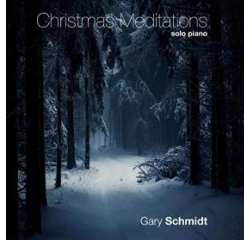


Gary Schmidt

Christmas Meditations



Pianist and composer **Gary Schmidt** offers up the gift of music on his new album **Christmas Meditations**. You will hear no Jingle Bells here. It is fourteen solo piano tracks of holiday cheer. Some traditional, some popular, but every one guaranteed to be delightful and give joy to the occasion. The album is soft and gentle and reflective of the true nature of the season.

With a snowy cascade of notes Gary opens the album with **Carol of the Bells**. He gets at the theme surreptitiously, but then the familiar rings in. It has the warmth of familiarity and even if you don't know all the words, you sing it inside. It demonstrates the wonderful memory of music.

Gary's rendition of **Silent Night** sounds as if he is playing for an audience of One. Nothing fancy, just the beautiful music of composer Franz Gruber as he envisioned it more than two hundred years ago. A waltz of the spirit in celebration of a miracle.

I have always thought that there are a couple of songs that are underutilized to commemorate Christmas. One of them is **Lo How a Rose**. It is the ultimate Christmas hymn. The Rose is the Mother Mary blooming with the Birth of the Christ Child. Schmidt's classic composition suggests that the ravages of winter are no match for this kind of miracle.

Schmidt offers up both commonly known versions of **Ave Maria**. It is a song I sang as a boy for Christmas Mass and the music still touches a special place in my heart. In Bach's variation there is a sweet sadness in Schmidt's interpretation. An underlying reverence. In the Schubert version, also known as *Ellen's Third Song*, there is an intrinsic beauty. It is a misunderstood concept, but still it is a prayer to the Virgin Mary. Schmidt's classical roots run deep in this version. It is heartfelt and poetic.

Another under used song that I like to hear any time is called **Bring a Torch** (Jeannette, Isabella). This French tune was actually a party song. Music for dancing. I can't think of a better party. You hear this one in a lot of television commercials. Gary's notable rendition is in quick time like an allemande that adds to the festiveness.

Some of the more traditional tunes, I'll be Home for Christmas, It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year, and Little Drummer Boy are all rendered without schlock or varnish. Just clean, comforting memories made out of thoughtful tones that rejoice in the season.

One of my favorites on Christmas Meditations is **In the Bleak Winter**. Gary combines it with elements of J.S. Bach's *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desire* and it is truly masterful. It is music that creates the "frisson", those musically generated chill bumps that send heart and soul into rapture mode. I thought I could hear Gary humming in the song, but that just might be my Christmas imagination.

I highly recommend Christmas Meditations as an album you can play and replay. It will not only summon up joyful memories from the past, it will help you to create wonderful memories for the future. - R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews