

NAXOS

# The Night Before Christmas

narrated by Stephen Fry



and other  
seasonal music  
for orchestra

## THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

In its original form, what I have called *Classic Sleighride* is one of several movements in *Musical Sleighride*, attributed to Leopold Mozart, describing a trip in the snow with some sections describing horses, and ladies, shivering in the cold, a ball and other events along the way. However what is the original version is something of a mystery as at least two published versions have different pieces of music for most of each work. What I have done is to take two versions of what is described as the actual 'sleighride' and made an ABA piece out of them embellishing the orchestration while still maintaining an 18th century-sized ensemble. It is even, in some circles, attributed to one Johann Georg Wassmuth and not Leopold at all. So authenticity takes a well deserved holiday - at least for a while.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was born in London, the son of a West African father and English mother. Early in his life, his father, a doctor, unable to make a success in Britain, returned to Sierra Leone. The boy showed talent on the violin from the age of five, and by 1890, with generous backing from a Presbyterian choirmaster, entered the Royal College of Music, studying with Charles Villiers Stanford. Elgar called him 'far and away the cleverest fellow going among the younger men'. The *Hiawatha* trilogy made his name and performances were so plentiful that with Mendelssohn's *Elijah* it held second place only to *Messiah* in the hearts of choral societies the length of the country. He died in Croydon at the age of only 37 before his full potential as a composer could be fulfilled. His *Christmas Overture* appeared posthumously in 1925, arranged by Sydney Baynes, of *Destiny Waltz* fame; it features *God rest you merry, gentlemen*, and *Hark the herald angels sing* and is thought to have been put together from incidental music he wrote for a children's play called *The Forest of Wild Thyme*.

Julius Massenet studied at the Paris Conservatoire, where he later taught from 1878 to 1896. His operas, including *Manon*, were staple fare in houses all over Europe in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, but

he also wrote songs, instrumental works and a series of orchestral suites called *Scènes*, usually based on regional or literary sources [Naxos 8.553124 and 8.553125]. The oratorio, or *Sacred Legend* as he dubbed it, *La Vierge*, dates from 1880 and contains the orchestral interlude, *The Last Sleep of the Virgin*, which remains virtually the only part of the work heard regularly today. It was later employed by Leighton Lucas as the prelude to his score for the ballet of *Manon*, which draws on Massenet's music from disparate areas of the composer's œuvre, with the exception of the opera of the same name.

Philip Lane was born in Cheltenham and read Music at Birmingham University. Since giving up teaching after more than twenty years, he has been active as a record producer (with over a hundred discs to date), composer of music for the concert hall [Marco Polo 8.225185] and television, with many animation series including the immortal *Captain Pugwash*, and as reconstructor of classic film scores for new digital recordings. The idea for the *Overture on French Carols* sprang from a visit to Bayeux in the weeks leading up to Christmas in 2001 when carols were being played through loudspeakers in the streets to accompany seasonal shoppers. There did not seem to be an orchestral work based exclusively on French carols in regular use, so to mark a return to writing for the orchestra in the concert hall after a period of thirteen years, the overture was given its première by the BBC Concert Orchestra under Brian Kay, to whom it is dedicated, in Huddersfield Town Hall in December 2003. The carols employed include, in order, *Il est né le divin enfant*, *Patapan*, *Noël nouvelet*, *Quelle est cette odeur agréable* and *Masters in This Hall*. Some of these are brought back together in the final section with *Quittez, pasteurs* as additional counterpoint in the horns.

The apparent lack of a perennially performed version of *The Night before Christmas* for narrator and orchestra was a catalyst to producing one, initially prompted by seeing a picture-book version of the

Clement Clarke Moore (1779-1863) poem on a friend's childhood bookcase. It was composed in just over a week in November 2005, deliberately lasts only marginally longer than it takes to read the poem alone and is scored for a modest orchestra in the best tradition of such fare, *Peter and the Wolf*, or *Tubby the Tuba*.

Otto Nicolai is remembered today almost entirely for the overture to his last opera, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, but his output is a good deal more substantial, with four earlier operas, sacred and secular choral works, songs, chamber music, and orchestral works including two symphonies. In addition he is credited with founding the mighty Vienna Philharmonic. His *Christmas Overture* (*Weihnachtsouvertüre über Vom Himmel hoch*) only seems to have really come to light nearly a century after his death from a stroke at the age of 39. It is scored for orchestra with optional chorus doubling in the brass declaration of the famous seasonal chorale in the final pages.

John Carmichael was born in Melbourne and studied at the city's Conservatorium, and later at the Paris Conservatoire before moving permanently to London in 1954, holding dual Australian/British citizenship. There he continued his studies with fellow Australian, Arthur Benjamin, and Anthony Milner. He acted as musical director of a Spanish dance company and later was in the vanguard of the music therapy movement. Among his recordings are concertos for piano, trumpet and flute, the last written for James Galway. In addition he wrote a suite for him based around the ski resort of Thredbo in New South Wales. *Sleighride to Thredbo* appears here in a version for small orchestra and reflects snow sports and alpine scenery as the ride takes in the winter slopes, with echoing horn and trumpet figures piercing the clear air.

Franz Liszt wrote his *Christmas Tree Suite* (*Weihnachtsbaum*) between 1874 and 1876. From the

original twelve movements the English composer and conductor Anthony Collins published his arrangement of four of them, for strings and celeste, in 1952. The suite had been plundered some years earlier by Constant Lambert for the ballet, after Liszt, *Apparitions*.

Doreen Carwithen studied at the Royal Academy of Music and became the first student there to be selected for the Apprenticeship Scheme for composers to specialise in the study of film music, working closely with the doyen of film conductors, Muir Mathieson. She wrote the music for over thirty films, including the official film of the 1953 Coronation, *Elizabeth is Queen*. She became composer William Alwyn's second wife, devoting herself to him and writing little. In 1955, for her friend Wendy Toye as director and star, she composed the continuous score for *On the Twelfth Day*, a charming short film without dialogue which took the famous seasonal song absolutely literally (as John Julius Norwich does in his famous prose piece) to disastrous and comic effect. In 1956 it was Oscar-nominated in the category 'Best short subject, two reels' and the following year nominated for a BAFTA. The setting is an idealised snow-covered Edwardian square, and inside the house of Miss Tilly, the object of Mr Truelove's affections. Everything is brought to her door, and to her and her butler's increasing consternation, from a partridge in a pear-tree to twelve drummers drumming. In the film, 'choirboys singing' replace 'seven swans a-swimming' and snippets of 'Oh for the wings of a dove' are folded into the score. On repeated hearings and without the sight of unruly songsters the joke wears a little thin so in my reconstruction I have reinstated the traditional birds and given the lads the day off. In addition, the chorus parts are cued into the instruments for when no voices are available.

Philip Lane

## Stephen Fry

Stephen Fry was born in 1957 and educated at an unfeasibly large number of educational establishments, most of which rapidly tired of him. At Cambridge University, however, he met and worked with amongst others, Emma Thompson and Hugh Laurie, a life-long friend and comedy partner. Fry's first play *Latin!* received a Scotsman Fringe First award and has subsequently been performed around the United Kingdom. The Footlights review he wrote with Thompson, Laurie and Tony Slattery was televised by the BBC. There followed *Alfresco*, a comedy series for Granada (along with Laurie, Thompson, Ben Elton and Robbie Coltrane), three series of *Blackadder* with Rowan Atkinson (and Hugh Laurie again), four series of *A Bit of Fry and Laurie* with Hugh Laurie (both for the BBC) and also with Hugh, four series of *Jeeves and Wooster* for Granada TV and WGBH Boston. He hosts the BBC quiz show *QI* for which he won a Golden Rose, has completed two series for *Absolute Power* with John Bird for the BBC and appeared in numerous single dramas for television, including *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. As a stage actor he performed in Alan Bennett's *Forty Years On*, Michael Frayn's *Look Look*, Simon Gray's *The Common Pursuit* and *Cell Mates* (a run cut inexplicably short). He won a Drama Circle award and a Tony nomination for his work on the revived musical *Me and My Girl*, which ran for years and years on Broadway and the West End. His numerous film appearances have included award winning performances in *Peter's Friends*, *Wilde* (his performance was nominated for a Golden Globe), and *Gosford Park*. He wrote and directed *Bright Young Things* in 2003. He has written four best-selling novels, an autobiography "*Moab is my Washpot*" and is well-known amongst a younger generation as the reader of the audiobook versions of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels.



## BBC Singers

Established in 1924, the BBC Singers has grown from a small group, singing the broadcast daily act of worship, into today's virtuoso 24-voice ensemble, forming Britain's only full-time professional chamber choir. Equally at home on the concert platform and in the recording studio, the BBC Singers performs a wide range of music, from Tallis to Takemitsu. The group's particular expertise in contemporary music has led to creative relationships with some of the most important composers and conductors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The BBC Singers' outreach work includes regular collaborations across the country with school children, youth choirs and the amateur choral community, as well as with tomorrow's young professionals – composers, singers and conductors.

## BBC Concert Orchestra

The BBC Concert Orchestra was formed in 1952. It has a wide and flexible repertoire, ranging from classical works and musical theatre to light music and film scores, and appears with a huge range of artists every year. Its Principal Conductor is Barry Wordsworth and Charles Hazlewood has recently been appointed Principal Guest Conductor. Anne Dudley was the Orchestra's first Composer-in-Association; and Jonny Greenwood has now taken on that rôle as Composer-in-Residence. The Orchestra has close links with BBC Radio 3 which broadcasts the majority of its concerts, and with BBC Radio 2 where it is featured on the weekly programme *Friday Night is Music Night*. On BBC Television the BBC Concert Orchestra has appeared in several programmes, and can be heard on countless BBC TV soundtracks including Peter Ackroyd's *London*, *The Little Prince*, *Coast* and *Planet Earth* on BBC 1. The Orchestra performs annually at the BBC Proms, makes regular visits to the Royal Festival, Royal Albert and Barbican halls in London and appears throughout Britain and abroad. It has made many recordings, with recent releases on Chandos, ASV White Line and Dutton Epoch labels. The Orchestra is resident at Chichester Festival Theatre.



**BBC** Concert ORCHESTRA



## Barry Wordsworth

Barry Wordsworth is the Principal Conductor of the BBC Concert Orchestra and the Brighton Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as a frequent guest conductor with many of the major British Orchestras. In 1973 he became assistant conductor to the Royal Ballet's touring orchestra and, in 1974, principal conductor of the Sadlers Wells Royal Ballet. In 1987 he extended his activities to perform orchestral repertoire, while retaining a position as an official guest conductor of the company, and in 1989 made his first televised appearance on the BBC Proms. He has continued to conduct during every Prom season since, with the BBC Concert Orchestra. His recent career has brought a major tour to Japan with the BBC Concert Orchestra and engagements with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic, New Zealand Symphony and Sydney Symphony Orchestra as part of the Sydney Festival. In Britain he has conducted the Philharmonia Orchestra, the London Symphony Orchestra, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. In addition to his symphonic career, Barry Wordsworth has enjoyed a long and close relationship with the Royal Ballet and Birmingham Royal Ballet. He was Music Director of the Royal Ballet until 1995 and regularly conducts key productions with them (including a critically-acclaimed triple bill and *Romeo and Juliet*) and the Birmingham Royal Ballet, where he continues as Music Director and with whom he has conducted performances in New York. He has recently entered into a new relationship with the Tokyo Ballet where he has now conducted three productions, including the Macmillan *Manon*. He has a large number of recordings to his credit.

8.570331

DDD

COMPACT  
disc  
DIGITAL AUDIO

All rights in this sound recording, artwork, texts and translations reserved. Unauthorised public performance, broadcasting and copying of this compact disc prohibited. MCPS  
 © & © 2006 Naxos Rights International Ltd.  
 Made in the UK




# The Night Before Christmas

narrated by  
**Stephen Fry**

**BBC Singers \***

**BBC Concert Orchestra • Barry Wordsworth**

Leopold Mozart (1719-87) arranged by Philip Lane (b.1950)

**1 Classic Sleighride** 3:11

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912) arranged by Sydney Baynes (1879-1938)

**2 Christmas Overture** 5:53

Jules Massenet (1842-1912)

**3 The Last Sleep of the Virgin (from La Vierge)** (solo cello: Matthew Lee) 4:49

Philip Lane (b.1950)

**4 Overture on French Carols** 5:05

**5 The Night before Christmas** (Narrator: Stephen Fry) 6:10

Otto Nicolai (1810-49)

**6 Christmas Overture (based on the Chorale Von Himmel Hoch) \*** 11:26

John Carmichael (b.1930) orchestrated by Philip Lane

**7 Sleighride to Thredbo** 1:57

Franz Liszt (1811-86) arranged by Anthony Collins (1893-1963)

**The Christmas Tree Suite** 10:35

**8 Lighting the Carols** 1:59

**9 In Olden Times** (solo violin: Rebecca Turner) 4:12

**10 Games** 1:43

**11 Bedtime (Dreaming)** 2:41

Doreen Carwithen (1922-2003) reconstructed by Philip Lane

**12 On the Twelfth Day \*** 20:24

Recorded at The Colosseum, Town Hall, Watford, on 11th and 12th September, 2006

Producers: Neil Varley and Philip Lane • Engineer: Simon Hancock • Editor: Richard Scott

Booklet Notes: Philip Lane

Publishers: OUP (tracks 1 and 5); Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd. (track 2);

Fulcrum Music (track 4); Sunbury Music (track 7); FDH/EMI (tracks 8-11);

Alwyn Foundation (track 12) • Cover Illustration: Arthur Robins • Photo by Johnny Boylan

