

## LETTER TO THE AUDIENCE

*From the concert programme of To Bethlehem With Kings Christmas concert series, December 2018*

Dear Friends,

Welcome to our ninth annual *To Bethlehem with Kings* concert. I hope you have come to this evening's performance out of purely self-interested motives. I hope you have come to have your soul fed and your ears enthralled by carols "ancient and modern", sung well. Because this is our ultimate goal and our deepest desire: that, as a men and boys choir in 21<sup>st</sup> century North America, we might be able to put on a concert worthy of your patronage solely because the music-making is that good. I would also like to acknowledge the fact that by coming to tonight's performance you are supporting Capella Regalis, and we are grateful to you for this.

Our opening hymn, in staggeringly Victorian tones, suggests that "Christian children all must be: mild, obedient, good as he". The boys of Capella Regalis are many things, but about the last word I would use to describe them would be "mild". Thank goodness for that! Some of them may occasionally be mildly obedient, but that's about it. Their singing does not come across as *mild*. Focused, hopefully, and I suspect this is what is striking about seeing a choir like this in action (it is still for me!): the manifest fact that good music exerts both an emancipating and civilizing influence on those it encounters. We are freed to be ourselves, yet somehow better at working in groups.

This music is both timeless and rooted. My hope is that it will be a place of refuge and recuperation for the boys of Capella Regalis throughout their lives, a center to hold to amidst the "changes and chances of this fleeting world". But to keep this gift tucked away, held close to the bosom and shielded from the great wide world out there would be to destroy it. A gift unshared is no gift at all. So the men and boys must not be mild, but something like the opposite, sallying forth into the world in the rather bold hope that someone might be interested enough, or hungry enough, to come hear them sing. And here you are, our dear audience! I hope you will join us in singing heartily yourself on one or more of the classic Christmas hymns we have on the docket this evening, or perhaps you'll be inspired to hold forth on Paul Halley's whacky and wonderful arrangement of *Il est né le divin Enfant*.

To be sure, it is not entirely accurate to sing *hodie Christus natus est* (today Christ is born). Even for Christians it is still, after all, the season of Advent. But the world is nonetheless enchanted. The solstice is upon us and the sun will return for another year, Christmas is fast approaching and the three kings from Persian lands will soon begin their annual pilgrimage, the shepherds will, so recklessly, leave their flocks a-feeding in tempest, storm, and wind, yet the animals will be the first to the miracle scene – small wonder! – and all to redeem my poor heart since, as we are told often enough tonight, this is the only gift we can offer and if only in this we succeed, well then it is possible that for you, today, *in terra canunt angeli*.

Thank you for joining us,  
Nick