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Christmas in Anglia

Early
English Music
for Christmastide

ENSEMBLE FOR EARLY MUSIC
Frederick Renz, director



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ENSEMBLE FOR EARLY MUSIC

Johana Arnold, *soprano*
Daniel Collins, *countertenor*
Wendy Gillespie, *rebec, vielle, violin, mandora*
David Hart, *flute, recorder, penny whistle, lute, mandora, harp*
Frederick Renz, *organistrum, tambourine, bells*

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director

Side One (19:30)

1. *Rex virginum amator* (13th cent.) (2:43)
soprano, countertenor
2. a) *Edi beo thu* (13th cent.) (1:53)
soprano, organistrum
- b) *Alleluia psallat* (13th cent.) (1:58)
rebec, mandora, organistrum
- c) *Angelus ad virginem* (14th cent.) (1:57)
soprano, countertenor, rebec, mandora, organistrum
3. *Qui creavit celum* (15th cent.) (2:20)
5 voices
4. *Estampie* (14th cent.) (1:41)
2 mandoras, tambourine
5. *Nowell, Nowell! This Is the Salutacion* (15th cent.) (2:58)
soprano, countertenor, organistrum
6. *Nowel, Owt of Your Slepe* (15th cent.) (2:02)
countertenor, mandora, harp, bells
7. *Ther Is No Rose of Swych Vertu* (15th cent.) (2:31)
5 voices

Side Two (20:50)

1. *Lully, Lulla, Thou Little Tiny Child* (16th cent.) (3:19)
soprano, countertenor, vielle, lute
2. *Tandernacken* (16th cent.) (1:54)
soprano, recorder, vielle
3. *All Sons of Adam* (17th cent.) (2:45)
5 voices, vielle, harp, bells
4. *Irish Air* (traditional) (1:33)
harp, mandora
5. *Balulalow (I Come From Hevin)* (16th cent.) (2:05)
countertenor, harp
6. a) *Scots Air: Sueit Smylling Katie Loves Me* (17th cent.) (1:31)
organistrum
- b) *Now Blessed Be Thou* (16th cent.) (1:49)
countertenor, harp, organistrum
- c) *Scots Air: Kathren Oggie* (17th cent.) (1:09)
violin, flute, organistrum
- d) *Come, My Children Dere* (17th cent.) (1:38)
soprano, countertenor, violin, tambourine, organistrum
- e) *Scots Air: Green Grows the Rushes* (17th cent.) (1:08)
violin, penny whistle, organistrum
- f) *Greensleeves (The Old Year Now Away Is Fled)* (18th cent.) (1:36)
soprano, countertenor, violin, penny whistle, organistrum

Texts & translations enclosed

The delight in retelling the events of the Christmas story extends back to the earliest Middle Ages and informs the simple Christian faith reflected in this album of early English music for the Christmas season. Although the genres included here are varied, there is a striking kinship of melody, phrase, rhythm, and harmony among these pieces from the 13th to the 18th centuries. Owing to several tragic decisions in earlier times—the thoughtless cutting-up of parchment collections of music and art to serve as bindings in books of the following era, the systematic destruction of the monasteries and their treasures by Henry VIII's henchmen, and the Commonwealth's attack on churches—much, if not indeed most, medieval English music has been lost, probably forever. The fragments that survive, however, imply that an enormous repertory once existed, a repertory as richly varied, as unusual, and as original as any from England's later history.

From the earliest part of this period come the Kyrie trope *Rex virginum amator* and the strophic hymns *Edi beo thu* and *Angelus ad virginem*. Late in the 14th century, such hymns began to be overshadowed by a new, distinctly English form of song, the carol, which surrounds verses for soloists with a choral refrain (the burden). A deliberate folk or popular appeal is often evident in such pieces, as in the three 15th-century

carols heard here, *Nowell, Nowell! This Is the Salutacion*; *Nowel, Owt of Your Slepe*; and *Ther Is No Rose*. In the 16th century, popular tunes, as well as popular sentiments, begin to make increasingly frequent appearances in the new Protestant genres, a trend that reaches a climax in such pieces as the early-17th-century *All Sons of Adam*, with its patchwork-quilt medley of favorites of the day. The selection of instrumental tunes here passes almost completely into the realm of vernacular music, in which a basic melody is repeated several times with variations in details of figuration and ornamentation; most of the arrangements here derive from 17th-century Scottish violin and cittern versions of the airs. In keeping with the traditional idiom of this largely folk art, the tunes are accompanied by drones on a hurdy-gurdy (*organistrum*).

Side One

1. *Rex virginum amator*. The plainchant for this troped Kyrie is the widespread and familiar *Cunctipotens genitor* (Roman IV); the additional text (here Marian in nature) replaces the words *Kyrie*, *Christe*, and *Kyrie* in the acclamations. The age and distribution of sources of this trope text suggest that it may be English in origin, as is the lively two-voiced polyphonic setting.

2. a) *Edi beo thu*. This is one of the rare pre-15th-century polyphonic settings of vernacular English to have survived. Its two-part counterpoint is simple and melodious, perhaps reflecting a popular rather than a learned compositional style. The devotional lyrics of this strophic Marian hymn are conventional in sentiment, but in the present strongly metrical and straightforwardly phrased setting, they take on an immediacy and a touching charm.

b) *Alleluia psallat*. Here a brief and tuneful voice-exchange motet, intended originally to preface a longer polyphonic *Alleluia* setting for a Lady Mass (now lost), has been adapted for instrumental performance.

c) *Angelus ad virginem*. Four insular sources from the late 13th and early 14th centuries preserve this Latin hymn on the Annunciation, in both plainchant and polyphonic versions. In catchiness of melody and simple piety of lyrics, it is a direct counterpart to *Edi beo thu*. There is an oft-cited reference to *Angelus ad virginem* in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*, where the Oxford clerk Nicholas is said to sing it to the accompaniment of the psaltery. The polyphonic setting in three parts to which the last two stanzas are sung here dates from roughly 1360, exactly contemporaneous with Chaucer himself.

3. *Qui creavit celum*. This delightful Christmas lullaby is found among the antiphons and responsories for processions on feast days in a manuscript *Processional* of ca. 1425 once belonging to the Benedictine Nunnery of St. Mary at Chester. Though notated as a single line of music, the refrain to the fifth and sixth stanzas is harmonized here by improvising polyphony primarily in parallel six-three chords—a technique known as *faburden*, which was commonly used for processional music in England in the 15th century.

4. *Estampie*. This short instrumental dance has been abridged and arranged from a much longer setting for keyboard found in a manuscript from Robertsbridge Abbey now at the British Library. Its lively rhythms and vigorous, improvised percussion accompaniment offer a taste of what fully improvised dance music for festive occasions may have sounded like in mid-14th-century England.

5. *Nowell, Nowell! This Is the Salutacion*. This monophonic carol on the Annunciation dates from the late 15th century. The text retells in dialogue the story of Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she will give birth to "very God himself."

6. *Nowel, Owt of Your Slepe*. This mid-15th-century Christmas carol begins with a monophonic burden and then breaks into three-part harmony for the verse. Subsequent refrains, following indications in the original notation, use the burden's tune in counterpoint against itself to create polyphony.

7. *Ther Is No Rose*. This early-15th-century carol is preserved in the famous Trinity Roll. Its text, like those of many carols, is macaronic—i.e., it combines English verses with a Latin tag at the end. The two-part counterpoint of the original has been enriched with the addition of a third voice in the burden which parallels the top part a fourth below.

Side Two

1. *Lully, Lulla, Thou Little Tiny Child*. Commonly known as the Coventry Carol, this piece comes from one of the Coventry mystery plays, a pageant of the Guild of Shearmen and Tailors. The text of the play was first printed in 1534, but the music, which is definitely from the latter half of the 16th century, does not survive in a source earlier than 1591. As is characteristic of 16th-century style, the melody is in the top voice, the harmonies are smooth (save for one biting cross-relation), and the subtly shifting metrical scheme imparts rhythmic vitality to a declamatory setting. In the play, the carol is sung by three women just prior to Herod's slaughter of their children.

2. *Tandernacken*. This sprightly instrumental setting of the famous Netherlandish tune *Tandernacken* is attributed to King Henry VIII in its unique source, the early Tudor songbook which is the chief surviving monument of secular music from Henry's court. The *cantus firmus* has been texted here with the word *Nowell*.

3. *All Sons of Adam*. This Scottish Christmas medley from ca. 1600 incorporates texts and music from famous songs and carols in a matrix of learned three-part polyphony. Scottish polyphonic music was, for political reasons, more under the influence of France than of England in this era, and this medley owes its form mostly to the earlier French quodlibet of popular chansons known as the *fricassee*. After a formal invocation, the medley breaks into *Sing We Nowell*, and, following a section on the Annunciation, *There Cam a Ship*—an early version of *Sunny Bank (I Spied Three Ships)*. Parallel six-three chords evoke the singing of the angels, and in the final section the melody of the hymn *Conditor alme siderum* is heard in the middle voice.

4. *Irish Air*. The tune and its instrumental setting are traditional.

5. *Balulalow (Ane Sang of the Birth of Christ) or I Come from Hevin*. The text of this Christmas song, a translation into vernacular Scots dialect of Martin Luther's children's hymn for Christmas Eve, *Vom Himmel hoch*, dates from as early as 1578, though the tune comes down to us only in sources from the late 17th century. The setting appears to have been in circulation by the late 16th century.

6. a) *Scots Air: Sueit Smylling Katie Loves Me*. The three Scots airs heard in this medley are among the best known of the native folk songs that for centuries have been the backbone of the living Scottish musical heritage. They are played here in the versions in which they were first written down in the 17th century, i.e., as solo tunes for instrumental performance. *Sueit Smylling Katie* is found in a setting for cittern (a guitar-like instrument) which comes from a Scottish minister's personal collection of music from ca. 1650.

b) *Now Blessed Be Thou*. The tune of this setting is traditional. The words are those of Miles Coverdale (1487-1568), an active Protestant preacher and translator, best known for rendering the Bible into English in 1535. *Now Blessed Be Thou*, a translation of the famous Lutheran Christmas hymn *Gelobet seist du Jesu Christ*, first appeared in 1546, in Coverdale's *Goostly Psalmes and Spirituelle Songes*.

c) *Scots Air: Kathren Oggie*. This piece for violin comes from an anonymous Scottish manuscript of ca. 1680.

d) *Come, My Children Dere*. Both music and text of this spiritual version of a secular love song probably date from ca. 1600. The poem, which speaks of the love of a woman for Christ, is by Alexander Montgomerie (ca. 1550-ca. 1610).

e) *Scots Air: Green Grows the Rushes*. This is another violin tune from the manuscript that contains *Kathren Oggie*.

f) *Greensleeves (The Old Year Now Away Is Fled)*. Numerous ballads and other sets of words, such as the present New Year's text, have been set to the famous tune *Greensleeves*. Immediately popular from its first appearance ca. 1580 as a tune for singing and dancing, *Greensleeves* has long been a fertile source for improvisation on its melodic-harmonic scheme. The version of the tune employed here is taken from J. C. Pepusch's arrangement for John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* of 1728.

PETER M. LEFFERTS

MODERN EDITIONS. Side One, Band 1: ed. A. T. Davison & W. Apel, *Historical Anthology of Music*, Vol. 1, Cambridge, Mass., 1946; Bands 2a (music), 2b: ed. N. Greenberg, *An Anthology of English Medieval and Renaissance Vocal Music*, New York, 1961; Band 2a (text): ed. E. H. Sanders (Polyphonic Music of the Fourteenth Century, 14), Monaco, 1979; Band 2c: ed. A. Hughes & P. A. Grainger, *English Gothic Music*, New York, [1943]; Band 3, Side Two, Bands 1, 6b: ed. Dearmer, Vaughan Williams, Shaw, *The Oxford Book of Carols*, London, 1929; Side One, Band 4: ed. W. Apel (Corpus of Early Keyboard Music, 1), [Rome], 1963; Bands 5-7 (music): ed. John Stevens (Musica britannica, 4), London, 1952; Bands 5, 7 (text): ed. R. L. Greene, *The Early English Carols*, Oxford, 1935; Band 6 (text): ed. R. L. Greene, *A Selection of English Carols*, Oxford, 1962. Side Two, Band 2: ed. J. Stevens (Musica britannica, 18), London, 1962. Bands 3, 5, 6d: ed. K. Elliott (Musica britannica, 15), London, 1957; Bands 6a, 6c, 6e: ed. K. Elliott, *Early Scottish Keyboard Music*, London, 1958; Band 6f: ed. W. Chappell, *The Ballad Literature and Popular Music of the Olden Time*, London, 1859, 2 vols., repr. New York, 1965.

Founded in 1974 by its director, Frederick Renz, and other former members of the New York Pro Musica, the Ensemble for Early Music assumed a leading role in the presentation of early music with its 1975 staged production of the 14th-century *Roman de Fauvel*. Equally at home in music from the 12th to the 18th centuries, the Ensemble is dedicated to reuniting music, dance, and drama as originally intended, by the use of original instruments and through extensive study of historical performing practices. The group tours the United States annually, and in addition to a permanent residency at the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine in New York, it has held summer residencies at the Indianapolis Museum of Art and the Detroit Institute of Arts. This album marks the first appearance of the Ensemble for Early Music on Nonesuch.

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cover illustration/Large historiated initial "C," showing
Nativity and two related scenes; De la Twyere Psalter
(English, ca. 1320), folio 161v, Spencer Collection,
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