



Brighton Philharmonic Orchestra

Music Director  
Joanna MacGregor CBE

Charles Dickens'

# A Christmas Carol

**Alistair McGowan** narrator  
**Joanna MacGregor**  
conductor/piano

**BPO Brass Quintet**  
**John Ellwood** trumpet  
**Julie Ryan** trumpet  
**David Wythe** horn  
**William Brown** trombone  
**John Elliott** tuba

Abridged and directed by  
**Richard Williams**

Saturday 14 December  
6pm & 8pm  
St George's Kemptown,  
Brighton

Over 180 years later, *A Christmas Carol* continues to be relevant. It sends a message that cuts through materialism and gets to the heart and soul of Christmas. Dickens describes the season as ‘a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of other people as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys.’ This was what Dickens described as his ‘Carol Philosophy.’

At the beginning of the Victorian period the celebration of Christmas was in decline. Medieval Christmas traditions – which had combined the birth of Christ with the ancient Roman festival of Saturnalia and the Germanic winter festival of Yule – had come under intense scrutiny by Oliver Cromwell. By the time of the Industrial Revolution, in Dickens’ time, workers were allowed very little time off for the celebration of Christmas. Under Queen Victoria, a romantic revival of Christmas traditions slowly stirred. Prince Albert brought over the German custom of decorating the Christmas tree; Christmas carols (many of which were medieval or folk-based) began to thrive again; and the first Christmas card appeared in the 1840s. But it was the Christmas stories of Dickens – particularly his 1843 masterpiece *A Christmas Carol*, as well as his earlier *The Pickwick Papers* – that rekindled the joy of Christmas, along with plum pudding, Christmas goose, roasted chestnuts and Christmas punch, called ‘Smoking Bishop’.

Our version of the much-loved story of Ebenezer Scrooge, Tiny Tim and the spirits of Christmas Past, Present and Future is narrated by the wonderful Alistair McGowan, with Christmas music and interludes provided by myself and principal brass players from Brighton Philharmonic Orchestra. Right at the end, do hum along with our final Carol Fantasy.

We wish you all a very Merry Christmas!

**Joanna MacGregor**  
Music Director Brighton Philharmonic Orchestra

### Interludes: some musical background

**Ding Dong Merrily on High** 16th century French dance, Jehan Tabourot; arr. John Rutter

**God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen** 16th century, traditional Somerset: arr. Luther Henderson

**Es ist ein Ros entsprungen** 15th century, Trier Germany: arr. Roger Harvey

**Gypsy Rondo** from Haydn’s Piano Trio no.39: arr. Arthur Frackenpohl

**O Come, O Come Emmanuel** 15th century, French plainchant: arr. Toby Street

**Past Three a Clock** 17th century town crier tune, ‘London Waits’: arr. Roger Harvey

**I Saw Three Ships Come Sailing In** 17th century, traditional Derbyshire: arr. Luther Henderson

**Coventry Carol** 16th century, Coventry Mystery Play: arr. Roger Harvey

**Ding Dong Merrily on High** 16th century French dance, Jehan Tabourot arr. Toby Street

### and original music by Joanna MacGregor

**Carol Fantasy (arr. John Iveson) – please hum along!**

**Angels from the Realms of Glory** 19th century, Scottish/English

**Away in a Manger** 19th century, English/American

**God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen** 16th century, traditional Somerset

**Good King Wenceslas** 13th century, Finnish

**We Wish You a Merry Christmas** 18th century, traditional West Country

**Alistair McGowan** is an impressionist, actor, writer of jokes, plays and sketches, stand-up comedian and, latterly, pianist. His early career on *Spitting Image* and *The Big Impression*, two of TV’s most popular shows, made him a household name. He has also worked extensively in theatre, and has appeared in the West End in *Art*, *Cabaret*, *The Mikado* and *Little Shop of Horrors* (for which he received a Laurence Olivier Award nomination). At the age of forty-nine Alistair went back to the piano (having reached Grade 2 as a nine-year old), achieving a No.1 Sony album that grew into the successful live tour *The Piano Show*. Alistair now lives in Ludlow, where he has created an annual piano festival.

Described as ‘a brilliant light in the music world,’ **Joanna MacGregor CBE** is the fourth Music Director in the history of the Brighton Philharmonic; she’ll be appearing as pianist and conductor in several of this year’s concerts. Joanna has performed as a concert pianist in over eighty countries, working with many eminent conductors including Pierre Boulez, Colin Davis and Simon Rattle; in 2024-25 she tours Europe and Scandinavia, US and Canada, Australia and China. Joanna is Dame Myra Hess Chair of Piano at the Royal Academy of Music and runs two annual piano festivals for young pianists, as well as a year-round Wigmore Hall series. She has been Artistic Director of Dartington Summer School, Bath International Festival and Deloitte Ignite at the Royal Opera House, as well as a curator for festivals around the world. She has released over forty solo recordings, ranging from Chopin and Piazzolla to Bach and John Cage, and has commissioned many landmark works. Joanna is a regular broadcaster on TV and radio, appearing many times at the BBC Proms; she performed Beethoven’s thirty-two sonatas in 2020, followed by an immersive Schubert series in 2023. Her collaborative composing projects encompass jazz, film, visual art, contemporary dance and electronica, and she’s currently overseeing the music for forty-seven silent Sherlock Holmes films with the BFI, for release worldwide. For many years she chaired the Paul Hamlyn Composers Awards and has been a Booker Prize Judge.

As well as working at The National Theatre, the writer/director **Richard Williams** has been the artistic director of four theatre companies: Manchester’s Contact Theatre, where he directed Rik Mayall in Brecht’s *Mann ist Mann*, Roger Allam in *Macbeth* and Imelda Staunton in *The Threepenny Opera*; The Oxford Stage Company for whom he directed *Hamlet* at Elsinore Castle with David Threlfall, and *The Seagull* in the West End with John Hurt and Vanessa Redgrave; The Arts-Unicorn Theatre London; and Liverpool Playhouse. He has won several awards for his productions, which include Baroque and contemporary opera; his libretto and production of *Tarka-the Opera* (composed by Stephen McNeff) received the Royal Philharmonic Society Award for Best New Opera. As a writer he has adapted seven novels for the West End, and Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* and *Oliver Twist* for regional theatre. He has recently published two books: *Audition Your Way to Success*, and *Directing for the Stage* (Crowood Press). Richard also teaches at The University of the Arts London.

Established in 1925, **Brighton Philharmonic Orchestra** is a professional orchestra performing bold, innovative programmes every year at Brighton Dome and across Sussex. Led by their Music Director **Joanna MacGregor**, the orchestra is formed of principal players of all the London orchestras – many of whom are playing in tonight’s concert – as well as brilliant young professional players. Celebrating our 100th year, BPO’s blockbuster season includes music by Igor Stravinsky and Steve Reich, Sibelius and Duke Ellington, with international soloists: percussionist Evelyn Glennie, sax player Jess Gillam and jazz pianist Gwilym Simcock are among the artists joining us. Brighton Philharmonic Orchestra has been performing to audiences in Sussex for the last century, and our concerts are for everyone.

[brightonphil.org.uk](http://brightonphil.org.uk)





Blue  
Notes:  
Duke  
Ellington,  
Wayne  
Shorter,  
Gwilym  
Simcock

Saturday 25 January, 7.30pm  
Gwilym Simcock Trio  
Clark Rundell conductor



Belshazzar's  
Feast;  
Enigma  
Variations



Sunday 9 February, 2.45pm  
with Brighton Festival Chorus  
Cody Quattlebaum baritone  
Ben Gernon conductor

Steve  
Reich,  
Yoko  
Ono,  
Gerhard  
Richter

Sunday 23 March, 7.30pm  
Colin Currie conductor/claves  
Joanna MacGregor piano

Centenary  
Gala:  
Messiaen's  
Turangalîla  
Symphony

Sunday 13 April, 2.45pm  
Sian Edwards conductor  
Joanna MacGregor piano  
Cynthia Millar ondes martenot

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