

Cantoris Choir Presents

Oratorio de Noël
Camille Saint-Saëns

Ceremony of Carols
Benjamin Britten

Featuring Michelle Velvin on the harp

in

Joyeux Noël

**Directed by
Thomas Nikora
and Sam Berkahn**

Saturday 16th December
St Peter's on Willis
2pm or 8pm

Tickets from humanitix.com, cantoris.net.nz, door sales
General \$25, Concession \$15



candle image credit: Lonni Besançon

Programme

Oratorio de Noël

Camille Saint Saëns

Eclogue for Piano & Strings

Gerald Finzi

~ *Intermission* ~

A Ceremony of Carols

Benjamin Britten

Oratorio de Noël

Camille Saint-Saëns

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921) was just 23 years old when he composed the first six movements of his *Oratorio de Noël* in December 1858. It received its first performance, probably at Midnight Mass, in the church of La Madeleine in Paris in 1860.

German musicologist Christina Stahl says the parallels with Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* are clear. "And not just because of the subtitle on the first page of the printed score, (*Dans le style de Seb Bach*'). Although a small work, it is extremely popular worldwide."



Image: Note Perfect

Eclogue for Piano and Strings

Gerald Finzi



Text and Image:
Classic FM

Eclogue for Piano and Strings is a piece Finzi started writing in the late 1920s, but never got round to finishing. At least, not finishing in the manner he had wanted. The idea originally was to write a grand piano concerto – it's very possible that his *Grand Fantasia* and *Toccata for piano* might well have been part of the original plan, too – but, for some reason, it was never to be.

This movement is based on an archaic form of poem that was originally meant to be a conversation between shepherds. In the end, probably knowing that other movements were never going to come, Finzi reworked it so that it could be played on its own. Even then, it didn't see the public light of day until the composer was dead and buried.

A Ceremony of Carols

Benjamin Britten

English composer, Benjamin Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols* is a gorgeous mix of 15th and 16th century texts and poems. Accompanied by harp the choir enters and leaves the church singing the "procession" and "recession".

Britten composed *A Ceremony of Carols* in 1942 while crossing the Atlantic on a Swedish cargo ship in the middle of World War II. At the time he and his partner Peter Pears were going home after three years in America. According to Pears their shipmates were "callow, foul mouthed and witless" and there was always the fear of an attack by German U-Boats. When they docked at Halifax, Nova Scotia, Britten escaped ashore to a local bookstore where he discovered a copy of *The English Galaxy of Shorter Poems* which motivated him to tackle a Christmas work.



Image: BBC

Thomas Nikora

Director Cantoris Choir

Thomas Nikora is in his eighth year as Cantoris' musical director. Under Thomas's direction, the choir has performed a diverse repertoire of programmes, from familiar classical choral works, to contemporary theatre favourites and large works with orchestra.

Thomas quickly gained attention around Wellington and New Zealand as an accomplished pianist, conductor, and composer. He grew up in Masterton, attending Makoura College where he earned the school's top Kia Manawanui award. He attended Te Kōkī New Zealand School of Music under the tutelage of Dr Jian Liu.

Thomas has since gained further recognition as a Pianist and Conductor, directing Cantoris. Thomas is also the accompanist for NZSM, music director of St. Peter's on Willis, conductor for Chilton St. James Seraphim choir, and most recently, founder and musical director for the St. Peter's Orchestra.



Samuel Berkahn

Conductor

Samuel Berkahn is a musical polymath, whose interests and abilities make him an extremely versatile musician, highly sought after within the Wellington region. Born the son of a musician, there was much time spent making music as a young child. He started learning piano at the age of seven, the first of many instruments. Indeed, he has made quite the hobby out of his collection of instruments.

As former musical director of St. Barnabas Church in Khandallah, Samuel has developed his competence on the organ. From one St. Barnabas to another, he took up the position of Musical Director at St. Barnabas Roseneath in late 2023. As a conductor, he has been the director of the Tawa Community Orchestra since 2019. The orchestra has grown substantially under his leadership, and he has even premiered a few of his own compositions with them.

In 2020, Samuel completed his Bachelor of Music (with Honours) from Te Kōkī New Zealand School of Music, majoring in Cello Performance. He studied cello under the excellent guidance of Inbal Megiddo, as well as conducting and orchestration under Ken Young. Since graduating, Mr. Berkahn has found himself to be in high demand as an instrumental teacher, accompanist and music arranger, a very eclectic roster of activities, which cement him as a key emerging figure within the Wellington music scene.



Michelle Velvin

Harp



Michelle Velvin is a Wellington based harpist, composer and teacher who completed her Postgraduate Diploma in Harp performance, with distinction at Te Kōkī, New Zealand School of Music in 2015.

She performs regularly as part of Orchestra Wellington and the NZSO and is also involved with diverse chamber music groups such as Flow (trombone, voice and harp), Stroma, Duo Eolienne (saxophone and harp), Tamira Pūoro (taonga pūoro, cello, vocals and harp) and Seasons Ensemble (piano, saxophone and harp).

In 2022 she released the debut album 'Feather Spines' with Ruby Solly as part of the duo 'Tamira Pūoro' - featuring taonga pūoro, cello, vocals and harp. In 2019/2020 Michelle won the SOUNZ Community Commission to create a new work for the Auckland Harp Orchestra and live dancers. Earlier this year she completed a new commission for the NZ Harp Festival, to be performed by contestants at the event.

Performers

Oratorio de Noël

Conductor: Samuel Berkahn

Organ: Thomas Nikora

Harp: Michelle Velvin

String orchestra as below

Soloists: Francesca Fagan (Soprano)

Jessica Pritchard (Mezzo-Soprano)

Rosemary Coppell (Alto)

Micheal David (Tenor)

Minto Fung (Bass)

Patrick Shanahan (Bass)

Eclogue for Piano and Strings

Conductor: Samuel Berkahn

Piano: Thomas Nikora

Violin 1: Paula Carryer

Edward Clarkson

Cherise Le Sueur

Mike Wood

Cellos: Caitlin Morris

Tomos Christie

Basses: Teresa Pohl

Alex Huang

Violin 2: Emily Wilby

Antonia Grant

Lynne Scott

Alistair Dong

Viola: Milliann Lim

Vivienne Lim

Nicola Kirkup

Jim Waters

A Ceremony of Carols

Conductor: Thomas Nikora

Harp: Michelle Velvin

Soloists: Francesca Fagan (Soprano)

Jessica Pritchard (Soprano)

Erica Leahy (Soprano)

Rosemary Coppell (Alto)

Cantoris Choir

Formed in 1970 by a small group of friends, Cantoris was established as a chamber choir in 1971 with a strong focus on Early Music. Over the last 40 plus years, Cantoris has explored a diverse repertoire of choral music and broadened its range to include works of all sizes, from a range of genres and eras. The choir has had particularly notable successes in the seventies and eighties with its performances of baroque music.

In 2014 Cantoris along with 11 other international choirs was invited to sing at Carnegie Hall, New York, in honour of composer Karl

Jenkins's 70th birthday celebration, which included the US premiere of "The Bards of Wales". Most recently in March 2018, Cantoris was back in New York to sing Cherubini's Requiem at the Lincoln Center.

For more information or to enquire about joining the choir, please visit cantoris.net.nz.

Sopranos

Anne Amber¹, Catherine Conland¹, Christine Taylor², Erica Leahy¹, Francesca Fagan¹, Genevieve Hanify¹, Jessica Pritchard¹, Jocelyn Syme², Kathy Froy², Suzanne Manning¹, Tajinder Kaur¹.

Altos

Angela Corrigan², Anne Broome³, Anne Selwyn-Smith³, Ella Buchanan Hanify², Gill McLean³, Helen Janes³, Kely Newman², Lydia Fagan³, Mary MacGibbon³, Ruth Sharman³, Sue Barnett³, Rosemary Coppell².

The sections for A Ceremony of Carols are as follows: Treble 1 (¹), Treble 2 (²) and Treble 3 (³). These are indicated after the names of the of the Sopranos and Altos.

Tenors

Clive Conland, Louise Marsden, Michael David, Minto Fung, Paul Oliver.

Basses



Andrew Atkins, Benji Whiskin, CJ Pearce, David Crabbe, Peter Whiskin.

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for funding this concert



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