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Generations of Yuletide

Ken Elkinson

2008 / August Son Productions - 1.1 hours

"Generations of Yuletide" is Ken Elkinson's sixth solo piano release to date. Not your typical Christmas album, Elkinson has combined several of the more obscure songs of the season with his improvised arrangements of traditional gems and has created a pensive collection of sixteen holiday classics. Overall, the mood of the album is solemn and the arrangements are on the dark side, but Elkinson has made the pieces his own by improvising and adding very personal musical touches. While the music isn't necessarily joyful or celebratory, it is deeply meaningful and very beautiful. It is interesting to note that Elkinson placed the songs on the CD in chronological order, beginning with the 13th century and coming all the way through the ages to 1966. If you're looking for a Christmas CD that's different and fresh, this is a good one to check out!

The CD begins with "The Star of Christmas Morning," a 13th century English piece that is bittersweet yet shimmers with light breaking through the darkness. "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" comes from about the same time period but from France. Elkinson freely interprets the haunting melody and alters the traditional rhythm a bit, bringing it into the contemporary musical realm. On "Greensleeves" he plays through traditional melody and then takes off on his own, maintaining the gentle spirit of the song while exploring harmonic and rhythmic changes. I love "The Huron Carol," a haunting 17th century Canadian piece that Elkinson puts heart and soul into. "Prepare the Way, O Zion" is a lighter Swedish piece that he gives a very beautiful and flowing treatment. Elkinson makes some interesting rhythmic changes in "Silent Night" and "We Three Kings of Orient Are" that will catch listeners off-guard a bit - intentionally, I'm sure. "Gabriel's Message" is a new carol for me. It is a late 19th century Spanish carol with a simple melody and lovely chord changes. "Carol of the Bells" is a really different arrangement. I've been amazed over the years about how well this piece holds up to a huge variety of arrangements, and this one is no exception. Very slow and pitch black, this version is almost funereal - a fascinating interpretation. "The Little Drummer Boy" lightens the mood substantially. "I'll Be Home For Christmas" and "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" are appropriately dreamy and wistful, and are a bit jazzier than some of the other tracks. The closing track is Vince Guaraldi's "Christmas Time Is Here," and is one of my favorite versions of this touching jazz piece.

If you are looking for a bouncy and effervescent Christmas album, "Generations of Yuletide" is probably not going to do it for you, but if you'd like a new take on the music of the season, give it a try! It will be available on October 14, 2008 from www.kenelkinson.com, amazon.com, [iTunes](http://iTunes.com), and other music outlets.

- Kathy Parsons

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