

A Guide to Bill Huot's Christmas and Yuletide Samplers

This year Bill Huot will again be selling his annual Christmas and Solstice music samplers at GHC practices as a fund-raiser for the Power of Hope. The CDs will be available at all practices during the last two weeks before the holiday break (i.e., from December 7-17.)

The suggested donation is \$15 -- \$5 for people on low income. **All** of the proceeds from the CDs is donated to the Power of Hope registered charity. (Technically, for tax purposes he isn't selling you the CDs. You are making a donation to the Power of Hope and you are letting Bill have your tax receipt to cover his costs. He is giving you the CD as a gift.)

These are home-made 78 minute compilation CDs drawn mostly from Bill's extensive collection of (mostly) commercial recordings (many of which are out-of-print).

These are not like the standard collections of "Holidays favourites." Bill is a folksinger and folklorist, who for twenty years worked as the Senior Policy Analyst for the province's Heritage Branch. He is intrigued by the special role and meaning of Christmas and Yuletide music has in our intangible cultural heritage. Bill's aim is for this music to become a treasured part of your annual holiday tradition, and also through the line notes to share some of the insights that he is gaining about the unique role that Christmas and Yuletide music plays in our popular culture. Unless noted below, each CD includes detailed notes that discuss the background of the selections.

Some of these samplers focus on Nativity story foundation of the Christmas holiday, some on its secular aspects, and one is a Winter Solstice sampler that explores the pre-Christian roots of the Yuletide season and tries to avoid songs that have associations with the Christian holiday.

Don't worry about these being boring academic study collections! Each sampler is filled with beautiful, lively, entertaining songs, thoughtfully selected and organized to reward active listening.

Of course, these samplers also make great gifts!

Bill's 2009 Christmas Music Sampler

The working title for this year's sampler was "Nativity Lullabies." Actually, they are not all lullabies, but the songs, hymns and tunes all express a gentleness and reverence reflecting the close relationship between the young mother and her miraculous tiny baby, or which portray the story of the birth within a scene of peacefulness and tranquility. The sampler is soothing and restful.

Bill's 2008 Christmas Music Sampler

The selections on this sampler are mostly lively, recently-written songs about the "spirit of Christmas", beginning with joyous celebration and ending on a note of reflective nostalgia. Most are songs sung by relatively unfamiliar soloists. There are three main themes: cowboy music, Caribbean celebration, and songs of social justice. (Yes, they do fit together!) The selections range from a *Christmas Yodel*, to a lively Cajun *St. Nicolas* dance, to a poignant version of Stan Rogers' *First Christmas Away from Home*.

Bill's 2007 Christmas Music Sampler

Most of these samplers tend to avoid the holiday songs that many people consider to be over-used. This all-instrumental sampler is different from all the others, consisting of the Christmas songs that were American pop "hits" during the 20th century which still comprise about half of the familiar "holiday classics". While the melodies are familiar these arrangements are not – they range from a Hawaiian slack-key guitar version of *Jingle Bell Rock* to the NORAD military band's *Carol of the Bells*. Liner notes focus on the professional songwriters who created these lasting favourites.

Bill's 2006 Christmas Music Sampler

This one features songs related to the Nativity story, from Isaiah and the Sybil's prophecies to the flight to Egypt. Emphasis is on harmony vocals, with several *a cappella* selections. While the theme reflects the religious meaning of the holiday, most of the selections are non-liturgical and are fairly lively. Instead of the usual interpretive liner notes this sampler is accompanied by a humorous story depicting the Nativity as seen from the angels' perspective.

Bill's 2005 Solstice Music Sampler

This is **not** a Christmas album. It features customs and celebration of the Winter Solstice, as distinct from celebrating Christmas. It sets the stage by drawing listeners back in time to the world of our ancient ancestors, challenged by a season when they were deprived of the Sun's warmth and light, when fire

was sacred and essential to their survival. Our ancestors huddled around hearth and communal fires, and developed customs of seasonal ritual, celebration, and sharing that are still with us today.

Bill's 2004 Christmas Music Sampler

This is a children's holiday album for grown-ups. It is the musical equivalent of a Christmas stocking overflowing with toys and treats. It begins on Christmas Eve with sing-alongs and games, then there are lullabies and a bedtime ghost story, sweet dreams of children bringing peace to the world, then a day-long sugar-buzz. Lots of fun -- my daughters' favourite!

Bill's 2003 Christmas Spoken Word Sampler

This is a spoken word sampler, but reflecting a similar broad range of selections from our rich heritage of Christmas oratory and literature. It is organized into three sections (plus a prelude and an epilogue): historical interest and reminiscences; the Nativity story; and Christmas fiction. Brief musical interludes.

Bill's 2002 Christmas Music Sampler

This sampler primarily has acoustic and folk music celebrating both the Solstice and Nativity aspects of the mid-winter holidays. It includes new songs and modern arrangements of old ones, as well as authentic traditional music. It is not chronologically structured. As with all of the samplers (except 2007) the selections emphasize less-familiar songs.

Bill's 2001 Christmas Music Sampler

Non-religious seasonal music – old and new. The collection is a musical journey through time, beginning with modern country and bluegrass music and going back in time through the American folk music that it comes from. Then we go back further, tracing rural British traditional music that descends from the season's pre-Christian Solstice festivities and rituals. It's a return trip, but we come back to the present via lively professionally-composed urban music of seasonal frivolity.

A Millennium of Christmas and Yuletide Music

A historical review of the development of Northern European and North American Yuletide and Christmas seasonal music over the past 1000 years. There is a bit of everything from medieval plainchant to 1960's Rock 'n' Roll, and from raucous wassailing music to elaborate choral harmonies. The instrumentation, arrangements and style of presentation reflect the time periods of the songs.

Bill's 1997 Christmas Music Sampler

This is a new re-release of my 1997 sampler, which focused on the secular celebration of Christmas. The songs are arranged in musical "movements": early music and medieval songs; wassails and marches; lullabies; and playful celebratory songs. For this re-release on CD (the original was on tape) I have included additional songs of historical interest, and I have added my usual style of interpretive liner notes.