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Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958): Fantasia on Christmas Carols / Hodie

- [01] **Fantasia on Christmas Carols**
Traditional carols collected in Herefordshire, Somerset and Sussex

This is the truth sent from above,
The truth of God, the God of Love:
Therefore don't turn me from your door
But hearken all, both rich and poor.

The first thing which I will relate
Is that God did man create,
The next thing which to you I'll tell,
Woman was made with man to dwell.

Then, after this, 'twas God's own choice
To place them both in Paradise,
There to remain, from evil free,
Except they ate of such a tree.

And they did eat, which was a sin,
And thus their ruin did begin,
Ruined themselves, both you and me
And all of their posterity.

Thus we were heirs to endless woes.
Till God the Lord did interpose,
And so a promise soon did run,
That he would redeem us by his Son

Come all you worthy gentlemen that may be standing by,
Christ our blessed Saviour was born on Christmas day,
The blessed Virgin Mary unto the Lord did pray
O we wish you the comfort and tidings of joy!

Christ our Blessed Saviour now in the manger lay,
He's lying in the manger, while the oxen feed on hay.
The blessed Virgin Mary unto the Lord did pray
O we wish you the comfort and tidings of joy!

On Christmas night all Christians sing
To hear the news the angels bring;
News of great joy, news of great mirth,
News of our merciful King's birth.

When sin departs before thy grace,
Then life and health come in its place,
Angels and men with joy may sing,
All for to see the new-born King.

God bless the ruler of this house, and long may he reign,
Many happy Christmases he live to see again!
God bless our generation, who live both far and near
And we wish them a happy New Year
Both now and evermore,
Amen.

Hodie (This Day)

[02] **I. Prologue**
From the Vespers for Christmas Day

Nowell! Nowell! Nowell!
Hodie Christus natus est: hodie salvator apparuit:
Hodie in terra canunt angeli, laetantur archangeli:
Hodie exultant justi, dicentes: gloria in excelsis Deo:
Alleluia.

[03] **II. Narration**
Matthew 1:18-21; Luke 1:32

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: when as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream.

Angel (Tenor Solo):
Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: He shall be great, and shall be called the son of the Highest: Emmanuel, God with us.

[04] **III. Song**
John Milton (1608-1674), "Hymn on the Morning of Christ's Nativity"

It was the winter wild,
While the Heaven-born child,
All meanly wrapt,
In the rude manger lies;
Nature in awe to him
Had doff'd her gaudy trim,
With her great Master so to sympathize.
And waving wide her myrtle wand,
She strikes a universal peace through sea and land.

No war, or battle's sound
Was heard the world around:
The idle spear and shield were high uphung;
The hooked chariot stood
Unstain'd with hostile blood;
The trumpet spake not to the armed throng;
And kings sate still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by.

But peaceful was the night.
Wherein the Prince of light
His reign of peace upon the earth began:
The winds, with wonder whist,
Smoothly the waters kiss'd
Whispering new joys to the mild ocean,
Who now hath quite forgot to rave,
While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmed wave.

[05] **IV. Narration**
Luke 2:1-7

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. And all went to be taxed, everyone into his own city, And Joseph also went up into the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

[06] **V. Choral**
Miles Coverdale (1488-1569), after Martin Luther

The blessed son of God only
In a crib full poor did lie;
With our poor flesh and our poor blood
Was clothed that everlasting good.
Kyrieleison.

The Lord Christ Jesu, God's son dear,
Was a guest and a stranger here;
Us for to bring from misery,
That we might live eternally.
Kyrieleison.

All this did he for us freely,
For to declare his great mercy;
All Christendom be merry therefore,
And give him thanks for evermore.
Kyrieleison.

[07] **VI. Narration**
Luke 2:8-17 and The Book of Common Prayer

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them, 'Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.'

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. We praise thee, we bless thee, we worship thee, we glorify thee, we give thanks to thee for thy great glory; O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty.'

'Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.'

And the shepherds came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

[08] **VII. The Oxen**
Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
'Now they are all on their knees,'
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearth side ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! yet, I feel
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
'Come; see the oxen kneel,

In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,'
I should go with him in the gloom
Hoping it might be so.

[09] **VIII. Narration**
Luke 2:20

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them. Glory to God in the highest.

[10] **IX. Pastoral**
George Herbert (1593-1633)

The shepherds sing: and shall I silent be?
My God, no hymn for thee?
My soul's a shepherd too: a flock it feeds
Of thoughts, and words, and deeds.
The pasture is Thy Word; the streams, Thy Grace
Enriching all the place.

Shepherd and flock shall sing, and all my powers
Out-sing the daylight hours.
Then we will chide the sun for letting night
Take up his place and right;
We sing one common Lord; wherefore he should
Himself the candle hold.
I will go searching, till I find a sun
Shall stay till we have done;
A willing shiner, that shall shine as gladly
As frost-nipt suns look sadly.
Then we will sing, and shine all our own day,
And one another pay;
His beams shall cheer my breast, and both so twine
Till even his beams sing, and my music shine.

[11] **X. Narration**
Luke 2:19

But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

[12] **XI. Lullaby**
William Ballet

Sweet was the song the Virgin sang,
When she to Beth'lem Juda came
And was delivered of a son,
That blessed Jesus there to name
'Lulla, lulla, lulla-bye,
Sweet babe,' sang she,
And rocked him sweetly on her knee.

'Sweet babe,' sang she, 'my son,
And eke a saviour born,
Who hast vouchsafed from on high
To visit us that were forlorn:
Lalula, lalula, lalula-bye,
Sweet babe,' sang she,
And rocked him sweetly on her knee.

[13] **XII. Hymn**
William Drummond (1585-1649)

Bright portals of the sky,
Emboss'd with sparkling stars,
Doors of eternity,
With diamantine bars
Your arras rich uphold,
Loose all your bolts and springs,
Ope wide your leaves of gold,
That in your roofs may come the King of Kings.

O well-spring of this All!
Thy father's image vive;
Word, that from naught did call
What is, doth reason, live;
The soul's eternal food;
Earth's joy, delight of heaven;
All truth, love, beauty, good;
To thee, to thee be praises ever given!

O glory of the heaven!
O sole delight of earth!
To thee all power be given,
God's uncreated birth!
Of mankind lover true,
Indearer of his wrong,
Who dost the world renew,
Still be thou our salvation and our song!

[14] **XIII. Narration**
Matthew 2:1,2,11

Now when Jesus was born, behold, there came wise men from the east saying 'Where is he that is born King? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.' And they said unto them, 'In Bethlehem.' When they had heard that they departed; and, lo! the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.

[15] **XIV. The March of the Three Kings**
Ursula Vaughan Williams (1911-2007) (used by kind permission)

From kingdoms of wisdom secret and far come
 Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar;
 they ride through time, they ride through night
 led by the star's foretelling light.

Crowning the skies
 the star of morning, star of dayspring calls,
 lighting the stable and the broken walls
 where the prince lies.

Gold from the veins of earth he brings,
 red gold to crown the King of Kings.
 Power and glory here behold
 shut in a talisman of gold.

Frankincense from those dark hands
 was gathered in eastern, sunrise lands,
 incense to burn both night and day
 to bear the prayers a priest will say.

Myrrh is a bitter gift for the dead.
 Birth but begins the path you tread;
 your way is short, your days foretold
 by myrrh, and frankincense and gold.

Return to kingdoms secret and far,
 Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar,
 ride through the desert, retrace the night
 leaving the star's imperial light.

Crowning the skies
 the star of morning, star of dayspring, calls:
 clear on the hilltop its sharp radiance falls
 lighting the stable and the broken walls
 where the prince lies.

[16] **XV. Choral**
1: Anonymous; 2: Ursula Vaughan Williams

No sad thought his soul affright;
 Sleep it is that maketh night;
 Let no murmur nor rude wind
 To his slumbers prove unkind;
 But a quire of angels make
 His dreams of heaven, and let him wake
 To as many joys as can
 In this world befall a man.

Promise fills the sky with light,
 Stars and angels dance in flight;
 Joy of heaven shall now unbind
 Chains of evil from mankind,
 Love and joy their power shall break,
 And for a new born prince's sake;
 Never since the world began
 Such a light such dark did span.

[17] **XVI. Epilogue**
John 1:1-14; John Milton, "Hymn on the Morning of Christ's Nativity"

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. Emmanuel, God with us.

Ring out, ye crystal spheres,
Once bless our human ears,
If ye have power to touch our senses so;
And let your silver chime
Move in melodious time,
And let the bass of heaven's deep organ blow;
And, with your ninefold harmony,
Make up full consort to the angelic symphony.

Such music (as 'tis said),
Before was never made,
But when of old the sons of the morning sung,
While the Creator great
His constellations set,
And the well-balanced world on hinges hung:
And cast the dark foundations deep,
And bid the weltering waves their oozy channel keep.

Yea, truth and justice then
Will down return to men,
Orbed in a rainbow; and, like glories wearing,
Mercy will sit between,
Throned in celestial sheen,
With radiant feet the tissued cloud down-steering;
And heaven, as at some festival.
Will open wide the gates of her high palace hall.