

Ann Hampton Callaway spreads ‘Hope Of Christmas’ ‘On Union Street’



Ann Hampton Callaway’s “On Union Street” will put anyone down in the dumps in a festive mood, thanks to the heartwarming lyrics of Bill Schermerhorn.

#AnnHamptonCallaway

Ann Hampton Callaway sings the lyrics of William Schermerhorn in "On Union Street" from the album "The Hope Of Christmas" • October 9, 2015 • MCG Jazz

Christmas is supposed to be a joyous time of year. Isn’t that what the endless round of often-covered holiday songs, carols, and commercialized slogans bombard harried shoppers with earlier and earlier in the season?



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For all too many hearts and souls, Christmas is the darkest time of the year. People grieve the loss of loved ones, remember anniversaries of divorce, funerals, and homeless evictions. It's all too much to bear.

In this digital world of social media terrorism that's anything but social, it takes a special kind of holiday album (and a special musical touch) to break through such a thick wall of self-absorption and despair.

When [Ann Hampton Callaway](#) and William Schermerhorn got together to make a new holiday album, her voice, his lyrics, their music, they probably had no idea of the emotional impact. They could only hope to bring a little joy into the lives of those who would wish to listen.

The opening track fulfills that hope excellently. "On Union Street" is an instant classic, a modern version of Irving Berlin's "White Christmas" from the 1940s, the one that Bing Crosby immortalized in the musical by the same name and in subsequent TV performances.

With the excited rush captured by the forward melodic thrust of the trumpet on piano and Callaway's warm, maternal intro penned by a therapeutic master, "Snow is softly swirling, smoke from a red-bricked chimney's curling, as dear friends and strangers meet on Union Street," the song welcomes one and all to the idyllic possibility everyone longs for regardless of circumstance.

It won't matter if you're surrounded by several generations under one roof, or sitting alone by an imaginary fire, this inviting song will make everyone in the world who listens feel like a part of the family of humankind. That is the true meaning of Christmas.

There's a lot of star power on this October 9, 2015 holiday album in the musicians, performers, and songwriters. But it is Callaway's voice and Schermerhorn's lyrics that really make this album something special, raising it to the level of a multi-generational album in the collection of personal music the listener can hold onto for the rest of the year. Like a talisman.

As the Tony-nominated Callaway sings on the title track, "Let strangers know we care." She and Schermerhorn lock in on this caring immediately and never let go.

"Christmas music, in all its styles, touches the heart like no other music I know. For over two decades, I have been blessed to have the opportunity to tell new Christmas stories for a wide variety of events through the lyrics of my songs," William Schermerhorn explained in press for the record. "It's a gift to now hear these songs interpreted by [Ann Hampton Callaway](#) and the extraordinary [jazz](#) musicians that Marty Ashby has assembled for this recording. Knowing that proceeds from the sale of this recording benefit [[Manchester Craftsmen's Guild](#)] Jazz to carry out its mission is like having extra tinsel to make the holiday season shine even brighter."

If you missed her holiday celebration with the [Pittsburgh Jazz Orchestra](#) for MCG Jazz last Saturday, Callaway is back for several more holiday specials, including the Society of the Four Arts' "[Making Spirits Bright](#)" concert tomorrow night in Palm Beach, FL, and Marty Ashby's sixth annual "Holiday Jazz Celebration" in [Phoenix's MIM Music Theater](#) Friday and Saturday.