *****

The First Nowell – Choir and audience

PROGRAMME NOTES

Michael Praetorius: Es ist ein' Ros' entsprungen (1599)

Literally “A rose has sprung up”, this hymn is more commonly known in English as “Lo, how a rose e'er blooming”. The hymn first appeared in print in 1599, but its author is unknown. It was originally written with two verses that describe the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah foretelling the birth of Jesus. It emphasizes the genealogy of Jesus and describes a rose (a symbolic reference to the Virgin Mary) sprouting from the stem of the Tree of Jesse, father of King David. Since the 19th century, other verses have been added. We sing the arrangement by Michael Praetorius.

During the Nazi era, many German Christmas carols were rewritten to promote Nationalist Socialist ideology, and to delete reference to the Jewish origins of Jesus. This carol was thus rewritten as “*Un sist ein icht erstanden / in einer dunklen Winternacht*” (“A light has arisen for us / on a dark winter night”) to evoke sunlight falling on the Fatherland and extolling the virtues of motherhood. (Wikipedia)

Michael Praetorius (1571-1621) was a German composer, organist and music theorist. He was one of the most versatile composers of his age, being particularly significant in the development of musical forms based on Protestant hymns. He was born Michael Schultze (Praetorius being the Latinized version of his family name), the youngest son of a Lutheran pastor. He studied divinity and philosophy and was fluent in a number of languages. His first compositions appeared around 1602/3 and were the first in Germany to make use of the new Italian performance practices. He died in 1621 on his fiftieth birthday. His body was entombed in a vault beneath the organ of the Marienkirche in Wolfenbutel.

Benjamin Britten: A Ceremony of Carols, Op. 28

Benjamin Britten (1913 – 1976) wrote this cantata during World War II while he was crossing the Atlantic in 1942 aboard a cargo ship. The work has become a classical music staple during the Christmas season in English-speaking countries. It is made up of 11 movements. The texts were part of a 1942 collection edited by Gerald Bullett, *The English Galaxy of Shorter Poems*. Some of them are in Latin, some in Middle English based on poems from the 14th to the 16th centuries.

Britten was born in 1913 in Lowestoft, a fishing port on England's east coast. He was the youngest of four children and the only one who showed any interest in classical music. His formal music education involved private lessons in composition, piano and viola. From 1930 to 1933, he studied at the Royal College of Music in London, and by the late 1930s he had become one of Britain's most promising composers.

He died in 1976, having completely changed the face of music in the country, and is regarded as one of Britain's most respected composers.

Did you know?

Britten was a lifelong pacifist and registered as a conscientious objector during World War II. At first he had to render non-combatant service by playing piano at various wartime concerts but was later granted full exemption.

Britten was the first composer to be awarded a life peerage in Britain, and it resulted in a change of name for him. He became known as Baron Britten of Aldeburgh in the British County of Suffolk.

In 2013, more than 2000 events were held in 39 countries to celebrate his centenary.

Did you know?

When Britten was three months old he contracted pneumonia and nearly died. The illness left him with a damaged heart, and doctors warned his parents that he would probably never be able to lead a normal life.

He was one of the last composers brought up on exclusively live music: his father refused to have a gramophone or a radio in the house.

Camille Saint-Saëns: Oratorio de Noël

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) was an only child, born in Paris. His father died when he was less than two months old, and he was sent to live with a nurse south of Paris for two years. A child prodigy on the piano, he gave his first recital at the age of ten and his career as an organist took him to La Madeleine, the official church of the French Empire, a post he held for 20 years. He is often referred to as the greatest organist that the world has ever seen.

In 1875, Saint-Saëns married the 19-year old Marie Truffot, bringing on perhaps the saddest chapter of his life. They had two children, who died within six weeks of each other, one from a four-storey fall. The marriage ended in 1881.

He was something of an anomaly among French composers of the nineteenth century in that he wrote in virtually all genres – operas, symphonies, concertos, songs, sacred and secular music, solo piano and chamber music. And while after 1890 his music was regarded with some condescension in his homeland, in England and the United States he was hailed as France's greatest living composer well into the twentieth century. In the last decades of his life, he remained attached to his dogs and was largely a loner. He died in Algeria in 1921.

Saint-Saëns wrote the Oratorio de Noël – a cantata-like work for soloists, chorus, organ, strings and harp - in less than a fortnight, completing it ten days before its premiere at Christmas 1858. He used several verses from the Latin Bible for the text. The narrative portion is taken from Luke's gospel, while the remainder are from the Gospel of John, Isaiah, Lamentations, and the Psalms.

Did you know?

Camille Saint-Saëns loved to travel. He toured every continent except Australia and Antarctica. On his travels, he developed an interest in North African countries – notably Egypt and Algeria.

In his later years, he opted to settle in Algeria, where he eventually died.

Did you know?

The Carnival of the Animals was a joke!

Saint-Saëns wrote his celebrated Carnival of the Animals as a complete joke. He was known as a serious man and did not want to be associated with the composition because it was not as sombre as his other works.

Shortly after it premiered, Saint-Saëns made it clear that he did not want the complete collection of pieces to be performed. He only allowed a single movement, *Le Cygne* (The Swan), to be published in his lifetime. It was not until his passing that the full work received its first public performance in 1922 by the Concerts Colonne.

LEVI ALEXANDER – Conductor



Levi holds a Masters in Music *cum laude* specialising in Choral Conducting from Stellenbosch University. He also holds a BMus in baritone saxophone performance and conducting from UCT (2015) and is currently studying towards a Postgraduate Certificate in Education specialising in Creative Arts and Music from Rhodes University.

He was the student assistant conductor of the UCT Symphonic Wind Band and Symphony Orchestra, assistant conductor of the Beau Soleil Senior Wind Band, resident conductor of the University of the Western Cape Symphonic Wind Orchestra, assistant conductor of the Symphony Choir of Cape Town, guest conductor of the South African National Youth Orchestra String Ensemble, the National Youth Wind Orchestra of Zimbabwe in the annual Zimbabwean National Music Camp, Windworx Symphonic Wind Ensemble, the Philharmonia Choir of Cape Town and UCT Wind Ensemble.

He is currently the Departmental Head of Music at the SACS High School, peripatetic Lecturer of Classical Saxophone Performance at the South African College of Music (UCT), and Music Director of the Symphony Choir of Cape Town.

Our Soloists this Evening

HLENGIWE MKHWANAZI – Soprano



A native of KwaZulu-Natal and currently residing in Cape Town, soprano Hlengiwe Mkhwanazi is an alumnus of the prestigious Ryan Opera Center at the Lyric Opera of Chicago. She obtained her postgraduate diploma in music performance in 2012 from the University of Cape Town and has won a number of local and international singing competitions.

Hlengiwe has performed in several festivals and concerts and has also performed locally and internationally in various productions of opera and oratorio. Recently she has been guest artist working with the Cape Town City Ballet, Cape Philharmonic Orchestra and CT Opera, as well as the Cape Town Baroque Orchestra.

JODIE KHAN – Soprano



Jodie's interest in music began in her formative years in the New Apostolic Church. She completed a Performance Diploma in Music in 2015 at Stellenbosch University under the instruction of Minette du Toit - Pearce. She is currently under the tutelage of Hanna van Schalkwyk.

In 2016 she worked as a part-time singing lecturer at Stellenbosch University and from 2017-2022 formed part of CT Opera's vocal ensemble performing as soloist and ensemble member in a large number of their productions. She has also performed as soprano solo in several oratorios. She is currently the voice teacher at Frank Pietersen Music Centre and looks forward to many exciting engagements in the future.

DANIELLE SPECKMAN – Mezzo Soprano



Danielle sings the alto solo part in this concert. She hails from Mitchells Plain, Cape Town, and holds a Postgraduate Degree in Opera from the University of Cape Town where she studied under the Direction of Professor Virginia Davids and Professor Kamal Khan. She is currently singing under the direction of Lize Thomas.

Danielle has performed in various operatic and oratorio productions. She has travelled abroad for many performances, touring with different choirs and also with CT Opera. Danielle is currently a member of the Cape Town Opera Vocal Ensemble.

ARTHUR SWAN – Tenor



Arthur studied opera at the SA College of Music and was a member of CT Opera's Young Artists' Programme. His lyric tenor with his natural vocal flexibility and versatility has been in demand on both the concert and opera stage, ranging from the baroque to the late romantic. He has performed most of the standard oratorio repertoire as well as some lesser-known works. His opera repertoire includes works by Mozart, Rossini, Donizetti, Bizet, Puccini and Offenbach.

Arthur's forays into operetta include works by J. Strauss II and Gilbert and Sullivan. After a professional career that took him from Cape Town to Windhoek and London to Hong Kong, Arthur is now happily settled in Cape Town.

CONROY SCOTT – Bass



Conroy studied mechanical engineering at the WP Technical College and was employed as a mechanical engineer at a subsidiary of Daimler Benz. After four years he decided to pursue a full-time musical career. He specialized in Opera at the UCT's Opera School and started taking double-bass lessons with the late Zoltan Kovats. He is now constantly active as an ad-hoc double-bass player with all major South African orchestras.

Conroy's operatic repertoire is extensive and covers an array of roles in many of the major operas. He has also appeared as bass soloist in countless oratorios such as the Mozart Requiem and most notably in Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, for which he received the Woordtrofee (2018) for best classical vocal performance. Conroy earned a Fleur de Cap nomination for Best Supporting Actor in a Musical as Ivan in the musical *Calling Me Home*.

KOBIE DU PLESSIS – Harp



Although born in SA, Kobie currently lives in Barcelona, Spain. She majored in harp at the University of Pretoria and gained scholarships for outstanding performance. She toured South America as harp soloist with the SABC Junior Orchestra. Kobie continued her studies with Ventura Rosenthal and Kathleen Alister and took master classes in Europe with international harp virtuosos including Edward Witsenburg, Susanna Mildonian and Daphne Boden.

Kobie has performed with most of the major symphony orchestras of South Africa and also has extensive experience as a soloist and in chamber groups in several European countries and in South Africa. She loves performing concerts on three of her harps – the Celtic, Austrian Folk, and Concert harp - to demonstrate the variety of sound effects and possibilities on the different instruments, as well as in duo with flute, cello, oboe and voice accompaniment.

Apart from her family, Kobie's main passions are performing and teaching on her different harps and arranging folk music from around the world for her instruments.

WARREN PATIENTIA – Organ



Warren began his music studies at the University of Cape Town where he studied piano, clarinet and later conducting - both choral and orchestral. He graduated from UCT with a BMus Ed degree in 2010.

Warren has performed with UCT Wind Band, the New Apostolic Church Symphony Orchestra, and accompanied the UCT String Ensemble and various Baroque Chamber ensembles in and around Cape Town.

He has played harpsichord, organ and clarinet in performances of various Oratorios and has assisted as a conductor for a number of choral performances.

Warren is a music educator at SACS High School and the choir director for the SACS High School Choir. The Choir performs at all major performances and concerts and has won awards in various local Eisteddfodau. Warren also heads the Clarinet Choir, an ensemble which has also been awarded multiple Gold Diplomas at local Eisteddfodau.

As an accompanist, Warren worked and toured with the Cape Town Male Voice Choir from 2012 to 2018. In 2020, Warren was appointed resident accompanist for the Symphony Choir of Cape Town. The choir performs regularly and performances have included works by a wide range of composers encompassing many different musical styles and genres.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church, Strand Street

The church complex originated in the 1760s and has functioned as a church from the 1780s. There is very little in this church that is not original, and all the detail is in the remarkable carvings by 18th century sculptor, Anton Anreith.

Notice the tall Gothic-arched windows, the stinkwood and yellowwood panelled galleries and of course, the pulpit, which is the church's masterpiece.

If you are wondering why there are limited or no sight-lines in the gallery, thank our ancestors. Slaves in the Cape Colony had to sit upstairs and were only allowed to see "die predikant op die preekstoel."

The Symphony Choir of Cape Town is a non-profit organisation of classical music enthusiasts, which rehearses at Rondebosch United Church.

Under the direction of Levi Alexander, with Warren Patientia as accompanist, the choir aims to provide quality music to the public in conjunction with community organisations and emerging young soloists and conductors.

We are always looking for new members,
so if you are interested in joining us,
please apply online via our website or on email
(see our details below)

**Why not stay in touch with all our news
by joining our mailing list?
Check out our website for more information:**

www.scct.co.za

Find us on Facebook & Instagram: @SymphonyChoirCT

Email: symphonychoircapetown@gmail.com

Non-Profit Organisation Registration number: 053-049 NPO

Our ability to continue as a choir and to be able to perform choral music for music lovers of Cape Town is entirely dependent on the generosity of our sponsors.

This evening we specially thank
The Rupert Music Foundation



And the estate of the late Kathy Collins

**Should you wish to become a sponsor,
please contact us (see our details above)**

Special thanks go to Gretchen van der Byl
(email: gretchencvdb@gmail.com)
for our poster and cover artwork