

Quire Cleveland: Jay White
talks about *Carols for Quire X*

by Daniel Hathaway



There are myriad ways to organize a concert of carols. For Quire Cleveland's tenth "Carols for Quire" program, to be presented by his professional singers in three venues from December 20-22, conductor Jay White turned to Renaissance settings of ancient antiphons for structure. "These three concerts are sponsored by the letter O, just like in *Sesame Street*," he said in a phone conversation from his studio at Kent State University.

Let's explain. By the eighth century, the Roman church had developed a series of devotional antiphons to be sung one-per-day during the last week before Christmas as introductions to the *Magnificat* hymn at Vespers. Derived from the prophecies of Isaiah, each begins with "O" and names a specific attribute of the Messiah — *Sapientia* (Wisdom), *Adonai* (Lord), *Radix Jesse* (Root of Jesse), *Clavis David* (Key

of David), *Oriens* (Daystar), *Rex Gentium* (*King of Nations*), and *Emmanuel* (God with us).



These antiphons will be familiar to those who know the hymn *O come, O come, Emmanuel*, a compilation of the “O” antiphons in poetic form which appeared in Germany during the early 18th century, originally with only five stanzas. Paired with a 15th-century French melody in the widely-adopted *Hymns Ancient and Modern* in 1861, the hymn came into general use in English-speaking countries.

White planned his Quire program around the seven O’s, each of which will be sung first in Gregorian chant, then in settings by Pierre Certon, Jean “Hotinet” Barra, Antoine de Mornable, Guillaume Leroy, and Pierre de Manchicourt, from a 16th-century collection published by Pierre Attaignant.

“Then I wanted to find complementary texts that reiterated the coming of Christ in prophecy,” White said. “I highlighted major words in the antiphons and tried to match them up with carols by later composers. I was so pleased to see that this format seemed to work.”

Those later carols include Vaughan Williams' *The truth from above*, Herbert Howells' *A spotless Rose*, Peter Wishart's *Alleluya, a new work*, Michael Praetorius' *Lo, how a Rose e're blooming*, Boris Ord's *Adam lay ybounden*, and Robert L. de Pearsall's *In dulci jubilo*.

Most of those titles will be well known to fans of the King's College, Cambridge Festivals of Nine Lessons and Carols. "I wanted to return to Quire Cleveland's decade-long tradition of combining Renaissance and familiar settings," White said.



There will also be three sing-along, "communal" carols arranged by King's director emeritus, Sir David Willcocks: *O come, O come, Emmanuel*, *The First Nowell*, and *O come, all ye faithful*. An unusual feature of those carols is that Quire will take on the role of the organ while the audience sings the tunes, an idea inspired on a tour during White's eight years singing with the men's choir Chanticleer.

"Our conductor Joe Jennings said, 'We're going to sing the organ arrangement for *The First Nowell*, so pick a part.' There were only twelve of us, and I think at one point there was a chord with fourteen notes, so we probably left something out. But that became one of our favorite pieces on that particular tour, and we ended up recording it."

White noted that the majority of the selections in Quire's program are Advent carols. "The first time we hear about the Nativity is in *The First Noel*. These concerts come later in December than we typically perform, so one of the things I set out to do with this program was to concentrate on the anticipation of Christmas, rather than jumping right into all the wonderful music of the season.

“I believe that talking about the anticipation and excitement of something that is to come is a nice foray into the New Year when many people, including myself, feel it’s time to start something fresh. A new light is coming into the darkness of the world, and I hope that in the communal singing people will find a vibrational lifting of their souls and spirits.”

Carols for Quire X will be presented on Friday, December 20 at 7:30 pm at St. Ignatius of Antioch Church, on Saturday, December 21 at 7:30 pm at Our Lady of Peace Church, and on Sunday, December 22 at 4:00 pm at Historic St. Peter Church. Freewill offerings will be received.

An open rehearsal will be held at St. Peter Church on Thursday, December 19 from 6:45-9:30 pm. [Registration](#) is required by Tuesday, December 17.

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