

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

This recording was made possible through the financial assistance of the Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, The Charles H. Ivey Foundation, Marquis Classics and the Canadian Musical Heritage Society.

NOËL: Early Canadian Christmas Music

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 Athonhia	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
	ClarenceLucas	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

Marquis

30 Kenilworth Avenue

Toronto Canada M4L 3S3

All Rights Reserved

© 1998 Marquis

(p) 1998 Canadian Musical Heritage Society / Marquis