



AUSTRALIAN
BRANDENBURG
ORCHESTRA



Noël! Noël!

Reflect and rejoice with us

Noël! Noël!

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With Thanks

MELBOURNE RECITAL CENTRE Sat, 06 Dec, 2025 5PM Sat, 06 Dec, 2025 7:30 PM	ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI CATHOLIC CHURCH, PADDINGTON Tue, 09 Dec, 2025 7PM	SAINT PATRICK’S CATHEDRAL, PARRAMATTA Tue, 16 Dec, 2025 7:30 PM
CITY RECITAL HALL, SYDNEY Thu, 11 Dec, 2025 5PM Thu, 11 Dec, 2025 7:30 PM Sat, 13 Dec, 2025 5PM Sat, 13 Dec, 2025 7:30 PM	PARISH OF HOLY NAME CHURCH, WAHROONGA Mon, 15 Dec, 2025 7PM	SAINT BRIGID’S CATHOLIC CHURCH, MARRICKVILLE Thu, 18 Dec, 2025 7PM

ARTISTS

- María Eugenia Nieva (Argentina) Mezzo-soprano
- Andrew Blanch (Sydney) Classical guitar
- Paul Dyer (Sydney) Conductor / Chamber Organ
- Brandenburg Choir
- Australian Brandenburg Orchestra
- Peter Rubie (Sydney) Lighting Designer

The Australian Brandenburg Orchestra is privileged to live, create and perform on the lands of the longest living culture in the world, and we pay deep respect to traditional custodians and Elders, past and present.

Repertoire

Mendelssohn	Hark! The Herald Angels Sing
Palestrina	'Kyrie' from <i>Missa Papae Marcelli</i>
Rutter	What Sweeter Music
Soto de Langa	'Gioia, & amore' from <i>Il Quinto Libro delle Laudi Spirituali</i>
Ruiz de Ribayaz	<i>Españoletas</i>
Viñas	<i>El Sueño de la Vendimia</i>
Arbeau	Ding Dong! Merrily on High
Traditional	<i>Jácara</i>
Traditional	<i>Riú Riú Chiú</i>
Traditional (arr. Ronzani)	<i>El Noi de la Mare</i>
Anonymous	<i>Ciaccona di Paradiso e d'Inferno</i>
Monn	<i>Allegro</i> from Sinfonia in G major
Arbeau	<i>Branle de l'Official</i>
Albéniz (arr. Maiorana & Palmer)	<i>Leyenda (Asturias)</i>
Falla	'Nana' from <i>Siete canciones populares españolas</i>
Traditional (arr. Palmer)	God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen
Traditional (arr. Palmer)	O Little Town of Bethlehem
Adam (arr. Palmer)	<i>Santa la noche</i> (O Holy Night)
Stopford	A Christmas Blessing
Gruber (words Fr. Mohr)	<i>Stille Nacht</i>
Wade (arr. Willcocks)	O Come, All Ye Faithful

KEYBOARD TUNERS	PERFORMANCE LENGTH
Chamber Organ preparation in Melbourne by Campbel Hargraves	Performance will be approximately 85 minutes without Interval
Chamber organ preparation in Sydney by Nathan Cox & Joanna Butler	



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is only a waltz away.



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About the Brandenburg



Photo by Keith Saunders

The Australian Brandenburg Orchestra is the national Baroque music flagship. It is a world leader in historically informed performance and hugely influential in the broader musical landscape.

The rise and triumph of the Brandenburg through the unflagging passion and vision of its co-founders Paul Dyer and Bruce Applebaum is one of the most extraordinary success stories in the nation's performing arts history.

Since its stunning debut at the Sydney Opera House in 1990, the orchestra has introduced Baroque (and earlier) music at a serious level, playing on instruments authentic to the period. The Brandenburg is renowned for its energetic spirit, stylistic diversity, ambition and innovation. In the words of the Honorable Dame Quentin Bryce, the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra 'has brought untold rewards in its brilliant musicianship, imaginative programming, outstanding soloists and partnerships. It has created adventures steeped in tradition yet luminously alive and liberating.'

A unique company, the Brandenburg vibrantly reawakens Baroque and Classical masterpieces for a contemporary audience. The Brandenburg's 20 recordings with ABC Classics include five ARIA Award winners for Best Classical Album.

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'...what stands out at concert after concert is the impression that this bunch of musicians is having a really good time. They look at each other and smile and laugh... there's a warmth and sense of fun not often associated with classical performance.'

THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

About the Choir



Photo by Laura Manariti

The Brandenburg Choir are a passionate and versatile ensemble renowned for their astonishing vocal blend, technical virtuosity, and deep love for the music they perform. Since their first appearance in 1999 under Artistic Director Paul Dyer, they have been an essential and celebrated part of the Brandenburg story.

Their journey begins with their debut in the inaugural Noël! Noël! concert — a radiant fusion of medieval chant, polyphony, and traditional carols sung in their original languages. That first performance, featuring thirteen voices alongside the Orchestra, captures hearts with its rare combination of scholarly depth, musical authenticity, and sheer beauty. It becomes an instant success, and Noël! Noël! has since become an enduring favourite, recorded across four live albums now available on major streaming platforms.

Over the past two decades, the Choir have continued to grow and evolve, regularly taking the stage as part of the Brandenburg's annual subscription seasons. From the sacred intensity of Bach's Cantatas and Mozart's Requiem to the jubilant brilliance of Handel's Coronation Anthems and Ode for St Cecilia's Day, their repertoire spans centuries and styles — each performance offering a new opportunity

to connect with audiences through the expressive power of the human voice.

What unites the Choir is their shared commitment to the distinctive Brandenburg sound. Though many members are highly accomplished singers with formal training, they come from remarkably diverse professional backgrounds — music teachers, lawyers, doctors, business managers and more. When they gather to rehearse and perform, they become one voice and one artistic spirit.

For the Choir, the voice is the most intimate and expressive "early instrument," capable of revealing joy, sorrow, love, and triumph across time and culture. Their performances, from meditative chant to exuberant carols, are crafted to uplift, immerse, and inspire. Through the Brandenburg Mentorship Program, guided by seasoned choristers, they remain dedicated to nurturing the next generation of early-music singers.

"[The Brandenburg Choir is] one of the finest choruses one could put together in this town."

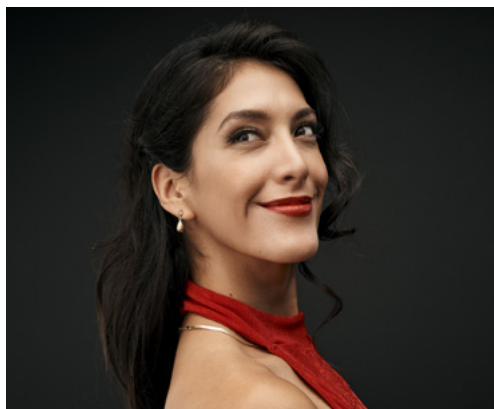
THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD



Noël! Noël! at City Recital Hall
Photo by Keith Saunders

Maria Eugenia Nieva

Mezzo-soprano



María Eugenia Nieva is an Argentinian mezzo-soprano, passionate about the power of music and expressive storytelling. Born in Mendoza, she began her formal musical training at the age of six with the Niños Cantores de Mendoza, gaining her first international experience as a soloist and choir member on tours through Brazil, Mexico, Ecuador, and Chile. She completed a Bachelor in Choral Conducting at the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo (Mendoza) and later pursued studies in Musical Theatre and Classical Singing at the Universidad Nacional de las Artes (Buenos Aires). She also holds a Postgraduate Degree in Higher Education Pedagogy from the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo.

Nieva has performed for Canberra Art Song, Concerts Australia, the Bowerbird Collective, the Adelaide Guitar Festival, and has forthcoming engagements with Four Winds, Wagga Weekender, and Concerts America. She has collaborated with the Orquesta Barroca de Mendoza, Germany's Bach Akademie Choir, and performed Argentine tangos with string quartet and Scottish accordionist James Crabb. Praised for her 'expressive dramatic style' (City News)

and as 'a gorgeous mezzo-soprano from Argentina on a mission to bring the music of her homeland to the world' (Shreveport-Bossier Advocate), she has toured extensively with guitarist Andrew Blanch, performing over 70 concerts to more than 20,000 people across the United States of America.

Photo by Toby Burrows

AUSTRALIAN BRANDENBURG ORCHESTRA

Andrew Blanch

Classical Guitar



Andrew Blanch is recognised as one of Australia's leading classical guitarists. Described as 'dazzling' (ArtsHub), 'the real deal' (Classics Today), 'brilliant' (Limelight), and 'the rockstar of nylon-acoustic music' (On Sounds), he has won more than ten international prizes and was a finalist for Performance of the Year at the 2022 Australian Art Music Awards.

A versatile collaborator, Blanch has performed with Ensemble Offspring, the Luminescence Chamber Choir, the New Zealand Guitar Quartet, and with orchestras across Australia, Europe, South America and the USA. His three acclaimed studio albums have reached No. 1 and 2 on the ARIA Core Classical Chart and collectively earned over 1.5 million streams. *Spanish Guitar Music* was hailed by Soundboard Magazine (USA) as 'one of the best debut albums I've ever heard', while his latest album with QSO harpist Emily Granger was described as 'one of the most extraordinary albums to come out of Australia in a long time' (Sydney Arts Guide).

Blanch has commissioned and premiered works by leading composers including Elena Kats-Chernin, Robert Davidson, Jessica Wells, and Daniel Rojas, whose Guitar Concerto No. 1 he recorded in Brazil in 2023. A founding member of the Australian Guitar Quartet alongside the Grigoryan Brothers and Vladimir Gorbach, he performs on a 2014 Greg Smallman & Sons guitar, sponsored by Augustine Strings and Schertler Audio, and records for ABC Classic.

Photo by Toby Burrows

NOËL! NOËL!

Paul Dyer AO Artistic Director



Paul Dyer is one of Australia's leading specialists in period performance.

Paul co-founded the Brandenburg in 1989 after completing postgraduate studies at the Royal Conservatorium in The Hague, and has been Artistic Director and conductor since that time. He is a performing artist comfortable in his unique music arena — whether working in ancient music, contemporary music, opera, with artists such as circus performers, contemporary dancers, or visual artists.

Paul is an inspiring teacher and has been a staff member at various conservatories throughout the world. In 1995, he received a Churchill Fellowship and he has won numerous international and national awards for his CD recordings with the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra and Choir, including the 1998, 2001, 2005, 2009 and 2010 ARIA Awards for Best Classical Album.

Paul has performed with many international soloists including Andreas Scholl, Cyndia Sieden, Marc Destrubé, Hidemi Suzuki,

Stefano Montanari, and countertenor Derek Lee Ragin. Leading an ensemble of Brandenburg soloists, in August 2001, Paul toured the orchestra to Europe with guest soloist Andreas Scholl. In 2015, he was featured on the soundtrack of the James Bond 007 movie, *Spectre*.

A passionate cook, entertainer, foodie, teacher, swimmer and traveller, he is friends with people and artists from Istanbul to India, Japan and Italy, and creates a unique platform for overseas performing artists to work with him and the Brandenburg in Australia.

Among his list of achievements, Paul was awarded the Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) in 2013 for his 'distinguished service to the performing arts in Australia'. In 2003, Paul was awarded the Australian Centenary Medal for his services to Australian society and the advancement of music, and in 2010, Paul was awarded the Sydney University Alumni Medal for Professional Achievement.

Paul Dyer conducts the Brandenburg Choir
Melbourne Recital Centre
Photo by Laura Manariti



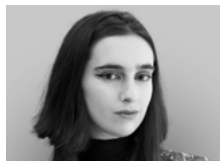
Brandenburg Choir



Adria Watkin (Sydney)
Soprano



Anna Sandström (Sydney)
Soprano



Astrid Girdis* (Sydney)
Soprano



Clare Macpherson (Sydney)
Soprano



Josie Ryan (Sydney)
Soprano



Wei Jiang (Sydney)
Soprano



Mark Nowicki (Sydney)
Alto



Paul Tenorio (Newcastle)
Alto



Philip Butterworth (Sydney)
Alto



William Varga (Sydney)
Alto



Richard Sanchez (Sydney)
Tenor



Spencer Darby (Sydney)
Tenor



Brendan McMullan (Sydney)
Tenor



Daine Ellicott (Sydney)
Tenor



Aaron Erdstein* (Sydney)
Bass



James Pinneri* (Perth)
Bass



Jesse van Proctor (Sydney)
Bass



Philip Murray (Sydney)
Bass

Australian Brandenburg Orchestra



Paul Dyer* (Sydney)
Conductor / Chamber Organ



Matthew Bruce* (Sydney)
Associate Concertmaster,
Baroque Violin



Jared Adams* (Sydney)
Baroque Violin



James Armstrong (Melbourne)
Baroque Violin



Sarah Papadopoulos (Sydney)
Baroque Violin



Monique O'Dea* (Sydney)
Principal Baroque Viola



Edwina Cordingley (Melbourne)
Baroque Cello



Robert Nairn* (Adelaide)
Principal Baroque Violone



Brian Nixon (Sydney)
Principal Timpani / Percussion



Hannah Lane (Melbourne)
Principal Baroque Harp



Tommie Andersson* (Sydney)
Principal Theorbo / Baroque Guitar



Nicholas Pollock (Melbourne)
Theorbo / Baroque Guitar



George Wills (Sydney)
Theorbo / Baroque Guitar

*Denotes Brandenburg Core Musician

Member of the Mentorship Program

^ Denotes soloist

Mentorship Program supported by Patricia H Reid Endowment

† Robert Nairn appears courtesy of Elder Conservatorium, Adelaide University (Staff)



PROGRAM NOTES

Noël! Noël!

01.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)
Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Originally written as a *Hymn for Christmas-Day* in 1739, this well-known adaptation of Charles Wesley's famous hymn combines the modern Oxford University Press text with a tune by Felix Mendelssohn that has also been adapted from an earlier source. 'Vaterland, in deinen Gauen' from Mendelssohn's *Festgesang* was composed for male chorus and brass orchestra (including an ophicleide) in 1840, it was part of a commission for the 400th anniversary of Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press.

02.

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525/6-1594)
'Kyrie' from *Missa Papae Marcelli*

Affectionately called Gianetto (Johnnie) by his contemporaries and crowned the 'Prince of Music' at his death, Palestrina is now known by the name of his birth town, located a marathon's run away from Rome. In 1527, Gianetto's home town was sacked during a series of horrific attacks and reprisals that would deprive Rome of four-fifths of its population. These events led to the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which discussed the numerous issues facing the Catholic Church including its music. In Palestrina, the Catholic Church would find a musical saviour. The beauty and purity of the polyphonic style found in his masses and motets would be studied, codified and emulated by other composers long after his death, including by JS Bach.

03.

John Rutter (1945-)
What Sweeter Music

Written in 1987 for King's College Cambridge's Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, *What Sweeter Music* sets poetry by 17th-century clergyman Robert Herrick originally composed for King Charles I at Whitehall. Herrick's carol first appeared in *His Noble Numbers* (1647) with music by Henry Lawes, though that setting is lost. The poem celebrates Christ's birth transforming December into May, turning 'patient ground to flowers.' Rutter's typically tranquil setting was in fact the first commission he had received Stephen Cleobury for King's College Choir. The, luminous music unfolds in two principal melodies, building from solo voices through rich four-part harmony before returning to a gentle unison conclusion, mirroring the carol's message of transformation through Christ's birth.

04.

Francisco Soto de Langa (1534-1619)
'Gioia, & amore' from *Il Quinto Libro delle Laudi Spirituali*

The *lauda spirituale* emerged from medieval Italy's popular devotion, cast in vernacular Italian rather than liturgical Latin to encourage congregational singing. St. Philip Neri's afternoon gatherings at San Girolamo in Rome interspersed sermons with the singing of *laudi*, like *Gioia, & amore*. Sacred texts were set to simple, memorable melodies that exploited music's mnemonic power to remind the faithful of faith's mysteries.

Unlike the refined polyphonic style of his Sistine Chapel colleague Palestrina, Spanish-born Soto de Langa's *laudi* remained fundamentally popular and accessible. This particular Christmas devotion is quintessentially Oratorian in its joyful, direct spirituality and meditates lovingly on the Christ Child's 'vago aspetto' (lovely/fair appearance), with each stanza building intensity from gentle adoration to the final exhortation that 'true lovers sing victory to the King of Glory'.

05.

Lucas Ruiz de Ribayaz (1626–after 1677)
'Españoletas', *Luz y Norte* (1677)

Born near Burgos in northern Spain, Lucas Ruiz de Ribayaz was a Spanish harpist and composer for lute and guitar now known for his seminal collection of Spanish guitar and harp music, *Luz y Norte*. Conceived as a practical performance manual for guitarists and harpists, *Luz y Norte* provides detailed instruction in *rasgueado* (strumming) and *punteado* (plucked) technique and included dances that were circulating widely in Spain and the New World (*folías*, *jácaras*, *canarios*, and *españoletas* for example). The *españoleta* was understood as a graceful, moderately slow dance-song, often with a lilting triple meter, as in this case.

06.

Jorge Viñas (1944–)
El Sueño de la Vendimia

Composed sometime in the 1970s–80s by Jorge Viñas with lyrics by Ismael Guerrero, *El Sueño de la Vendimia* gained prominence through Mercedes Sosa's iconic 1987 recording. With its title roughly translating as 'The Dream of the Vintage', this Argentinian folk song celebrates Mendoza's natural

beauty, vineyards, and guitar playing during the harvesting season.

Argentina's winemaking tradition dates to the 16th century, when Spanish missionaries planted grapevines in Mendoza and San Juan for sacramental wine. The annual *Fiesta Nacional de la Vendimia* developed from these activities, tracing its roots to 17th-century religious celebrations where peasants would offer fruit to the Virgen de la Carrodilla (patron saint of Mendoza's vineyards) after completing arduous harvest work.

Musically uplifting, this piece is a *cueca cuyana* (the regional variant of *cueca* found in Argentina's Cuyo region) in 6/8. Guerrero's lyrics also paint an inspiring picture: water flowing from high peaks through irrigation channels (*acequias*), the tender earth gestating wine, the sun's rays singing through grape clusters, and February's light illuminating vineyard paths as workers' dreams ripen alongside the grapes.

07.

Thoinot Arbeau (1520–1595)
Ding Dong! Merrily on High

This popular carol was first published with its now well-known text by Anglican priest George Ratcliffe Woodward in 1924, but the melody dates back to the Renaissance. The *Branle de l'Official* (which we will hear later in this program) was first published in 1589 by French cleric Jehan Tabourot, who used the anagrammatic pen name Thoinot Arbeau. He was most famous for his *Orchésographie*, a study of late 16th-century French social dance. A video of a recreation of the dance can also be found on YouTube.

08.

Traditional
Jácara

The *jácara* is one of the most colourful musical genres to originate in 17th-century Spain. Appearing either as songs or purely-instrumental pieces like in this concert, *jácaras* feature driving syncopated rhythms (often in triple metre), with repeated chord patterns and hemiolas to create a push-and-pull between duple and triple feels.

Originally tied to theatre and the world of the *pícaro* (rascal), its swaggering rhythms accompanied tales of rogues and street life. In the hands of composers such as Sanz, Guerau and Ribayaz, the *jácara* moved from the stage to the solo guitar repertory, where its strummed *rasgueado* textures became hallmarks of the Spanish Baroque style. The form also travelled widely through the Spanish colonies, gaining new rhythmic inflections along the way.

09.

Traditional
Riú Riú Chiú

This Spanish Renaissance *villancico* (carol) survives in a single source, the *Cancionero de Uppsala* (1556) which resides at Uppsala University Library in Sweden. Now one of the most frequently performed pieces of Renaissance music today, *Riú Riú Chiú* addresses two theological themes central to Counter-Reformation Spain: the Immaculate Conception and the Nativity. The onomatopoeic refrain imitates the kingfisher (Catalan 'riu' = river; Spanish 'guardarrío' = kingfisher), whose aggressive territorial defense symbolises divine protection. Satan is represented by the wolf, and 'nuestra cordera' (our ewe-lamb) is the Virgin Mary.

10.

Traditional
El Noi de la Mare
 (arr. Hugh Ronzani)

Tender and joyous, *El Noi de la Mare* evokes the quiet warmth of a Catalan Christmas Eve. This beloved carol imagines the Christ Child surrounded by simple gifts and lulled by angels, its melody shaped with the softness of a cradle song. Long sung in Catalan households, the tune eventually travelled far beyond its origins, especially through Miguel Llobet's haunting guitar arrangement later adopted by Andrés Segovia as one of his signature encores. Whether sung or played instrumentally, the piece radiates a gentle intimacy, inviting listeners into a moment of stillness and wonder at the heart of the Nativity story, here sublimely arranged for the Brandenburg Choir and Orchestra by Sydney-based composer Hugh Ronzani.

II.

Anonymous
Ciaccona di Paradiso e d'Inferno
 (att. Francesco Ratis)

This *Ciaccona di Paradiso e d'Inferno* comes from another collection with ties to St. Philip Neri's Oratory, *Canzonette spirituali, e morali*, published anonymously in Milan. The collection is attributed to Francesco Ratis (d. 1676), a priest from Como who served as organist at the collegiate church of San Lorenzo in Chiavenna from 1638, and borrows freely from the most popular dances and melodies of the previous decades. Texts aligning with St. Philip Neri's teachings are set to catchy tunes, encouraging one's personal relationship with God.

In *Ciaccona di Paradiso e d'Inferno*, verses painting vivid contrasts between Heaven's eternal bliss and Hell's unimaginable torments alternate over a hypnotic repeating bass pattern. 'Oh how nice it is to be in Paradise, where we live in joy and laughter!' is countered immediately by 'Oh how horrible it is here in hell, where we burn in eternal fire!' St. Philip Neri believed that music, humor, and accessible language were the best ways to reach the hearts of ordinary people, and this spirited dialogue between Paradise and Inferno exemplifies his revolutionary approach to spiritual education through joyful, popular music-making.

12.
Georg Matthias Monn (1717-1750)
***Allegro* from Sinfonia in G major**

Born Johann Georg Mann in Vienna in 1717 (the same year as CPE Bach), he later changed his surname to 'Monn' to avoid confusion with his younger brother who was also a composer, Johann Christoph Mann (1726-1782). Working alongside other Austrian composers in Georg Christoph Wagenseil and Josef Starzer, Monn's innovations influenced the Classical symphony's emergence, but sadly Monn died tragically young from tuberculosis.

Monn was among the first composers to systematically introduce contrasting secondary themes in different keys within symphonic movements, a technique essential to the development of *sonata form*, and his 1740 Symphony in D major is historically significant as one of the first symphonies written in four movements with a *minuet* as the third movement (a structure that would become standard).

This opening *Allegro* from Monn's Sinfonia in G major immediately announces its pre-Classical credentials: clear periodic phrasing, galant ornamentation, and transparent string writing that looks forward to Haydn's early symphonies.

13.
Thoinot Arbeau (1520-1595)
Branle de l'Official

Long before its melody became the joyful carol 'Ding Dong! Merrily on High,' *Branle de l'Official* was a spirited French dance tune enjoyed in Renaissance courts and town celebrations. As previously mentioned, it first appeared in Arbeau's *Orchésographie* (1589), a treatise documenting the steps, rhythms, and etiquette of contemporary social dancing. A circle dance full of bright, swinging motion, the *Branle de l'Official*'s infectious tune has helped it endure for more than four centuries.

14.
Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909)
Leyenda (Asturias)
(arr. Stefano Maiorana & Alex Palmer)

Although Isaac Albéniz is celebrated as one of Spain's great nationalist composers, he wrote almost exclusively for the piano. His vivid keyboard idiom, however, translated so naturally to the guitar that many of his works are now inseparable from that instrument's modern repertoire. *Leyenda* (Legend), originally published as the first piece in *Chants d'Espagne*, was the title Albéniz himself assigned. Only after his death did his publisher repackage several pieces into the *Suite española*, renaming *Leyenda* as *Asturias*, a label that bears little relation to the music.

The fiery rhythmic patterns and distinctive Phrygian colour of *Leyenda* evoke the flamenco traditions of Andalucía. In this concert, Albéniz's music has been arranged by Stefano Maiorana and Alex Palmer, placing the well-known piece in a new timbral world, enriching it with guitar and Baroque instrumental colours.

15.
Manuel de Falla (1876-1946)
'Nana' from *Siete canciones populares españolas*

Manuel de Falla described *Nana* as a melody he heard from 'his mother's lips before he was old enough to think.' This tender admission reveals the deeply personal nature of the fifth song from his *Siete canciones populares españolas*, composed in Paris in 1914 when Falla was in his late thirties. The song's distinctive character stems from its oriental modal inflections, which Falla attributed to the Indian origins of much Andalusian vocal music, a legacy of the region's complex cultural exchanges across centuries.

Marked *mormorato* (murmured), the vocal line employs the melismatic inflections characteristic of Spanish folk idiom, sung as a whisper. Traditionally accompanied by piano, the song takes on a very different character in this arrangement for Baroque harp and Baroque cello. Their gut strings, softer attack, and lightly articulated phrasing cast the music in a more ancient light, as though the lullaby were echoing across centuries.

16.
Traditional
God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen
(arr. Alex Palmer)

Groups ofwassailers, going from door to door singing in return for something to drink to the good health of those they visited, have long regaled in this secular English carol dated to the 16th century (or earlier), here amusingly arranged for members of the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra. Clearly the spontaneous revelers were not always well-received, as noted by Charles Dickens in his 1843 work, *A Christmas Carol*: '...at the first sound of "God bless you, merry gentlemen! May nothing you dismay!" Scrooge seized the ruler with such energy of action that the singer fled in terror, leaving the keyhole to the fog and even more congenial frost.'

17.
Traditional
O Little Town of Bethlehem
(arr. Alex Palmer)

American priest Phillips Brooks wrote the text for this beloved carol, inspired after visiting the town of Bethlehem in 1865 where he attended Christmas Eve worship at the Church of the Nativity. In the Commonwealth, it is usually sung to the older folk tune known as *Forest Green*, collected in 1903 by the English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams from a Mr. Garman, resident in the Surrey village of the same name. Vaughan Williams harmonised the tune for *The English Hymnal* (1906), helping establish the version best-known in Australia today. *Forest Green*'s folk contours give the carol a warm, pastoral character, here explored in a new arrangement by Alex Palmer for guitar, Baroque harp, percussion, organ and strings.

18.
Adolphe Adam
***Santa la noche* (O Holy Night)**
 (arr. Alex Palmer)

The transcultural journey of Adam's 1847 *Cantique de Noël* illuminates how art can transcend ideological controversy through popular adoption. Born from the unlikely pairing of atheist composer Adolphe Adam and socialist poet Placide Cappeau, whose text depicted a vengeful God requiring appeasement, the work faced immediate ecclesiastical opposition. Following the 1848 Revolution, French Catholic leadership condemned its 'militant tone' and banned it from hymnals.

The *cantique* survived through oral transmission and grassroots devotion, a fact reflected in Spanish-speaking cultures where multiple translations are in circulation. *Santa la noche* has achieved deep integration into Christmas traditions, becoming a staple of *Nochebuena*, midnight Masses from Madrid to Manila to Mexico City.

19.
Philip Stopford (1977-)
A Christmas Blessing

English composer Philip Stopford began his musical journey as a Westminster Abbey chorister at age eight, expecting a trip to the zoo but instead winning a place in one of England's most prestigious choirs. His career followed the traditional path of cathedral musicians: serving as organ scholar at Truro, Canterbury, and Keble College, Oxford, then becoming Director of Music at Belfast Cathedral in 2003 at age 25. At that time, he was the youngest Anglican cathedral organist in Britain.

Stopford composed a new Christmas anthem annually, including this lilting benediction in 2008, adapting the words from the traditional *Christmas Blessing* found in the *Book of Common Prayer* which dates back as far as 1549. A *Christmas Blessing* also featured as a test piece in the BBC Young Chorister of the Year Final 2021, demonstrating its suitability for showcasing young singers' abilities at the highest level.

20.
Franz Xaver Gruber (1787-1863)
Stille Nacht

A true Christmas favourite, this carol was first performed on Christmas Eve in 1818. At the time of its composition, Franz Xaver Gruber was the organist and choirmaster at St Nicholas Church in Oberndorf, Austria, where he had met local priest Father Joseph Mohr and had become his good friend. Mohr, having written the words to *Stille Nacht* sometime earlier in 1816, needed a carol for his midnight mass and Gruber spent just a few hours composing the melody. As they say, 'the rest is history'.

In 1834, *Stille Nacht* became an immediate Christmas favourite of King Frederick William IV of Prussia upon his hearing it, and by 1939 the carol had been performed as far as New York City. The current English version dates to 1859, and today the church where it was first performed is now known as the *Stille-Nacht-Kapelle* (Silent Night Chapel).

21.
Traditional
O Come, All Ye Faithful
 (arr. David Willcocks)

Since its first performance in the original Latin as *Adeste fideles* in 1999, *O Come, All Ye Faithful* has been a regular part of the Brandenburg festive tradition.

The hymn has been attributed to various composers, and while the earliest surviving manuscript of the work bears the name of King John IV of Portugal (1604-1656), it is likely the tune is even older. The text has been translated countless times, the version you will hear is the most famous English translation by the English priest Frederick Oakeley in 1852.

Program notes by Hugh Ronzani 2025



From left to right: Sara Macliver, Margaret Waugh, Marshall McGuire, Tommie Andersson, Hans-Dieter Michatz
 Photo by Steven Godbee, 2001



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