

Nine Lessons and Carols, a Quieter Side of Christmas



“Silent Night” is one of the more familiar pieces that the Williamsport Civic Chorus will perform on Saturday, December 9th in “A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols”. If you desire a serenely beautiful experience, you should come. The candlelit sanctuary of St. Mark’s Lutheran Church will itself set the mood, only to be enhanced by choral music, bell choir, and the spoken word.

“Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols” is a British tradition that dates back to 1880, although the lessons and music (with some excep-

tions) vary annually. Our rendition is described in greater detail by Music Director Michael Connor on page 2 of this issue, and it will include a variety of readers, accompaniment, and some *a cappella* arrangements. Following the program, the Chorus will host an audience reception in the Church’s fellowship hall.

Tickets for the 7 pm performance may be purchased at The Otto Book Store, R.M. Sides Family Music Center, [online](#), and at the door. As always, children ages 12 and under receive free admission. 🎵

Singers’ Corner: The Star-Spangled Banner

On August 21, 2017, Americans from coast to coast gazed skyward to view a solar eclipse in its 2-hour sweep from northwest to southeast. Lycoming County residents will remember that afternoon’s 74% blockage of the sun’s rays for years to come, much as we will also remember the Williamsport Civic Chorus’ same day performance of our national anthem. Invited by Little League Baseball to open game 20 of the Little League World Series between the United States’ Northeast and Northwest teams, we sang our hearts out before an enthusiastic crowd at Lamade Stadium. Twilight fell as we intoned Francis Scott Key’s lyrics accompanied by David Bailey on trumpet. As the final notes

sounded, ominous clouds on the horizon led to a rain delayed start of play. Undeterred, teams of 12-year-old baseball players emerged an hour later to compete beneath the unfurled flag that “was still there”, earning the adoration of fans and singers who remained to view an elimination game of the largest, organized youth sport in the world.

The Chorus looks forward to participating in other community events such as the American Cancer Society’s River Valley Relay For Life on June 1st, 2018. If your group wishes to discuss such choral collaboration further, please contact Music Director Michael Connor at wccmail@yahoo.com. 🎵



Know the Score



Michael Connor

“The typical carol gives voice to the common emotions of healthy people in language that can be understood, and music that can be shared by all.” —Percy Dearmer (1867-1936)

The singing of Christmas songs and carols with music for brass instruments goes hand-in-hand—like mistletoe and eggnog, or turkey and cranberry sauce. Christmas carols date back to pagan times, originally used to mark the end of one season and the start of the next. As Christianity grew, carols gradually developed a link to the birth of Jesus, but the association to paganism remained in the shadows, and the singing of carols was prohibited at times. In the 19th century, the Victorians reinvented Christmas as a sentimental festival of good cheer with families and friends, and the carol enjoyed a renaissance. Many new carols and songs in a pseudo-traditional style were written, and there was a conscious shift from the nativity story to a focus on the

more secular, festive pleasures of Christmas, like the winter solstice, eating, drinking, and Santa Claus. By the end of the 19th century, small English parish churches began the Christmas Eve practice of lessons, prayers, and a short sermon mingled with a variety of carols. It was later expanded to a festival of nine lessons and carols, made popular around the world in the 20th century by King’s College, in Cambridge, England.

Although traditional Christmas carols are always a hit, the arranging and composing of new carols is an ongoing tradition. Arranging is the art of reworking and adapting a composition for a medium, or in a style different from that for which the piece was originally written. The goal is to leave the basic musical substance essentially intact. Arranging or transcribing has occurred throughout music history—from vocal music like motets and madrigals—to J.S. Bach’s keyboard transcriptions of concertos by Vivaldi—to Franz Liszt’s piano arrangements of popular operatic scenes of the day. Carols were fair game for arranging, and even the texts were occasionally altered. When King Edward VIII abdicated the British throne in 1936 to marry the American socialite Wallis Warfield Simpson; for example, one of the most popular carols became “Hark the Herald Angels Sing/Mrs. Simpson’s pinched our King!”

“Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols” is the Christmas Eve ser-

vice held in King’s College Chapel. The festival was introduced to the Chapel in 1918 to bring a more imaginative approach to worship. It was first broadcast in 1928, and it is now transmitted to millions of people worldwide. The service includes carols and readings from the Bible, with the opening carol’s always being “Once in Royal David’s City”. There is always a new, specially commissioned one, as well.

So now that you know the storied origin of our performance, please come and ring in the Christmas season with the Williamsport Civic Chorus and a traditional musical Christmas! 

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“Know the Score” is provided for the enjoyment of our readers by Michael Connor. Currently in his third year as music director of the Williamsport Civic Chorus, Michael comes to us from the Harmonia Gesang Verein, where he is entering his fifth year as conductor. He holds a master’s degree in education with music specialization from Bucknell University, having served as a graduate assistant to Dr. William Payn there. Connor teaches choral music at Central Mountain Middle School in Clinton County and has also appeared as a frequent vocal soloist with the Chorus and with numerous other performing organizations. He is also the proud father of Aidan, Gabrielle, and Liam.

Visit us:
williamsportcivicchorus.org

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74th SEASON

"A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols"

Saturday, Dec. 9, 2017
7 pm

St. Mark's Lutheran Church
142 Market Street
Williamsport

"American Spirituals"

Sunday, Feb. 18, 2018
3 pm

Klump Academic Center
Auditorium
Penn College

"Mozart's Coronation Mass and Poulenc's Gloria"

Sunday, April 29, 2018
3 pm

St. John's-Newberry
United Methodist Church
2101 Newberry Street
Williamsport

**Chorus to sing with
Essence of Joy Alumni**

On Sunday, February 18th, 2018, the Chorus will proudly sing gospel music and spirituals in the company of Pennsylvania State University's legendary "Essence of Joy Alumni Singers". This concert will be conducted jointly by EOJAS's revered Dr. Anthony Leach and by our own Michael Connor.

We will recognize Black History Month in song by reflecting the rich cultural heritage and struggles of the African-American people. Featured music derives from Africa as well as from the diaspora on this continent. 🎵



Patrons Reminder

The Civic Chorus patron campaign is underway. You can now make those very important contributions by mail at P.O. Box 752, Williamsport, PA 17703, or on our website using PayPal. Thank you!

williamsportcivicchorus.org



Some singers enjoy a Halloween break during rehearsal...

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



“The Williamsport Civic Chorus is an open community of singers dedicated to making fine music accessible to all through education, participation, and inspiration.”

Holiday shopping?

Give a basket containing
Chorus fundraiser items—

- WCC tee-shirts
- Gardners Candies
- Rada Cutlery

Details from singers and
online.

The Williamsport Civic Chorus receives state arts funding support through a grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

Stay tuned for information about the WCC's upcoming performance tour abroad and our 75th anniversary celebration.

