



CHAMPS HILL  
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Produced and Engineered by Richard Sutcliffe  
Mixed and Mastered by Richard Sutcliffe  
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Executive Producer for Champs Hill Records: Alexander Van Ingen  
Product Manager for Champs Hill Records: John Dickinson



# EX-MASS

David Rees-Williams Trio



## I FOREWORD

The *modus operandi* of my trio has been largely about the re-invention and re-working of well-known music from a multitude of eras and styles. For this project, the challenge was to produce an album based on the festive season of Yuletide. I must admit to a sense of trepidation at first, as this part of the year already sees many newly recorded, and countless re-released, versions of seasonal fare in many guises.

The title 'Ex-Mass' is a word play on the obvious 'Xmas', but the Latin prefix also suggests that the music is removed from its normal place, i.e. in church. So in compiling the material, I decided it wise to avoid the all too obvious 'chestnuts' (excuse the pun) and concentrate on other beautiful and seasonally relevant melodies, from the ancient to the more modern, which could be coloured effectively by adding the cherished Hammond RT3 organ and the purity of the vibraphone to the basic sound of the DR-W trio. The beautiful pipe organ flutes and voix celestes to be heard occasionally are amazingly those of the Nord C2 digital keyboard. Their sound is particularly effective in my 'spoo'f version of Bach's *Erbarm' dich mein*.. which, I hope, suggests the inside of a baroque church. Apologies to the purists on this one, but on certain occasions practicalities play a part!

Perhaps for me though, the most surreal and poignant moment of all on the disc is the brief inclusion of my very own treble solo of forty years ago on *King Jesus hath a garden* recorded at New College Oxford....a 'ghost of Christmas past' you might say.

As usual, recording at Champs Hill was a pleasure and an inspiration, and many thanks must go to David and Mary Bowerman for their continuing support and generosity. Thanks also must go to Neil Francis and Phil Laslett for their tireless support and input into all things bass and percussion, the slick and skilful work of our engineer Richard Sutcliffe, and to Alexander Van Ingen for, among other things, the general co-ordination, needling, pushing and humorous encouragement on this project.

Finally, I hope that this compilation may be considered 'all year, not just for Christmas'.



## I CHRISTMAS MUSIC

From earliest times, Christmas has been a period of mixing disparate things together. A pagan celebration of the winter solstice is appropriated by Christian Rome and - hey presto! - that odd hybrid Christmas springs into life. The ancient German pantheistic worship of winter greenery is tarted up with baubles and tinsel by the Victorians and becomes the beloved Christmas tree. A traditional Christmas pudding is a mix of savoury beef suet and sweet dried fruits. Even the very name of the celebration is - bear with me here - a Middle English version of an Old English word derived from a Greek translation of a Hebrew term with a Latin suffix. All clear at the back?

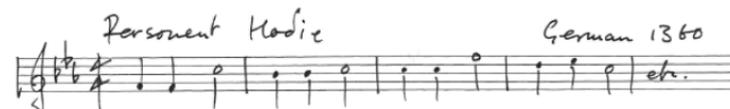
So it's very much in the spirit of the festival that David Rees-Williams takes these Christmas melodies, transforms them via his eclectic musical sensibility, and creates a joyous tertium quid. And as fans of his music will know, 'eclectic' is something of an understatement when applied to DR-W. Medieval tunes rub shoulders with prog-rock, street samba, and blues here. Bach's sorrowful *Erbarm' dich mein* is turned into a humorous parody. Canonic patterns, improvisation, eastern European folk modes, film music, and jazz are all parts of the Rees-Williams musical engine too.

The results are surprising, moving and entertaining. But perhaps the most touching mash-up of all is between David R-W and himself. When the adult musician accompanies his own treble solo of forty years before in *King Jesus hath a garden*, the concept of Christmas transformation reaches a new level of wonder. Thanks, David - and long may the transformations continue.

Warwick Thompson

**Gabriel's Message**

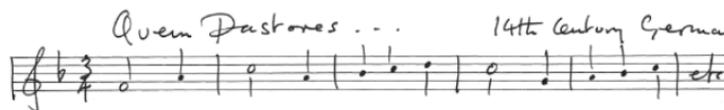
The origins of this beautiful lilting Basque melody are lost in the corridors of time, but ever since it was transcribed and published by the French musicologist Charles Bordes in the nineteenth century it has been popular with church choirs. Based on passages from St Luke's Gospel, it tells the story of Gabriel's annunciation to Mary that she will be the future mother of Christ. *DR-W: The tune is very poignant and my arrangement almost touches on the feel of a soft 'progressive rock' style ballad.*

**Personent hodie**

The earliest known version of this energetic melody can be found in a Bavarian manuscript of 1360. Its first appearance in print dates from a Lutheran collection (published in Finland) of 1582. *DR-W: This wonderful tune is pretty much guaranteed to galvanize congregations whenever sung. My version initially makes use of a canonic treatment of the melody between piano and bass, accompanied by organ flutes for a church-like reference. This soon gives way to a full-on latin style, emphasizing the joyousness of the song. A rhythmically free imitation of bell ringing precedes the recapitulation of the tune, bringing on a triumphant conclusion.*

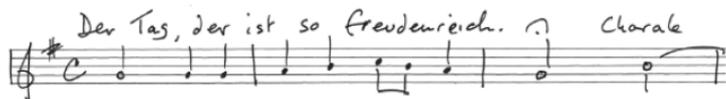
**Bethlehem Down**

Anglo-Welsh composer Peter Warlock (1894-1930) wrote this carol in 1927 for submission to the *Daily Telegraph's* annual Christmas carol contest: he was on his beam ends and desperately needed the cash prize. He won, and used the money to - as he put it - 'finance an immortal carouse' on Christmas eve. *DR-W: Warlock's wonderful modal melody lends itself quite naturally to this version which is introduced by solo piano and then rhythmically developed. The engaging Hammond character more than assists to coax out the already evident bluesy undertones. The arrangement also sees a hint of driving double-time between the verses but always on a subtle, understated basis.*

**Quem pastores**

This typically structured four-phrase hymn tune has become popular in English speaking lands with words 'Jesus, good above all other' written by the English priest and musicologist Percy Dearmer (1867-1936). Its earliest recorded incarnation however is as the melody of a Christmas carol with the Latin words 'Quem pastores' and dates from a German manuscript of 1410. *DR-W's arrangement creates an unashamedly romantic build-up through the verses by means of key-changes, solos from the Hammond organ and vibraphone, and concludes with a gentle final play-out (DR-W).*

## Der Tag...



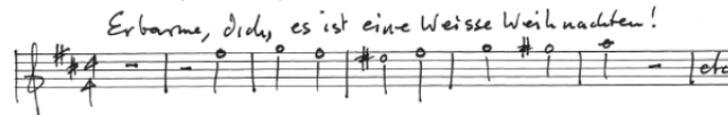
Bach's *Orgelbüchlein* is a set of 46 chorale preludes for organ which were composed to be played during specific periods of the church year. This one is originally from the Christmas section, and the first chorus is given here *more or less as the master wrote it, with the addition of an intro, bridge and coda. The original has a wonderfully triumphant driving energy which is divided between piano and organ. The repeat sees a busy improvised jazzy organ accompaniment supporting the mighty Steinway's large chordal playing of the chorale, and culminates in a cheeky coda and cadence (DR-W).*

## Rocking



This Czech folk carol/lullaby depicts Christ asleep in his cradle. The dark side of the Bible story - the wrath of Herod and the imminent slaying of the innocents - is represented here *by the minor tonality at the outset, and by the bridge and coda sections which have an eastern tonal quality. As in a film, the music depicts a scene-change from the peaceful stable to sinister figures making their night-time searches (DR-W).*

## Erbarm dich... (DRW 911)



This is a "no holds barred" humorous arrangement unashamedly based on Bach's famous chorale prelude *Erbarm' dich mein (BWV 721)*, which substitutes the original theme with a far more obvious crooners' favourite. If the semi-cadence at the three-quarter point doesn't give the game away, then a translation of the title might help (DR-W).

## Zither carol



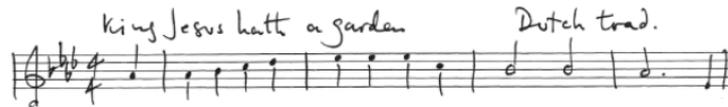
Malcolm Sargent's popular arrangement of this traditional Czech carol (with the English words 'Girls and boys, leave your toys'), begins with an onomatopoeically sung 'zing zing' in a flexible duple/triple time. *DR-W: This slips very easily into a jazz waltz style with a new introduction and bridge sections added. There are lively bass and drum features too, which capture the jolly festive nature of the piece.*

## Stille Nacht



Composed in 1818 by the 21 year-old schoolmaster Franz Xaver Gruber, *Stille Nacht* ('Silent Night') has become so popular that in 2011 it was declared an 'intangible cultural heritage' by UNESCO. The music usually suggests a peaceful snowy scene, *but as silent nights can also be cold, scary and full of mystery, this rendition plays on the carol's alter-ego. The arrangement stays mainly in the relative minor key, and uses a tense pedal bass. It all adds up to a rather ghostly scenario, and only at the very end does it finally rest on a major conclusion as in the original, thus relieving the suspense created beforehand (DR-W).*

## King Jesus hath a garden



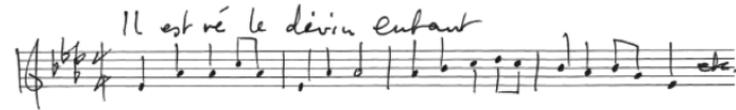
The music of this traditional Dutch carol is first recorded in a manuscript of 1633. *DR-W: The delightfully innocent melody has been subtly re-harmonized with the inclusion of improvisatory intros and bridge passages, but at the three-quarter point - this was an opportunity that just had to be taken! - a ghostly treble solo makes an appearance from the past... Yes, it's me from forty years ago at New College Oxford. This was borrowed from a cherished Harry Mudd recording of the choir's seasonal album in the early 1970s. I must say, a rather surreal experience accompanying one's self in this way.*

## O come, O come



It is thought that the music for this solemn carol was composed a processional hymn for Franciscan nuns in the fifteenth century. The Latin words ('Veni, veni, Emmanuel') are much older, and dating from at least the twelfth century and possibly even earlier. David Rees-Williams offers a spontaneously improvised version. *DR-W: The organ voix celestes were added later to accompany the bell-like repetition of the melody in the upper register of the piano. The arrangement draws to a close with the texture gradually thinning out.*

## Il est né, le divin Enfant



Although the tune for this French carol is loosely based on an old traditional hunting song from Normandy called 'Tête bizarre', some scholars believe that the version as we know it today was composed in the eighteenth century 'in a rustic style'. It brings the album to a triumphant conclusion. *DR-W: The statement of the tune has a march-like military feel. The first section includes an entertaining organ flute solo, and at the half-way point the Hammond organ joins forces for a joyful conclusion played in a 'street samba' style.*

## THE DAVID REES-WILLIAMS TRIO

The David Rees-Williams Trio was formed in 1988 and features David Rees-Williams (piano), Neil Francis (bass guitar) and Phil Laslett (drums). Based in Canterbury, they have performed in an interesting variety of concerts and festivals over the years both in England and Spain, and now specialise in a programme that unites the best of classical and jazz. David's arrangement of Purcell's *When I Am Laid In Earth* from their CD *Classically Minded* was first played on Radio 3 during the summer of 2001 on Sean Rafferty's programme *In Tune*. The response was extraordinary, resulting in the BBC being inundated with enquiries, and subsequently inviting them to record a commercial disc on their new Late Junction label.

*Hidden Colours*, released in May 2002, features arrangements of Purcell, Bach, Grieg, Fauré, Franck, Debussy and Ravel. It received excellent reviews in *The Times* and the *Independent on Sunday* and shortly after its release, was Editor's Choice in *HMV Choice Magazine*. It was then to become No.2 of HMV's 10 best Classical discs of 2002. It was also rated best of its genre by the *Financial Times* in its end of year disc review on world music of 2002.

In September 2004, *Time Scape* was released and includes arrangements of works by Ravel, Bach, Chopin, Stanford, Purcell, Buxtehude, Elgar, Warlock and Bossi. It received 4-star reviews in *The Sunday Times*, *The Independent On Sunday* and *Jazzwise Magazine*. It was also featured as one of the top ten CDs of 2004 by Clive Davis in the *Sunday Times Culture* magazine in December 2004.

The Trio's latest CD *Thinking Allowed* was released in February 2007. Featuring regularly on BBC Radio 3 and Classic FM's new station, theJazz, it has been widely and unanimously acclaimed as one of the outstanding albums of its genre.

***"The David Rees-Williams Trio have just got better and better .... their new recording of jazz forays into the classical repertoire is just magical."***

Guy Dammann, *The Guardian*

***"Rees-Williams can cast a Bach prelude in exotic colours, but he and his colleagues are equally at home with Scarlatti, Grieg and Cesar Franck."***

Clive Davis, *Sunday Times*

## BIOGRAPHIES

**David Rees-Williams** (piano) began his musical career as a chorister at New College Oxford, where the rich variety of musical styles performed by choir and organ made strong and lasting impressions. From here he won the top music scholarship to Cranleigh School where he studied piano, oboe and organ. He graduated from the Royal College of Music in 1981 with a B.Mus. While still a student, he held posts as organist at two London churches. Apart from his concert work with the trio, and as a soloist on piano and organ, he teaches piano in Canterbury, both privately, and at The King's School, and Christ Church University College.

Until 2002, **Neil Francis** (electric bass) enjoyed a dual career as teacher and freelance bass guitarist. He now devotes his time entirely to his playing. His performance work has embraced disciplines as diverse as improvised trio jazz, blues, rock, studio sessions, and, most recently, the classically inspired cross-over style featured by the David Rees-Williams Trio.

Over the last three decades, **Phil Laslett** (drums) has built a solid reputation as a versatile player backing a variety of international artists in his own right, and also as part of the David Rees-Williams Trio. He has also led his own quartet specialising in modern jazz arrangements. Recent reviews of the Trio have complimented his playing for its subtlety and musicianship.

