

A carol composed exclusively for you!

A Winter Carol

Composer **Grace-Evangeline Mason** invites us to step out into the snow in her new carol, commissioned for *BBC Music Magazine* readers

When I was invited to write a new carol for *BBC Music Magazine*, I started wondering about what makes Christmas carols so enchanting, how a modern carol might fit into the wonderful repertoire that already exists and, most importantly, what it is exactly that we love about them. When I asked my friends and family what their favourite carol might be and why, I was delighted to discover that the array of preferences was so vast. Christmas carols can elicit such a wide range of festive memories for us all, from singing in cold churches surrounded by snow to families huddled by warm fires and the welcome wishes of good tidings.

My own favourite is Holst's setting of Christina Rossetti's *In The Bleak Midwinter*. I love the simplicity of the music and that, even though the text was written in 1872, the descriptions of the winter landscape, the references to the sacred Christmas story and that beautiful 'what can I give him?' moment of self-reflection still feel relevant in our world today. Inspired by this, I decided to write my own poem for this year's carol. The words, which depict snowy scenery and starry allusions to heaven and earth, also include a modern twist as I dream of walking home at Christmas time under the warm glow of the streetlamps all covered in a silver frost.

Performance notes

A Winter Carol is written in three verses, with a short refrain in between which



Setting the scene: 'My carol begins in quiet consideration'

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repeats the word 'winter' (at bar 9, for example.) The music might move a little quicker than you are expecting as, even though it is to be sung thoughtfully with a focused delivery of the words, the piece is a small, celebratory reflection of Christmas time and it is not necessarily sentimental. The carol begins in quiet consideration before opening up a little later. During the

verses, there are moments of almost call-and-response patterns between the upper and lower voices (at bar 11, for example, with 'creation waits' starting in the tenors and basses before passing to the sopranos and altos in the following bar).

In the refrains (which occur with soprano up-beats into bars 9, 20 and 35) feel free to add embellishing swells of dynamic interest to the repeated word 'winter'. From bar 20 onwards, the piece should feel quite hearty and warm as you sing out the louder dynamics. Give more attention to the dynamics from bar 29, as the *fortepiano* marking at bar 30 can be really effective if you exaggerate it as well as the longer drawn-out crescendo in bars 33 and 34. Make sure that you have reached a loud dynamic pinnacle by bar 35, though, so that when you suddenly drop down to a really quiet dynamic at bar 37 it feels like a large contrast.

This section, involving bars 37-42, can be quite playful in nature. The upper parts swing back and forth quietly whereas underneath, in an almost whisper at first, the lower voices have gentle interjections. This builds, growing in dynamic, until all the parts are united again in bar 42 ready for the final coda, which returns to a more soft, thoughtful expression reminiscent of the opening passage.

I hope that you might enjoy singing *A Winter Carol*. A big thank you for taking the time to do so, and Merry Christmas! To buy further copies of *A Winter Carol*, go to boosey.com/WinterCarol

for the readers of *BBC Music Magazine*

A WINTER CAROL

Words and music by
GRACE-EVANGELINE MASON
(b 1994)

Thoughtfully ♩ = 76

SOPRANO ALTO

TENOR BASS

La-den with snow, The trees hang low, Un-der gold-en street-lamp glow, Keep-ing Un-der gold lamp, street-lamp glow,—

warm Un-der my coat, Home-ward, I go. Win-ter, win-ter, win-ter, win-ter. Cre-a-tion waits, As hea-ven's gates, Rend wide the star-ry

star-ry-skies, An air, A qui-et hush A-round us lies. Win-ter, win-ter, A si-lent air, A qui-et hush All a-round us lies. Win-ter,

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21 -ter, win - ter, win - ter, win - ter, win - ter. *mf*
 win - ter, win - ter, win - ter, win - ter, win - ter. morn, A gen - tle
 win - ter, win - ter, win - ter, win - ter. On win-ter's morn, A gen-tle,

27 *fp* *f*
 fawn a gen-tle fawn Ex - plores the day's de - light, A sil-ver frost, A glist'n-ing dream, Earth-ly
 a gen-tle fawn Ex - plores the day's, day's de - light, frost, *fp* *f*

32 *mp* *f* *pp sub*
 won - ders in sight. Win - ter, win - ter, win - ter, win - ter,
 win - ter, win - ter, *win-ter, win-ter,
 win-ter, *win-ter, win-ter,

38 *cresc*
 -ter, win - ter, win - ter, win - ter, win - ter, win - ter,
 win - ter, win - ter, win - ter, win - ter, win - ter, win - ter,
 win - ter, win - ter, win - ter, win - ter, win - ter, win - ter,
 win - ter, win - ter, win - ter, win - ter, win - ter, win - ter,

41 *mf* *mp* *mfp* *mp* *p*
 -ter, win - ter. win - ter, win - ter. All blan-ket-ed white, Soft speaks the night, win - ter.
 win - ter, win - ter. All blan-ket-ed, blan-ket-ed white, Soft speaks the night in win - ter.
 win - ter. All blan-ket-ed, blan-ket-ed white, Soft speaks the night in win - ter. *mf* *mp* *mfp* *mp* *p*

* Almost whisper. Gradually less whispering from bar 39 (*cresc*) to normal singing at beat 3 of bar 41