

2021 -
2022
A SEASON OF
LIGHT AND
IMAGINATION



MENDELSSOHN
CHOIR OF PITTSBURGH

THE PROMISE OF LIGHT

DECEMBER 10-18, 2021
VARIOUS LOCATIONS

Matthew Mehaffey, *Music Director*

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SPECIAL THANKS

MCP is grateful to the following individuals and organizations that supplied expertise and/or materials for our sensory friendly performance of The Promise of Light:

**Dr. Jeryl Benson, Dr. Meghan Blaskowitz,
Dr. Abigail Delehanty, Alivia Cartwright,
Rachel DeStefano, Dr. Amy Mattila, Katie Micco,
& Dr. Heather Leavy Rusiewicz** (Duquesne University)

Vanessa Braun (Pittsburgh Cultural Trust)

Anne Fullenkamp (Children's Museum of Pittsburgh)

Kathryn Gigler & Lindsey Kaine (Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre)

Amber Haer (Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children)

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THE PROMISE OF LIGHT

Song Lyrics

Stars

Sara Teasdale/*Ēriks Ešenvalds*

Alone in the night	Myriads with beating	And I know that I
On a dark hill	Hearts of fire	Am honored to be
With pines around me	The aeons	Witness
Spicy and still	Cannot vex or tire;	Of so much majesty.
And a heaven full of stars	Up the dome of heaven	
Over my head	Like a great hill	
White and topaz	I watch them marching	
And misty red;	Stately and still	

White Winter Hymnal (in E)

Fleet Foxes/*Robin Pecknold*

I was following the pack,
All swallowed in their coats,
With scarves of red tied 'round their throats
To keep their little heads from falling in the snow,
And I turned 'round and there you go.
And, Michael, you would fall
And turn the white snow red as strawberries in the summertime.

Celebration

Tom Jones/*Harvey Schmidt*

Timothy Marquette and Zanna Fredland, soloists

Some people say that tonight is the night
When the bird will fly and eat away the light;
And it may be so. I just don't know.
All I know is up until we have to go,
I want to celebrate! Make a celebration!
I want to celebrate! Savor each sensation!
Feel the blazing fire! Drain the cup of wine.
I want to light the torch and teach the sun to shine;
I want to celebrate! Ev'ry day!

Some people say that today is the day
When the cold will come and never go away;
When the bird will fly, the wind will blow--
But something deep inside me says it can't be so.
I want to celebrate! Make a celebration!
I want to celebrate! Savor each sensation!
Something deep inside says: beneath the snow
There's a tiny seed and it's gonna grow!
I want to celebrate! Celebrate! Celebrate!
Ev'ry day!

READING: Astronomy Lesson

Anastasia L. Robinson and Lucky T. Rattan, readers

The Promise of Light

Len Schiff/Georgia Stitt

August was your sweetest month, beautiful and bright;
September burned, October turned into November's night.
So you wrap yourself in wool and down
And December dons her midnight gown
With a snowy cape and a starry crown
And you settle in for winter,

Winter's heart is cold and dark, bitter and severe,
But when the shrouds of snow and clouds depart, the moon is near.
And your face is washed in silver beams,
And the sidewalks shine like frozen streams,
And the streetlamps glow, and the city dreams...
So blow wind and fall the snow
You will walk into the night.
You'll spread your arms and tip your face
Towards the grace and the promise of light.

READING: A Word About Winter

Ogden Nash

Jonathan A. MacDonald, reader

Now the frost is on the pane,
Rugs upon the floor again,
Now the screens are in the cellar,
Now the student cons the speller,
Lengthy summer noon is gone,
Twilight treads the heels of dawn,
Round-eyed sun is now a squinter,
Tiptoe breeze a panting sprinter,
Every cloud a blizzard hinter,
Squirrel on the snow a printer,
Rainspout sprouteth icy splinter,
Willy-nilly, this is winter.
Summer-swollen doorjambs settle,
Ponds and puddles turn to metal,

Skater whoops in frisky fettle,
Golf club stingeth like a nettle,
Radiator sings like kettle,
Hearth is Popocatepetl.
Runneth nose and chappeth lip,
Draft evadeth weather strip,
Doctor wrestleth with grippe
In never-ending rivalry . . .
On the hearth the embers gleam,
Glowing like a maiden's dream,
Now the apple and the oak
Paint the sky with chimney smoke,
Husband now, without disgrace,
Dumps ashtrays in the fireplace.

Sleigh Ride

Mitchell Parish/*Leroy Anderson*

Just hear those sleigh bells jingling,
Ring ting tingling too.
Come on, it's lovely weather
For a sleigh ride together with you.
Outside the snow is falling
And friends are calling "yoo hoo;"
Come on, it's lovely weather
For a sleigh ride together with you.
Giddy yap, giddy yap, giddy yap,
Let's go, Let's look at the show,
We're riding in a wonderland of snow.
Giddy yap, giddy yap, giddy yap,
It's grand, Just holding your hand,
We're gliding along with a song
Of a wintry fairy land.

Our cheeks are nice and rosy
And comfy cozy are we.
We're snuggled up together

Like two birds of a feather would be.
Let's take that road before us
And sing a chorus or two;
Come on, it's lovely weather
For a sleigh ride together with you.
There's a birthday party
At the home of Farmer Gray.
It'll be the perfect ending to a perfect day.
We'll be singing the songs
We love to sing without a single stop.
At the fireplace while we watch
The chestnuts pop. Pop! Pop! Pop!

There's a happy feeling
Nothing in the world can buy
When they pass around the coffee and the pumpkin pie
It'll nearly be like a picture print by Currier and Ives.
These wonderful things are the things
We remember all through our lives!

READING: A Severe Lack of Holiday Spirit

Amy Gerstler

Scott M. O'Neal, reader

I dread the icy white concussion of winter.
Each snowfall demands panic, like a kidnapper's hand
clapped over my chapped mouth.
Ice forms everywhere, a plague of glass.
Christmas ornaments' sickly tinkle makes my molars ache.
One pities the anaemic sun come January.
Trees go skeletal.
Children born in the chilly months are apt to stammer.
People hit the sauce in a big way all winter.
Amidst blizzards they wrestle unsuccessfully with the dark comedy
of their lives, laughter trapped in their frigid gizzards.
Meanwhile, the mercury just plummets,
like a migrating duck blasted out of the sky
by some hunter in a cap with fur earflaps.

To Shorten Winter's Sadness

Thomas Weelkes

To shorten winter's sadness
See where the nymphs with gladness — Fa la.
Disguised all are coming,
Right wantonly a-mumming. — Fa la.
'Though masks encloud their beauty,
Yet give the eye her duty; — Fa la.
When Heav'n is dark it shineth
And unto love inclineth. — Fa la.

Reading: from Small Poems for the Winter Solstice

Margaret Atwood

Gail Elizabeth Roup, reader

The weeks blink out, the winter solstice
with its killed pine branches
and tiny desperate fires
is almost upon us
again & again, in fifty versions
the trees turn dull blue, the fields dun
for the last time.
We have a minute, maybe two
in which we're walking together
towards the edge of that evergreen forest
through the drifted snow
which is no colour,
which has just fallen,
which has just fallen,
on which we leave no footprints.

Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening

Robert Frost/*Randall Thompson*

Anna Lahti, reader

Whose woods these are I think I know
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.
My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farm-house near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.
He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sounds the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.
The woods are lovely, dark and deep
But I have promises to keep
And miles to go before I sleep
And miles to go before I sleep.

Solstice

Milton Brasher-Cunningham/*Taylor Scott Davis*

Come sit in the dark with me
and look at that moon that
is so at home in the night
let us reach deep into the
pockets of our souls for
scraps of hope and wonder

come gaze at the firefly stars
sing softly into this silent night
Oh that we had a ladder to make
a constellation of ourselves
a consolation of ourselves
come sit in the dark with me

Icicles (Tim Heavner, piano solo)

J. Benjamin Druskin

Let There Be Light!

Susan Bentall Boersma/Craig Courtney

And God said:
Let there be light out of the darkness shining.
And the light was good.
Sun, moon and stars out of the darkness shining.
And the light was good.

Reading: **A Litany of Holidays**

Bradley Greenwald

Nathan Hart, reader

The Christians and the Pagans

Dar Williams

Briana Brickner-York, soloist

Amber called her uncle, said "We're up here for the holiday,
Jane and I we're having Solstice, now we need a place to stay."
And her Christ-loving uncle watched his wife hang Mary on a tree,
He watched his son hang candy canes all made with red dye number three.
He told his niece, "It's Christmas Eve, I know our life is not your style,"
She said, "Christmas is like Solstice, and we miss you and it's been awhile."
So the Christians and the Pagans sat together at the table,
Finding faith and common ground the best that they were able,
And just before the meal was served, hands were held and prayers were said,
Sending hope for peace on earth to all their gods and goddesses.

The food was great, the tree plugged in, the meal had gone without a hitch,
'Til Timmy turned to Amber and said, "Is it true that you're a witch?"
His mom jumped up and said, "The pies are burning," and she hit the kitchen,
And it was Jane who spoke, she said, "It's true, your cousin's not a Christian,"
"But we love trees, we love the snow, the friends we have, the world we share,
And you find magic from your God, and we find magic everywhere."

So the Christians and the Pagans sat together at the table,
Finding faith and common ground the best that they were able,
And where does magic come from? I think magic's in the learning,
'Cause now when Christians sit with Pagans only pumpkin pies are burning.

When Amber tried to do the dishes, her aunt said, "Really, no, don't bother."
Amber's uncle saw how Amber looked like Tim and like her father.
He thought about his brother, how they hadn't spoken in a year,
He thought he'd call him up and say, "It's Christmas and your daughter's here."
continued...

The Christians and the Pagans continued...

He thought of fathers, sons and brothers, saw his own son tug his sleeve, saying,
“Can I be a Pagan?” Dad said, “We’ll discuss it when they leave.”

So the Christians and the Pagans sat together at the table,
Finding faith and common ground the best that they were able,
Lighting trees in darkness, learning new ways from the old, and
Making sense of history and drawing warmth out of the cold.

READING: **Unbelievers**

Joseph Campbell

Hayden Keefer, reader

Many of us today are unbelievers. Or if believers, then our inherited beliefs fail to represent the real problems of contemporary life. Without the symbols and rites of the mythological and religious inheritance that guided earlier generations, we must face the psychological dangers of the human condition alone, or, at best with only tentative, impromptu guidance. This can be a problem for us as modern, «enlightened» individuals, for whom all gods and devils and miracles have been rationalized out of existence.

I Believe

Ervin Drake/Irvin Graham/Jimmy Shirl/Al Stillman

I believe for every drop of rain that falls a flower grows.
I believe that somewhere in the darkest night a candle glows.
I believe for everyone who goes astray someone will come to show the way.
I believe, I believe.

I believe above the storm the smallest prayer will still be heard.
I believe that someone in the great somewhere hears every word.
Every time I hear a newborn baby cry or touch a leaf or see the sky
Then I know why I believe.

READING: **The Sun**

Mary Oliver

Stephanie Sue Curtice, reader

Light of a Clear Blue Morning

Dolly Parton

Thespina Christulides, soloist

It's been a long dark night
And I've been a waitin' for the morning.
It's been a long hard fight
But I see a brand new day a dawning.
I've been looking for the sunshine
You know I ain't seen it in so long
But everything's gonna work out just fine.

And everything's gonna be alright
That's been all wrong
'Cause I can see the light of a clear blue morning.
I can see the light of a brand new day.
I can see the light of a clear blue morning.
Oh, and everything's gonna be alright;
It's gonna be okay.

Let the Sunshine In

James Rado, Gerome Ragni/*Galt MacDermot*

Let the sunshine in...

READING: **Prayer at Winter Solstice**

Dana Gioia

Gina Morgano, reader

Blessed is the road that keeps us homeless.
Blessed is the mountain that blocks our way.

Blessed are hunger and thirst, loneliness and all forms of desire.
Blessed is the labor that exhausts us without end.

Blessed are the night and the darkness that blinds us.
Blessed is the cold that teaches us to feel.

Blessed are the cat, the child, the cricket, and the crow.
Blessed is the hawk devouring the hare.

Blessed are the saint and the sinner who redeem each other.
Blessed are the dead, calm in their perfection.

Blessed is the pain that humbles us.
Blessed is the distance that bars our joy.

Blessed is this shortest day that makes us long for light.
Blessed is the love that in losing we discover.

Halcyon Days

Jacqueline Goldfinger/*Melissa Dunphy*

Sacred days draw near, traditions hallowed and wan,
Well-worn prayers embrace their heirs when love returns as embers.
Dreams delayed, hopes frayed in the blue nights of winter.
Daybreak dreams of reunions lost.
Rise up, tattered and torn! Rise up, barren and reborn!
Go forth in peace, bring joy to the dawn,
And grace, turn your face upon us.

Reflection

Matthew Mehaffey

Lonely as a pilgrim in a country far from home,
Looking for connection in a town of steel and chrome,
You need indigo and violet skies,
You need pools of moonlight in your eyes
For the sun to set; for your soul to rise.
And so you climb on streams of freezing air
Over trees, over buildings, over care...

So blow wind and fall the snow
You will walk into the night.
You'll spread your arms and tip your face
Towards the grace and the promise of light.