

How Christmas was Celebrated in the Middle Ages

Excerpts from an article by Dave Roos visit for the full article www.history.com/news/middle-ages-christmas-traditions

In medieval times, Christmas celebrations carried on for multiple raucous days and nights.

Long before Santa Claus, caroling and light-strewn Christmas trees, people in medieval Europe celebrated the Christmas season with 12 full days of feasting and revelry culminating with Twelfth Night and the raucous crowning of a “King of Misrule.”

Christmas in the Middle Ages was preceded by the month-long fast of Advent, during which Christians avoided rich foods and over-indulgence. But all bets were off starting on the morning of December 25, according to Anne Lawrence-Mathers, a historian at the University of Reading in the UK where she specializes in medieval England, a period that runs roughly from the 5th century A.D. to 1500 A.D.

“Once Christmas Day came around, if you had the stamina, then you were expected to eat, drink, be merry, dress up, play games, go dancing around the neighborhood for 12 days solid before you collapsed in a heap,” she says.

Feasting

The degree of Christmas decadence depended on your social status, but Lawrence-Mathers says that most people would at least have a pig slaughtered in November and salted and smoked in preparation for Christmas bacon and hams.

“One thing that comes out very clearly is that drinking was as important as eating, if not more so,” says Lawrence-Mathers, noting that ale and spiced cider were the drink of choice for the commoners, while the lords and royalty gulped down casks of wine. In just one year, Henry III ordered 60 tons of wine for Reading Abbey with one ton being equal to 1,272 bottles.

Mumming, Hogging and the Feast of Fools

Mumming was a popular Christmas pastime in medieval English villages. Mummers would dress up in animal masks or disguise themselves as women, and then go door-to-door singing festive folk songs and telling jokes. Some mummers did it for fun, while others expected a few coins or small gifts in exchange.

In the middle of the 12-day party was the Feast of Fools, in which priests, deacons and other church officials were given a brief license to be silly. Role reversals were popular, in which the lowly sub deacons delivered sermons, and things sometimes got out of control, according to a 15th-century French account condemning the practice.

Bean Cake

Celebrated on the night of January 5, Twelfth Night or Twelfth tide was a holiday all its own and represented the culmination of 12 days of merrymaking and mischief.

The centerpiece of Twelfth Night was a bean cake, a rich fruit filled cake in which a tiny dried bean was hidden.

“Whoever got the slice of cake with the bean in it was ‘king’ for the night and could give people silly forfeits (penalties) which they had to obey” says Lawrence-Mathers.

Predicting the Future

Oddly enough, the 12 days of Christmas also held special significance for the medieval pseudo-science of prognostication.

Priests pored over texts called “prognostics” to explain the bible-centered practice of interpreting signs from nature—including storms, high winds and rainbows—to predict the weather for the coming year and also foretell important events.

AUSTIN MUSIC CLUB

Holiday Celebration

December 4, 2024



PROGRAM

Program Leader: **Linda Tietz**

Song Leader: **Deborah Hammons**

Accompanist: **Melanie Richards**

Song: "People, Look East" UUA 226

A sing-along of Hanukkah songs,

Song Leader: **Sue Bilich,**

with **Sarah Avnet,** guest guitarist

- *Meditation – Ave Maria* by Bach/Gounod (1685-1750) / (1818-1893)
- *Allegro Molto* and *Rondo* from "Christmas Festival" (comp. 1899) by Carl Buttshardt (unknown dates)

Performed by **Kathryn Govier** and **Marcia Edwards**, pianists

- *Allemande* and *Corrente* from "Partita in A minor for Solo Flute" by J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

Performed by **Pat Yingst**, flutist

- *Panis Angelicus* by Cesar Franck, 1822-1890
- *My Christmas Song For You Music* by Hoagy Carmichael (1899-1982),
Lyrics by Furniss Peterson (1890-1956)
- *I'll be Home for Christmas* by Walter Kent (1911-1994)
- *White Christmas* by Irving Berlin (1888-1989)

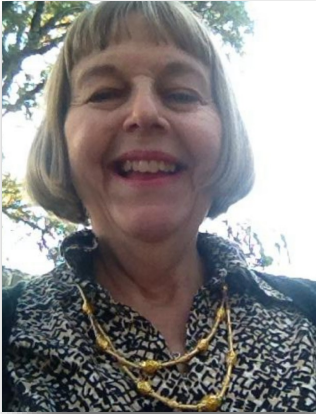
Performed by **Charles Palmer**, baritone, and **Kathryn Govier**, pianist

- A Sing-along of Christmas Carols

Deborah Hammons, Christmas Carol Song Leader, with **Kathryn Govier**, pianist

Following the program,

please join us outside the sanctuary for tasty treats and holiday cheer!



President's Musings

Elisabeth Moreno

When I hear music . . .

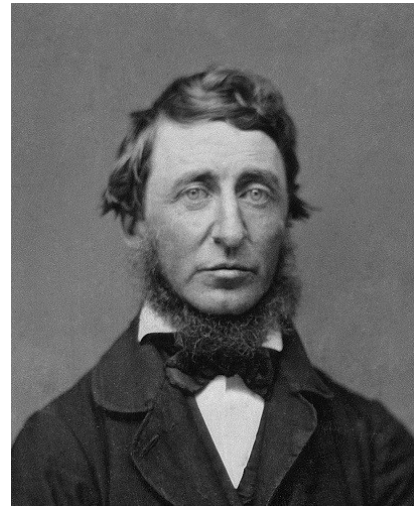
I don't know about you, but I have never thought of Henry David Thoreau, the American philosopher of Walden Pond, in the context of *anything* musical.

That is why I was surprised to see him quoted in Jon Meacham and Tim McGraw's *Songs of America*, a fascinating survey of the music which underpins American history from Quaker hymns to twenty-first century protest songs:

When I hear music, I fear no danger. I am invulnerable. I see no foe. I am related to the earliest times, and to the latest.

The first half of that quotation (When I hear music, I fear no danger . . .) reads as if it might apply to the drumbeat of martial music which so often has been used to rouse troops as they enter battle. But Thoreau was a pacifist and it seems unlikely he would be endorsing the idea of using music for aggressive purposes. The tell is in the second half of the quotation where Thoreau, in the presence of music, finds his foes have disappeared and he is instead related to all of humanity past, present and future. It is the communitarian spirit of music which Thoreau singles out; it brings us together and connects the human family across both space and time.

Now that is a lot to ask of any art form, but if there were a moment we might believe it possible, it would be the holiday season. As we join together between now and the end of the year, let's indeed try to "see no foe." We can simply celebrate our common humanity and rely on the transcendent ability of music to change people, and thereby change the world.



Henry David Thoreau

1817-1862

This dog never wants to hear anyone complain about his barking ever again.



MEMBER HIGHLIGHT



George Edwards

My first formal experience with music occurred when I was in the second grade. My mother felt it important for me to learn how to play the piano. So, when I was seven years old I embarked on piano lessons. Unfortunately for my well-intentioned mother, I turned out to have very little talent and an aversion to practice. Nevertheless, she and I persisted with lessons for four years. During that time, I was provided with additional motivation to continue the lessons when we moved to Houston and my new piano teacher's family owned two horses. Regularly following my piano lesson, my piano teacher's teenage daughter would give me a "riding lesson," which consisted of letting me ride one of the horses while following her on the other. When my teacher's daughter left for college and the "riding lessons" ceased, my aversion to practice and my lack of talent finally triumphed, and my piano lessons ceased as

well. At that point, my mother, bless her heart, was probably as relieved as I that we no longer had to negotiate whether and how long I would practice. Today, although I can't play the piano, I can understand some basics of music theory and appreciate many aspects of music that otherwise I would not be able to do. I have my mother to thank for that gift.

During high school in North Carolina I started listening to the radio as I did my homework. I was attracted to a radio station that played only black artists, and I developed a liking for what was then called rhythm and blues or soul music. That station introduced me to the sound of Ray Charles. This blind pianist and singer (who also played soprano saxophone) was a huge influence on my musical interests. He sang raw blues; he played cool instrumental jazz; he performed ballads. He had a small combo, but he also toured with a full orchestra. His repertoire went from soul music and jazz to country and western.

In college at Rice University, my admiration for Ray's jazz endeavors led me to enjoy multiple other jazz artists, from John Coltrane and Miles Davis to the Modern Jazz Quartet. To this day, some of my favorite recordings are of the MJQ and its pianist John Lewis. Lewis could fuse jazz with classical music brilliantly, as evidenced by his recordings of preludes and fugues by Bach as well as an album based on the Goldberg variations which was a collaboration with his wife on harpsichord. I was fortunate to hear the MJQ once in Houston. I was also fortunate to hear two of the best blues singers of all time in Houston, Mance Lipscomb and Lightnin' Hopkins.

After college friends got me listening to country music, and I found myself drawn to Charley Pride, Merle Haggard, Bob Wills, and especially Willie Nelson. Willie reminded me of Ray Charles with his instrumental proficiency and his ability to perform different genres, from pure country and reggae to ballads and jazz. I think he hit his apex with the *Red Headed Stranger*.

Marrying Marcia further expanded my music horizons. She plays the piano extremely well and has a strong interest in classical music. Further, both our children learned piano and then played instruments in the marching band at Austin High. Our son went on to the drumline with the USC Trojan Marching Band then to become a professional musician. He is now the drummer for the band Cheekface based in Los Angeles. They play Indie Rock.

My musical autobiography would not be complete without mentioning some of the memorable live performances I have enjoyed. They include Ray Charles at the Latin Casino in New Jersey; Willie Nelson at Gilley's Club in Pasadena, Texas; Paul Simon at the Erwin Center here in Austin; Fleetwood Mac at the Erwin Center; Wynton Marsalis at Bass Concert Hall; Jimmy Buffet at COTA; and of course, season tickets with Marcia to the Austin Symphony Orchestra at the Long Center.

My attraction to music has always been more emotional and less cerebral. Although I appreciate technical skill and proficiency, it is the emotions music evokes that captivate me. As Jon Batiste wrote recently in the *New York Times*, "Classical music has allowed for things to be written down, but it's also allowed for people to hold onto the score in lieu of the mystery of the music." The mystery isn't so much in the notes, but in the way they are played and in the space between the notes. I think my mother recognized that mystery. That is probably why she wanted her son with no talent and an aversion to practice to learn something about music. She helped me become a listener.

TFMC District VI Fall Conference 2024 Report (by Marcia Edwards)



District VI members held their annual fall conference on Saturday, November 16, at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in north Austin. The meeting was hosted by Sue and Brett Bachus and the Opus 64 Music Teachers Club and chaired by District VI President Janie Keys. Music Club Austin members Janie Keys, Virginia Kniesner, Angela Smith, George Edwards, and Marcia Edwards were present.

The business meeting included approval of the district budget for the fiscal year July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025. There were a number of officer and club reports. Since Janie Keys has moved from District VI 1st VP to President, Marcia Edwards agreed to serve as 1st VP until new officers are installed in June. Janie Keys shared information about the national convention which will be held in Austin, June 6 - 10, 2025. NFMC has a number of expectations for the clubs in this area and what we can do to help with the convention. (Watch this space!) As part of the memorial service, Angela Smith presented moving eulogies for Kay Race and Carol Koock.

Brett Bachus gave a brief presentation about the *Miniatures, 46 Piano Duets for Student and Teacher* by Leopold Godowsky. Brett and his 10-year-old student, Krithik Tenneti, played a number of these delightful duets. Attendees were also wonderfully entertained by members of A Cappella Unlimited, a local chapter of Sweet Adelines International. The director, Katy Dane, shared information about the singers and the music. The audience had the opportunity to try out singing each of the four parts for these a cappella arrangements.

The meeting concluded with a tasty buffet lunch and pumpkin pie.

The next district meeting will be the biennial Board of Directors meeting in June 2025. It will be held on Zoom. Between now and then, District VI will hold its nomination and election process for new officers. The Nominating Committee is chaired by the 1st and 2nd Vice Presidents with District VI club presidents on the committee as well.



Photos from the fall conference are available on the District VI website Photo Page—tfmcdistrict6.org.



Update on Fielder Vocal Competition

On November 15 the application cycle closed for the 2024-25 Fielder Vocal Grant Career Advancement Competition. The committee received 10 very strong applications. Administrative logistics, including publicity and tallying applicants' submission materials, were very competently handled by Christine Hallock and Susan Ashworth.

During the month of December the club's listening committee will be evaluating each applicant's materials and audio files. That means Heather Arnos, Deborah Scott Hammons, Mollie Tower, Fran Rush and Katharine Shields will have their work cut out for them. Those applicants advancing to the final live competition round on **March 19th, 2025** will be advised by mid-January. The finals are open to the public and we encourage any club member interested in hearing some very fine vocal talent to attend. As in previous years, it will be an opportunity to see our part of our club's mission (encouraging the development of young talent) on full and gratifying display!

Christmas Bells

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow 1807 – 1882

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
 And wild and sweet
 The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
 Had rolled along
 The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

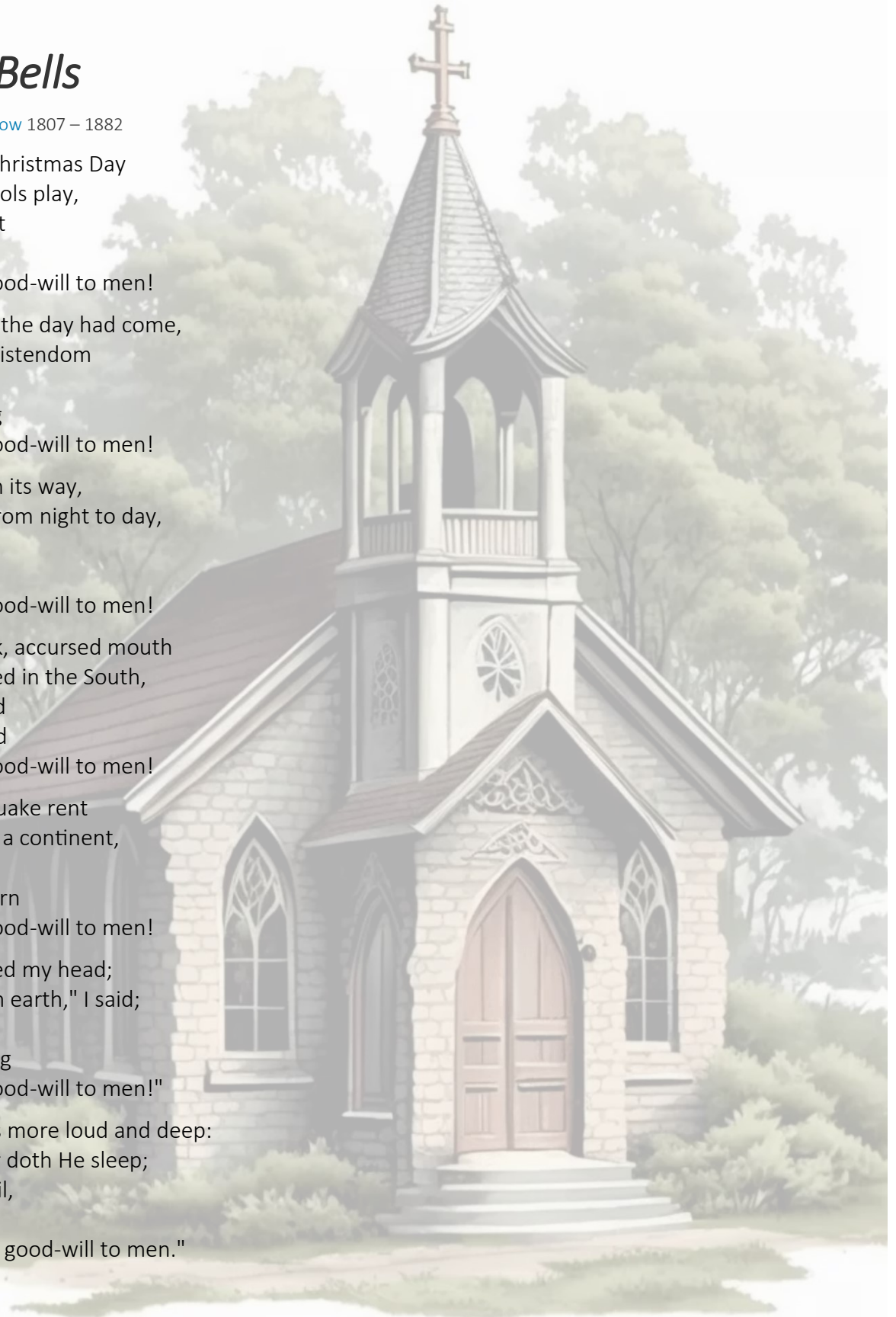
Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
 A voice, a chime,
 A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
 And with the sound
 The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
 And made forlorn
 The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
 "For hate is strong,
 And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
 The Wrong shall fail,
 The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."



Upcoming Events

Armstrong Community Music School <https://www.acmsaustin.org/special-events> Music and singing classes...plus events like Ukulele Family Jams and Ukulele Happy Hour (for ages 21+) The Mr. Walter Holiday Show: Saturday, December 21st @3pm.

Arts On Alexander <https://www.artsonalexander.org/events> Philharmonie Austin|The Redeemer Choir: Friday, December 6th and Friday 13th.

Austin Chamber Music Center <https://austinchambermusic.org/concert-season/> A Charlie Brown Christmas: Saturday, December 7th. <https://tickets.austintheatre.org/11502>

Austin Civic Orchestra <https://austincivicorchestra.org/events/> On A Winter's Eve - Happy Holidays! Saturday, December 14th and Sunday 15th.

Austin Classical Guitar <https://austinclassicalguitar.org/events/> ACG Originals - JOURNEY with Matt Hinsley & Friends: Saturday, December 7th and Sunday 8th.

Austin Jazz Society <https://austinjazzsociety.org> Mitch Watkins - Guitarist Extraordinaire: Sunday, December 22nd.

Austin Opera <https://my.austinopera.org/> Concerts At The Consulate: Thursday, December 12th.

Austin Symphony <https://my.austinsymphony.org/events?view=list> Handel's Messiah: Tuesday, December 3rd. The Nightmare Before Christmas: Tuesday, December 17th.

Austin Women's Club <https://www.austinwomensclub.com/calendar> LIVE! at Chateau Bellevue Presents - Anton Tgubnov and Andrei Zimbalist A Christmas Concert: Sunday, December 15th.

Ballet Austin <https://balletaustin.org/performances/seasontickets/> The Nutcracker - 62nd Annual Production: Friday, December 6th -- Monday, 23rd.

Beethoven <https://www.beethoven.com/upcomingshows> Hoppy Holidays with Tinsel Singers at The Neill-Cochran House Museum: Sunday, December 15th, Saturday 21st, Sunday 22nd

Central Texas Philharmonic <https://www.centraltexasphilharmonic.org/> Messiah: Sunday, December 22nd.

Chorus Austin <https://www.chorusaustin.org/events-calendar.html> Handel's Messiah: Tuesday, December 3rd. Sing-It-Yourself Messiah: Sunday, December 8th. On a Winter's Eve (with Austin Civic Orchestra) Saturday, December 14th and Sunday 15th.

Conspirare <https://www.conspirare.org/tickets/> Conspirare Christmas: Saturday, December 7th and Sunday, 8th. SING BIG - Holiday: Saturday, December 21st.

INVOKE Quartet <https://www.invokeound.com/> Invoke & Friends "Under the Hood": Monday, December 16th.

KMFA <https://www.kmfa.org/events> Always a full calendar of community events.

Editors: Marie White, Marcia Edwards, Joy Gooden

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center <https://www.wildflower.org/> Luminations - Winter in our garden and natural areas: November 22 - January 5th.

La Follia <https://www.lafollia.org/upcoming-concerts> Hidden Gems of Baroque Chamber Music: Friday, January 3rd and Saturday, 4th. Mentors of Mozart, with Anton Nel: Friday, January 31st and Saturday, February 1st.

The Long Center <https://thelongcenter.org/upcoming-calendar/> A full calendar - symphony, opera, ballet and more.

The Metropolitan Opera On stage: <https://www.metopera.org/season/2023-24-season/> On Demand: <https://www.metopera.org/season/on-demand/>

Panoramic Voices <https://www.panoramicvoices.org/24-25> Ceremony of Carols - with Chaski: Saturday, December 14th and Sunday 15th.

Texas Early Music Project <https://www.early-music.org/20242025-artistic-season> Joy and Light - Delights of the Season: Saturday, December 14th and Sunday 15th.

UT Butler School of Music <https://music.utexas.edu/events> They always have a full calendar of wonderful music and most of it is FREE.

UT-Texas Performing Arts <https://texasperformingarts.org/events> Ballet Afrique - Duke Ellington's The Nutcracker: Thursday, December 19th

Williamson County Symphony Orchestra <https://wilcosymphony.org/> A Nutcracker Christmas: Friday, December 6th and Saturday, 14th

Women In Jazz <https://womeninjazz.org/events/> 'Tis The Season to be Jazzy - Holiday Concert: Sunday, December 8th.

Zach Scott Theatre <https://zachtheatre.org/sh> A Christmas Carol: Many dates in December.

Sometimes events are left out because they are not posted on their websites in time to make our calendar. PLEASE let me know of any arts listings that you think should be included in our monthly calendar. Joy joygooden@austin.rr.com

The Met's 2024–25 season of live movie theater transmissions features eight extraordinary operas.

Check your local cinema for times.

Aida (GIUSEPPE VERDI) Saturday, January 25

Fidelio (LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN) Saturday, March 15

Le Nozze di Figaro (WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART)
Saturday, April 26

Salome (RICHARD STRAUSS) Saturday, May 17

Il Barbiere di Siviglia (GIOACHINO ROSSINI)
Saturday, May 31