



Classical Sounds of Christmas

Dr. Rachel Franklin

Thursday, December 4 & 11, 2025 - 12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. ET

Popular speaker and concert pianist Rachel Franklin revisits this most beloved seasonal repertory, hand-picking additional selections to explore how classical Western composers created a canon of both secular and sacred experiences that are now deeply rooted in our collective seasonal expectations. From sleigh bells and sugarplums to the mystical beauties of the Nativity, every December our senses are filled with the music of Christmas. Some of this music is ancient and folk-based, some grandly Baroque, and more recent masterpieces have evoked images of feasting, bells, snowy winter landscapes, brightly-colored candy, elves and Santas. We enjoy some beloved favorites and lesser-known gems by such composers as Bach, Leroy Anderson, Finzi, Tchaikovsky, Francisco Guerrero, Rimsky-Korsakov, Vaughan Williams, and many others.

British-born Franklin has been a featured speaker for organizations including the Library of Congress and NPR, exploring intersections among classical and jazz music, film scores, and the fine arts.

Dec. 5 – A Christmas Box of Musical Delights

We embark on our yearly sleigh ride this time with Leroy Anderson's much-loved jingling favorite. Elves and sorcerors conjure glittering holiday magic with Rimsky-Korsakov and Hans Pfitzner. We shiver romantically with Fanny Mendelssohn's *December* while Brahms touches us with his tender *Sacred Lullaby*. A snapshot of a traditional English Christmas with Elgar and Vaughan Williams is followed by Hindemith's magical puppet tale *Tuttifantchen*, and Jake Heggie's poignant operatic version of *It's a Wonderful Life*. The holidays aren't complete without Tchaikovsky's incomparable *Nutcracker*, and we finish with Ellington and Strayhorn's swinging homage to that most famous Christmas ballet.

Works explored, media used

Leroy Anderson, 1908-1975

***Sleigh Ride*, 1946**

- Junpei Fujita, Tanpopo Symphony Orchestra
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LrQST0q_hJ0&list=RDlrQST0q_hJ0&start_radio=1
- Anderson and Roe
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7u2CsZeKHw&list=RDH7u2CsZeKHw&start_radio=1

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, 1844-1908

***Christmas Eve Suite*, 1903**

- Ernest Ansermet, L'Orchestra de la Suisse Romande
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xghS8ixK5E>

Hans Pfitzner, 1869-1949

***Das Christ-Elflein (The Little Elf of Christ)*, 1906**

- Kurt Peter Eichhorn, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GDHu68zY2H8&list=RDGDHu68zY2H8&start_radio=1

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, 1805-1847

***Das Jahr*, 12 Characterstucke: No. 12, *December*, 1841**

- Sarah Rothenberg
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vd2-2hdyfSE&list=RDVd2-2hdyfSE&start_radio=1

Johannes Brahms, 1833-1897

Two Songs for Voice, Viola and Piano, Op. 91, no 2. *Sacred Lullaby (Geistliches Wiegenlied)* 1863

- Jessye Norman, Daniel Barenboim, Wolfram Christ
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqVDYueeH04&list=RDxqVDYueeH04&start_radio=1

Edward Elgar, 1857-1934

***A Christmas Greeting*, Op. 52, 1907**

- Roy Massey, Hereford Cathedral Choir
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UT3RAzoRcwI>

Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872-1958

Fantasia on Greensleeves, 1912, arr. Ralph Greaves, 1934

- Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields, Neville Marriner
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_EK87AFUf0

Paul Hindemith, 1895-1963

Tuttifantchen, orchestral suite from the incidental music, 1922

- Queensland Symphony Orchestra, Werner Andreas Albert.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fljB_Uq6jg&list=RD6fljB_Uq6jg&start_radio=1

Jake Heggie, 1961

It's a Wonderful Life, 2018

- Golda Schultz, San Francisco Opera
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m97oYWDnzDs>
- William Burden, San Francisco Opera
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8VzSPekT2lo>

Piotr Tchaikovsky, 1840-1893

The Nutcracker, 1892

- Arabian Dance, Sergey Chumakov and Elena Petrichenko, 2014
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-sEgjXxjxlw>
- Post:ballet: Waltz of the Snowflakes
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ru5H3LHiU1M>

Duke Ellington, 1899-1974, Billy Strayhorn, 1915-1967

Nutcracker Suite, 1960

- Promo film, Duke Ellington & His Orchestra
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bcHRuMujlOI>

Peanut Brittle Brigade

- Duke Ellington & His Orchestra
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RB6PnBLQhh0>