



Dr. Robert Gehrenbeck ● Artistic Director

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[www.wisconsinchamberchoir.org](http://www.wisconsinchamberchoir.org)

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presents

## Ceremony of Carols

with Celia van den Bogert, harp

**Saturday, December 14, 2024, 7:30 p.m.**

Bethel Lutheran Church

312 Wisconsin Avenue, Madison, WI

Join the Wisconsin Chamber Choir for an evening of holiday favorites featuring Benjamin Britten's joyous *Ceremony of Carols*, in the beautiful sanctuary of Bethel Lutheran Church, downtown Madison. Also on the program are seasonal Latin motets from the seventeenth through twenty-first centuries, stunning arrangements of traditional carols, and a set of carol-inspired works highlighting the relevance of the Christmas story to our own time.

Britten's *Ceremony* celebrates the many moods of Christmas in music that is alternately joyful, contemplative, pensive, and uplifting. Composed in 1942 during Britten's return to England by sea after a three-year sojourn in the US, the playful innocence of *Ceremony's* music belies Britten's dangerous wartime voyage across the north Atlantic, then teeming with German U-boats. En route, the vessel stopped for repairs at Halifax, Nova Scotia, where Britten purchased an anthology of English poetry that contains most of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century poems that he set to music in the work. Britten originally scored *Ceremony of Carols* for harp and children's voices; the WCC presents the work in the commonly performed version for mixed choir, accompanied by harpist Celia van den Bogert.

The concert will open with Latin motets from the early Baroque and contemporary eras: *Hodie Christus natus est* by Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, *Regina Caeli* by Cecilia McDowall, and *O magnum mysterium* by Wayne Oquin. Three beloved carols of the season will ring forth in exquisite arrangements by contemporary Irish and American composers: *The Wexford Carol* by David Mooney; *I Wonder as I Wander* by Steve Pilkington, and *Go Tell It On the Mountain* by Evelyn Simpson-Currenton.

An additional group of works are united by their common "Lullay Lully" refrains: Gustav Holst's *Lullay, My Liking*; Malcolm Archer's *This Endris Night*, and the anonymous, sixteenth-century *Coventry Carol*. Inspired by the tragic tone of the latter work, Kansas City composer Jean Belmont Ford composed *Manifesto* in 2018 as "a plea for kindness in the world." Her harmonically rich and intensely personal style has made her one of the WCC's favorite composers, and Belmont's music is certain to leave a profound impact on the audience.

Tickets are \$25 for adults and \$5 for students, available in advance from [www.wisconsinchamberchoir.org](http://www.wisconsinchamberchoir.org) or at the door. Discounted tickets are available for children, students, and patrons experiencing financial hardship.

Founded in 1998, the Wisconsin Chamber Choir has established a reputation for excellence in the performance of oratorios by Bach, Handel, Mozart, and Brahms; a cappella works from various centuries; and world premieres. WCC Artistic Director Robert Gehrenbeck, who serves as Director of Choral Activities at UW-Whitewater, has been hailed by critics for his vibrant and emotionally compelling interpretations of a wide variety of choral music. Under his leadership the WCC has presented major works with orchestra as well as innovative programs of rarely heard music by composers from a wide variety of eras, nationalities, and cultures.