victoria baroque

Festive Concertos
By Christina Hutten

Saturday, November 28 at 2:30pm
St John the Divine | 1611 Quadra Street

Music has been a powerful connective force throughout human history. It can spread emotional contagion (the shared experience of emotion) and trigger memory. Music engages our minds with layered patterns of rhythm, melody, and harmony. And, because memories associated with strong emotion become more deeply embedded, emotionally evocative music not only intensifies our important life events and celebrations but also cements them in our memories. How many of your favourite holiday memories are associated with music? This concert is a festive program to prepare you for the holidays, but it is also a program about memory – memories of community, longings for a remembered rural life, musical earworms, and more.

In the past, winter was the season of dancing. Carols were popular dances, often performed by a ring or chain of dancers. The texts of these dance songs referenced the festive season, dance steps, and contexts for singing and dancing. In the medieval era, carol dancing was sometimes incorporated into the Christmas liturgy. These carols for Christmas came to be known as *noëls* or *nowels*, derived from the Latin *natalis* – birthday. Renaissance historian Estienne Pasquier writes, "In my youth, in almost every family, it was a custom that had become a ceremony, to sing every evening some noels." By the late sixteenth century, keyboard versions of these ancient dance songs begin to appear, probably for use as preludes, postludes, and offertories for the Mass, but also as home entertainment. In the French Chapelle Royale, noëls were played all day on Christmas Eve. In this context, Marc-Antoine Charpentier composed his *Noëls pour les instruments*, dance suites for Christmas. Wouldn't it be fun to add some dancing to your carol singing this year?

Another powerfully evocative winter tradition involves the herding of sheep and cattle from high alpine summer pastures to warmer lowlands, accompanied by the sounds of pastoral music, including flutes and the mellow and reedy shepherd's pipes, known as *zampogna* in Italy. In the Baroque, the *siciliana*, a folk dance from Sicily that is a sort of lilting slow jig, became a musical signal of a pastoral context. For example, the instrumental Pifa in Handel's Messiah is a *siciliana* that sets the scene of shepherds keeping watch over their flocks before they are stunned by the angelic announcement of the birth of Jesus. Telemann's Concerto in D Major features another example of this pastoral dance with all its associations with winter rest and the pleasures of folk music.

One might expect Vivaldi to include a *siciliana* in his Violin Concerto in E Major "*per il Santissimo natale*", as so many other Christmas concertos do. Instead, Vivaldi paints the mood of

Christmas Eve in a rather different way. He asks the whole orchestra, including the violin soloist, to play with mutes, creating a sense of hushed anticipation. The solo violin line sits in a very high register, sparkling, shimmering, and whistling. For me, this is the sound of an icy winter's night with just a few flakes of snow in the air. In Gregor Joseph Werner's *"Dezember,"* you will hear more examples of musical scene painting, from snow squalls to a New Year's party. Though he is mostly unknown today, Werner held a very significant musical position. He was Haydn's predecessor as music director at the Esterhazy court.

Have you ever experienced "Involuntary Musical Imagery" – music appearing in your mind, unbidden? Some earworms seem to ricochet through the centuries. Sometimes, a piece of music sounds so much like a familiar song, despite being unrelated, that we can't un-hear the connection. Movements of Handel's *Messiah* have earworm quality and incredible longevity. Handel's *Messiah* is one of very few Baroque pieces that has remained continually in the performing repertoire since it was composed. I created a pastiche Handel's *Messiah* concerto for this program, consisting of a movement from his Concerto a due cori, HWV 332, which repurposes the chorus "And the Glory of the Lord"; Mozart's subtle reworking of "He Shall Feed His Flock"; and a movement from Handel's Organ Concerto, Op. 7, No. 3, based on a theme awfully similar to the "Hallelujah Chorus". That organ concerto movement blurs the distinction between Handel's deliberate repurposing of his own music and coincidental musical similarity. The Bach Gavotte that ends the program must certainly be a case of coincidental similarity. How does it sound so much like Hark the Herald Angels Sing? Could it be that a memory of Bach's Gavotte appeared unbidden in Mendelssohn's mind when he composed that tune of Hark the Herald Angels? Did he know Bach's Orchestral Suites as he knew Bach's keyboard music and Passions?

Finally, a comment about (almost) forgetting. Despite its strong connection with memory, so much music of the past survives only by chance. Music is ephemeral. It persists in memory for a time, possibly in notation for a few centuries, but eventually it passes away. That continues to be true today. When I created this program, I hoped to share with you a piece called *Winter's Prelude* by Canadian composer and jazz pianist, James Gelfand. When I wrote to request a copy of the piece, neither the composer nor the harpsichordist who premiered the work were able to locate one in their records, so the piece is now being transcribed by ear from the only surviving recording! In its place, you will hear the Praeludium from Christoph Graupner's suite "Vom Winter", the only surviving suite from a four-seasons cycle that he wrote for the pleasure of home entertainment.

Wishing you all a pleasant and memorable holiday season in the company of loved ones and good neighbours.

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2026-27 Season | Concert No. 2
Title: Festive Concertos
Date and Time: Saturday, November 28 at 2:30pm
Location: St. John the Divine, 1611 Quadra Street
Run time: 70 mins plus 20 minute intermissions

Short Description:

Instrumental music full of flair and virtuosity exploring the approach of winter and celebrating the holiday season. The program will feature concertos by Telemann and Vivaldi, French carols by Charpentier, and more, led by violinist Chloe Meyers.

Programme:

Carillon	Louis Couperin (1626-1661)
Noëls sur les instruments, H. 531	Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643-1704)
Telemann Concerto for Two Flutes, Violin and Cello in D major Allegro (3rd mov't), Sicilliano, Gavotte	Telemann
Winter's Prelude (harpsichord solo)	James Gelfand (b. 1959)
Il Dezèmbre from *Calendrier musical instrumental*	Gregor Joseph Werner (1693-1766)
In dulci jubilo, BWV 608, arranged for strings	Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
Intermission	
Concerto in Bb Major, "Memories of *Messiah"* Ouverture, HWV 332/I (And the glory) Larghetto e piano (He shall feed his flock) Allegro, HWV 308/I (Hallelujah)	George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)
Violin Concerto in E Major, "Il Riposo", RV 279	Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)
Carillon	Telemann
Noëls sur les instruments, H. 534	Marc-Antoine Charpentier
Gavotte from Orchestral Suite No. 4 (Hark the Herald Angels Sing)	Johann Sebastian Bach

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Bios:

Chloe Meyers, guest violin soloist

Violinist Chloe Meyers performs with early music ensembles across North America as leader, orchestra member, and chamber musician. She is the concertmaster of the Pacific Baroque Orchestra in Vancouver and co-concertmaster of Arion Baroque Orchestra in Montreal. She has led or appeared as soloist with groups including the Victoria Baroque Players, Pacific MusicWorks, Ensemble Les Boréades, the Theatre of Early Music, Ensemble Masques, and Les Voix Baroques, of which she was a founding member. She has had the pleasure of sharing the stage with international violin stars, performing double concerti with Stefano Montanari, Enrico Onofri, Amandine Beyer, and Cecilia Bernardini. Chloe's playing may be heard on many award-winning disks, including the 2022 Juno award winning recording "Solfeggio"… in which she leads the orchestra L'Harmonie des Saisons as concertmaster. In 2023, she was nominated as Best Musical Director for her work in Pergolesi's Stabat Mater with the Edmonton Opera.