



Toronto
Mendelssohn
Choir



FESTIVAL OF CAROLS

Jean-Sébastien Vallée

Artistic Director & Principal Conductor

December 2- 4, 2025 - 7:30pm
Yorkminster Park Baptist Church



Toronto Mendelssohn Choir

Festival of Carols

Jean-Sébastien Vallée, conductor

Irene Gregorio, piano

Jonathan Oldengarm, organ

Colleen Allen, saxophone

Toronto Mendelssohn Choir

Toronto Mendelssohn Singers

Run Time: 90 minutes, no intermission

This year's performances will be recorded live for an upcoming album—we thank you for joining us for this special year which will be captured forever.

If you enjoyed this evening's performance,
please consider making a donation in support
of Toronto Mendelssohn Choir.

tmchoir.org/donate-now

Toronto Mendelssohn Choir acknowledges that the land on which we perform is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.

We are honoured to share our music across these lands.

PROGRAM

Sing-alongs are marked with an asterisk*

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

TMSingers

Traditional, arr. Richard Proulx

Good News

TMChoir Commission

Aaron Manswell

Ding! Dong! Merrily on High

Traditional, arr. Mack Wilberg

O Tannenbaum

TMSingers

Traditional, arr. Jim Clements

Nicholas Nicolaidis, tenor

The Treasures

World Premiere & TMChoir Commission,
generously underwritten by Deborah Finlayson & Dan Leader

Stephanie Martin

This Christmastide

Rebecca Claborn, mezzo-soprano

Donald Fraser

O Come All Ye Faithful*

Traditional, arr. David Willcocks

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold him, born the King of angels:

Refrain

O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

(Choir only)

God of God, Light of Light
Lo! He abhors not the Virgin's womb;
Very God, Begotten not created:

Refrain

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation
Sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above;
Glory to God in the highest

Refrain

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning,
Jesus, to thee be glory giv'n;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing

Refrain

In the Stillness

TMSingers

Sally Beamish

Lo, How a Rose / The Rose

Traditional, arr. Craig Hella Johnson

Carol of the Bells

Mykola Leontovych, arr. Peter J. Wilhousky

Venez mes enfants

TMSingers

Traditional, arr. Donald Patriquin

What Child Is This?

Traditional, arr. Paul Halley

On this Silent Night

Sarah Quartel

Silent Night*

Traditional, arr. Stephen Paulus, Jonathan Oldengarm

Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child
Holy Infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace
Sleep in heavenly peace

(Choir only)

Silent night, holy night
Shepherds quake at the sight.
Glories stream from heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia,
Christ the Savior is born
Christ the Savior is born

Silent night, holy night
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth

Quelle est cette odeur agréable?

Traditional, arr. Healey Willan

Noe! Noe!

Traditional, arr. Mack Wilberg

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

Traditional, arr. Shawn Kirchner

Les Anges dans nos campagnes*

Traditional, arr. Jonathan Oldengarm

(Choir only)

Les anges dans nos campagnes
Ont entonné le chant des cieux;
Et l'écho de nos montagnes
reprend cet air mélodieux:

Refrain (all):

Gloria in excelsis Deo.
Gloria in excelsis Deo.

(Choir only)

Bergers, pour qui cette fête?
Quel est l'objet de tous ces chants?
Quel vainqueur, quelle conquête
Mérite ces cris triomphants?

Refrain (all)

They announce the birth
Of the liberator of Israel
And full of recognition
They sing on this solemn day:

Refrain



PROGRAM NOTES

Welcome to the 2025 Festival of Carols!

Now in its 26th year, this concert has become a beloved holiday custom within the Toronto community. It provides an opportunity to usher in the holiday season and to take a break from the hustle and bustle of busy preparations to reflect, listen to, and sing Christmas carols. This year's Festival is, in many ways, a retrospective, and one that is being undertaken as the TMChoir prepares a *Festival of Carols* recording, scheduled for a 2026 release. Our repertoire tonight fuses traditional favourites, contemporary classics that are familiar to our long-term audience members (and which are likely destined to become new holiday favourites for those of you attending your first-ever Festival!), as well as recent or newly-composed works: one by our 2024-25 composer-in-residence, Aaron Manswell, and another by our 2025-2026 composer-in-residence, Stephanie Martin.

There are, of course, some songs it simply wouldn't be Christmas without, and many of them feature in tonight's program. "O Tannenbaum," "Ding Dong! Merrily On High," "Carol of the Bells," "O Come All Ye Faithful," "What Child Is This?," and (my personal favourite Christmas carol), "Silent Night" all feature in this concert in varied arrangements that still manage to never lose their traditional focus. Notably, the concert also celebrates Canada's Francophone community, highlighting "Les Anges dans nos campagnes" (familiar to the Anglophone community as "Angels We Have Heard on High") and two traditional French carols commonly sung in Québec, "Venez mes enfants," and "Quelle est cette odeur agréable," ("Whence is this goodly fragrance flowing?"). "Quelle est cette" is especially noteworthy to our community, because the setting being sung tonight is that of English-Canadian—and, from 1913-1968, Toronto-based—composer Healey Willan. Mack Wilburg's 2008 setting of the French carol "Noël! Noël," though sung in English, also augments this concert's nod to French and French-Canadian culture.

"Lo, how a rose e'er blooming" has been a particular favourite holiday classic among our regular audience members, and it's featured in three highly distinct settings on tonight's program, all of which draw on the melody of the original 15th-century German carol ("Es ist ein Ros entsprungen"). The concert opens with a 2003 setting by Richard Proulx which adheres particularly closely to the traditional melody; its fame has been enhanced by its recent inclusion in Season 3 of *The White Lotus*. However, the other two settings provide the opportunity to consider how innovation and experimentation with music and words can lend the same carol new meanings and interpretations. Craig Hella Johnson's 2008 "Lo, How a Rose/The Rose" blends the familiar carol with Bette Midler's 1979 hit single "The Rose," reminding us that roses are not always in bloom—but will be again, as the seasons pass. Shawn Kircher's setting of the carol began during an improvisation session on his grandmother's front porch on Christmas Day, 1997. Kircher began to experiment with the timing and voicings of his sister's favourite Christmas carol, in the process creating—entirely by accident—a version of it informed by and fused with gospel traditions.

About the Artwork | *sometimes to the left* by Julie Liger-Belair
www.julieligerbelair.net | Instagram: @julie.liger.belair

Julie Liger-Belair is a Toronto-based visual artist. She attended the Ontario College of Art and Design, where she studied printmaking, photography, illustration, and metal-smithing. Julie creates assemblage pieces—three-dimensional collages using found objects, paper ephemera, and Japanese paper in handmade frames or found containers. Her larger-scale pieces combine painting and collage on wood cradle boards.



Aaron Manswell's 2024 composition "Good News" recurs from last year's program due to its overwhelming popularity, and like Kircher's piece, fuses gospel and R&B influences into a beloved holiday classic, in this case the melody of J.S. Bach's beloved "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring." Tonight's concert also features the premiere of Stephanie Martin's "The Treasures." Setting a 1907 text from the writer Lucy Maud Montgomery (of *Anne of Green Gables* fame) to a cappella four-part harmony, Martin's commission lends a distinctly Canadian contribution to holiday repertoire. In a season that can often feel driven by consumerism and gift-giving, "The Treasures" reminds us that moments and memories—the affection that we are able to share with our loved ones, our acts of generosity towards our communities—are the only true treasures we take with us.

A couple additional "contemporary classics" join these newer pieces, including Donald Fraser's "This Christmastide (Jessye's Carol)," composed in 1984 for famed soprano Jessye Norman's Christmas party; her inclusion of it in her 1988 "Christmastide" television special has led to its enduring fame. Sarah Quartel's 2022 "On This Silent Night," which appeared in the Nine Lessons and Carols Service and *Oxford Book of Carols*, depicts a snowy and wintry landscape through text and music. Sally Beamish's 2007 composition "In the Stillness," which draws on poetry by Katrina Shepherd, also depicts stillness and a wintry landscape, focusing on the quiet experienced during winter church services.

Thank you for joining us to celebrate music and the spirit of the Season. On behalf of the TMChoir's choristers, musicians, and artistic and administrative teams: we hope your holiday season reflects something similar to this concert, in joining together favourite traditions, new traditions, some moments of still, quiet, reflection, and hopefully a couple joyous surprises thrown in for good measure. Happy holidays!

— Rena Roussin, Musicologist-in-Residence

TORONTO MENDELSSOHN CHOIR

Toronto Mendelssohn Choir (TMChoir) is proud to be one of Canada's oldest, largest, and best-known choral organizations. The choir presented its first concert on January 15, 1895, as part of Massey Hall's inaugural season, and has been a leader in choral music in Canada ever since, commissioning works by Canadian composers, and presenting world and Canadian premieres. The choir also regularly performs and records with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. In May 2021, Jean-Sébastien Vallée was named as Artistic Director, only the eighth conductor in TMChoir's over 130-year history.

Through its performances, educational programs, and community engagement, TMChoir aspires to introduce its audiences to choral masterworks from the past and present—and make both renowned and lesser-known pieces available, accessible, and inspirational to all.

TMChoir includes a core of professional singers and more than 160 auditioned and experienced volunteer choristers. The smaller professional ensemble, the Toronto Mendelssohn Singers (TMSingers), was created to deliver more intimate repertoire in a variety of nontraditional venues. This past 130th anniversary season included a commercial recording *Remember: 130 Years of Canadian Choral Music*, by ATMA Classique, and a recording with Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra and Orchestre symphonique de Québec celebrating the late composer Jacques Hétu.



Jean-Sébastien Vallée, Artistic Director and conductor

Jean-Sébastien Vallée is an internationally recognized Canadian American conductor, scholar, and pedagogue, acclaimed for his expertise in vocal, choral, and orchestral repertoires. Over the course of his career, he has led ensembles across North America, Europe, and Asia, and has collaborated with some of the world's leading orchestras, including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, l'Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, and the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Ottawa.

Dr. Vallée is Full Professor of Music Performance, Director of Choral Studies, and Coordinator of the Ensembles & Conducting Area at McGill University's Schulich School of Music. He also serves as Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir and its professional chamber ensemble, the Toronto Mendelssohn Singers. Prior to his appointment at McGill, he directed choral studies at California State University, Los Angeles, and taught on the choral faculty of the University of Redlands. His discography includes several critically acclaimed recordings on the ATMA Classique label: *Lux* (2017), *Requiem* (2018 – Fauré and Duruflé), *Distance* (2021), and *Remember* (2024). Broadcast internationally, these projects reflect his dedication to both historical and contemporary repertoire.

Upcoming engagements include performances with the National Arts Centre Orchestra, the Orchestre symphonique de Québec, the Tanglewood Festival Chorus and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and the Alberta Youth Choir. In recognition of his artistic leadership and contributions to the field, Dr. Vallée received the 2025 Distinguished Alumni Prize from Université Laval, awarded to alumni who exemplify innovation, creativity, talent, and exceptional leadership in their professional achievements.



Jonathan Oldengarm, organ

Organist and chamber musician Jonathan Oldengarm is Minister of Music at Toronto's Metropolitan United Church where he oversees an extensive musical programme that includes multiple ensembles, two concert series, and numerous annual musical service highlights. He maintains an active solo performance, broadcast and recording schedule, and is a laureate of several international competitions. Jonathan holds degrees in organ and harpsichord performance from Wilfrid Laurier and McGill Universities; the Fellowship diploma of the Royal Canadian College of Organists; and studied at the Hochschule für Musik in Stuttgart, Germany.



Irene Gregorio, piano

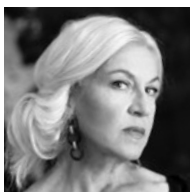
Irene Gregorio enjoys a diverse and active musical life as a pianist, educator, and music director. As a pianist, she has collaborated with members of the LA Phil and San Francisco Symphonies and the TSO, and served as pianist for the Los Angeles Children's Chorus, LA Opera Education and Outreach, Ontario Youth Choir, National Youth Choir of Canada, and the International Trombone Festival, among others. Her performances as a collaborative pianist have taken her throughout North America, Europe, Cuba, and the Philippines, and she has also appeared on PBS, CBC Radio 2, and on film soundtracks in the LA area.

A passionate educator, Dr. Gregorio has also served on the music faculty of the California State University, Los Angeles and East Bay campuses, and teaches at the University of Guelph and Wilfrid Laurier University. She currently serves as the Director of Music Ministry at Dublin St. United Church, and is the founding director of the Pamati Filipino Children's Choir. She has enjoyed serving as the Collaborative Pianist/Musical Assistant for the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir since 2021.



Stephanie Martin, composer-in-residence

Canadian composer Stephanie Martin's music is performed by choirs across North America, Europe, Asia and Australia. A life-long participant in choirs of all sorts, her work flourishes in both sacred and secular settings, addressing current issues, and timeless themes. Her recent oratorio '*WATER: an environmental oratorio*' premiered in 2023 with the Grand Philharmonic of Kitchener-Waterloo. Other major choral works include *The Sun, the Wind, and the Man with the Cloak* (2019) and *Requiem for All Souls* (2017). Martin has recorded for Naxos, Marquis, and Dorian labels and holds degrees from the University of Toronto, Wilfrid Laurier University, and the Royal Canadian College of Organists. In the 25/26 Season, Stephanie joins the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir as Composer-in-Residence.



Colleen Allen, saxophone

Alberta born Colleen Allen plays all saxes, flute, and clarinet. She is top call in Toronto for live shows, festivals, and recording projects. Recent performances include Sessionsx recordings with Gospel legend Carvin Winans, featuring Michael MacDonald, Take 6 and Martha Reeves.

She has performed extensively with Molly Johnson, David Clayton Thomas, Holly Cole, Emilie-Claire Barlow, Shakura S'Aida, Jackie Richardson, Cirque Du Soleil, SoulPepper Theatre, Brian Barlow's Big Band and is a proud member of Manteca, one of Canada's premier fusion jazz bands. Recent recordings include Hilario Duran's Juno and Latin Grammy award winning Big Band featuring Paquito D'Rivera.

Her first CD, "Colleen Allen," is a beautiful collection of nine tracks displaying her many talents as instrumentalist, arranger, band leader and producer. Her most recent recording is a collaboration with pianist Fern Lindzon and bassist George Koller entitled "Tryptique."

TORONTO MENDELSSOHN CHOIR

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Calvin Presbyterian Church, Toronto

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