

Celebrate the holidays with The Cleveland Orchestra

by Mike Telin



“What gets me excited about holiday concerts? Honestly, everything about them,” conductor Brett Mitchell said during a telephone conversation. “Every performance is for the audience, but these concerts really are for them. There’s so much opportunity for banter, and every crowd feels different.”

Mitchell pointed out a favorite quote of his from the late Stephen Sondheim, who said, *the audience is the final collaborator*. “And that is what we have been missing for the last two years in general, but particularly for this kind of program.”

Beginning on Thursday, December 9 at 7:30 pm, Brett Mitchell returns to Mandel Hall at Severance to lead The Cleveland Orchestra and Cleveland Orchestra Chorus in a holiday program devoted to music of the season. The concert also features director of choruses Lisa Wong as well as vocalist and Northeast Ohio favorite Capathia Jenkins. Performances continue through December 19. See our [Concert Listings](#) page for dates, times, and guest choirs. Tickets are available [online](#).

Mitchell noted that the concerts are also a family affair where everyone in the audience gets dressed in their holiday finest. “It’s a special occasion for them, and to look out and see the kids and the magic in their eyes when ‘you know who’ makes his special entrance is so heartwarming.”

The conductor said that this year’s program is full of musical selections that will appeal to everyone. “The longest piece is only seven minutes — the ‘Waltz of the Flowers’

from *Nutcracker*. So if you're not into one piece, just wait, because the next one is coming."



He said that the selections are also intended to evoke the feeling of a homecoming, beginning with the first piece — *Oh Come all ye faithful* — which by tradition, serves as the opener for the Orchestra's holiday concerts.

"It starts with just the voices and builds and builds," Mitchell said. "Then there's a big key change, and that's when all the wreaths and bows and all of the other holiday finery lights up. Even though we've done it hundreds of times, it always has an emotional effect."

Asked if he has a favorite piece on the program, Mitchell said that since one of his last projects as associate conductor of The Cleveland Orchestra was leading fully staged performances of *The Nutcracker* at Playhouse Square, "Waltz of the Flowers" is his sentimental favorite.

"But as a guy who was eleven years old in 1990 when *Home Alone* came out, getting to do 'Somewhere in My Memory' is very special, and it's one the great holiday songs of all time. And right before that is another piece from *Home Alone*, 'Holiday Flight.' Getting to conduct both of these John Williams songs couldn't be more exciting. It just

takes me back to being an eleven-year-old again every time I hear that music. And if you can't embrace that during the holidays, I don't know when you can."

Click [here](#) to watch the Orchestra's preview video with Mitchell.

Mitchell has never worked with [Capathia Jenkins](#), and he said he couldn't be more thrilled to have the opportunity. "I love the first line she has on her website: *Capathia Jenkins can definitely act but all those who know her also know that this diva can blow and blow and blow you right off this planet.*"



Capathia Jenkins with The Cleveland Orchestra at Blossom, July 2021

During a telephone conversation from Columbus, Ohio, where she was performing holiday concerts with the Columbus Symphony, the acclaimed vocalist reflected on what it means to be able to perform concerts in front of a live audience.

"I love my husband and family but when you don't get to *do* the thing that you love, something inside of you breaks. So I'm just thrilled to be in this holiday season, getting to stand on the stage with The Cleveland Orchestra with an audience gathered just to celebrate."

Jenkins will be spending a lot of time in Ohio this holiday season. In addition to her appearances in Columbus and Cleveland, after a quick trip to the West Coast for a

concert with the San Francisco Symphony she will return for a New Year's Eve performance with the Cincinnati Symphony.

“It just worked out that way but it's great,” she said. “Ohio loves me and I love Ohio. I've been in Cleveland every year for the past five or six years for concerts at Blossom, which is gorgeous. But this is my first time with the Orchestra for the holiday shows. I'm honored and thrilled any time I get to perform with Cleveland — it's every singer's dream.”



Jenkins said that the three songs she will be featured in are all classics and set the mood for the season. “*Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas* is just so much fun. And I love a song like *Let it Snow*. The lyrics are great — there's a snow storm going on outside but as long as you hold me tight, ‘let it snow, let it snow, let it snow.’ It's so beautiful and heartwarming. What's interesting about *Santa Claus is Coming to Town* is that it's Ella Fitzgerald's arrangement from her album *Ella's Swinging Christmas* — and nobody can swing like The Cleveland Orchestra.”

The vocalist said that she will be happy to spend an extended period of time in Cleveland. “It is nice to be able to sit down, although I probably will be spending some time in a studio prepping for the shows that I have coming up in San Francisco and Cincinnati. But that's the life of a singer. I love Cleveland and I'm sure I'll get out to some of those great new restaurants and visit some friends while I'm there.”

Click [here](#) for the Orchestra's preview video with Capathia Jenkins, and click [here](#) to listen to her new single — *I am strong*.

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