

FOUR SEASONS



A CHRISTMAS DELIGHT: Principal Ballerina Natalia Kungurtseva and Principal Dancer Andrey Shalin of the Russian National Ballet Theatre perform at the Royal Theatre in Sydney, Australia, in 2005. Facing page, Moscow Classic Ballet dancers rehearse "The Nutcracker Suite" in Madrid, Spain, in 2006.

Listen To The Holidays



Geeta Bhatnagar-Novotny

WE ARE heading into the time of year when the world bonds in preparation for the holiday season – that auspicious time from Thanksgiving through the December holidays and into the New Year.

Whatever your creed may be, the magical spirit of the American holiday season is undeniable and would not be complete without music, specifically, holiday music. Although much of the popular holiday music is both secular and sacred, it is mostly generalized as “Christmas” music. There is also much wonderful music that comes from the Hanukkah and Kwanzaa holidays that sometimes gets left out of the mix. But chances are, if you live in the United States, you can no doubt hum a Christmas carol or two.

If you are looking to celebrate the holidays with a musical event, you won’t have to look very far. From film and TV, to theater and concert halls, one can easily get a fill of holiday-themed entertainment.

But did you know that there are works in the Western classical music repertoire that are performed specifically during the holiday season? The seasonal performances of these works have been going strong since their conception, some for over 250 years. There are many arts establishments, large and small, that will produce several concerts around the December holidays. Here is a closer look at some of the most popular concerts for all ages in the Western classical music genre:

HOLIDAY POPS CONCERTS

These concerts are usually lively performances of standard holiday tunes performed by sym-

phony orchestras and/or chorales, children’s choirs and soloists. These will usually segue into a sing-along, where the audience is innocently encouraged to, yes, sing along to these popular tunes. Don’t worry, no one can actually hear you ... it is all in good fun. You will usually hear tunes such as “Jingle Bells,” “We Wish You a Merry Christmas,” “Frosty the Snowman,” “Silent Night,” “Joy to the World” and the list goes on. These pops concerts are aural and visual enchantments that will no doubt have you humming a tune or two on the way home.

THE NUTCRACKER BALLET

Composed by Tchaikovsky, “The Nutcracker Ballet” is timeless and one of my absolute favorites. Most importantly, this work is perfect for children with its captivating story told through ballet, colorful and unique sets and costumes and a symphony orchestra. It takes us on a journey through the fantastical dream of a little girl named Clara on the eve of Christmas into Christmas Day. Clara is gifted a Nutcracker who turns into a Prince after the defeat of the fierce Mouse King. Clara and the Prince embark on

their charmed voyage to the Land of Snow, then onto the Land of Sweets, where they are greeted by fascinating characters. The dream finally ends and Clara awakens to Christmas morning.

Now you must remember that much of Western classical music had its inception in European Judeo-Christian beliefs. So it makes sense that these beliefs were embedded in the composition of Western classical holiday music. Here are examples of standard sacred pieces that are widely performed around the world during the holiday season:

MESSIAH

Composed by G.F. Handel, this three-part work is a tour de force usually performed in English and comprises symphonic and choral pieces with vocal solos interspersed throughout. “Messiah” is the story of Christ told through music, with the text taken from the Old and New testaments of the Bible. The first part refers to the birth of and second refers to the passion of Christ. The third part, which is preformed around the Easter holidays, refers to the aftermath and resurrection. This work will take you on an emotional journey with its heavy dra-

matic music and its catchy light-hearted airs. And who can’t sing a phrase from the ever-popular “Hallelujah Chorus”?

AM AHL & THE NIGHT VISITORS

“Amahl” was composed by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer and librettist Gian Carlo Menotti. Menotti wrote this very popular Christmas opera, performed in English, for NBC and it aired as a television opera in 1951. It was inspired by Hieronymus Bosch’s painting “The Adoration of the Magi” and tells of the healing of a poverty-stricken crippled boy and his mother after the boy selflessly offers his crutches to the Three Kings as a gift to the infant Jesus. This piece is an inspirational story performed through music and sung dialogue.

THE CHRISTMAS ORATORIO

Composed by J.S. Bach, this work is performed in German with full orchestra, choir and vocal soloists. It is similar to “Messiah,” and follows the life of Christ.

This work is actually six cantatas that are meant to be performed on six days between Christmas and the Feast of the Epiphany, including a cantata for New Year’s Day.

So whatever your preference, these five concerts will appeal to everyone’s disposition during the holiday season.

One thing is for certain, this music will enhance your holidays and, at the end of the day, it is all just beautiful music.

Geeta Bhatnagar-Novotny is a multifaceted artist. She keeps harmony in her life by rhythmically juggling a career as a professional classical singer, actor and teacher. She keeps the melody in her life by making it all about her life force: Music. www.geetanovotny.com



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