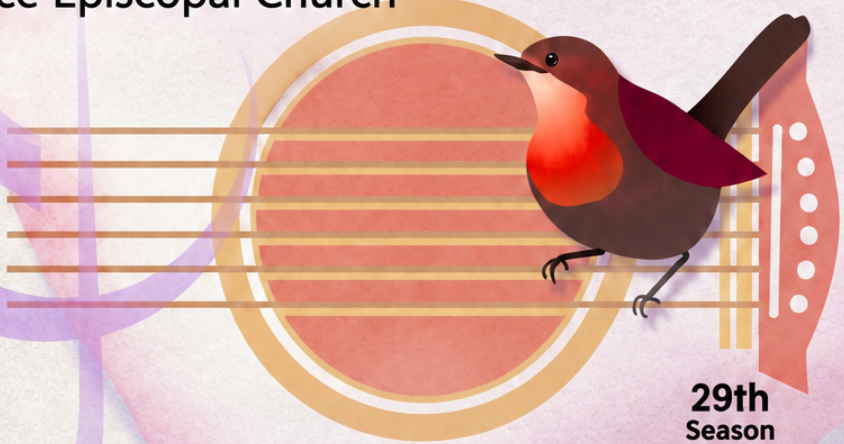
DIVERSITY

THE VOICES OF SARASOTA

Close to the HEART

The Story Behind the Songs

Sunday, December 13th at 7 PM
St Boniface Episcopal Church



2026
2027

29th
Season

An evening to keep close

A favorite melody can hold a childhood memory, a friendship, a place we call home, or someone whose love still shapes us. Tonight, familiar carols sit beside songs of belonging and remembrance, with laughter, reflection, and wonder along the way.

These notes offer stories behind the songs, the poetry that inspired them, and a few discoveries to listen for. Let the music make its own connections.

Explore the music

Tap a selection to open its page.

BEFORE INTERMISSION

A Holiday Road of Carols 3

Sing 3

Betelehemu 4

Stand By Me / Lean On Me 4

What Sweeter Music 5

12 Days of Christmas Confusion 5

OUTFront

Friends 6

Chapel of Love / Unholy 6

AFTER INTERMISSION

Glimmer

We Are Family 7

You've Got a Friend 7

You'll Be in My Heart 8

When She Loved Me 8

I'll Be Home for Christmas 9

Homeward Bound 9

Gabriel's Oboe 10

Silent Night 10

01 / A FAMILIAR ROAD, WITH FESTIVE TURNS

A Holiday Road of Carols

Music and text: Lindsey Buckingham, James Lord Pierpont, and traditional sources
Arranged by Greg Gilpin

Greg Gilpin sends familiar Christmas favorites on a lively musical road trip. Lindsey Buckingham's *Holiday Road*, known from *National Lampoon's Vacation*, supplies the recurring refrain as *Jingle Bells*, *Deck the Hall*, and *We Wish You a Merry Christmas* join the journey. The pleasure is in the combination: recognizable carols riding along on a buoyant pop groove.

> ***Listen for:*** *Notice how the returning refrain connects the different carols into one continuous celebration.*

02 / THE JOY OF JOINING IN

Sing

Music and lyrics: Sam Hollander, Scott Hoying, Kevin Olusola, Mitchell Grassi, and Martin Johnson
As recorded by Pentatonix
Arranged by Mark Brymer

This Pentatonix song celebrates the sheer pleasure of using your voice. Its rhythmic drive and exuberant invitation to sing make it a natural expression of what brings a chorus together: different people creating a shared moment. Here, singing becomes a way to release the pressures of the day and find energy in one another.

> ***Listen for:*** *Listen for the rhythmic lift that turns an individual voice into a shared celebration.*

03 / BETHLEHEM, SUNG IN YORUBA

Betelehemu

Choral work: Babatunde Olatunji / Wendell Whalum
SATB adaptation by Barrington Brooks
Text: Yoruba (Nigeria)

Betelehemu means Bethlehem. The Yoruba text expresses trust in God, celebrates the birthplace of Jesus, and offers praise and gratitude. Nigerian musical roots meet an American choral history: the work developed through Olatunji's collaboration with Whalum at Morehouse College in Atlanta. Its rhythmic energy gives the celebration a physical presence, inviting us to hear familiar Christmas themes through another language and musical tradition.

> ***Listen for:*** *Listen to the partnership between repeated vocal patterns and percussion, and how it gathers momentum.*

04 / TWO SONGS, ONE PROMISE OF SUPPORT

Stand By Me / Lean On Me

Stand By Me: Ben E. King, Jerry Leiber, and Mike Stoller (released 1961)
Lean On Me: Bill Withers (released 1972)
Arranged by Kirby Shaw

These familiar songs meet around a simple promise: someone will be there when life becomes difficult. One offers steadfast companionship; the other acknowledges that everyone sometimes needs help. Heard together, they suggest a community in which strength can be shared and asking for support is part of belonging. The medley lets two generations of popular music speak to the same human need.

05 / THE POETRY OF A HEARTFELT GIFT

What Sweeter Music

Music: John Rutter (composed 1987)
Text: Robert Herrick, adapted by John Rutter
Written for the King's College Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols

Herrick's Christmas poem imagines winter transformed into spring by the birth of Christ. Flowers awaken out of season, and cold gives way to warmth and renewal. These images express the wonder of the Nativity while asking what gift we can offer in response. Rutter's flowing setting carries the answer through the poetry: music itself can be an offering of the heart.

> ***Listen for:*** *Follow the changes in the poem's imagery as the musical phrases move from winter toward warmth.*

06 / A LITTLE SEASONAL MISCHIEF

12 Days of Christmas Confusion

Based on traditional carols and other musical material
Arranged by Chris R. Hansen

You may know all twelve gifts, but that knowledge will only take you so far tonight. Chris Hansen's arrangement gives the familiar carol a wonderfully unruly musical imagination. Listen for unexpected interruptions, changes of direction, and the choir's determination to keep the festivities moving. Recognizing the tune is part of the fun; discovering where it goes next is the rest.

OUTFront

Ensemble selections

Friends

Music and lyrics: Buzzy Linhart and Mark Klingman
Arranged by Spencer Zembrodt
Recorded by Bette Midler on *The Divine Miss M* (1972)

Friendship can turn solitude into belonging. Closely associated with Bette Midler, this song gives that familiar truth a direct, conversational voice: we need people beside us, especially when life feels uncertain. For an ensemble within our chorus community, its message has a particular warmth. Shared music can become the beginning of friendships, and those friendships can give us a place to feel at home.

Chapel of Love / Unholy

A mashup of two choral settings

Chapel of Love - music and lyrics: Phil Spector, Ellie Greenwich, and Jeff Barry; arranged by Laura E. A. Morrell
Unholy - music and lyrics: Samuel Smith, Henry Walter, Blake Slatkin, Kim Petras, Ilya Salmanzadeh, Omer Fedi, and James Napier; arranged by Charles Beale
Mashup arranged by Stigner/Stockman

Wedding-day optimism meets a story of temptation and infidelity. OUTFront brings the bright promise of *Chapel of Love* into contact with the darker pulse of Sam Smith and Kim Petras's *Unholy*. The pairing creates its own dramatic tension: what people promise in public and what they choose in private can be very different things. Listen for how a change in musical atmosphere changes the story.

INTERMISSION

December 13, 2026

Selections >

Glimmer

Opening the second half

We Are Family

Music and lyrics: Nile Rodgers and Bernard Edwards
Arranged by Audrey Snyder
As recorded by Sister Sledge

Sister Sledge's familiar anthem turns belonging into something you can feel in its rhythm. Its exuberant declaration embraces the bonds that bring people together - through kinship, friendship, and chosen family. Glimmer opens the second half with a celebration of the connections at the heart of our chorus community.

You've Got a Friend

Music and lyrics: Carole King
Arranged by Philip Lawson

Carole King's song offers a quieter expression of connection: the reassurance that someone will answer when we need them. Its warmth comes from the simplicity of that promise. After the exuberance of "We Are Family," Glimmer turns toward the personal bond between friends - the steady presence that helps us through uncertain times.

07 / A PROMISE THAT CROSSES DIFFERENCES

You'll Be in My Heart

Music and lyrics: Phil Collins
From Disney's *Tarzan* (1999)
Arranged by Ed Lojeski

In *Tarzan*, Kala, a gorilla who becomes an orphaned human baby's mother, offers him reassurance and protection. Her promise reaches across their obvious differences: he belongs, and her love will endure. That context gives Phil Collins's song a particular tenderness. It speaks to the families we are born into and the families formed through love, care, and the decision to stand beside someone.

08 / LOVE REMEMBERED THROUGH A TOY'S EYES

When She Loved Me

Music and lyrics: Randy Newman
From Disney/Pixar's *Toy Story 2* (1999)
Arranged by Audrey Snyder

Jessie, a cowgirl doll, remembers Emily, the little girl who once made her the center of her world. As Emily grows up, their adventures fade and Jessie is left behind. The song tells that childhood story through Jessie's memories, giving voice to the ache of a relationship changed by time. Love once shared can remain part of us long after everyday companionship has ended.

> ***Listen for:*** *The tenderness of remembered happiness gives the sense of loss its emotional weight.*

09 / HOME HELD IN THE IMAGINATION

I'll Be Home for Christmas

Music: Walter Kent
Lyric credits: Kim Gannon and Buck Ram
First recorded by Bing Crosby (1943)
Arranged by Mark Hayes

Bing Crosby's 1943 recording reached listeners during World War II, when countless families were spending Christmas apart. Its promise of coming home carries hope and uncertainty together. Today, that longing can speak to anyone separated from the people they love by distance, circumstance, or loss. The song leaves room for home to be both a place we remember and a feeling we carry.

10 / THE FREEDOM TO LEAVE, THE PROMISE TO RETURN

Homeward Bound

Music and lyrics: Marta Keen
Arranged by Mack Wilberg

Marta Keen's poem asks for the freedom to follow a calling, with the promise of returning when the journey is complete. Its pastoral images make that request feel intimate and unhurried. The song holds departure and belonging together: someone can venture into the world while remaining connected to the person or place that gives them a sense of home.

> ***Listen for:*** *The long musical phrases give the journey room to unfold, carrying the thought beyond any single breath.*

11 / A STORY CARRIED WITHOUT WORDS

Gabriel's Oboe

Music: Ennio Morricone
From *The Mission* (1986)
Arranged by Craig Hella Johnson
Featured instruments: oboe and cello

Morricone's melody comes from *The Mission*, where a Jesuit missionary uses an oboe to make his first musical contact with the Guaraní people. Craig Hella Johnson's setting creates another kind of encounter: oboe and cello carry the melody within the choir's wordless sound. The voices become part of the surrounding atmosphere, giving each listener room to bring a personal story to the music.

> ***Listen for:*** *Listen for the changing relationship between the instrumental melody and the surrounding voices.*

12 / A FAMILIAR MELODY, OPENING INTO WONDER

Silent Night

Melody: Franz Xaver Gruber
Original text: Joseph Mohr
First performed in 1818
Arranged by Dan Forrest
Presented with string quartet

Dan Forrest begins with spare musical ideas, then gradually expands this familiar carol into a powerful affirmation of the Nativity. Voices and strings shape that unfolding together, allowing a well-known melody to reveal fresh color and depth. As the concert's closing selection, the setting invites us to carry its sense of wonder and peace beyond the final note.

> ***Listen for:*** *Notice how the music grows from its quiet beginning, and how the strings enrich the familiar melody.*