

A DAVE BRUBECK

# Christmas

Each family has its own traditions and rituals, from the menu on Christmas day, to when the gifts are opened, to which ornament belongs at the top of the tree. In our house, it's a star. Music is part of that tradition, and, in our family, an essential part. Growing up, every house I knew had a piano in the parlor, and it was around this noble instrument that all of us, uncles, aunts, cousins, parents, and friends, gathered to sing the familiar carols.

When first approached about recording a Christmas album, I thought in terms of the Christmas concerts my sons and I, along with Bobby Militello and Russell Gloyd as conductor, had performed with the San Francisco Symphony in 1993 and with the London Symphony in 1995. We had beautiful arrangements which were already proven to reach and touch audiences. Then I remembered those parlor pianos of my childhood and thought, "No, I don't want a big symphony orchestra. I want this to be a very personal statement."

Because of the fun that is part of the holiday season, I've chosen to open the recording with a "**Homecoming**" **Jingle Bells** that evokes the sound of sleigh bells heralding the arrival of guests. The second version, "**Farewell**" **Jingle Bells**, depicts the departure of tired parents, children half asleep, and the close of festivities as guests disappear into the night.

The music we hear through the holidays is filled with childhood associations and typically the carols that have endured the passage of time. Most of the selections on this recording will be very familiar to you. True, we occasionally hear new carols, and a few gradually work their way into our collective memories. Mel Tormé's **The Christmas Song** is now one of the most recorded melodies in the United States. I

included some "originals" on this recording which may be new to you. **To Us Is Given**, a chorale and an improvisation based on a 2000-year-old Hebrew chant, is derived from my choral composition "Pange Lingua Variations." And **Run, Run, Run to Bethlehem** is from my Christmas cantata "La Fiesta de la Posada." The traditional Mexican folk song **Cantos para Pedir las Posadas** which I play on this recording is one that is sung as "pilgrims" go from house to house knocking on doors, re-enacting the story of Joseph and Mary searching for shelter in Bethlehem.

In the past twenty years it has been *our* tradition — my wife Lola and I, and Russell Gloyd, our conductor — to spend each December traveling from city to city, performing our Christmas pageant based on this Latin American custom of Las Posadas with various choruses, symphony orchestras, church and college choirs. For eleven years the Christmas season at the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in Manhattan opened with "La Fiesta de la Posada."

When I was most aware of the plight of Joseph and Mary, and the humble birth of Jesus (and it still remains my most vivid recollection of a Christmas) was when I was far from family in strange surroundings during the Battle of the Bulge in World War II. The next most memorable Christmas in my mind was when the war was over and I returned home to the ranch. There, things were the same — the long-needle pine trees brought down from the hills decorated with familiar ornaments, the toyon berries over the mantel, and my mother singing **O Tannenbaum!** in German. It is only recently that I discovered why she sang "O Christmas Tree!" in the original language. My mother's mother came to America from Poland to work in Concord, California, for a family where only German was spoken. For some years it was the first language of my grandmother, whom I never knew, and possibly also for my mother in her earliest years.

Many carols we sing have come to this country with immigrant families. **Silent Night** has an Austrian origin, and my mother used to sing it in German, too. Many of our most familiar carols came from England. It is said that Henry VIII composed the melody of "Greensleeves," which developed into the Christmas carol **What Child Is This?**, and **Joy to the World** was adapted from Handel's *Messiah* by the American hymnologist Lowell Mason.

Here are some of the Christmases I remember:

The year I learned that there might not be a Santa Claus. Sharp-eyed Cousin Louie asked, "How come Santa Claus is wearing Cousin Henry's shoes?"

The time that big brothers Henry and Howard got into a scuffle and knocked down the Christmas tree after everyone else had gone to bed.

The year that an inebriated Santa Claus (our ranch was the last house on his list of calls) terrorized the children by his over-exuberant "Ho-Ho-Hos" and jangling of bells.

When my own family grew, I recall the great thrill it was for me when we could all be together. Often I had to travel miles from some remote place "on the road," but I would always try to get home for Christmas. Sometimes we would have to celebrate our family Christmas in strange places and at odd hours because, as you probably know, musicians are often called upon to work on holidays. One Christmas I remember in particular, I drove through a snowstorm from Chicago to Salt Lake City to meet Lola and our first two children who had come from California by train to meet me. She was determined to surprise me with a real Christmas, so she fought the snow with young children in tow to buy decorations and a tree, which she and the kids dragged back to the motel. On Christmas morning I went to the Mormon Tabernacle to hear the choir sing Handel's "Messiah." My son, Darius, who was then three, begged to come along, but I thought he was too young to go. Lola let him hear the broadcast on the radio and he was moved to tears, and when he heard that it was to be rebroadcast Christmas night, while I was at work, asked to be allowed to stay up so that he could hear "the angels sing again."

In the early not-so-prosperous days of the family I always waited until Christmas Eve to buy a tree. Mr. Pynch's Christmas tree lot in the Mission District in San Francisco practically gave the trees away when the hour grew late. I had to time it just right—not too early and pay full price, but not too late either, or the lot would be closed.

Christmas Eve was decorating time with all the kids joining in. Our son Michael would always want to sing "Cribfer," which was his title for "Away in a manger, no crib for a bed." Sometimes our tree was of eucalyptus or of palm leaves, depending on where we were. One time in Hawaii I recall a palm leaf in the shape of a tree, decorated with orchids, which had been given to my wife by the janitor of a school on Maui. As our family grew and we eventually had our own home, the trees grew bigger and more elaborate, the house decorations under our daughter Cathy's eyes became more artistic, the Christmas music a little louder with Dan on drums and Chris on bass, and our baby, Matthew, who became the tallest member of our family, was called upon to put the star on top of the tree.

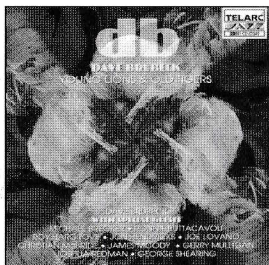
When our son Chris was at our house recently, he heard me playing the tape from this recording session. A big smile flashed across his face. He said, "That sounds just like the Christmases when I was growing up in this family. I remember you and Uncle Howard playing carols, trading off or playing four hands. I even remember when I was very little Grandma Bessie playing the piano too, and how her bracelets used to jingle!"

Emotions aroused by the music of Christmas are often a curious mixture of happiness with childhood Christmases remembered and sadness for the Christmases that can never be recreated. The exciting trappings of Christmas — decorations, lights, food and parties, Rudolph and Santa Claus, holly and mistletoe, Sunday school pageants, shepherds and angels — can be, at times, tinged with peaceful solemnity, if one quietly lights a candle and ponders the mystery of His birth.

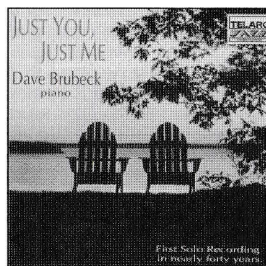
Merry Christmas!



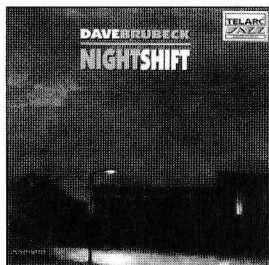
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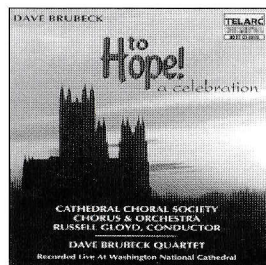
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Millennia In-Studio Microphone Preamplifier:

Millennia Media HV-3

Digital Recording Processor: Telarc/UltraAnalog Tandem 20-bit ADC custom  
engineered by Kenneth Hamann and Gary Gomes

Microphone and Interconnecting Cables: Audio-Quest, Monster, and Mogami

Power Amplifier:

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Monitor Speakers: ATC SCM-20

20- to 16-bit Encoding: Apogee UV-1000 Super CD Encoder

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