

Winter Dreams – December 12 - 14, 2025

As music lovers, we all have our favorites. But how many of us have “winter-themed” music included in a classical playlist? This edition of *Prelude* is an introduction to the pieces you’ll hear at the concert, but it also serves as a curated journey through the past three hundred years. As you scroll through the best “winter dreams” that classical music has to offer, we hope to remind you of some old favorites and perhaps introduce you to new ones. Grab a cup of hot chocolate, a comfy seat and, as you curl up by a cozy fire if you have one, be sure to click on the links we have provided after each paragraph.

What makes classical music so special is that the music itself, with or without words, can conjure the beauty of a winter wonderland, the delicate structure of a snowflake or the starkness of a frozen landscape. Many composers found inspiration in nature, specifically winter.

HSO’s upcoming concert features two distinctly different compositions. The first, **Tchaikovsky’s *Winter Dreams*** composed in 1866, is filled with palpable emotional intensity. Reports indicate that Tchaikovsky worked so hard on the piece that he became physically and emotionally ill. At one point, his doctor forced him to take a break, asserting he was “one step away from insanity” due to overwork. The first two movements, with suggestive subtitles of “Dreams of a Winter Journey” and “Land of Desolation, Land of Mists” make it easy to imagine any number of wintry scenes to match the music. [Tchaikovsky - Symphony No. 1 “Winter Dreams”, Op. 13 \(Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra, Valery Gergiev\)](#)

The next composition on the program is ***Seasons of Change*** by **Curtis Stewart**, HSO’s Joyce C. Willis Artist in Residence. In Curtis’ words, it is a re-composition of Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons*, featuring the voices of unhoused people from Phoenix, Arizona. Curtis wrote the piece as an exploration of the impact of climate change on people, namely, those struggling without

shelter or basic resources. The twelve movements of the composition echo small pieces of Vivaldi’s original work but add new and different rhythms that reflect Curtis’ heritage. The piece gives a much-needed voice to people for whom climate change is an acutely experienced daily reality. The recordings you will hear in the piece are punctuated by Stewart’s original texts, which themselves echo and deconstruct elements of the four poems Vivaldi wrote as the basis for his concertos. These elements come together on ***Seasons of Change*** to explore the question: Who will climate change erase first? Here’s a sample of what you will hear: [An Introduction of Sorts](#)

And now for more!

Tchaikovsky’s 1891 score for ***The Nutcracker*** is instantly associated with winter. But the composer was unenthusiastic about the project when the commission was offered to him by Ivan Vsevolozhsky, director of the Imperial Theater in Russia. The composer was then grieving the loss of his sister, Alexandra (Sasha) and it was her passing that inspired the character – and



The Nutcracker

music – for the Sugar Plum Fairy. Tchaikovsky used a new instrument he discovered on a trip to Paris, the celesta, which produces glass-bell tones, creating the iconic sound we associate with the music today. The St. Petersburg premiere of the ballet in 1892 was not a success, but the music withstood the test of time. While the George Balanchine choreography was made famous by the annual New York City Ballet production, it was not the first *Nutcracker* produced in the United States. That credit goes to William Christensen, a student of George Balanchine, and founder of the San Francisco Ballet, the first full ballet company in the United States, and it lives on in the annual production by Ballet West, the company Christensen founded when he left California and moved to Salt Lake City. The choreography between the two versions varies, but the music remains true to the original score.



Don't miss it!

On December 20 and 21st, the HSO will collaborate with Connecticut Ballet to present the timeless classic. [The Nutcracker Suite Full Album Tchaikovsky](#)

Tchaikovsky was certainly not the first (or last) composer inspired by winter. Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, written in 1720, is ubiquitous and has been used in everything from commercials to films. It consists of four violin concertos, each dedicated to a season, complete with sonnets that use words to enhance the descriptions embedded in the music. Winter's sonnet includes:

To tremble from cold in the icy snow, in the harsh breath of a horrid wind; To run, stamping one's feet every moment, our teeth chattering in the extreme cold. [Vivaldi - Winter from The Four Seasons | Netherlands Bach Society](#)

Curtis Stewart is not the first musician/composer to reimagine Vivaldi's famous work. In 2012, Max Richter produced *Vivaldi Recomposed*, a work for violin and orchestra, in which the composer took elements from the original concertos and combined them with new music, hoping to encourage listeners to hear the original work by Vivaldi with "new ears." Can you catch the subtle and not-so-subtle differences from the original? [Vivaldi - Winter - The Four Seasons | Recomposed by Max Richter \(4/4\)](#)

Like Vivaldi, Joseph Haydn was inspired by the seasons to create his oratorio *The Seasons*, composed in 1801. It is a musical portrait of each season and the winter section of the work describes shorter days, frozen lakes and a panicked wanderer who becomes lost in a blizzard but manages to find a warm and safe

shelter. [Joseph Haydn / Die Jahreszeiten: Der Winter \(Schuldt-Jensen\) - YouTube](#)

Frédéric Chopin's *Winter Wind*, a piano etude written in 1836, considered one of his most difficult etudes, has a slow start but soon explodes into a terrifying description of a blizzard, with a flurry of notes that cascade in the right hand, as if snowflakes are being tossed about by an icy winter wind. [Pollini plays Chopin Etude Op.25 No.11 'Winter Wind'](#)

Felix and Fanny Mendelssohn, brother and sister, heralded as brilliant musicians and composers, were both inspired by winter. In 1830, Felix wrote *Winterlied*, one of his Six Songs, featuring a mother who begs her son to stay home rather than venturing forth in a blizzard to find his lost sister. [6 Gesänge, Op. 19a: No. 3. Winterlied](#)

In 1841, Fanny composed *Das Jahr*, a collection of piano works dedicated to each month of the year. The piece for January is a breathless recollection of the distant glories of Spring. [Das Jahr, H.385: I. January. Ein Traum](#)

Robert Schumann composed his *Album for the Young* in 1848 as a gift for his children. Robert and his renowned composer/pianist wife, Clara Schumann, had eight children, but their last three children (Ferdinand, Eugenie and Felix) were born after the piece was written. When Robert composed the piece, Clara was pregnant with or had just given birth to their fifth child, Ludwig, and somehow managed to maintain a hectic teaching and international performing schedule. The collection, consisting of forty-three short easy works for solo piano, includes *Wintertime*. [R. Schumann: Winterzeit I-II, from Album für die Jugend Op. 68](#)



Like Schumann, composer **Franz Liszt** dedicated a twelve-movement piano suite, composed in 1876, *The Christmas Tree Suite*, to a child. It was a gift to his first granddaughter, Daniela von Bülow, born in 1860, and named for Liszt's only son, Daniel, who had died at the age of 20. Liszt's daughter, Francesca Gaetana Cosima Liszt, was then married to conductor Hans Von Bülow, but their union was a loveless one. After just six years of marriage, Cosima entered what was considered a scandalous relationship with composer Richard Wager, who was 24 years her senior and just two years younger than her father. Although Cosima, like her brother Daniel, was the product of their father's passionate and years-long relationship with Marie d'Agoult, who was married to someone else, Liszt was outraged by his daughter's betrayal of her marriage. Liszt traveled to Lucerne to confront the couple and did not speak with them for five years. His anger eventually subsided, but he never fully forgave his daughter for marrying Wagner. The piece for his first granddaughter was composed in 1876, just after reconciliation with Wagner. [Franz Liszt - Weihnachtsbaum, S. 186 - YouTube](#)

Though he never had a child, **Tchaikovsky** had children in mind when he composed *The Children's Album*, a set of twenty-four piano pieces intended for children and consciously modeled after Schumann's works. Tchaikovsky wrote the work in 1878 and dedicated the music for his beloved seven-year-old nephew Vladimir ("Bobik") Davydov, writing this to his brother-in-law: "Tell Bobik that the music has been printed with pictures, that the music was composed by Uncle Petya and that on it is written, Dedicated to Volodya Davydov. The silly little fellow will not understand what dedicated means... Even so, Bobik is an inimitably delightful figure when he's playing, and he might look at the notes and think that a whole symphony is dedicated to him." One section of the work, titled *Winter Morning*, portrays the poignant beauty of a winter morning. [Tchaikovsky - Winter Morning | Children's Album, Op. 39](#)



Following in the footsteps of Schumann and Tchaikovsky, **Béla Bartók** was inspired to write collections of short solo piano pieces for children. One collection written in 1908-1909, *For Children*, features eighty-five short pieces and the thirty-eighth piece in the volume celebrates "The Winter Solstice." [Béla Bartók plays Bartók "For Children"](#)

Another piece written with children in mind is **Claude Debussy's** *The Snow is Dancing*, a piano prelude, published in 1908 as part of *The Children's Corner*, a suite originally dedicated to the composer's three-year old daughter Claude-Emma. The dedication reads: "A ma chère petite Chouchou, avec les tendres excuses de son Père pour ce qui va suivre. C. D." (To my dear little Chouchou, with tender apologies from her father for what follows). [Debussy: Children's Corner, CD 119: IV. The Snow is Dancing](#)



In 1913, **Sergei Rachmaninoff** wrote *The Bells*, a symphony for chorus and orchestra, and believed it was one of the best pieces he composed. The words are taken from American poet Edgar Allen Poe's poem "The Bells" and begins with the jingling and tinkling of silver bells, evoking the winter season. [Sergei Rachmaninoff - The Bells, Op.35 - Simon Rattle, Berliner Philharmoniker, 2013 \[24/44.1\]](#)

Sergei Prokofiev's *Winter Bonfire* was written in 1950 for Soviet state radio. It is the story of a group of children on a celebratory trip from Moscow into the countryside. See if you can identify the sounds of children boarding a train, waltzing on ice and building an evening bonfire to keep warm. [Sergei Prokofiev : Winter Bonfire, Suite for small orchestra and boys' chorus Op. 122 \(1949-50\)](#)

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *The Snow Maiden*, written in 1880-1881, concludes with a fifteen-year long winter that finally ends with the melting of the Snow Maiden who, by falling in love, has doomed herself in a shaft of sunlight. Enjoy the full opera! [Nicola Ghiuselev Alexandrina Milcheva The Snow Maiden full opera \(1985\)](#)

In his 1899 ballet *The Seasons*, **Alexander Glazunov** portrayed each season, starting with a winter scene, with dancers representing Winter and four companions: frost, ice, hail and snow. With fluttering woodwinds, trilling strings and harp flourishes, the ballet does capture the beauty of winter. [Glazunov: The Seasons op. 67 \(Winter\)](#)

Edward Elgar composed *The Snow*, a piece written in 1895 for chorus, piano and two solo violins and the lyrics were written by his poet wife, Caroline Alice Elgar. [The Snow, Edward Elgar](#)

The Austrian-Jewish composer **Erich Wolfgang Korngold**, born in 1897, famously fled to the United States after he escaped the Nazi regime that consumed Europe. A child prodigy, at age five he could play four-hand piano pieces with his father and began composing at the age of seven. His first orchestral score was written when he was 14. At the age of 11, he wrote a four-hand ballet-pantomime, *Der Schneemann* (“The Snowman”). The work was performed in 1910 for a charity gala and caused a sensation when it was performed at the Vienna Court Opera. Korngold’s teacher then arranged it for orchestra, and it has remained a favorite ever since. [E. W. KORNGOLD · Der Schneemann, eine Ballettpantomime · Philharmonie Salzburg · Elisabeth Fuchs](#)

Ever the innovator, **John Cage** created *Winter Music*, a set of 20 separate pages of music that can be played by up to 20 different pianists, using some or all of the pages, in any order. Confused? Everyone feels the same, but that’s Cage’s way, creating a seeming jumble of random pages and contrasting piano rhythms and pitches. It is an ode to winter, with a landscape that can be harsh, jagged, icy and slippery, but also soft, delicate and tranquil. There is an unpredictable mood of the piece, creating a one-of-a-kind characterization of winter. [Winter Music](#)



The iconic *Ice Skaters* is the classic waltz composed by **Émile Waldteufel** in 1882. The composer was something of a “one-hit wonder” and he was inspired to write the piece while watching skates at a rink at the Bois de Boulogne in Paris. [Émile Waldteufel: The Skater's Waltz Robert](#)



No list of winter-themed music would be complete without American composer **Leroy Anderson’s** enduring *Sleigh Ride*. Anderson composed the orchestral work in 1948, and it was first performed by the Boston Pops on May 4, 1948 (notably NOT in winter!) under the direction of Arthur Fiedler. [Leroy Anderson: Sleigh Ride // Simon Halsey & London Symphony Orchestra](#)

And by the way: Did you know that the Andrews Sisters recorded *Sleigh Ride* in 1950? Here it is! [The Andrews Sisters - Sleigh Ride \[1950\]](#)

JOIN US!

Please join the HSO on December 12 - 14, 2025, to enjoy a thrilling performance of Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 1, *Winter Dreams*, as well as *Seasons of Change*, a contemporary reimagining of Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons* by Curtis Stewart, HSO’s Joyce C. Willis Artist in Residence, all under the baton of HSO’s Carolyn Kuan.

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Composer Yearbook



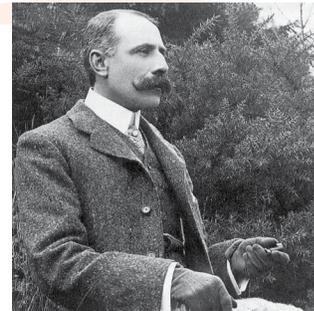
Alexander Glazunov



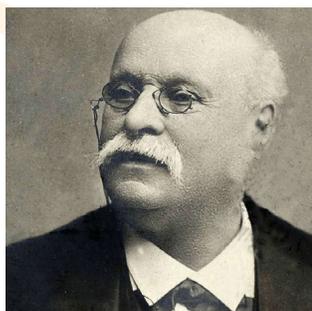
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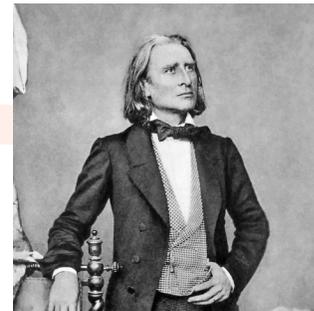
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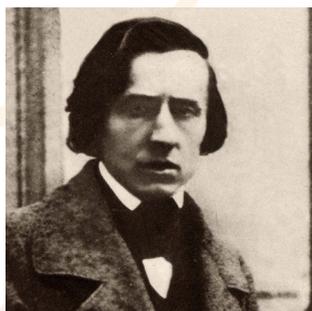
Erich Wolfgang Korngold



Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel



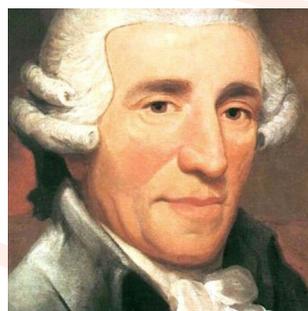
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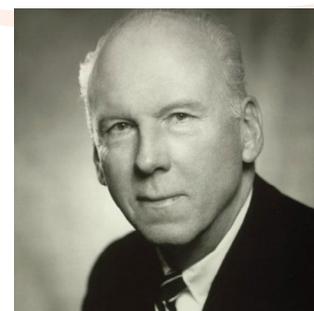
Frédéric Chopin



John Cage



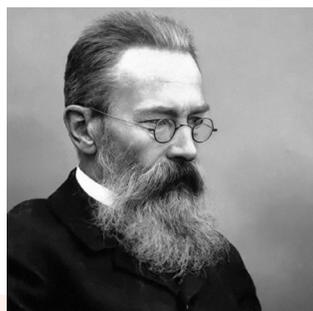
Joseph Haydn



Leroy Anderson



Max Richter



Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov



Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky



Robert Schumann



Sergei Prokofiev



Sergei Rachmaninoff

Wishing you a cozy
winter season!



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[Ballet West, Willam Christensen and the history of ballet in America](#)

[A 60th anniversary special: Ballet West's extraordinary history, the legacy of Willam F. Christensen – The Utah Review](#)