

Christmas Carols for Orchestra

HELY-HUTCHINSON: *Carol Symphony*; **KELLY:** *Improvisations on Christmas Carols*; **LANE:** *Wassail Dances*; **STANDFORD:** *Christmas Carol Symphony*; **WARLOCK:** *Bethlehem Down*

City of Prague Philharmonic/ Gavin Sutherland
Naxos 557099—68 minutes

One can imagine that works like these were popular on Christmas concerts some 50 years ago; now the music all sounds a bit nostalgic and dated. The composers are all British, and the style is conservative: sometimes lush, sometimes rhythmic and spiky, and always comfortably tonal. Some pieces stick quite closely to the tunes, while others assume a more symphonic dress and use the carols more as thematic material. Many of the movements use two or more carols, so by the time you're through you've had a good dose of Christmas cheer. All the music is very attractive and appealing (and sections of the Lane and Standford are a good deal more than just appealing), but the style is akin to what you find at a "pops" concert. There is little here to challenge the intellect. Nonetheless, an enjoyable disc, one I'll certainly pull out when the tree is up.

Should you want to find this, note that only Hely-Hutchinson's name appears on the front and spine of the jewel case, even though his piece occupies less than one-third of the time.

ALTHOUSE