

CC recommends

Music in the [December 14, 2004](#) issue

A Festive Baroque Christmas. The Choir and Orchestra of the Academy of Ancient Music, directed by Paul Goodwin. Classical Express, Harmonia Mundi France 3957202, \$7.00.

From Harmonia Mundi's excellent line of budget-priced reissues comes this set of 11 motets by Heinrich Schütz, plus instrumental pieces by Gabrieli, Weckmann and Usser. The texts and translations are available at www.classicalexpress.com/7202.htm.

Joy to the World. Boston Pops and Tanglewood Festival Chorus, directed by John Williams. Sony Custom Marketing 59972, \$7.00.

For those who like a big, boisterous Christmas, public-television style, it's hard to beat these colorful performances of more than 30 traditional favorites. The medleys are tastefully arranged, and Robin Williams is guest narrator for Clement Moore's poem "A Visit From St. Nicholas." Several of the tracks are from John Williams's own score of Home Alone. This CD is available from <http://www.mp3.com/albums/136597/summary.html>.

Classical Christmas Music for Trumpet and Organ. Music by Bach, Krebs, Kauffmann, Alcock, and Corrette. Ludwig Güttler, Friedrich Kircheis, Felix Friedrich, Holm Vogel, and Hansjürgen Scholze. Laserlight 15272, \$5.00.

About half of this disc is organ solos, from four different organists. It includes the standard Bach compositions on Christmas chorales (including the *Vom Himmel hoch* variations, with which Bach was inaugurated into a connoisseurs' society of musical scientists near the end of his life). More ear-catching are the various chorale arrangements in which Güttler joins the organ, playing either corno da caccia or trumpet. His playing adds a dynamic and articulative shape to the melodic lines.

O Holy Night (En la fête de Noël). La Petite Bande de Montréal, directed by Martin Dagenais. Naxos 8. 554435, \$7.00.

French Christmas tunes are here in mostly simple, strophic arrangements (same music for multiple stanzas). The choir includes 20 to 30 young-adult members, accompanied with organ on some tracks. Although marketed more toward a Canadian audience than to Americans, one need not follow the French text—unfortunately not in the booklet—to enjoy these delightful melodies. Complete online samples and ordering info are at www.naxos.com/mainsite/NaxosCat/Naxos_Cat.asp?item_code=8.554435.

J. S. Bach. *Magnificat in D, “Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis” (Cantata 21) and “Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied” (a motet).* Choir of Swiss Radio and Ensemble Vanitas, directed by Diego Fasolis. Arts 47374, \$11.00.

Favorite spots in this *Magnificat* performance are the “Suscepit Israel” and the interpretive choice to start “Omnes generationes” pianissimo and build it up as the generations multiply. The cantata is appropriately penitential, and *Singet dem Herrn* is bright and joyful. And as with this outstanding conductor’s other recordings of 16th- to 18th-century vocal music, everything here is graceful, intense, and clearly focused on the meaning of the words. <http://www.artsmusic.de>.

Vaughan Williams. *Hodie and Fantasia on Christmas Carols.* Janet Baker, Richard Lewis, John Shirley-Quirk, Westminster Abbey and Bach Choirs, London Symphony, directed by David Willcocks (Hodie); John Barrow, Guildford Cathedral Choir, Barry Rose (Fantasia). EMI 67427, \$11.00.

These are classic mid-1960s performances of Vaughan Williams’s hour-long Christmas cantata (composed 1953-4), and the shorter fantasia for baritone, choir and strings. This is grand, majestic music with this composer’s typically spacious harmonies.

***Christmas Through the Ages.* Hyperion NOEL1, \$10.00.**

This greatest-hits sampler from the Hyperion catalogue collects music from all over Europe. The first piece sounds early American even though it’s English. With a disc packed so full (79 minutes) it is inevitable that some of the selections are only excerpts. Complete details are at www.hyperion-records.co.uk/details/noel1.asp.

Michael Praetorius. *Christmas Music.* Westminster Cathedral Choir and The Parley of Instruments, directed by David Hill. Hyperion 66200, \$17.00.

Eight motets (including the familiar “Es ist ein’ Ros’ entsprungen”) contrast with two seven-minute sets of dances from the Terpsichore collection. The choir of boys and men produces a bright sound, and the instrumentalists are some of the London area’s finest, from 1986. Full details and notes are at www.hyperion-records.co.uk/details/66200.asp.

Bright Day Star: Music for the Yuletide Season. Baltimore Consort. Dorian 90198, \$16.00.

This prolific ensemble produces its typically bright, improvisatory collection of tidbits, nicely juxtaposing traditional folk music with folksy-composed music. The variety of instrumentation is a delight. Much of this music impels the listener to get up and dance. This album has been around for ten years, but it always seems fresh.