

The Mystery Of Christmas (2018)

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 19 December 2019 17:02 -

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1 William Byrd - *O Magnum Mysterium* 2:43 2 Adrian Peacock - *Venite, Gaudent!* 2:23 3 Roderick Williams - *O Adonai, Et Dux Domus Israel* 7:08 4 Judith Weir - *Drop Down, Ye Heavens, From Above* 1:40 5 Thomas Tallis - *Videte Miraculum* 9:55 6 *Coventry Carol (Medieval)* 2:42 7 Richard Allain - *Coventry Carol* 3:52 8 James MacMillan - *Nova, Nova* 1:57 9 James MacMillan - *Nova! Nova! Ave Fit Ex Eva* 5:39 10 John Rutter - *Suzi's Carol* 5:00 11 Jamie W Hall - *As I Lay Upon A Night* 3:13 12 *There Is No Rose (Medieval)* 3:32 13 Ben Rowarth - *There Is No Rose* 4:41 14 Thomas Hyde - *Sweet Was The Song* 2:02 15 *Now May We Singen (Medieval)* 4:25 16 Cecilia McDowall - *Now May We Singen* 3:29 17 Fredrik Sixten - *Mary's Lullaby (Silent Night)* 4:01 18 Steven Sametz - *Gaudate* 2:15 19 Morten Lauridsen - *O Magnum Mysterium* 6:00 ORA (Chorus)

Programs mixing Renaissance music with contemporary compositions are almost obligatory in the genre of the British choral holiday album, so it's nice to encounter a release that gets back to the roots of the phenomenon and takes seriously the impulses that gave rise to it. The small (23-voice) ORA singers and conductor Suzi Digby, honored here by the dedication of a new composition by John Rutter, apply the method used on the group's earlier recordings: seeking out, by commission if necessary, new compositions that respond to earlier settings of the same text. With Christmas music, where long chains of interpretation are already in place, the results are especially resonant. Some of the melodies are familiar. Sample the anonymous medieval carol *Nova nova*, bracingly brought to life by its juxtaposition with James MacMillan's setting. A few pieces don't fit this pattern, and two of these are not British; Fredrik Sixten's *Mary's Lullaby (Silent Night)* and Morten Lauridsen's *O magnum mysterium* allow the choir to display its considerable skills in full. The grand result is a choral program that holds your attention throughout, and delivers the promised mystery where so many other holiday releases bog down in ritual. Harmonia Mundi's engineering at London's St. Augustine's Church is a major contributor to the sense of focus in this standout holiday release. ---James Manheim, AllMusic Review

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