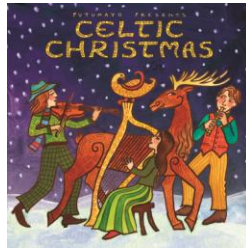


CELTIC CHRISTMAS LINER NOTES



PUT 314

Introduction

Music is an inseparable part of the Christmas season. Indeed, one of the first signs that Christmas is approaching is that familiar carols begin playing overhead in retail stores. While two of the songs on this collection were written in the 20th century, most feature melodies that date back hundreds of years and have roots in Irish, Scottish, English and French folk songs.

In fact, most carols were part of pre-Christian solstice celebrations. Over time, new Christmas-oriented lyrics were written and the carols came to be used exclusively for the winter holiday period. The tradition of choirs roaming from door to door singing carols originated with wassailing, an early Anglo-Saxon tradition that was adapted from its pagan roots.

Centuries ago, when people suffered through harsh winters in unheated homes with limited provisions, the Christmas season allowed them to forget their problems and join together in celebration. These days, it continues to be a time for us to cherish the things that are important: family and the principle of treating people with respect and charity.

The Albion Christmas Band

Here We Come A-Wassailing

The Albion Christmas Band is an offshoot of the The Albion Band, one of England's best-known folk bands. Ashley Hutchings, a founding member of legendary British folk groups Steeleye Span and Fairport Convention, formed The Albion Band in 1973. While The Albion Band is no longer active, Hutchings and musicians Simon Nicol, Kellie White and Simon Care continue to record holiday-themed albums and participate in seasonal concert tours.

"Here We Come A-Wassailing" is an Old English Christmas carol from the mid-1800s. The word "wassail" is derived from the old Anglo-Saxon drinking toast "Waes-Hael" and the Norse "ves heil," both meaning "good health." In pagan times, it was part of a ritual to generate a good harvest. In the Middle Ages, peasants would visit the lord of the manor and express their good will, and the lord would reciprocate by offering food and drink. Eventually, this became a ceremony that involved strolling through the community to wish good health to your neighbors and to call for joyous Christmas celebration.

Charles T. Cozens
O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Charles T. Cozens is an internationally recognized composer, orchestrator, producer, conductor and arranger from Canada. His orchestral arrangements have been performed by many major orchestras across North America and Europe. Cozens has participated on more than 80 albums for a wide range of record labels and film and television soundtracks and has played piano for everyone from Eartha Kitt to the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. In 2008, he produced the album *Celtic Christmas*, which featured instrumental Celtic versions of holiday classics.

“O Come, O Come Emmanuel” is an ancient Advent song that dates back hundreds of years, possibly as far back as the 8th century.

The Gothard Sisters
Little Drummer Girl

Greta, Willow and Solana Gothard were born and raised in Seattle, Washington, but have been performing Irish music and dance since they were little children. Still quite young (the oldest member of The Gothard Sisters is in her early twenties and the youngest still in her teens), the sisters have already recorded five albums and toured extensively, bringing their lively show to appreciative audiences across the country. The trio has recorded two holiday albums, including *Christmas* in 2010, which featured this energetic adaptation of the classic song “Little Drummer Boy.”

“Little Drummer Boy” was written by Katherine K. Davis in 1941; the melody was adapted from a Czech carol. Originally entitled “Carol of the Drum,” the song was recorded in 1955 by the Trapp Family Singers (the choir made famous by the musical and film *The Sound of Music*).

DruidStone
Noel Nouvelet

DruidStone was a side project for Irish harpist Áine Minogue, who is featured under her own name elsewhere in this collection. In 2001, Minogue, joined by a group of top Celtic musicians, recorded a now out-of-print album of Celtic-themed Christmas songs entitled *Spirit of Christmas*. She included “Noel Nouvelet” to represent the Celtic heritage in France; Brittany is one of the six Celtic nations.

“Noel Nouvelet” is a French New Year’s carol with versions dating as far back as the late 15th century. The words “noel” and “nouvelet” derive from the same root meaning: “new” or “newness.” English translations began appearing in the 1600s, and the melody has been used as the basis of numerous other hymns. The carol’s English title is usually “Sing We Now of Christmas,” and the lyrics translate roughly as “New Christmas, Christmas we sing here / Devout people, let us sing Christmas for the new King.”

David Huntsinger
Angels We Have Heard on High

David Huntsinger is a composer, pianist, songwriter and arranger in Nashville, Tennessee, who specializes in instrumental spiritual music. Huntsinger moved from California in the 1970s and joined the popular gospel group The Rambos. He has since worked with country music stars Vince Gill and his wife, Amy Grant, as well as Glen Campbell, Johnny Cash, Dolly Parton and others. In 2009, Huntsinger released the album *Hark! A Celtic Christmas Celebration*, which featured Celtic-flavored interpretations of holiday classics.

“Angels We Have Heard on High” is a classic Christmas carol with lyrics derived from the traditional French carol “Les Anges dans nos Campagnes,” which was translated in 1862 by English Bishop James Chadwick and quickly became popular across Britain and Ireland. The melody is also the basis of the hymn “Gloria” by Edward Shippen Barnes.

Charles T. Cozens
Good King Wenceslas

“Good King Wenceslas” is a well-known Christmas carol, but few people are aware of its origins or what the song is about. The melody derives from a 13th century song of spring entitled “Tempus adest floridum” (“It is time for flowering”). Though this is an instrumental version, the lyrics were first published in 1853, and written by English hymn writer John Mason Neale and his editor Thomas Helmore. The song’s lyrics tell the story of Saint Wenceslas I, the Duke of Bohemia (a region now part of the Czech Republic), who travels through the wind and snow on December 26th to give alms to a poor peasant. During the journey, the king’s page struggles to continue in the cold, but miraculously he is warmed by the heat emanating from his king’s footsteps. The moral of the carol is summarized in the final line: “Ye who now will bless the poor, shall yourselves find blessing.”

Lasairfhíona Ní Chonaola
Nollaig Bhán (White Christmas)

Lasairfhíona Ní Chonaola grew up in Inisheer, a small town on the Aran Islands in the West of Ireland. As a child, she was surrounded by traditional Irish music and could sing before she could even talk. Her songs have roots in the *sean-nós* tradition, an old style of singing usually performed without any instruments and sung in the Gaelic language of Ireland.

You don’t have to speak Gaelic to recognize the melody of “White Christmas,” the Irving Berlin composition made famous by Bing Crosby in the 1954 film of the same name. *The Guinness Book of World Records* cites the Crosby recording as the bestselling single of all time. Ní Chonaola recorded her Gaelic version of this holiday staple especially for this collection.

Steve Schuch & The Night Heron Consort

Joy to the World

Steve Schuch is an award-winning performer, author and composer. Classically trained on violin, he has performed from New England to Alaska, the Netherlands to the British Isles. He founded The Night Heron Consort in 1993, and they have since performed at venues ranging from colleges and classical concert series to major folk festivals and The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

The lyrics to “Joy to the World” were first published in 1719 by English hymn writer Isaac Watts and were based on the Bible’s Psalm 86. American composer Lowell Mason set the words to music in 1839, using a portion of a Handel melody for inspiration. Everyone from Percy Faith and Boney M. to The Supremes and Mariah Carey has recorded the song, although it is not to be confused with the rock hit of the same name popularized by Three Dog Night in 1970.

Áine Minogue

Manx Jezebel Carol

Áine Minogue was born in Borrisokane, County Tipperary, Ireland. She was raised in a large musical family and learned to play many different instruments as a child. Minogue performed with her family at traditional music festivals called *fleadhs*. When she was 12 years old, Minogue fell in love with the sound of the harp, and that has been her main instrument ever since. Like many Irish people before her, Minogue moved to the United States and now lives in Massachusetts.

“Manx Jezebel Carol” is a traditional holiday song from the Isle of Man, a small island located in the Irish Sea between Great Britain and Ireland. One of the six Celtic nations, along with Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall and Brittany, the Isle of Man is a British crown dependency but is not part of the UK or the European Union. Manx is a close relative of Irish and Scottish Gaelic, all three of which derive from older forms of the Irish language. Like many early carols, it has a lively, syncopated melody meant for dancing and probably derives from pre-Christian solstice ceremonies.

David Arkenstone
God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

David Arkenstone's blend of global sounds, classical music and electronic fusion has made him one of the most popular artists on the New Age music scene. Born in Chicago, Arkenstone moved to California at the age of 10 and played music throughout high school and college. After discovering the music of Japanese composer Kitaro, Arkenstone began developing his own sound, which reflects his passion for fantasy and ancient themes. Arkenstone has also composed extensively for film, television and video game soundtracks. "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" is a traditional English Christmas carol that dates back to at least the mid-1700s. It is mentioned in the Charles Dickens novel *A Christmas Carol*, which was published in 1843. The opening line and title of the carol are intended to remind those who might have had a bit too much eggnog at the Christmas party of the true significance of the season.

Dougie MacLean
Auld Lang Syne

Dougie MacLean is a popular Scottish singer and songwriter who has composed many beloved songs inspired by the folk traditions and natural wonders of the area around his home in the beautiful rural village of Dunkeld. MacLean plays guitar, fiddle and other instruments and records and performs with his son Jamie, who also plays several instruments.

"Auld Lang Syne" was written by Scottish poet Robert Burns in 1788 and set to the tune of a traditional folk song. The bittersweet melody is an essential part of New Year's Eve celebrations. Its title translates from the Scots language as "old long since," meaning "long long ago" or "days gone by." The song was a regular feature of Hogmanay, the Scots word for the last day of the year, and spread to other parts of the British Isles and eventually the entire English-speaking world.