

CABARET SCENES

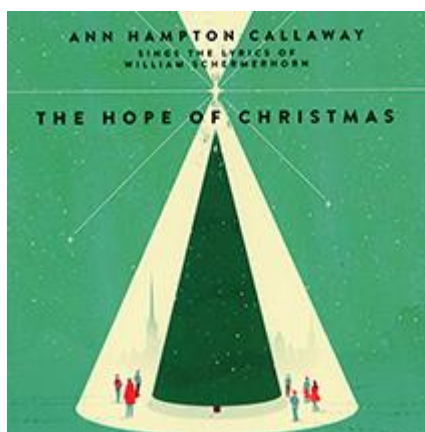
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REVIEWS

Ann Hampton Callaway: The Hope of Christmas

Ann Hampton Callaway

Sings the Lyrics of William Schermerhorn, The Hope of Christmas, (MCG Jazz)



Blessedly, here's a unique CD that is not your ordinary, recycled holiday fare of beloved Christmas favorites. This is a contemporary, collaborative effort with exceptional musicians, lyricists and composers fused together making for an original seasonal disc that will be around for a long time. Ann Hampton Callaway has shared her musical gifts through the years, with many CDs, including one previous holiday outing and guest appearances on others. This particular album, *The Hope of Christmas*, adds to that collection. It runs the gamut from sad to glad holiday emotions. However, ultimately, it is about the power of reflection and sharing, without being overwrought. Singing a dozen serious and silly seasonal songs with lyrics by two-time Emmy Award-winning songwriter (in 2009 and 2012) William Schermerhorn makes this an inspired album of brand new holiday treasures. The impressive disc also features many exceptional talents, including New York Voices, Gerald Albright, Jay Ashby, Michael Davis, Five Play, Hubert Laws, Chuck Loeb, Claudio Roditi, Steven Wilson and Ted Rosenthal. The CD was produced by Marty Ashby, Executive Producer of MCG Jazz, and the collaborators are particularly diverse, which lends to a wider appreciation throughout. Every arrangement is flawless.

To say every cut is a highlight is an understatement and the disc is sure to get a lot of recognition. Sung with her impeccable intonation and perfect pitch, Ann takes each song to untold heights. Particular standouts include the stunning title cut with music by Ann that will resonate with anyone who's ever wished for a better world. It's classic Ann Hampton Callaway, sung in a voice that just gains in substance the deeper she digs into a phrase. Those vocals and her definitive phrasing on every note, along with a quickening vibrato on drawn-out notes as she expresses emotion as only she can, make her the one-of-a-kind artist she remains. Space doesn't allow each cut to be singled out here (and, they all should be). Particular standouts include some wrenching beauties: "I Saw a Sparrow" (Matthew Skylar); a warm "My Gift of Thanks" (Michael Feinstein); and a cozy ditty called "On Union Street" (Wesley Whatley), which kicks off the CD. The beautiful ballads wrench and the upbeat cuts have a jazzy underpinning that swings. William Schermerhorn and Ann Hampton Callaway have given their followers a special gift. Order it before it sells out.