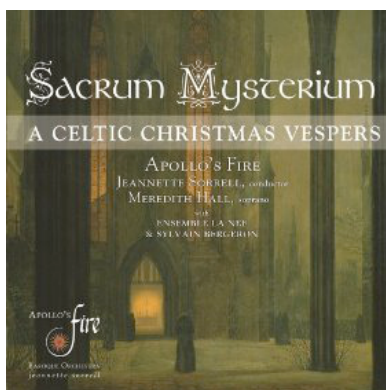


Feature

Seasonal CDs with local connections:
Great Gifts for last-minute shoppers

by Daniel Hathaway & Mike Telin

There should be a musical equivalent of the “locavore” movement to tag those who prefer to buy and listen locally. Here are some CDs by Northeast Ohio groups or, in one case, an ensemble that sang a memorable concert earlier this Fall at Oberlin, which are well worth considering for your eleventh-hour shopping lists.



Apollo's Fire: *Sacrum Mysterium: A Celtic Christmas Vespers*. As much of a liturgist as she is a music director, Jeannette Sorrell enjoys placing musical selections within a ritual structure. *In Sacrum Mysterium*, the floor plan is a 13th century Vespers preserved in the Sprouston MS in Glasgow attributed to St. Kentigern, the city's patron — but before, during and after, the program takes detours to explore wonderful Scottish and Gaelic carols, lullabies, folk music and other tunes ranging from medieval chant to 18th century jigs and reels, creating an irresistible mix of Celtic-inspired music.

Apollo's Fire's excellent collaborators are Sylvain Bergeron and his Montréal-based Ensemble La Nef, who are well-known for putting together their own programs seamlessly uniting period art and folk music (whose borders are remarkably porous). (Read a full review [here](#)). —DH



Quire Cleveland: *Carols for Quire from the Old & New Worlds 2*. The fourth edition of Carols for Quire by Cleveland's professional chamber choir under the direction of Ross W. Duffin goes up this weekend for Friday and Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon performances at Trinity Cathedral. The CD of repertory from Quire's 2010 and 2011 concerts begins with anonymous medieval music from France, England and Spain, and picks up hymns and motets by Palestrina, Byrd and Handl plus French *Noëls* and selections from the famous *Pie cantiones* on the way to more modern times (many of the pieces are sung in stylish and straightforward arrangements by Duffin).

The disc ends with Jennifer Conner's *Quiet Promise*, Gustav Holst's exquisitely simple *In the bleak midwinter*, H. Walford Davies's *The Holly and the Ivy* and Herbert Howells's plush *A spotless rose*. The recording, captured by Thomas Knab at live performances at Trinity Cathedral, gives a good sense of the acoustics of the

space. The singing is vibrant and immediate. (Read a review of the 2011 performance [here](#)). —DH



Seraphic Fire: *Silent Night*. This recording won't win any awards for a catchy title, but the Miami-based chamber choir Seraphic Fire profoundly impressed everybody within earshot when they sang at Oberlin Conservatory in September (read our review [here](#)). The recording is an appealing mix of traditional carols from Europe and America leavened with Anglican service music (William Smith's *Preces and Responses*), *Gitanjali Chants* by Craig Hella Johnson, a Victoria motet, a Billings fuguing tune and two splendid recent works, Steven Paulus's *Hymn to the Eternal Flame* and Steven Sametz's *Niño de rosas (Three Mystical Choruses)*. The spiritual, *Sweet Little*

Jesus Boy features the remarkable male alto voice of Reginald L. Mobley. The title song ends the album in an arrangement by SF's founder and Artistic Director, Patrick Quigley. Everything is sung with SF's signature purity of tone and superb tuning — without ever becoming precious or affected. —DH



Almeda Trio. What a pleasure it is to pop in a new CD, press the play button, and simply sit back and be thoroughly entertained from beginning to end. That is exactly how I experienced the debut studio CD by the Cleveland based *Almeda Trio*, Cara Tweed violin, Ida Mercer, cello and Robert Cassidy, piano. Released by Albany Records on December 1, this self-titled CD takes listeners on a stylistic journey beginning with Paul Ferguson's American jazz inspired *Solstice Suite* and concluding with Paul Schoenfield's inspired take on "high-class dinner music," *Café Music*. In between, feel the soulful sounds of Argentine Tango during *Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas (Four Seasons of Buenos Aires)* by Astor Piazzolla.

As we have come to expect from the trio's live performances, this CD brilliantly captures the Almeda's musical trademarks. Performing with strength of pure and focused tone both individually and collectively, their phrasing and balances provide clarity of texture. They are rhythmically precise and their well thought-out stylistic approaches to all three works make this CD a must have. This is the only time I have enjoyed a performance of the Piazzolla by a North American classical music ensemble. They have captured the passion of Argentina. Ferguson's *Solstice Suite*, commissioned by the Almeda for their popular Winter Solstice concerts (on again this year at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History) serves as the perfect opener. The Piazzolla-inspired first movement, *The Remains if the Day*, sets the perfect mood and Schoenfield's concluding *Presto* brings the CD to a rousing conclusion.

The production values of the CD are top notch. Elaine Martone of Sonarc Music produced the album and the recording engineer was David Yost. Beth Segal's photos are humorous, adding a nice touch that is often absent in recordings. —MT

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