NOËL
Early Canadian Christmas Music

This collection of hymns, anthems, carols, songs, and organ works for Christmas is a glimpse into the musical tastes of Canadians from the earliest missions of New France to the early 20th century.

The earliest Christmas music associated with Canada came from the 17th-century missions in Quebec and Ontario. Jean de Brébeuf was a Jesuit missionary associated with Ste Marie, a Huron (or Wendat) village on the shore of Georgian Bay. It is believed that he wrote the Wendat words to create the first, and one of the most haunting Canadian Christmas carols *Jesous Ahatonhia* (1648), also known as *The Huron Carol*.

In Quebec City music played an important role for the French pioneers as well, particularly around Christmas. In plain-chant style, *Sacrae familiae* (ca 1684) is structured in a call-and-response form. The Ursuline convent also gave music a prominent role. Among the many unsigned manuscripts is the Christmas motet *Magnus Dominus* (ca. 1700).

After the great upheavals of the French-English wars, and the American War of Independence of 1776, Canada welcomed immigrant composers from Europe. Stephen Humbert (1767-1849), a Loyalist from New England, settled in New Brunswick where he continued the tradition of teaching the "proper" singing of hymn-tunes and anthems and compiled and published a collection, *Union Harmony*, which includes the Christmas anthem *Herald Angels* (ca. 1816).

In French Canada, Christmas continued to offer compositional inspiration both in and outside the church. Christmas songs rather than official hymns of the church often expressed the people's devotion around Christmas, including *L'Enfant Dieu* (1861) by Antoine Dessane and Napoleon Crepault's *La Nuit de Noel* (1887). The latter's popular style, reminiscent of Gounod, conveys the atmosphere of a traditional Quebec Christmas.

In Protestant churches the hymn tune was the conveyor of much devotion around Christmas. George W. Linton's *Joy to the World* (ca. 1865), Rev. John Black's *Lo! He comes in clouds descending* (1874), evangelist John M. Whyte's *Ring on sweet bells!* (1885), and Thomas Charles Jeffers' *Calm on the listening ear* (1907) represent the diversity of the hymn in expressing Canadians' devotion in the Victorian era.

The discussion of Victorian Christmas music in Canada would not be complete without including the anthem. John Medley, Bishop of Fredericton, wrote numerous anthems, including *Prepare Ye the Way* (1879). He clearly knew Handel's *Messiah* since he set many of the texts and borrowed some musical ideas from the oratorio.

The revival of English folk songs influenced many anglophone composers. Ernest MacMillan's *Two Christmas Carols (The Storke and I Sing of a Maiden)* (1927) are settings of 15th and 16th century texts. The original tunes for these carols have not survived, but MacMillan's vocal lines, sensitive accompaniments, and metrical shifts to accommodate textual accents, produce two charming settings reminiscent of Vaughan Williams.

Christmas was the subject of cantatas as well. Excerpts from Clarence Lucas' *The Birth of Christ* (1901)
and Healey Willan's *The Mystery of Bethlehem* (1923) represent the larger forms of Canadian composition for the season. Rather than setting to music the appropriate gospel texts, *The Birth of Christ* includes Nativity poems by seven poets. Thus, instead of a narrative, it provides a series of Christmas moods.

Ernest MacMillan's Chorale-prelude on "In dulci jubilo" (1917) and Healey Willan's Chorale-prelude No.1 "Puer nobis nascitur" (1926), are examples of the Canadian organ repertoire for Christmas. MacMillan's Chorale-prelude was written during World War I while the composer was interned in the camp for enemy aliens in Germany. Willan's Chorale-prelude demonstrates dedication to Gregorian chant.

**Dedicated to the memory of Elmer Iseler, who played such a central role in bringing Canada's musical heritage to the public. It seems appropriate that this, his last complete recording, should celebrate Christmas from Canada's past.**

*Members of the choir:*
Elmer Iseler, *Conductor*
Jessie Iseler, *Company manager*
*Sopranos:* Donna Colley, Jamie Ray, Rosanna Senatore, Kathleen Tapp-Mock, Ann Wright, Rebecca Whelan
*Altos:* Carolyn Kirby, Andrea Ludwig, Alison Roy, Christine Stelmacovich
*Tenors:* Donald Bartle, Stephen Powell, Edward Wiens, Patrick Huang
*Basses:* Dennis Caines, Peter Fisher, David Havery, Alexander Jozefacki, David King, Nelson Lohnes

*Credits:*
Producer: Marilyn Dalzell, CBC
Recording Engineer: Doug Doctor, CBC
Digital editing: Doug Doctor, Peter Cook, CBC
Recorded at St. James Cathedral, Toronto, Canada, September 29-30, 1997
Artistic Direction: Canadian Musical Heritage Society (Helmut Kallmann, Elaine Keillor, Clifford Ford, John Beckwith and Frederick A. Hall)
Cover photo: Megumi Ono / Photonica
Liner Note: Clifford Ford

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The Elmer Iseler Singers

Elmer Iseler, conductor Mireille Legacé, organ
Michael Schade, tenor Ruth Watson Henderson, piano, harmonium, organ
Norine Burgess, mezzo soprano

1 anon Jesous Ahatonhia 1:57
2 Charles Martin (?) Sacrae familiae 5:55
3 anon Magnus Dominus 2:30
4 Healey Willan Chorale-prelude On "Puer Nobis" 4:18
5 Stephen Humbert Herald Angels 2:50
6 James Paton Clarke A Canadian Christmas Carol 1:59
7 Joseph-Julian Perrault Messe De Noël: Kyrie 4:33
8 Antoine Dessane L'Enfant-Dieu 3:23
9 Napoléon Crépault La Nuit de Noël 2:27
10 George W. Linton Joy to the World (fuguing tune, "Irons") 1:27
11 John Black Lo, He Comes (hymn-tune, "Advent") 2:04
12 John M. Whyte Ring on sweet bells! 2:01
13 Thomas Jeffers Calm on the listening ear (Christmas Hymn) 2:40
14 Ernest MacMillan Chorale-prelude On "In dulci jubilo" 3:09
15 Ernest Gagnon Dans cette étable 1:45
16 Ernest Gagnon Venez divin Messie! 2:08
17 John Medley Prepare Ye the Way 2:46
18 Paul Ambrose O Little Town of Bethlehem 2:03
   Ernest MacMillan Two Christmas Carols:
19 The Storke 2:42
20 The Maiden 1:54
21 William Anderson The Christmas Rose 2:13
22 Alfred Whitehead Bell Carol 2:02
23 Alfred Whitehead Christmas Slumber Song 3:44
   Clarence Lucas The Birth of Christ:
24 No.2 "The Dawn Rose Red" 6:08
25 No.3, "Watchman Tell Us" 2:44
26 No.4, "Carol Christians" 2:39
27 Healey Willan The Mystery of Bethlehem:
   "The Prophecy" 4:32

Total Time 78:40

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