

Merry Christmas Tonight **The Isles of Rhythm**

The Isles of Rhythm perform a mix of Caribbean, Irish, and Ragtime music. This project demonstrates Christmas music played using these various rhythmical styles.

In *Stories of Christmas Carols*, Ernest K. Emurian defines three types of Christmas music: hymns are religious poems written to be sung to “one of the Persons of the Holy Trinity”; carols are not as formal or spiritual as hymns, and songs are more secular in nature. William Studwell in *The Christmas Carol Reader* says that the word “carol” is probably derived from the Greek word “choros”, meaning “dance.” So, it is fitting that these Christmas carols are put to various styles of folk dance music.

1. Merry Christmas Tonight (Kevin Sanders) 2004 © 2004 by Kevin Sanders, Sandberg Music, BMI

This recording, coupled with *Ave Maria*, was originally released as a CD single in 2006 (Ragged But Right RBR 301) under the name *Paul Mast with the Kevin Sanders Band*. This song, written during a road trip to Colorado and based on a dream I had during the trip, is a traditional sounding Christmas waltz. Since I didn't have an instrument or recorder with me, I wrote down the melody as best I could and spent the entire trip singing it to myself so that I wouldn't forget it.

2. Here Comes Santa Claus (Gene Autry - Oakley Haldeman) 1947 Western Music Publishing

In 1947, with World War II behind us, the country was ready for a new Christmas song. Gene Autry, singing Cowboy in the movies and shrewd businessman, fulfilled that need with this song. Autry got the idea for the song when he was the Grand Marshal in the 1946 Los Angeles Christmas Parade and heard kids shouting “here comes Santa Claus”, seeing Santa on the float directly behind Autry's. Autry wrote a few notes about this parade experience and gave them to the manager of his publishing company who put it to music. The writers cleverly blend secular and religious elements in this song, assuring children that Santa Claus loves them all the same, whether they're rich or poor. Autry's recording of the song was a huge hit in 1947. It has been recorded by many artists including Bing Crosby (1948) and Elvis Presley (1957). The success of Autry's recording led to his next big Christmas hit, Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer (1949).

This version is played using the *clave* rhythm, also known as the Bo Diddley rhythm, since he used it in practically every one of his songs. Another good example is Jimmy Buffet's *Volcano* (1979). An interesting fact related to this CD is that Buffet was born on Christmas day. The *clave* is a distinct 3/2 over two bar rhythmic pattern developed in Cuba but derived from African rhythms. It shares the same name as the percussion instrument *claves*, which almost always plays this rhythm in Latin American music. The *claves* are a pair of wooden sticks struck together, with the palm of the hand cupped to resonate the sound.

3. Raise Your Spirits Jig (Pat Ireland, 2006) © 2006 by Pat Ireland

Inspired by the Christmas seasons of 2006 and 2007, Pat Ireland wrote the jigs and reels included on this CD (*Raise Your Spirits Jig; Holiday Spirit/Holiday Reel; Holiday Spirit Jig; Christmas is Coming/Christmas is Here*), and gave them Christmas titles. The jig, is a popular Irish folk dance written in 6/8 time. The term *jig* comes from the French word *gigue*,

which means “small fiddle” and is used to describe the dance and the accompanying music. Jigs and reels usually consist of two eight-bar sections, each repeated.

4. Mary’s Boy Child (Jester Hairston) 1956 Schumann Music Co.

Although this was first recorded by Harry Belafonte (1956), known as the “King of Calypso”, his version did not use a Caribbean rhythm. Although Belafonte’s recording reached #12 in the U.S. in 1956, it was a #1 hit in England in 1957 and made the top 20 in England the following year. The song was later recorded as a Reggae piece by the German-based group *Boney M* in 1978. It is done here as a beguine, an Afro-French dance developed in Martinique and St. Lucia. While the dancers do not embrace, the dance depicts man’s pursuit of woman. The beguine is closer to the Creole rhythms of New Orleans than to Latin rhythms. The word beguine is a French term meaning “flirtation.” Cole Porter’s *Begin the Beguine* is a popular song with beguine in the title, although it is more like a rumba than a beguine.

Alexander Stellio’s band recorded many beguines beginning in 1929, making them possibly the first band to record beguines. This song has been recorded by a variety of artists, including Irish singer Frank Patterson, Tom Jones, Jim Reeves and Roger Whitaker.

Jester Hairston was born in 1901 in North Carolina, the grandson of slaves. His career included acting, arranging, and directing choirs for movies, television, and radio. He trained choirs for Broadway shows, which led him to Hollywood where he played a number of character roles in movies as well as providing music for movies. While arranging the music for the movie *Carmen Jones* (1954) he met Belafonte who starred in the movie. Hairston died in Los Angeles at the age of 98.

5. Santa Claus is Coming To Town (Haven Gillespie – John F. Coots) 1934

EMI Feist Catalog, Inc.

John Coots (music) and Haven Gillespie (lyrics) were practically forced to write this song in 1934 when their publishing company, Leo Feist, Inc. promised a children’s Christmas song to the popular vaudeville singer and comedian Eddie Cantor. Although at first Gillespie told his publisher that he didn’t feel up to it, due to the recent death of his brother, on his way home he started writing down things his mother used to tell him around Christmastime when he was a kid back home in Kentucky. By the time he got home he had finished the poem. He sent it to his publisher who then hired Coots to put it to music. The song became one of the most commercially successful Christmas songs ever written through recordings by Bing Crosby with the Andrews Sisters (1943), and Perry Como (1946).

Gillespie had been writing songs for vaudeville acts and had two number one hits, *Breezin’ Along with the Breeze*, and *Honey*. Coots had written music for Broadway shows for stars such as Sophie Tucker and had some sentimental hits, such as *Love Letters in the Sand*. Gillespie and Coots had been writing songs together since 1933 and had some hits, such as *There’s Honey on the Moon Tonight* and *You Go to My Head*, both in 1938.

This version of the song represents a Western swing style. Swing, both Big Band and Western, were extremely popular when this song was written in 1934.

6. Ave Maria (Franz Schubert – Sir Walter Scott) 1825

The renowned classical composer Franz Schubert was so impressed with this poem from *The Lady of the Lake* (1810) by the great Scottish writer Sir Walter Scott, that he was moved to put it to music. Many of the lyrics, always sung in Latin and attributed to Scott, are based on the Marian prayer known as the *Hail Mary* found in the Gospel of Luke. Schubert considered this his best work. It is fitting that Mary should have such a beautiful Christmas song written to her since, without her, there would be no Christmas.

7. Holiday Sprit/Holiday Reel (Pat Ireland, 2006, 2007) © 2006 & 2007 by Pat Ireland

The reel, like the jig, is a popular Irish folk dance, and, unlike the jig, is written in 2/4 time. The term *reel* is used to describe the dance and the accompanying music. It is common for two or more jigs and reels to be played together as medleys, or *sets*, as done here and for *Christmas is Coming/Christmas is Here* (#14).

8. The Snow Lay on the Ground (unknown) circa late 1800s

The author of this traditional Christmas carol is not known. Written in 6/8 time, it is played in this version using a syncopated accompaniment, making it different from the 6/8 jigs and giving it more of a Caribbean feel. This carol was probably written in the nineteenth century. Its pleasant folk lyrics and English or Irish folk melody is somewhat popular in churches today. The Latin phrase “venite adoremus Dominum”, also used in *O Come All Ye Faithful*, translates as “come let us adore the Lord.”

9. Winter Wonderland (Dick Smith – Felix Bernard) 1934 WB Music Corp.

Winter Wonderland was discovered by singer Joey Nash at a neighbor's house in Brooklyn in 1934. He sang it on his radio show and it began to catch on. Nash and Guy Lombardo were the first to record it. The Andrews Sisters and Perry Como recorded it in the 1940s which helped contribute to its popularity. Felix Bernard, who wrote the music, came from a musical family. His father was a professional violinist and Felix was once a vaudeville performer and tap dancer.

This song is played here using the *beguine* accompaniment for the verses and the *meringue* rhythm for the bridge. The *meringue* is a folk dance from Haiti and has been called the national Haitian form of musical expression. One of the leading exponents of the Haitian *meringue* was composer and violinist Arthur Duroseau, who came from a family of popular Haitian musicians. Duroseau and his brothers recorded an album for the Folkways label in 1951. (Folkways 6837).

10. The Little Drummer Boy (Katherine Davis – Harry Simeone – Henry Onorati)

1958 International Korwin Corp.

Katherine Davis, from St. Joseph, Missouri, taught at Wellesley College and wrote over a thousand pieces of music, mostly operettas, hymns and choral works. Her choral pieces were very popular and she once won an award from the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers. Davis actually wrote the song in 1941 and called it *The Carol of the Drum*. Drums have been depicted in other Christmas carols, such as *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, where the twelfth day is assigned to drummers drumming, and *Patapan*, where the subject is a drum and a drum-like beat is used for the rhythm. In 1958, Harry Simeone, who once directed the Fred Waring Orchestra and now was a choir leader, was looking for songs for a Christmas album. He came across Davis's *The Carol of the Drum*, rearranged it, changed the name, recorded it, and it became a huge hit. It has been recorded by a variety of singers, including Joan Baez, Johnny Cash, Johnny Mathis and

Lou Rawls. In 1977, Bing Crosby sang it on his last Christmas television special as a duet with David Bowie.

This carol is played here with a *habanera* accompaniment. The *habanera* is a rhythm which developed in Cuba in the early nineteenth century, although its roots can be traced to the *Country Dance* of seventeenth century England. Musically, the *habanera* rhythm is similar to the tango. Possibly the most famous *habanera* is from Bizet's *Carmen*, although Bizet may have borrowed it from *El Areglito* by Spanish composer Sebastian Yradier. Yradier was the author of another well-known habanera, *La Paloma*. The habanera rhythm is found in many Ragtime pieces, such as Scott Joplin's *Solace* (1909) and it can also be heard in many New Orleans Jazz pieces.

11. Holiday Spirit Jig (Pat Ireland, 2007) © 2007 by Pat Ireland

12. Night of Silence/Silent Night (Daniel Kantor) 1984 © 1984 by GIA Publications, Inc / (Josef Mohr – Franz Gruber) 1818

This Christmas choral piece has been broadcast on PBS and NPR, and has been performed by some of the world's leading choral groups and orchestras. As you can hear, it provides contrapuntal harmonies when sung with Silent Night. Daniel Kantor, who lives in the St. Paul/Minneapolis area, has a variety of interests including running an award-winning communications consulting company and creating crossword puzzles for Will Shortz in the New York Times. He is also the author of a book, *Graphic Designs and Religion*, published in 2007.

On Christmas Eve 1818, Josef Mohr, a priest at St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf, Austria, had a problem. The church's organ was not working and he didn't want to have Christmas mass without music. So, he quickly wrote a Christmas poem, gave it to his organist, Franz Gruber, and asked him to put it to music and make it simple enough that the choir could learn it in one day. Gruber obliged and the result was *Silent Night*. The new song was performed that Christmas Eve with Gruber accompanying the choir on guitar. The song was spread throughout Europe by traveling folk singers, who probably heard it from the organ repairman who learned the song from Mohr when he came to repair the church organ. It was first recorded by the Haydn Quartet in 1905 and in 1935 it became the first Christmas song that Bing Crosby recorded. Today, it is one of the most popular Christmas songs in the world.

13. Angels We Have Heard On High/Jingle Bells (unknown)/ (James S. Pierpont) 1857

This carol is actually made up of three different parts from three different times: the lyrics to the Latin chorus "Gloria In Excelsis Deo" (Glory to God in the Highest), are from the second century, the English verses are based on a French carol probably written in the 1700s, and the music is from another French carol that could have been written around the same time. The chorus dates back to 130 A.D. when the Pope issued a decree that it be sung at all masses on Christmas. The simplicity of the melody would indicate that it was used by monks as an early chant. It is not known who put these three pieces together, but it was first published that way in 1855.

One of the earliest secular Christmas songs written in the United States, *Jingle Bells* is still one of the most popular Christmas songs today. Pierpont, from Boston, wrote the song for his father's Sunday school class on Thanksgiving 1857. Some musicologists believe that he may have borrowed a few of the lines from a Stephen Foster song. The original sheet music cover describes it as a "Grand Galop De Concert." Pierpont was the uncle of

financier John Pierpont (J.P.) Morgan. Bing Crosby's recording with the Andrews Sisters (1943) is a popular and Jazzy version.

This medley of these two pieces is played in a Ragtime style. Although today, Ragtime is thought of as primarily piano music, there is actually a long tradition of Ragtime played by string bands. Ragtime was the popular music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the United States and all over the world. Ragtime consists of a syncopated melody played over a steady or un-syncopated accompaniment and includes songs and instrumental rags. The instrumental rags follow a set thematic form (AABBACCDD), the themes consisting of 16 measures each. The "C" theme, or trio, often changes keys, usually to the subdominant. In many rags, the fourth theme is the same as the second theme, only in the new key, however, with the classic rag style of Scott Joplin, James Scott, and Joseph Lamb, the fourth theme is usually entirely new. Ragtime is highly danceable and popular dances of the era included the *Cakewalk*, the *Two-Step*, the *Turkey Trot*, the *Grizzly Bear* and later, the *One-Step*.

14. Christmas Is Coming/Christmas Is Here (Pat Ireland, 2006) © 2006 by Pat Ireland

15. Go Tell It On the Mountain (attr: Frederick Jerome Work) circa early 1800s

Of the hundreds of spirituals and African-American folk songs collected and preserved by John Wesley Work and his family, surprisingly few are Christmas songs. *Go Tell It On the Mountain* and *Mary Had A Baby* are probably the two best known. Although it is not known for sure who wrote the song, John Wesley Work II, a folk singer, composer, and professor, attributed it to his uncle, Frederick Work. The song dates from the antebellum period and was no doubt sung by slaves. It was made popular by the *Fisk Jubilee Singers* from Fisk University, an African-American college in Nashville, who toured the country and Europe, performing for Queen Victoria in England and President Chester A. Arthur in the United States, to raise money for the college. They were instrumental in spreading African-American music to a large number of people. John Work and John Work II both taught at the college. In 1909, *Go Tell It On the Mountain* was published in Thomas P. Fenner's book *Religious Folk Songs of the Negro as Sung on the Plantations*. The arrangement that is familiar today was published in 1940 in *American Negro Songs and Spirituals* by John Wesley Work III. This song is played here using a *meringue* rhythm for accompaniment.

16. O Holy Night (Placide Cappeau – Charles Adam) 1847

This nineteenth century French carol is based on a poem by Placide Cappeau and set to music by Adolphe Charles Adam. It was once so popular in France that many people went to church just to hear it sung, despite disapproval of religious authorities who believed it lacked taste and spirituality. The actual reason for the disapproval could be because Cappeau was the commissionaire of wines in the small French town of Roquemaure, and was known more for his poetry than for attending church. He was probably surprised when the parish priest asked him to write a poem for Christmas mass. Cappeau was so pleased with his work that he asked his friend Adolphe Charles Adam, a well-known classical musician, to put it to music. Adam, who was Jewish, didn't celebrate Christmas but was so moved by the poem that he honored the request.

It was not unusual for Adam to receive requests to write music. Before Cappeau asked him to write the music for O Holy Night, Adam was already known for his one-act operas, such as *Pierre et Catherine*, and *Richard en Palestine*. However, his most highly acclaimed works were his ballets, including *Faust*, *La Fille du Danube*, and *La Jolie Fille de Gand*.

-Kevin Sanders, April 2009

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Musicians



Kevin Sanders - Guitar, acoustic bass guitar, banjo-ukulele, banjo-guitar, harmonica, percussion.

Throughout his more than 40 years of writing music, Kevin has composed several songs and instrumental pieces. A folio titled, *Pound That Melody!*, contains seven of his pieces for piano. As a founding member of The Etcetera String Band, a well-known Ragtime string group, Kevin traveled throughout the country performing at Ragtime and Folk music festivals, including the *Festival of American Folklife* in Washington, D.C., by invitation of the Smithsonian. He appeared on all four of the band's highly acclaimed recordings, appeared in two PBS -TV specials: *The Cradle of Ragtime* and in concert at Mississippi State University, and on a National Public Radio special report on the famous Kansas City dancer "Doc" Brown. His interest in music research has led to published articles in the *Rag -Times* and the *Kansas City Rag -Time Revelry*. He has given symposiums and was interviewed for *Uniquely Kansas City*, a television documentary on the history of the arts in Kansas City, produced by the local PBS station KCPT-TV.



Pat Ireland – Violin.

Along with Kevin Sanders, Pat Ireland was a founding member of The Etcetera String Band. Although classically trained, Pat developed an early affinity for earthier forms of music and is a frequent competitor in old-time fiddle contests, of which he has won many. Today, he is a music teacher and a prolific composer who has written in many musical genres. For many years, Pat led a contemporary Jazz band, *The Unbound* and released a highly acclaimed CD. Pat has released CDs of traditional old-time fiddle tunes and his original fiddle tunes. A much sought after session musician, he has appeared on many local recordings.



Keith Van Winkle – Mandolin, penny whistle, (violin on Merry Christmas Tonight)

Keith's background is in Irish and other types of Celtic music including Scottish and Breton. Keith has played in a number of bands including *Gabriel's Gate* and is currently in *The Three Dollar Band*. He can also be heard on the soundtrack for the Australian movie *Bellflower*, as well as on the first album by the Irish band *Scartaglen*, which included the popular singer Connie Dover. Keith has also performed with the *Scottsdale Arizona Symphony Orchestra*, appeared at the *Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival* and toured with the *Missouri Repertory Theatre*. He has played and provided arrangements on recordings for singer songwriters. As a writer, Keith has composed a number of fine reels, jigs, waltzes and other instrumental pieces.



Paul Mast – Vocals.

Paul Mast comes from a family that has performed Ragtime, Jazz, and Classical music for over 95 years. His grandfather, Clare Mast, a Ragtime pianist and composer, performed in vaudeville and wrote *The Kaiser's Rag*, published in 1915 at age 19 for his fiancé. Paul's father, John Clare Mast, performed professionally as a Jazz pianist throughout the country. Bucking his family tradition, Paul played trumpet, his instrument of choice, in marching and concert bands at the University of Kansas, and has performed at both Kansas City Chiefs and Kansas City Royals games. Paul is currently the Director of Children's Music at his church and is an active member of the choir. During his career, Paul entered several vocal competitions and has won them all. He was chosen for the Kansas State Music Education Association Choir, and was fourth ranked bass/baritone in the state.



Theresa Gergick – Vocals.

Theresa first realized that she wanted to be a singer in the third grade when the parish priest, hearing her sing in the front row of the children's choir, told her that she had a really good voice. She may have picked up her singing abilities at home, since her parents were both talented singers. In high school, Theresa sang in the choir, the *Chieftain Singers* and girl's glee club. She went on to sing at State high school competitions, where she always received the highest score. Currently, Theresa sings at weddings, Karaoke bars, and for a variety of local events. She is also an active member and soloist for her church choir.

Dave Partin - mandolin on Merry Christmas Tonight

Produced and arranged by Kevin Sanders

Thanks to: Debby Sanders; Francois Delhalle; Lee Davidson; Kathy Ross; Rick & Kat Estes; Guiliano Mingucci; and Smiley Wallace. In memory of Helen Wallace, always a strong supporter of local musicians.