

It feels odd to think about beginnings in December—the final month of the year, with the winter solstice approaching and the days getting shorter. And yet: we welcome you to the concert that opens our season, **In Winter’s House**, as we wait in anticipation for new beginnings, whether sacred or secular. This concert serves as an invitation into our way of thinking for a season we’ve called **Wide the Circle**, where we welcome the stranger, open our arms to others, and strive for common ground and connection in a world that sorely needs it.

Our concert’s structure is built around the ancient liturgical structure of Evensong, a sung service originating from the Church of England in 1549, designed for communal evening worship. Today’s concert replaces the readings with contemporary reflections on winter, and various liturgical elements with spiritual and seasonal alternatives. We hope this music resonates with all in our community, believers or non-believers, as we intend: an expression of our human experience, described through an enduring, ancient musical architecture.

We open with an unlikely pairing: the raucous debauchery of Ralph Vaughan Williams’ **Wassail Song**, and the quiet beauty of Howard Helvey’s *O Lux Beatissima*. This tableau could be two neighboring houses: one full of the joy of imbibing with friends, the other still with reflection, clinging to a “most blessed light.” Then, **Maoz tzur**, one of the few near-universal hymns of the Jewish faith, sung by millions of Jews lighting their Hanukkah candles to mark the Festival of Lights.

As Part II begins, imagine the camera panning into another house, evoked in Jane Draycott’s stunning poem, **In Winter’s House**. Joanna Marsh’s cinematic and expressive music matches, as she takes us through a transformation from a cold, choked-up world to one full of light, sparked by a child’s dream of fire. Then, we nod our heads to the mainstay of the ancient liturgy with a set of Evening Canticles by Herbert Howells, written for King’s College, Cambridge. The **Magnificat & Nunc dimittis** show first the ecstasy of Mary having learned she will bear Jesus Christ, and then the solace of Simeon knowing he will see the face of the Lord—“a light”—before he dies.

We burst out of the gates in Part III with Robert Maggio’s galloping setting of Walt Whitman in **As Long As We Live**. In typical Whitmanian fashion, he invites the reader to travel with him—and asks if we might “stick by each other as long as we live.” Reena Esmail’s **A Winter Breviary** encompasses a more subtle approach to seeking, and asking questions, before bursting into praise at the impermanence of winter. She effortlessly fuses Western and Indian Classical musical languages with poetry that is equally nebulous, both sacred and secular at once.

After such exuberance, Part IV brings us to a delicate dénouement: first, with Zanaida Robles’s simple round-like Kwanzaa song, **Umoja**. It’s a reflection on one of seven principles of Kwanzaa, translating to unity. Jacob Narverud’s **Season of Light** reminds us to cherish the “comfort and stillness of night” this season, and to be with each other. And Abbie Betinis and Michael Dennis Browne’s **Carol of the Stranger** urges us to welcome all into our house—to “make wide the circle.”

What might that look like in our Lives? In our Society? In our World? Caroline Shaw offers one answer with **Her Beacon-Hand Beckons**, excerpted from her larger work “To the Hands.” It was a direct response to the immigration and refugee crises she was witnessing in 2015—though timely even now. It serves as our “benediction,” a plea for blessing and guidance. How can we be a refuge to others in times of darkness? How can we radiate light, or lighten the load, or lower our walls? What memories will you live in this season of light? What will you tell the Silence, or the Stranger, or the Mystery?

Part I: Most Blessed Light

Wassail Song arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)
O Lux Beatissima Howard Helvey (b. 1968)
CAROL: Maoz Tzur/Rock of Ages trad. Jewish hymn, ad. Jeremy Edelstein (b. 1995)

Part II: A Flame Being Dreamt

In Winter's House Joanna Marsh (b. 1970)
First Reading: "Those Winter Sundays" Robert Hayden (1913-1980)
Mark Kloeppe, *reader*
Magnificat, from *Collegium Regale* Service Herbert Howells (1892-1983)
Second Reading: "The Solstice" W.S. Merwin (1927-2019)
Mark Kloeppe, *reader*
Nunc dimittis, from *Collegium Regale* Service Herbert Howells (1892-1983)
Will Tollefson, *tenor*
CAROL: Deck the Hall trad. Welsh carol

—intermission—

Part III: Forgiving Light, Our Guide

As Long As We Live Robert Maggio (b. 1964)
A Winter Breviary Reena Esmail (b. 1983)
1. We Look For You (Evensong)
2. The Year's Midnight (Matins)
3. The Unexpected Early Hour (Lauds)
Third Reading: "White-Eyes" Mary Oliver (1935-2019)
Mark Kloeppe, *reader*

Part IV: Feed the Fire

Umoja, from Kwanzaa Songs Zanaida Stewart Robles (b. 1979)
Pete Jones and Maggie Smith, *soloists*
Season of Light Jacob Narverud (b. 1986)
Carol of the Stranger Abbie Betinis (b. 1980)
Adam Brown, *baritone*
CAROL: In the Bleak Midwinter Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

Benediction: we will be your refuge

Her Beacon-Hand Beckons, from To the Hands Caroline Shaw (b. 1982)

Wassail Song – arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams

Wassail, Wassail, all over the town,
Our bread it is white and ale it is brown;
Our bowl it is made of the green maple tree;
In the Wassail bowl we'll drink unto thee.

Here's a health to the ox and to his right eye,
Pray God send our master a good Christmas pie,
A good Christmas pie as e'er I did see.
In the Wassail bowl we'll drink unto thee.

Here's a health to the ox and to his right horn,
Pray God send our master a good crop of corn,
A good crop of corn as e'er I did see,
In the Wassail bowl we'll drink unto thee.

Here's a health to the ox and to his long tail,
Pray God send our master a good cask of ale,
A good cask of ale as e'er I did see,
In the Wassail bowl we'll drink unto thee.

Come, butler, come fill us a bowl of the best;
Then I pray that your soul in heaven may rest;
But if you do bring us a bowl of the small,
May the Devil take butler, bowl and all!

Then here's to the maid in the lily white smock,
Who tripp'd to the door and slipp'd back the lock;
Who tripp'd to the door and pull'd back the pin,
For to let these jolly Wassailers walk in.
Wassail, Wassail, all over the town,

— folksong

O Lux Beatissima – Howard Helvey

*O lux beatissima
reple cordis intima
tuorum fidelium.*

O most blessed light,
fill the inmost heart
of your faithful.

*Sine tuo numine,
nihil est in homine,
nihil est innocuum.*

Without the nod of your head,
there is nothing in man,
nothing that is harmless.

— from “*Veni Sancte Spiritus*,”
gen. attr. Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury (c. 1150 – 9 July 1228)

In Winter's House – Joanna Marsh

In winter's house there's a room
that's pale and still as mist in a field
while outside in the street every gate's shut firm,
every face as cold as steel.

In winter's house there's a bed
that is spread with frost and feathers,
that gleams in the half-light like rain in a disused yard
or a pearl in a choked-up stream.

In winter's house there's a child
asleep in a dream of light that grows out
of the dark, a flame you can hold in your hand
like a flower or a torch on the street.

In winter's house there's a tale
that's told of a great chandelier in a garden,
of fire that catches and travels for miles,
of all gates and windows wide open.

In winter's house there's a flame
being dreamt by a child in the night,
in the small quiet house at the turn in the lane
where the darkness gives way to light.

— *Jane Draycott (b. 1954)*

FIRST READING:

Those Winter Sundays, by Robert Hayden (1913-1980)

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?

Magnificat (Collegium Regale) – Herbert Howells

My soul doth magnify the Lord,
and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden.
For behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath magnified me, and holy is his Name.
And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations.
He hath showed strength with his arm;
He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek.
He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away.
He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel,
As he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever.

—*Luke 1:46-55, Book of Common Prayer, 1662*

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

SECOND READING:

The Solstice, by W.S. Merwin (1927-2019)

They say the sun will come back
at midnight
after all
my one love

but we know how the minutes
fly out into
the dark trees
and vanish

like the great ‘ōhi‘as and honey creepers
and we know how the weeks
walk into the
shadows at midday

at the thought of the months I reach for your hand
it is not something
one is supposed
to say

we watch the bright birds in the morning
we hope for the quiet
daytime together
the year turns into air

but we are together in the whole night
with the sun still going away
and the year
coming back

Nunc dimittis (Collegium Regale) – Herbert Howells

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word;
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
which thou hast prepared before the face of all people,
to be a light to lighten the Gentiles,
and to be the glory of thy people Israel

—*Luke 2:29-32*

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

As Long As We Live – Robert Maggio

Allons! through struggles and wars!
Have the past struggles succeeded?
What has succeeded? yourself? your nation? Nature?
Now understand me well—it is provided in the essence of things that from any fruition of success,
no matter what, shall come forth something to make a greater struggle necessary.

My call is the call of battle,
He going with me must go well arm'd,
He going with me goes often with spare diet, poverty, angry enemies, desertions.

Allons! the road is before us!
[Camerado,] (*My friend*) I give you my hand!
I give you my love more precious than money,
I give you myself before preaching or law;
Will you give me yourself? will you come travel with me?
Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?

– *Walt Whitman (1819-1892)*
“*Song of the Open Road*,” 6, 1867 edition
[Originally published in 1856] as “*Poem of the Road*”

A Winter Breviary – Reena Esmail

1. We Look For You (Evensong)

Eventide, our single star,
One looking star, this night.
Next to me, the sparrow hen,
Two pilgrims small and bold.
Dusking hour, that lonely hour
The sky dims blue to grey.
Our forest road will fade,
We look for You.
Pines glisten wet with sleet,
She looks with me,
We look for You.

Fog falls in
So close, my breath,
She looks with me,
We look for You:
Great Silent One Unseen,
We look for You.
Eventide, our single star,
One looking star, this night.
We look for You,
Forgiving light, our guide.

2. The Year's Midnight (Matins)

The longest night is come,
A matins for beasts, they low, they kneel,
O, their sleep, their psalm sung.
A matins for trees, they slow, they stem,
O, their reach, their psalm won.
Hush, hush,
Can I hear them?
Can I hear what is not said?
Hush, hush,
Can I hear You?
Ev'ry need met.

3. The Unexpected Early Hour (Lauds)

Praise be! praise be!
The dim, the dun, the dark withdraws
Our recluse morning's found.
The river's alive
The clearing provides
Lie down, night sky, lie down.
I feel the cold wind leaving, gone,
I feel the frost's relief.
My tracks in the snow can still be erased
In us, the sun believes.
Winter is, Winter ends,
So the true bird calls.
The rocks cry out
My bones cry out
All the trees applaud.
Ev'ry hard thing lauds.
Lie down, night sky, lie down.
I know the seeding season comes,
I know the ground will spring.
My fate is not night

To light, the path is dark,
Our star has gone.
Beneath my feet a year of leaves
fallen, frozen, done.
I walk these woods,
The longest night is come,
Above me, the sparrow,
She brings our new seed home.
Brown true sparrow,
Take tomorrow home.

I don't need to try
Behold! The dawn, within.
Horizon lights across my thoughts,
Horizon lines redraw.
Inside of my throat a rise of the gold
Inside my chest I thaw.
Winter is, Winter ends,
Nothing stays the same.
The moon strikes high,
The sun strikes high and
Now I hear your name:
Earth's Untired Change.
Praise be! praise be!
The unexpected early hour
grows the good light long.
Our darkness ends,
O mercy sun,
Trust can warm us all.
Begin again, again, again,
O may our day begin!

—*all poems by Rebecca Gayle Howell (b. 1975)*

THIRD READING:
White-Eyes, by Mary Oliver

In winter
all the singing is in
the tops of the trees
where the wind-bird

with its white eyes
shoves and pushes
among the branches.
Like any of us

he wants to go to sleep,
but he's restless—
he has an idea,
and slowly it unfolds

from under his beating wings
as long as he stays awake.
But his big, round music, after all,
is too breathy to last.

So, it's over.
In the pine-crown
he makes his nest,
he's done all he can.

I don't know the name of this bird,
I only imagine his glittering beak
tucked in a white wing
while the clouds—

which he has summoned
from the north—
which he has taught
to be mild, and silent—

thicken, and begin to fall
into the world below
like stars, or the feathers
of some unimaginable bird

that loves us,
that is asleep now, and silent—
that has turned itself
into snow.

Umoja – Zanaida Robles

“Umoja” means unity.

Season of Light – Jacob Narverud

Come sit by the fire and share stories of old,
bright visions of time and of wonders we’re told.
Surrounded by comfort and stillness of night,
we live in the memories of the season of light.

Come join in the cheer of the fresh falling snow,
where wonder and radiance set hearts all aglow.
For a moment on Earth all that’s wrong turns to right
and we’re warm in the spirit of the season of light.

Surrounded by comfort and stillness of night,
we live in the memories of the season of light.

—*Jacob Narverud (b. 1986)*

Carol of the Stranger – Abbie Betinis

Peace and grace be to this house
Where all are welcome in;
Receive the guest, receive this heart:
Tell the Stranger, tell.

*Tell the Stranger what you cannot tell
Those who love you and desire your joy:
Tell.*

Make tall your walls, make long these beams,
Who once believed alone;
Make wide the circle, feed the fire:
Tell the Silence, tell.

*Tell the Silence what you cannot tell
Those who love you and desire your joy:
Tell.*

Blessing be upon this place,
Let every wound be healed,
Let every secret, every dream:
Tell the Angel, tell.

*Tell the Angel what you cannot tell
Those who love you and desire your joy:
Tell.*

Peace and grace be to this house,
All will be returned;
Let every soul be called your own,
Tell the Mystery, tell.

*Tell the Mystery what you cannot tell
Those who love you and desire your joy:
Tell.*

—*Michael Dennis Browne (b. 1940)*

3. Her beacon hand beckons (from *To the Hands*) – Caroline Shaw

Her beacon-hand beckons:

give
give to me
those yearning to breathe free
tempest-tossed they cannot see
what lies beyond the olive tree
whose branch was lost amid the pleas
for mercy, mercy
give
give to me your tired fighters
fleeing flying
from the
from the
from
let them

i will be your refuge
i will be your refuge
i will be
i will be
we will be
we will
we will be your refuge

—*Caroline Shaw (b. 1982)*