



UMERI
DRAKE UNIVERSITY ALUMNI CHOIR
AIMEE BECKMANN-COLLIER, CONDUCTOR

PRESENTS

THE LESSONS, CAROLS
AND REFLECTIONS OF
CHRISTMAS



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18
3:00 PM
ST. AMBROSE CATHEDRAL



About This Concert

The Lessons, Carols, and Reflections of Christmas, presented today by *Umeri*, the Drake University alumni choir, is patterned on *The Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols of Christmas* offered annually at King's College, Cambridge University, in the United Kingdom. That festival is a more than one-hundred-year-old tradition presented in the King's College Chapel on Christmas Eve and broadcast around the world; a festival that, at its inception, was a response to a world changed by the devastation of World War I.

Until the late nineteenth century, Christmas carols were performed by singers visiting homes; they were not heard in churches. But in 1878 John Stainer introduced carols into choral evensong at St. Paul's Cathedral in London and in 1880 Edward White Benson, Bishop of Truro, created a predecessor to the later King's College festival at Truro Cathedral in Cornwall. Benson was concerned about the excessive consumption of alcohol during the holiday season and wanted to attract revelers from pubs into the church.

His experimental festival of carols, choral music, and readings was quite successful and became the model for the now legendary *Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols* that has been performed at King's College, Cambridge, since 1918. The King's College Festival was established by Eric Milner-White, Dean of the College, in response to the tragedies of World War I. The BBC has broadcast the Festival since 1928 and it has been televised since 1954. The Festival is heard by millions of listeners across the globe each Christmas Eve, including in the United States, where it has been broadcast live on National Public Radio stations since 1979. (You can hear the live broadcast on Iowa Public Radio at 9:00 am on December 24.)

Umeri began its musical life in 2019 by presenting *The Lessons, Carols, and Reflections of Christmas* in order to provide an opportunity for listeners to enjoy the music of the season in a reflective atmosphere that allows for a more expansive sense of the meaning of Christmas. Our concert is based on the

King's College model but offers a unique recasting of its structure in order to focus on specific aspects of the Christmas story:

The World Turned Upside Down, with its emphasis on the light and hope offered to those who are called to work for justice, leading through darkness into light; *Across the Threshold*, centering on Mary as a model of responsiveness and perseverance in the midst of uncertainty; and *Are we still summoned to the manger?*, which recognizes that the stories we hear today, in word and music, remind us of the counter-cultural nature of the Christmas narrative and call us to respond in life-giving ways.

In this fourth year of presenting *The Lessons, Carols, and Reflections of Christmas*, Umeri turned to Rev. Tim Fitzgerald, former pastor of Ss. John and Paul Parish in Altoona and a retired priest of the Diocese of Des Moines, Rev. Rachel Thorson Mithelman, who retired in 2020 as pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church in downtown Des Moines, and Rev. Tim Koester, senior pastor at St. Michael Lutheran Church in Omaha, to provide reflective pillars for this structure of spoken word and music. Father Tim has also provided substantial assistance in crafting this concert as a gift of light and promise, a time to reflect and then respond in hope and peace.

*This service of lessons and carols
follows a pattern that is time honored.
We hear from the Jewish and Christian Scriptures and ponder
their meaning,
then we respond—in song, in silence, in measured words.*

*We listen and we respond: it is the rhythm, the cadence of
human life.
Every love, every relationship,
the heartbeat of every household—
all are built upon that blessed dialogue.*

It is even the rhythm of our rapport with the divine.

*We hear the Lord speak to us—the Scriptures of our service
brief excerpts only.*

*Even so, listen closely, for we will hear
of promise, of visions, of hope greater than sorrow or suffering
or despair.*

*The words will speak of dreams to delight us once again:
that war will end, swords be turned into plowshares,
exiles will be welcomed home,
and peace will break out in our day.*

*These are words intended for our hearts, food for our spirits.
“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.”*

So we seek to respond:

*setting our hearts on that new and better day,
hungering and thirsting for what is right and just,
sheltering the refugee and welcoming the stranger.*

*Let this be a sign for you, the heavenly messenger proclaims.
The ancient Israelites looked for a sign to dispel the darkness,
and so did the shepherds,
and so do we.*

*So listen now with the heart,
revel in this ancient story of light shining in the darkness,
embrace again its visions and dreams,
and be strong in hope.*



THE LESSONS, CAROLS AND REFLECTIONS OF CHRISTMAS

Part I - The World Turned Upside Down

Quem vidistis, pastores?
from *Christmas Cantata*

Daniel Pinkham
(1923–2006)

Umeri

*Whom did you see? Shepherds, tell us!
Proclaim to us: who has appeared on the earth?*

*We saw the newborn child
And choirs of angels praising the Lord. Alleluia!
(text – first antiphon for Lauds of the Nativity)*

Bidding Prayer
Joyce Rupp, OSM

First Lesson – Isaiah 54:4-10
Craig Ihnen

When We Love

Elaine Hagenberg
(b. 1979)

*The towering tree spreads his greening canopy
–A veil between the soil and sky–
Not in selfish vanity,
But the gentle thrush to shade and shelter.
So it is with love.*

*For when we love,
Simply love,
Even as we are loved,
Our weary world can be transformed.*

*The busy thrush builds her nest below
–A fortnight' work to weave and set–
Not for herself alone,
But her tender brood to shield and cherish.
And so it is with love.*

*For when we love,
Simply love,
Even as we are loved,
Our weary world can be transformed
Into the Kingdom of God!
(text – Charles Anthony Silvestri)*

Second Lesson – Baruch 4:36-5:9

Marin Stark

Carol – People, Look East

French carol, arr. John Stainer
(1840-1901)

Umeri and audience

*People, look East. The time is near of the crowning of the year.
Make your house fair as you are able, trim the hearth, and set the table.
People, look East, and sing today. Love, the Guest, is on the way.*

*Stars, keep the watch when night is dim. One more light the bowl shall brim.
Shining beyond the frosty weather, bright as the sun and moon together.
People, look East and sing today. Love, the Star, is on the way.*

*Angels, announce with shouts of mirth Him who brings new life to earth.
Set ev'ry peak and valley humming with the word, "The Lord is coming."
People, look East, and sing today. Love, the Lord, is on the way.
(text – Eleanor Farjeon, 1881-1965)*

Third Lesson – Isaiah 11:1-4, 6-9

Cing Man

There is a Flower

John Rutter
(b. 1945)

Umeri

Heather Nail, soprano
Justin Scheel, tenor
Katelyn Mardis, soprano

*There is a flow'r sprung of a tree,
The root thereof is called Jesse,
A flow'r of price:
There is none such in paradise.*

*This flow'r is fair and fresh of hue,
It fadeeth never, but ever is new;
The blessed branch this flow'r on
grew
Was Mary mild that bare Jesu;
A flow'r of grace;
Against all sorrow it is solace.*

*The seed hereof was Goddes sand
(gift),
That God himself sowed with his
hand,
In Nazareth that holy land,
Amidst her arbour a maiden found;
This blessed flow'r
Sprang never but in Mary's bower.*

*When Gabriel this maid did meet,
With 'Ave Maria' he did her greet;
Between them two this flow'r was set
And safe was kept,
No man should wit,
Till on a day in Bethlem it could
spread and spray.*

*When that fair flow'r began to spread
And his sweet blossom began to bed
(bud),
Then rich and poor of ev'ry land
Marvelled how this flow'r might spread
Till kinges three that blessed flower
came to see.*

*Angels there came from heaven's
tower
To look upon this freshele flow'r,
How fair he was in his colour and how
sweet in his savour;
And to behold
How such a flow'r might spring in gold.*

*There is a flow'r sprung of a tree,
The root thereof is called Jesse,
A flow'r of price:
There is none such in paradise.
(text – John Audelay, fifteenth century)*

Reflection I – The World Turned Upside Down
Rev. Timothy Fitzgerald

Part II - Across the Threshold

O Emmanuel

Ēriks Ešenvald
(b. 1977)

Umeri

Ben Schultz, baritone

*O Emmanuel, our king and giver of law.
Come to save us, Lord our God.*
(text – from the O antiphons, eighth century)

Lesson IV – Luke 1:26–38

Kyle Lechtenberg

Magnificat

Halsey Stevens
(1908–1989)

Umeri

Paul Stodolka, trumpet

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
For he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.*

*From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is His name.*

He has mercy on those who fear Him in every generation.

*He has shown the strength of His arm,
He has scattered the proud in their conceit.*

*He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.*

*He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.*

*He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for He has remembered His promise of mercy,
the promise He made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.*

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and will be forever. Amen.*
(text – Luke 1:46-55)

Fifth Lesson – Matthew 1:18-28
Bridget Sheaff

O magnum mysterium
from *Christmas Cantata*

Daniel Pinkham
(1923-2006)

Umeri

*O great mystery, and wondrous sign,
That animals should see the newborn Lord lying in their
manger!*

*Blessed is the Virgin whose womb was worthy
to bear the Lord Jesus Christ. Alleluia!*
(text – responsory for Matins of the Nativity)

Reflection II – Across the Threshold
Rev. Rachel Thorson Mithelman

Part III - Are we still being summoned to the manger?

Carol – God Rest You Merry, One and All

English carol
sixteenth century

Umeri and audience

*God rest you merry, one and all, let nothing you dismay,
For Jesus Christ our Savior was born upon this day,
To save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy;
O tidings of comfort and joy.*

*From God our heav'nly Father a blessed angel came,
And unto certain shepherds brought tidings of the same,
How that in Bethlehem was born the Son of God by name:
O tidings of comfort and joy...*

*Now to the Lord sing praises, all you within this place,
And with true love and charity each other now embrace;
This holy tide of Christmas all others shall replace.
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy;
O tidings of comfort and joy.
(text – responsory for Christmas Day)*

Sixth Lesson – Luke 2:18–26

Marty Martin

Gloria in excelsis Deo
from *Christmas Cantata*

Daniel Pinkham
(1923–2006)

Umeri

*Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those of
goodwill.*

*O be joyful in the Lord, all you nations;
Serve the Lord with gladness.*

Come before His presence with exultation.

Know that the Lord is God,

He made us and not we ourselves.

(text – Glory to God... from Luke 2:14 other text from Psalm 100)

Seventh Lesson – Matthew 2:1-12

Kayleigh Koester

In the Bleak Mid-winter

John Armstrong
(b. 1946)

Umeri

*In the bleak mid-winter
Frosty winds made moan;
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter
Long ago.*

*What can I give Him,
Poor as I am? –
If I were a Shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man
I would do my part, --
Yet what I can I give Him, --
Give my heart.
(text – Christina Rossetti, 1830-1894)*

*Our God, heaven cannot hold Him
Nor earth sustain,
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When He comes to reign.
In the bleak mid-winter
A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty-
Jesus Christ.*

Reflection III – Are we still being summoned to the manger?

Rev. Timothy Koester

Eighth Lesson – John 1:1-14

Tim Sheaff

Umeri

*When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.*
(text – Howard Thurman, 1899–1981)

Closing Prayer

Monsignor Steve Orr

Carol – Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Umeri and audience

*Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King."
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all you nations, rise, join the triumph of the skies;
With the angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"*

*Christ, by highest heaven adored, Christ the everlasting Lord:
Late in time behold Him come, offspring of the Virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see: hail the Incarnate Deity,
Pleased as one with us to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"*

*Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings, ris'n with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by, born that we no more may die,
Born to raise us from the earth, born to give us second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"*
(text – Charles Wesley, 1707–1788)

Support

We hope you'll consider donating to Umeri, which is entirely supported by singers' investments and audience gifts. You may donate online at <https://alumni.drake.edu/umeri> or give your contribution to singers stationed at the doors following the concert. Contributors to Umeri during this 2022–23 season include:

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AIMEE BECKMANN-COLLIER, CONDUCTOR
SUSAN IHNEN, PIANO AND ORGAN

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Anna Gebhardt
Kelly Friesleben
Katelyn Mardis
Heather Nail
Gabbi Sarcone
Elizabeth Watson

Tenor

Trevor Bridge
Tom Florian
Seth Hammond
Justin Scheel
Tanner Smith

Alto

Sarah Florian
Kayleigh Koester
Emma Ksiazak
Abbi Nelson
Chelsea Rink
Betsy White

Bass

Patrick Carroll
Jacob Fross
Ian Ksiazak
Daniel Minnie
Nate Mohrhauser
Thomas Riordan
Ben Schultz
Bryn Start

Brass Quartet

*Paul Stodolka, trumpet
Elizabeth Stodolka, trumpet
John Benoit, trombone
Vincent Kenney, euphonium

*soloist for *Magnificat* – Halsey Stevens

About the Choir

Founded in November 2019, Umeri is an ensemble of alumni of the Drake Choir, Drake University. Seventy-five alumni of the choir live in the Des Moines metro area and, since its inception, fifty-five of them have participated in Umeri. Alumni who have sung in the choir graduated from Drake in the years 1992 through 2022 and represent all Colleges of the University and a plethora of academic disciplines. As alumni, the singers are contributing to the Greater Des Moines community in many professional areas, including education, health care, public relations, finance, marketing, accounting, sports administration, and the arts.

Among their employers are a number of school districts, as well as the Meredith Corporation, Wells Fargo, Nationwide Insurance, US Cellular, Des Moines Performing Arts, the Iowa Arts Council, Iowa Public Radio, ACLU of Iowa, Principal Financial Group, Drake University, Target, the Iowa Events Center, Make-a-Wish Iowa, the Iowa Center for Economic Success, the Iowa High School Girls Athletic Union, the West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce, Jewish Federation of Greater Des Moines, and Veterans Hospital of Central Iowa.

Umeri, which takes its name from the Latin word for “shoulders,” because Drake Choir members were frequently reminded that they stood on the shoulders of those who came before them, is a project-based ensemble. The choir rehearses 6–8 times preceding a concert, thus requiring a high level of musical independence and advance preparation on the part of each member. Umeri presents three concerts per year. For further information, contact Dr. Aimee Beckmann-Collier (aimee.beckmann-collier@drake.edu).



About the Reflection Writers

Rev. Timothy Fitzgerald is a priest of the Diocese of Des Moines. He has served as pastor, most recently at Ss. John and Paul Parish, Altoona; as teacher and resource leader for the St. Joseph Education Center, West Des Moines, the Center for Pastoral Liturgy at the University of Notre Dame, and the diocese; and as author of materials and articles on worship, prayer, and sacramental practices. In retirement he has become a beekeeper.

Rev. Tim Koester is senior pastor of St. Michael Lutheran Church in Omaha. A 2009 graduate of Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Pastor Tim served for seven years in Bloomfield, Nebraska, before his call to St. Michael. Prior to beginning his seminary education, he farmed with his family near Dresher, Nebraska, managed a seed business, and served the church as a youth ministry coordinator and parish ministry associate. Tim is a graduate of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he studied vocal music, played in the Cornhusker Marching Band, and graduated with a degree in agronomy. He and his wife, Shelli, a veteran educator and guidance counselor, are the parents of two children, Callen, and Kayleigh, who is a member of Umeri. Pastor Tim enjoys getting his hands dirty with gardening, working with wood and metal, and fixing things most people throw away.

Rev. Rachel Thorson Mithelman was ordained in 1983 and served congregations both rural and urban in Minnesota, California, Wisconsin, and Iowa for thirty-seven years. She retired as senior pastor at St. John's Lutheran Church in Des Moines in 2020. A native Iowan, Pastor Mithelman is a graduate of Wartburg College, Waverly, IA, where she earned a Bachelor of Music degree, and of Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN. She is an active volunteer in the community and serves as a supply preacher in area congregations. She is currently a member of the boards of directors of the Des Moines Area Religious Council (DMARC) and Calvin Community. Married to the Rev. Jack Mithelman, she is the mother of two children and grandmother of one.

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