

Flowers in Winter

by Jane Ellen (ASCAP)

Welcome to my third recording project, *Flowers in Winter*, a 12-track seasonal album. This offering features six arrangements of timeless Christmas carols along with six original compositions. As on the last album, noted percussionist Ken Battat sits in, this time on two tracks (a jazz trio piece, and a mediæval-flavoured number), while other tracks feature woodwinds, strings, bells, and even harpsichord. The title of the album is taken from Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale* and calls to mind the idea of beauty found even in the midst of trial and hardship. Although the theme is seasonal, there is clearly an underlying sub-text which speaks to a desire for peace, a cause which is close to my heart. The album was deliberately crafted in the hope that it may be enjoyed throughout the winter season by music lovers of any culture and background.

The traditional carols were selected for being my personal favourites and because each speaks to the overall theme of the collection. 'Good King Wenceslaus', is not only a beloved carol but a true story and one which serves as a call to social justice. For some time 'Greensleeves' was popularly thought to have been composed by King Henry VIII, but most scholars feel that the melody predates his reign. With a different text, this lyrical melody became known in the 19th century as 'What Child is This'. In deciding to arrange a carol medley, I wanted to achieve two things: firstly, that the carols be from similar time periods, and secondly, that I could weave them together in a way to create a sort of narrative tale. The resulting medley entitled 'The Eternal Rose' happily fulfills both of those requirements. 'Lo, How a Rose' (German, 15th century) is an Advent carol; 'This Endrys Night' (English, 15th century) is originally from the Mystery plays and speaks to the Nativity; and 'Coventry Carol' (English, 15th/16th century) tells the story of mothers trying to quiet their babies in order to save them from the wrath of Herod during the slaying of the innocents. 'God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen' was made famous by way of Dickens's immortal *A Christmas Carol*, itself a plea for social justice and a moral obligation to those less fortunate than ourselves. Christina Rossetti's classic poem 'In the Bleak Mid-winter' (arranged here using the melody by Gustav Holst), stresses the importance and value of each person's gifts and talents. The final track on the album is an arrangement of 'Silent Night' by Franz Gruber. This evocative standard has had a remarkable evolution over the years from the Austrian original which is still sung today in parts of Europe.

Among the original works on the CD is 'Prayer for Peace', with an accompanying text by Claire Roth (ASCAP), which was written for a 2007 World Peace Day Concert. Her beautiful meditative reading was included at the concert, and I have reprinted it here to share with you:

It is said that the peace of God passes all understanding. When nothing is missing and all is accomplished, when the hurriedness of preparation is past and the inevitable is at hand, there is peace.

When peace descends, things before seen of earthly importance lose their immediate significance.

Peace can bring a starting point or a reckoning, a moment to recollect and move forward in a new light. This mystery of peace passes all understanding.

We pray for peace; peace is sufficient.

'One Little Child' was written several years ago and subsequently published as a choral work for children's choir and keyboard. Over the years it has been performed with a flute obbligato, or with a flute taking the place of the vocal parts, so it seemed only natural that I should include an instrumental version for flute and piano on this album. 'Time for Rejoicing' is perhaps the most exuberant piece on the album; amongst the percussion chosen for that piece is the upright chimes, or tubular bells, which I have played at many midnight services. Other numbers written especially for this album are the Elizabethan-flavoured title track, 'Flowers in Winter', a reflective piano solo entitled 'A Child's Heart', and 'Children's Carol'.

I have always believed that there are far more things which unite the people of the world, and that we share in common, than there are things which divide us. I hope that you will find something in this recording that speaks to you, touches your heart, and brings you a moment of peace.

This album could not have been completed without the love, help, advice, encouragement, and constant support of my family and friends. You know who you are; thank you, and Happy Christmas.

Text: "A Prayer for Peace" copyright © 2007 Claire Roth (ASCAP).
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