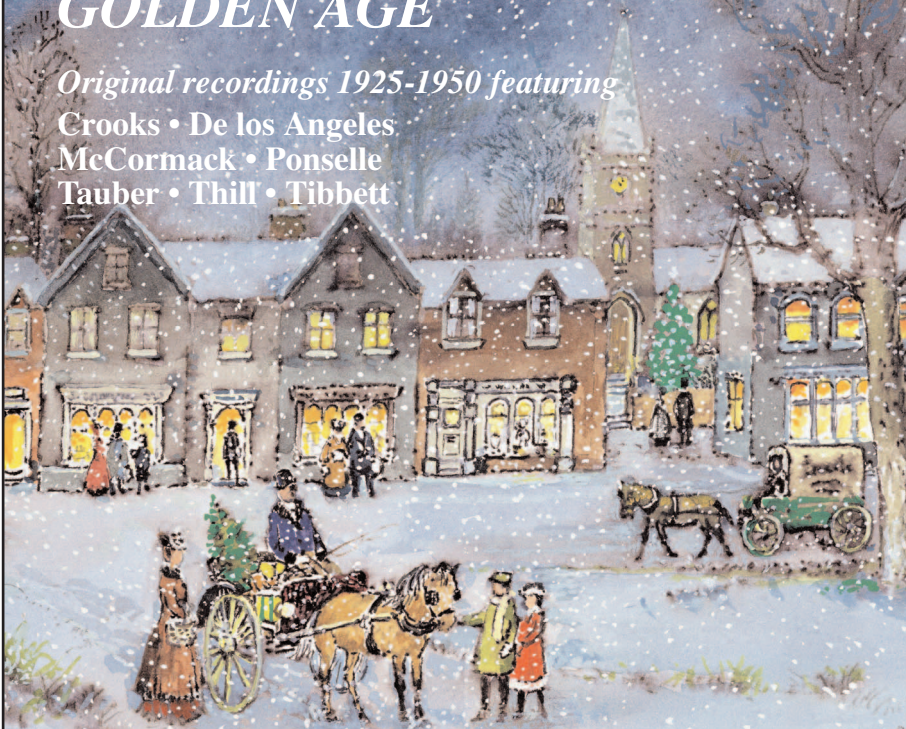


CHRISTMAS *from a* GOLDEN AGE

Original recordings 1925-1950 featuring
Crooks • De los Angeles
McCormack • Ponselle
Tauber • Thill • Tibbett



Christmas from a Golden Age

A 1930s magazine advertisement for the RCA record label pictured Santa Claus at the head of a procession of great singers and instrumentalists gathered on the staircase of some great house. A Christmas-tree and wind-up cabinet gramophone are before them in the hall. 'Will these great artists sing in your home on Christmas morning?' enquired the caption. 'Will Caruso thrill you? Alma Gluck or John McCormack play upon your heart strings?' Well, here are some in that procession, recorded between 1925 and 1950, the Voices of Christmas Past resurrected, gathered together once more to beguile you, in expertly-restored sound, eighteen of the most celebrated stars from the early history of the gramophone singing 23 favourite seasonal songs.

Do these ancient discs bear scrutiny? Are they really worth listening to when, today, you can hear any number of outstanding singers rendering Christmas selections in state-of-the-art sound? The answer is 'Yes, a hundred times yes'. Why? Apart from the rich variety of music ranging from oratorio and carols to Negro spirituals and popular songs, there is the distinctive timbre of each voice, some welcome unexpected repertoire and, most potently, the moving sincerity of every artist. Look no further than *Adeste fideles* [4]. Has anyone ever sung this with more nobility and fervour than John McCormack (1884-1945)? He might have been made the Papal Count he was purely as a result of this stirring account. The Trinity Choir which partners him includes the young Richard Crooks (1900-72), the silver-voiced American tenor, who makes his own inspired solo appearances in the 1890 Stephen Adams / Fred. E. Weatherly ballad *The Star of Bethlehem* [3] and *O little town of Bethlehem* [2]. For the latter, Crooks sings the tune by the American composer Lewis H. Redner and is accompanied by the distinguished organist Clarence Dickinson (1873-1969), a pupil of Moszkowski, Guilman and Pierné.

McCormack's exquisitely produced voice can be

savoured further in *Little Child of Mary* [6], one of many Negro spirituals arranged by the black American baritone H[enry] T[hacker] Burleigh (1866-1949), and *The Holy Child* [5], sometimes known (misguidedly - the text was first published in 1885) as '*Luther's Cradle Hymn*'. Other tenors represented here are the Danish Aksel Schiøtz (1906-75), noted especially for his singing of Mozart and lieder. The recitative *Comfort ye, my people* [1] is the opening vocal number in *Messiah*, which Handel follows immediately with the uplifting aria *Every valley shall be exalted* [2].

Giovanni Martinelli (1885-1969) was first engaged by the New York Metropolitan Opera in 1913. He remained there until 1946. After Caruso's early death (whose last performance, by the way, was given on Christmas Eve 1920), it was Martinelli who was rated as the leading operatic tenor of his time. Here is his much-loved recording of *Gesù Bambino* (The Infant Jesus) [9], originally an organ piece by the then organist of St Patrick's Cathedral, New York, Pietro Yon (1886-1943). 'The chances are,' wrote a former assistant manager of the Metropolitan Opera, 'if you went to Midnight Mass at St Patrick's Cathedral in the '20s and '30s, you would have been startled to have [Martinelli's] clarion tones, with no previous announcement whatever, hit you from the choir loft with "*Gesù Bambino*".'

Cantique de Noël [22] is by Adolphe Adam, the composer of *Giselle*, and was first performed at Midnight Mass in Paris in 1847. It is sung here in a spine-tingling performance by the greatest French operatic tenor of his day, Georges Thill (1897-1984). Richard Tauber (1892-1948), famed as a Mozart singer in his early career and enduringly associated with the operettas of Franz Lehár, is heard in one of his more unfamiliar recordings, perhaps the most popular of all seasonal songs, Irving Berlin's *White Christmas* [23] from the 1942 film *Holiday Inn*.

Two American baritones, both hugely popular in

the inter-war years, were John Charles Thomas (1891-1960) and Lawrence Tibbett (1896-1960). Thomas gives us *Christmas Candle*, one of many songs by the composer and pianist Elinor Remick Warren (1900-91), a student, incidentally, of Clarence Dickinson (see above). Tibbett is represented by a previously unpublished 1939 recording of *A star was his candle*, a number by the obscure Theresa del Riego (amongst whose other creations, we discover, are the titles *O dry those tears* and *Thank God for a garden*). The sole representative of the bass voice is the remarkable Marcel Journet (1867-1933), who made his operatic début as early as 1891. His repertoire included 65 French and 27 Italian rôles, the entire Wagner literature - and this song, by one Jean Luce, *O salutaris* [7] recorded in the last year of his life.

Now to the ladies. Rosa Ponselle (1897-1981), heard here in the Bach-Gounod setting of *Ave Maria* [6], was unarguably one of the greatest names in the history of singing. Described as 'a Caruso in petticoats', she first appeared at the Met. (opposite Caruso) in 1918 when the resident spinto soprano was Claudia Muzio (1889-1936). Muzio herself won the nickname 'the Duse of Song' because of her acting skills and deep understanding of the rôles she played. Of all the illustrious singers of this period whom Dame Eva Turner heard, Muzio made 'the most unforgettable impression of all'. Here Muzio sings *Marias Wiegenlied* (The Virgin's Lullaby) by Max Reger [8], No.52 of his *60 Schlichte Weisen* (Simple Airs) composed between 1903-12. The German soprano, Elisabeth Schumann (1888-1952) had a distinctive light voice that could charm the birds out of the trees, perfectly captured here in the *Coventry Carol* [4], a tune which dates from 1591 and was sung in the Coventry Mystery Plays from that time onwards. The Polish lyric soprano Hulda Lashanska is partnered by the German tenor Paul Reimers (1878-1942) in *Der Tannenbaum* [10], among the most familiar tunes in the world (it was composed in 1799) whether from its use as the American Civil War song *Maryland, My Maryland*, as the Socialist hymn

The Red Flag or in its present original 1820 form.

Dorothy Maynor (1910-1996) the black American soprano offers us *Go tell it on the mountain* [5], a popular spiritual written as long ago as 1865. *I wonder as I wander* [7] is the lovely Appalachian carol 'collected' in his 1934 *Songs of the Hill Folk* by the American folk-song authority John Jacob Niles (1892-1980). It is sung by the American mezzo Gladys Swarthout (1900-69), a star of the Met. from 1929 to 1945 who also had some success in films. This is followed by the haunting *El Cant des Ocells* (Song of the Birds) [8], a traditional carol from Catalonia and a favourite piece (almost a mantra) of the legendary Spanish cellist Pablo Casals. Here it is sung by the delectable Victoria de los Angeles (b. 1923). The Hungarian-born Margarete Matzenauer (1881-1963) began her career as a contralto. She made her American début as Amneris (in *Aida*) at the Met in 1911, remaining one of its leading members until 1930. After 1914 she called herself a soprano, nevertheless recording in 1925 the contralto air *He shall feed his flock from Messiah* [3]. Matzenauer retired in 1938 to live in California.

Finally in this roster of famous names comes the magnificent Ernestine Schumann-Heink (1861-1936), born near Prague but an American citizen after 1908. She was the most famous contralto of her generation, married and divorced three times, mother of eight children and boasting a career that spanned more than half a century. *Weihnachten* (Christmas) [11] is by Engelbert Humperdinck, composer of the opera *Hansel and Gretel*; Schumann-Heink became an American institution and at the stroke of midnight every Christmas Eve it was she who would usher in the great day on the radio singing *Stille Nacht* (Silent Night) [12]. The Spirit of Christmas Past is nowhere more perfectly reflected than in this serene and prayerful recording made three-quarters of a century ago.

- 1 G.F. HANDEL: Messiah: Comfort ye, my people** 3:31
Aksel Schiøtz, *tenor*
Orchestra directed by Mogens Wöldike
HMV DB 5239 [2CS.1620-1] 26th March 1940
- 2 G.F. HANDEL: Messiah: Ev'ry valley shall be exalted** 4:16
Aksel Schiøtz, *tenor*
Orchestra directed by Mogens Wöldike
HMV DB 5239 [2CS.1621-1] 26th March 1940
- 3 G.F. HANDEL: Messiah: He shall feed his flock** 3:54
Margarete Matzenauer, *contralto*
Orchestra directed by Rosario Bourdon
Victor 6555-A [CVE-33956-3] 1st December 1925
- 4 ANONYMOUS: Adeste fideles [O Come, All Ye Faithful]** 3:49
John McCormack, *tenor*
Trinity Choir (Mary Allen, E.Giles, Olive Kline, Lucy Isabelle Marsh, Ruth Rogers, *sopranos*;
Elsie Baker, Helen Clark, Margaret Dunlap, Mina Hager, *contraltos*;
Richard Crooks, Charles Harrison, Charles Hart, Lambert Murphy, tenors; Royal Dadmun,
Frank Croxton, J. Kinsey, Paul Parks, Fred Patton, *baritones/basses*)
and orchestra
Victor 6607-A [CVE-36606-1] 1st October 1926
- 5 EASTHOPE MARTIN: The Holy Child** 3:03
John McCormack, *tenor*, with orchestra
Victor 1281-B [BVE-37147-1] 17th December 1926
- 6 BACH / GOUNOD: Ave Maria** 4:37
Rosa Ponselle, *soprano*, with orchestra
Victor 6599-A [CVE-35470-2] 19th May 1926
- 7 JEAN LUCE: O salutaris** 3:31
Marcel Journet, *bass*
with violin and harmonium accompaniment
French Gramophone DA-1329 [OPG-743-1] 11th May 1933
- 8 MAX REGER: Ninna-Nanna della Vergine, Op. 76, No. 52 [The Virgin's lullaby]** 2:48
Claudia Muzio, *soprano*
Orchestra directed by L. Molajoli
Columbia 4135-M [CB-6985-1] June 1935

- 9 **PIETRO YON: Gesù Bambino** [The Infant Jesus] 3:58
 Giovanni Martinelli, *tenor*
 Ladies' Chorus (Della Baker, Erva Giles, E.Stokes, Ruth Rogers, *sopranos*;
 Elsie Baker, Helen Clark, Mina Hager, *contraltos*), and orchestra
 Victor 6602-A [CVE-34996-3] 7th April 1926
- 10 **TRADITIONAL GERMAN FOLK SONG: Der Tannenbaum** [The Christmas Tree] 2:59
 Hulda Lashanska, *soprano*, with orchestra
 Paul Reimers, *tenor*
 Victor 1748-B [BVE-38727-2] 5th May 1927
- 11 **ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK: Weihnachten** [Christmas] 3:51
 Ernestine Schumann-Heink, *contralto*
 Victor 6723-B [CVE-40011-1] 15th September 1927
- 12 **FRANZ GRUBER: Stille Nacht** [Silent Night] 3:58
 Ernestine Schumann-Heink, *contralto*
 Stewart Wille, *organ*
 Victor 6723-A [CVE- 36754- 3] 3rd November 1926
- 13 **STEPHEN ADAMS: The Star of Bethlehem** 3:38
 Richard Crooks, *tenor*, with orchestra
 Victor 55287-B [CVE-33411-8] 24th September 1925
- 14 **TRADITIONAL BRITISH FOLK SONG: Coventry Carol** 2:47
 Elisabeth Schumann, *soprano*, with orchestra
 Victor 2013-B [OEA-6819-II] 22nd October 1938
- 15 **NEGRO SPIRITUAL: Go tell it on the mountain** 2:48
 Dorothy Maynor, *soprano*, with unaccompanied male choir
 Victor 2211-B [BS-068318-1] 14th November 1941
- 16 **NEGRO SPIRITUAL adapted by H.T. BURLEIGH: Little Child of Mary** 2:41
 John McCormack, *tenor*
 Edwin Schneider, *piano*
 Victor 26772-A [OEA-2122-I]. 27th June 1935
- 17 **APPALACHIAN FOLK SONG arranged by JOHN JACOB NILES: I wonder as I wander** 3:24
 Gladys Swarhout, *mezzo-soprano* with RCA Victor Orchestra directed by Milton Katims
 Victor 10-3003-B [EORB-5113] 20th July 1950

- 18 TRADITIONAL CATALONIAN CAROL: El Cant des Ocells** [Song of the Birds] **2:34**
 Victoria de los Angeles, *soprano*
 Renata and Graciano Tarragó, *guitar*
 HMV DA.1977 [OEA-15022-1] 22nd September 1950
- 19 ELINOR REMICK WARREN: Christmas Candle** **2:39**
 John Charles Thomas, *baritone*
 Carroll Hollister, *pianist*
 Victor 10-1119-A [PBS-072011-1] 8th January 1942
- 20 THERESA DEL RIEGO: A star was his candle** **2:25**
 Lawrence Tibbett, *baritone*
 Stewart Wille, *piano*
 unpublished by Victor [BS-045764-2] 15th December 1939
- 21 LEWIS H. REDNER: O little town of Bethlehem** **3:07**
 Richard Crooks, *tenor*
 Clarence Dickinson, *organ*
 Victor 2182 [BS-067875-1]
- 22 ADOLPHE ADAM: Cantique de Noël** **4:06**
 Georges Thill, *tenor*
 with chorus, organ and orchestra directed by Armand Bernard
 Columbia 9097-M [WLX-1633-1] 26th September 1932
- 23 IRVING BERLIN: White Christmas** **3:03**
 Richard Tauber, *tenor*
 with chorus, organ and orchestra directed by Henry Geehl
 Parlophone RO 20534 [CE-11301-3] 8th November 1944

Transfers and audio restoration by Seth B. Winner Sound Studios, Inc.
 Records from the collection of Lawrence F. Holdridge. Item number 15 kindly supplied by R. Peter Munves.

With thanks to Ruth Edge, Gary A. Galo, Peter Lack and Jon M. Samuels for their discographic assistance.

Playing
Time
77:28

Christmas from a Golden Age

Original recordings 1925-1950

8.110296

ADD



All rights in this sound recording, artwork, texts and translations reserved. Unauthorised public performance, broadcasting and copying of this compact disc prohibited.
© 2003 HNH International Ltd. © 2003 HNH International Ltd.
Distributed by: Naxos of America Inc., 416 Mary Lindsay Polk Drive, (Suite 509) Franklin, Tennessee, 37067, USA.

MADE IN
CANADA



- 1 **HANDEL:** Messiah: Comfort ye, my People
Aksel Schiøtz
- 2 **HANDEL:** Messiah: Ev'ry valley shall be exalted
Aksel Schiøtz
- 3 **HANDEL:** Messiah: He shall feed his flock
Margarete Matzenauer
- 4 **ANONYMOUS:** Adeste fideles
[O Come, All Ye Faithful]
John McCormack
- 5 **EASTHOPE MARTIN:** The Holy Child
John McCormack
- 6 **BACH / GOUNOD:** Ave Maria
Rosa Ponselle
- 7 **LUCE:** O salutaris
Marcel Journet
- 8 **REGER:** Ninna-Nanna della Vergine
[The Virgin's lullaby]
Claudia Muzio
- 9 **YON:** Gesù Bambino [The Infant Jesus]
Giovanni Martinelli
- 10 **TRADITIONAL GERMAN FOLK SONG:**
Der Tannenbaum [The Christmas Tree]
Hulda Lashanska & Paul Reimers
- 11 **HUMPERDINCK:** Weihnachten [Christmas]
Ernestine Schumann-Heink
- 12 **GRUBER:** Stille Nacht [Silent Night]
Ernestine Schumann-Heink
- 13 **ADAMS:** The Star of Bethlehem
Richard Crooks
- 14 **TRADITIONAL BRITISH FOLK SONG:**
Coventry Carol
Elisabeth Schumann
- 15 **NEGRO SPIRITUAL:** Go tell it on the mountain
Dorothy Maynor
- 16 **NEGRO SPIRITUAL:** Little Child of Mary
John McCormack
- 17 **APPALACHIAN FOLK SONG:**
I wonder as I wander
Gladys Swarthout
- 18 **TRADITIONAL CATALONIAN CAROL:**
El Cant des Ocells [Song of the Birds]
Victoria de los Angeles
- 19 **FRANK WARREN:**
Christmas Candle
John Charles Thomas
- 20 **DEL RIEGO:** A star was his candle
Lawrence Tibbett
- 21 **REDNER:** O little town of Bethlehem
Richard Crooks
- 22 **ADAM:** Cantique de Noël
Georges Thill
- 23 **BERLIN:** White Christmas
Richard Tauber

Audio Restoration Engineer: Seth B. Winner Sound Studios Inc.
A complete track list can be found on pages 4-6 of the booklet.
Previously released on Romophone

www.naxos.com

A complete track list can be found in the booklet
Cover image: Village Street in the Snow, Stanley Cooke (1913-96)
(Bridgeman Art Library / Private Collection)

