

Calmus programme notes

Christmas A Cappella

The festival of Christmas takes many different forms. It is celebrated throughout the world, and naturally a wide range of varied traditions have developed in different cultures. And that is only logical, as any traveller from the north who has ever stood beneath palm trees during Advent in December in Florida or Southern California will confirm!

And during this festive season, there is generally more singing than at any other time of the year, and so there are a huge number of wonderful Christmas carols that come from all over the globe. Some pieces have their origin in the liturgical rites, beginning with the Catholic church and then from other Christian faiths. Some have developed into annual folk traditions by the people of a particular region, and then spread to become famous in other regions later. Some sing the praises of the baby Jesus, and others simply celebrate the winter season; some are centuries old, and others just a few decades. Some are virtuous and powerful, while others are calm and peaceful; some are geared for adults, and others particularly for children (including the children inside of all of us!). Often the sound of a particular language helps to create the atmosphere of a song—for example, in the *Huron Carol*, Canada's oldest carol, where we sing two verses in the native language of the Huron/Wendat people. And maybe it will surprise you to discover, that the Ukrainian song *Shchedryk* was the basis for a better known and more international version of the same melody – but with much less consonants in its words (you'll know when you hear it!)!

The variety of Christmas music is indeed vast, and it's not only the melodies themselves which are so very different, but also the form in which they are (or can be) sung: there are unison Gregorian melodies, classic four-part choral settings or polyphonic motets, complex jazzy or even trendy (or sometimes a bit kitschy) arrangements. And isn't it marvelous to take a familiar melody out of its old setting and give it a new one? Christmas carols are so versatile – there are hardly any which can't be set in several different styles!

Over the 18 years that Calmus has been singing together, we have developed a huge repertoire of Christmas music (and we have recorded two Christmas CD's, which reflect this wide variety!). This program is very representative of the huge range of music that can be sung with just five voices, and we have designed it with ancient and contemporary songs in the first part, with new arrangements and a little Christmas twinkling eye in the second part.

We hope that our *Christmas A Cappella* program will bring the Holiday spirit into your hearts, and perhaps bring you a bit of calm and inner peace during these often quite hectic December days. And, of course, we want you to "Have yourselves a Merry little Christmas!"

-Calmus