Ave Maria

— Javier Busto Sagrado, an internationally-known choral composer and conductor, was born in the Basque country of Spain in 1949. A man of many talents, he graduated as a medical doctor from Vallodolid University in Spain. This is a lovely, contemplative arrangement of Ave Maria with shimmering harmonies. If you listen closely, you will detect Busto’s homage to Franz Schubert’s well-known rendition of Ave Maria.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women; and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. Jesus. Both you and your children shall be called: blessed from all generations. Praise be to God. Praise be to you, Mary, for you believed that what God had said to you would be fulfilled. Amen. Amen.

Der Heiland ist erchienen, den der Herr promised. Heaven has appeared, as the Lord promised. He has bestowed his righteousness upon the world. Hallelujah!

There is No Rose of Such Virtue

— Michael Larkin is both faculty chair of the voice department and voice teacher at the Wilmington School of Music in Delaware. He is also Director of Music Ministry at St. Mary Anne’s Episcopal Church. This is his lovely, transparent arrangement of Ave Maria, which is common for most of Kodály’s choral compositions.

During its lifetime, Randall Thompson (1899-1994) was one of the most widely-performed and prolific choral composers of his generation. His most recognizable choral work is the anthem, Alleluia, commissioned for the opening of the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood. Glory to God in the Highest, written in 1958, is a joyous exaltation of God, propelled by driving rhythms and a lilting melody.

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There is No Rose
Ariana Quintana is a native of Argentina who began playing the piano at the age of 3. After earning a Bachelor’s and Master’s degree in Argentina with an emphasis in piano performance and additional study in composition, she came to the U.S. with her husband, mezzo-soprano Helene Urgo, and settled in California. Quintana joined the Los Angeles Masterworks Chorale under the direction of Paul Salomunovich who conducted some of his works, including the premiere of his Hodie Christus Natus Est in December, 2000. An accomplished musician, conductor, composer, arranger and pianist, Quintana is currently finishing the Doctoral Program in Conducting at the University of Southern California. Hodie Christus Natus Est is written for double choir, with divisi in all parts, offering rich and exultant harmonies alternating with chant-like melody lines to describe Christ’s birth.

Hodie Christus Natus Est | Today Christ is Born

Away in a Manger — Brant Adams was born in 1955 in Ohio. He has a doctorate in composition from the University of Texas, Austin, and is currently coordinator of music and theory at Oklahoma State University. He sets this traditional carol in a lovely, simple arrangement with interesting harmonies. The last three measures, however, are a somewhat amusing departure from the rest of the piece, with their suggestion of jazz harmonies.

Bring a Torch, Jeanette, Isabella — Although Stephen Chatman, born in 1950, is Canadian, he studied composition at Oberlin Conservatory in Ohio and received a Fulbright grant for study with Karlheinz Stockhausen in Cologne, Germany. He is a professor and Head of Composition at the University of British Columbia, where he started as their first composer in residence in 1976. This traditional carol, Bring a Torch, Jeanette, Isabella, was originally sung in the Provençal tongue, based upon a drinking song of Gaulish knights. In this version of the carol, Paulus alternates melody lines with four-part harmonies and sparse harp accompaniment to represent the simple sacredness of this traditional, well-known Christmas carol.

O Little Town of Bethlehem — In this version of O Little Town of Bethlehem, Stephen Paulus alternates melody lines with four-part harmonies and sparse harp accompaniment to represent the simple sacredness of this traditional, well-known Christmas carol.

**On Christmas Night All Christians Sing** — Howard Helvey (b. 1968) earned his doctorate in composition and piano performance from the College Conservatory of Music in Cincinnati. The joyful setting of this traditional carol uses a 4-hand piano accompaniment. It also alternates melody lines among different choral parts, with vocal obligati in the other voices, and an alternate setting of the melody in canon for one verse.

The Twelve Days of Christmas — This famous tune, first published in England in 1780, is possibly based upon an earlier French carol. It was arranged for the King’s Singers by Geoffrey Keating, who has a Masters in Music from Oxford and is currently a lecturer at Glasgow University. His sprightly, humorous setting weaves the traditional melody among various choral parts, while the other parts provide vocal accompaniment. Listen for brief insertions of passages from other well-known choral works. Can you guess what they are?

Winds through the Olive Trees — Robert Wezler, born in 1932, has served as choirmaster for various churches in Pennsylvania and Minnesota, and has received numerous composer awards from ASCAP. Winds through the Olive Trees is a lovely and loving description of Jesus’ birth, with choral obligati that represent the sound of the wind.

Spanish Carol — Andrew Carter (b. 1939) is an English-born composer, conductor, singer and workshop leader whose music is performed worldwide. He travels extensively throughout the U.S., Europe, Australia and New Zealand and was composer in residence at St. Olaf College in Minnesota during 2008. His setting of this traditional Spanish Carol is just plain fun! Although this piece is sung a cappella, one can almost hear a guitarron being played and slapped as accompaniment.

**Veni, veni Emmanuel** — Franz Biebl was born in 1906 in Pursruck, Germany. His was a large family; he was the 11th child. Biebl held various choral conducting positions in Germany and Austria, and, curiously enough, spent a few years as a prisoner of war in the United States, during and after World War II, where he was allowed to compose and conduct. He reported that the food was quite decent! Ave Maria, his best-known composition, is a tender and exultant setting of this well-known prayer, with beautiful and inspirational harmonies.