

Folk Harp Journal Fall 2005

This album is heralded as “Carols and songs to drive the cold winter away.” The song of this name is a delightful Yuletide mix of harp, recorder and voice that will be at home in any Christmas setting, grand or small. In fact all of the songs in this collection call to mind images of old fashioned stockings hung by the fireplace, and loved ones calling this holiday season.

The harp is recorded with just the right amount of reverb to catch your ear, but not overpower. It invokes the kind of feeling you get from a musician in a stone church. And its tone is complete throughout the register to give you a balanced feeling that lets you hear every note.

Amy has arranged all of the songs; many are traditional, and many from England. Her voice lends an earthy element to the mix, and is used to great effect on most of the selections. It is autumn as I listen to this recording, but I fully feel as though I should see a Christmas tree in the living room when I return there tonight. Don't get me wrong: this isn't a stomp-your-feet-and-make-another-bowl-of-wassail type of album, but rather a take-you-to-another-time-and-place collection of holiday songs. The longer you listen to it the more you'll wish St. Nick was here.

Some of the songs will be immediately familiar to listeners: Good King Wenceslaus, Coventry Carol, Deck the Halls, and I Wonder as I Wander; others will be favorites of those who love traditional, Old English music. As you listen you'll note how well the harp and recorder play with and off each other, and perhaps even wondering if you shouldn't hit the repeat button on your CD player one more time.

After all, it feels like the holidays.

— Mark Feil

STATIC Magazine November 2005

Harpist Amy Kortuem's third release, *All Hayle to the Days*, hails as much to the ease and vibrance of her live performances as the songs she plays — Celtic, Irish, English, Welsh, Hebrides and Manx.

Yeah, you know, Manx. The stuff could be stuffy. And Kortuem plays and sings with enough artistic and technical sophistication and she could strike a plenty highbrow pose.

Instead, track after track she gives warm, generous performances of works that work in lots of ways — as a fresh take on formal holiday tunes, like “The Coventry Carol” with Kortuem's silvery vocals in an airy, haunting call-and-response with the harp; as a remarkably accessible collection of period pieces, like the lush, sweet-sad “Lullaby of the Virgin Mary-Christ Child's Lullaby;” and as a showcase for the expressive ranges of the harp and the period instruments courtesy of recorder player Martha Lindberg, percussionist Sam Lawrence and violinist/violist Sena Thompson.

It's the most complete catalog of Kortuem's talents so far — she arranged all ten pieces, sings on several and shows her prowess as an artistic director via the assembly of ten tunes that stand solidly alone and hang together just right.

In performance, Kortuem speaks between pieces. She tells stories, she laughs, she lets her excitement for the music float out into the audience and hover there like a happy “I hope you like this” before the gift gets handed over. There's no talking on the recording, but the vibe is the same — Kortuem infuses the music with a thoughtful joy. And it's not until she hands you the Manx that you realize it was just what you wanted.

— Ann Fee

Applauze Magazine December 2005

It's hard to believe that winter could be upon us, or that thoughts of the holiday season could so soon be near. If you're like many people, preparations for the coming days can seem overwhelming: winterizing cars, bad driving conditions, shopping lists and lines at the department stores...all of it can easily add enough stress to make us forget why we're celebrating in the first place.

Amy Kortuem's latest release, *All Hayle to the Days*, is just the cure for those cold winter nights when we catch ourselves in a whirlwind of stress. The divine musical arrangements in her latest album immediately touched my soul with inspiration and a deep feeling of peace, speaking to the spirit. There are of course the traditional carols such as “Deck the Halls” and “Good King Wenceslaus,” but I found the instrumental arrangements to be perhaps the most beautiful of all. “I Wonder as I Wander,” a traditional instrumental Appalachian piece, induced an ethereal feeling of spirituality within me, one of those moments where you can almost feel the soul of the musician as the notes drift through your speakers into your heart.

“Carol from an Irish Cabin,” a Celtic tale of generosity through hospitality, produces haunting beauty, a gentle reminder of the importance of giving and sharing the warmth of what we have with those around us. Producing a crystal clear reflection with the universal message of seeking divine wisdom is the instrumental piece, “The Cutty Wren.” This is yet another traditional Welsh arrangement, and in Amy's hands, a calming, serene interpretation. If you're looking for the perfect way to warm up the season, and you'd like to add a classic beautiful album to your holiday collection, Amy Kortuem certainly knows how to drive the cold harsh winter away.

— Jaclyn Bromeland