

Sono Luminus Presents

IMAGINE CHRISTMAS

1 Frosty the Snowman 2:36

ENSEMBLE GALILEI

egmusic.com

"Frosty the Snowman" by Walter Rollins & Steve Nelson.
Reimagined by Ensemble Galilei.

2 December: Christmas 4:08

BRUCE LEVINGSTON

brucelevingston.com

"December: Christmas" by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

3 White Christmas 3:41

IRINA MURESANU & MATEI VARGA

irinamuresanu.com | mateivarga.com

"White Christmas" by Irving Berlin.
Reimagined by Jascha Heifetz.
Transcribed by Darwin Shen.

4 Holly Jolly Christmas 2:15

JASPER STRING QUARTET

jasperquartet.com

"Holly Jolly Christmas" by Johnny Marks.
Reimagined for string quartet by Sae Chonabayashi.

5 Walking in the Air 2:54

RONN McFARLANE

ronnmcfarlane.com

"Walking in the Air" by Howard Blake.
Reimagined for Lute by Ronn McFarlane.

6 'Twas The Night Before Christmas 3:56

CORY HILLS

splatboombang.com

"'Twas The Night Before Christmas" by Clement Clarke Moore.
Reimagined by Cory Hills.

7 Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town 2:32

KATHRYN BATES

delsolquartet.com

"Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town" by John Frederick Coots and Haven Gillespie.
Reimagined for solo cello by Kathryn Bates.

8 Christmas Time Is Here 3:06

CALEB NEI

calebnei.com

"Christmas Time Is Here" by Lee Mendelson and Vince Guaraldi.
Reimagined by Caleb Nei.

9 Joy to the World 1:45

CUARTETO LATINOAMERICANO & LYDIA LEWIS

cuartetolatinoamericano.com | lydialewisdrums.com

"Joy to the World" Traditional.
Reimagined by Cuarteto Latinoamericano.

10 Good King Wenceslas 2:55

STEWART GOODYEAR

stewartgoodyearpiano.com

"Good King Wenceslas" Traditional.
Reimagined by Stewart Goodyear.

11 Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas 2:42

SKYLARK VOCAL ENSEMBLE

skylarkensemble.org

"Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" by Hugh Martin and Ralph Blane.
Reimagined for choir by Peter Mansfield.

12 Silent Night 5:54

AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC ENSEMBLE

acmemusic.org

"Silent Night" Traditional.
Reimagined by American Contemporary Music Ensemble.

total time 38:16

Yippiee ki-yay...it's Christmas!

A crunch of snow beneath the tires as you pull into the last parking spot for miles, narrowly edging out a gleaming SUV with a driver who seems to be trying to express that you're...number one?

Eyelids narrow to slits and you tuck head to chin, bracing against icy gusts as you make for a battery of persuasive, brightly-lit store windows. It's a full week before Christmas—look at you, all on top of the situation, with a carefully considered list of gifts to buy buried in your parka. No eleventh-hour frenzy *this* year. Tiny platoons of chattering children curl the corners of your frosty lips skyward as the soothing aromas of mulling spices and candied confections drift past. An infinity of sparkling lights showering the trees stirs something inside you. Something lovely, and pure, and radiant.

An inviting cloud of warm air envelops you as you thrust the first door open. Your ears prick up as you are greeted with—

AN EAR-GOUGING MIDI PERVERSION OF A CHRISTMAS CLASSIC THAT TRIPS A WIRE IN YOUR BRAIN, MANCHURIAN-CANDIDATE-ING YOU INTO AN ARSONIST RAGE BEFORE YOU'RE CARTED OFF TO THE STATE PENITENTIARY.

We've all been there.

Which is why I am so grateful that this album you're holding in your hands—or unforgivably streaming on YouTube—exists. Despite my own unwavering love of this holiday, it does seem that the recording industry is hell-bent on chipping away at that love with a yearly onslaught of cloying, and largely redundant, Christmas-themed releases. *Imagine Christmas* is my antidote. A

single album that somehow balances out the fluff that's no doubt headed our way this, and every, season.

You will be aware of three striking elements on this record, from the minute you press play. The first is the quality of the performances. These are top-level musicians bringing their same superlative artistry to Christmas favorites that they do to a Schubert quartet or Taverner score. The second is the sterling quality of the recording. If there is a sonic equivalent to sipping a hot toddy while curled up before a roaring fire, it is Sono Luminus's peerless mixes and captures. Third—and in every way as essential as the previous two—this is a kaleidoscopic collection of styles and interpretations of beloved songs and carols that keeps me eager for the next number. If you're like me, four tracks in to just about any single artist's Christmas album, I am ready to move on. With such a fetching variety of artists and approaches, I find myself going top-to-tail on this one.

Simplicity is an underrated avenue when it comes to holiday releases, so the entries by Irina Muresanu & Matei Varga, Bruce Levingston, Kathryn Bates, and Skylark Vocal Ensemble are a breath of proverbial fresh air. Muresanu's seductive playing is a glimpse into the golden age of violin technique—lush vibrato and delicious sentimentality, which infuses “White Christmas” with every bit of nostalgia one could hope for. One can imagine twirling 19th century gowns in Levingston's solo piano rendition of Tchaikovsky's “Christmas,” with frictionless phrasing that plays like freshly sharpened skates on virgin ice. Heading over to cellist Kathryn Bates's reimagining of “Santa Claus is Comin' to Town,” we are tucked into a bed of extravagant resonance, spin-

ning arpeggios, and all the anticipation and delightful impatience of a child for whom morning cannot arrive soon enough. And of course, Skylark. I've still got their devastatingly gorgeous album *Crossing Over* (DSL-92200) in regular rotation, and with "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas," this chamber choir presents an intoxicating wistfulness that will find the listener awaking to find herself gazing out an ice-encrusted window when the final notes fade.

Speaking of nostalgia, is there any more transportive Christmas number than Vince Guaraldi's "Christmas Time Is Here"? Pianist Caleb Nei here manages to sensitively preserve the graceful melancholy of the original while animating and refreshing the pace of this cherished tune.

Given Sono Luminus's catholic—no, not that Catholic, the other one—appetite for divergent stylistic flavors, we should probably have seen the astonishment that is Cuarteto Latinoamericano's "Joy to the World" coming from a distance. Latin grooves and twitching bow hair send us off in an altogether more festive direction. Or take the scurrying interior lines and expansive tessitura of pianist Stewart Goodyear's "Good King Wenceslas," a piece that conjures up sonic impressions of dauntless backup vocalists carving out the harmonies. Coursing us back into the especially rich Christmas territory of the folk traditions are lute luminary Ronn McFarlane and the bewitching Celtic collective of Ensemble Galilei. The former's "Walking in the Air" is a go-to, non-pharmaceutical, elixir perfect for when things get a bit hairy with the in-laws this December, and the latter's "Frosty the Snowman" is like devouring an entire Buche de Noel, with none

of the regret or need to go up a pant size. The departure that is Cory Hills's spoken-word "'Twas the Night Before Christmas" brings a welcome charm to the track list, his spirited delivery illuminating and exploding the text with a concise cluster of percussion.

With the multiplicity of sounds offered on this record, any listener is bound to point to a favorite. For this listener, that arrives with the final selection, ACME's "Silent Night." Perhaps the furthest distance from what we might think of as "Christmas music," this meditation on one of the season's most stirring melodies is simply ravishing.

Imagine a Christmas in which every carol is this inspired.

—Doyle Armbrust



Everyone at Sono Luminus wishes to thank all of the artists with whom we've had the pleasure of working over the past several years. From all of us to you and yours—Merry Christmas!





DSL-92216

Imagine Christmas

VARIOUS ARTISTS

PRODUCER: Dan Merceruio

RECORDING, MIXING & MASTERING ENGINEER: Daniel Shores

ASSISTANT ENGINEER: David Angell

EDITING ENGINEER: Dan Merceruio, Daniel Shores

PIANO TECHNICIAN: John Veitch

PIANO: Steinway Model D #590904 (New York)

PHOTOGRAPHY: Collin J. Rae

GRAPHIC DESIGN: Caleb Nei

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: Collin J. Rae

Recorded at Sono Luminus Studios, Boyce, Virginia between January 2016 to June 2017. Except track 11 recorded at The Church of the Redeemer, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts.

Recorded with Merging Technologies Horus. Mastered with Merging Technologies Hapi. Recorded in DXD at 24 bit, 352.8kHz in Auro-3D 9.1 Immersive Audio.

Mixed and mastered on Legacy Audio speakers.
legacyaudio.com



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