

SONO
LUMINUS
SL|Editions

ESSENTIAL VOICES USA

Judith Clurman conductor

Lee Musiker piano

Season of Light

Songs of Thanksgiving, Christmas, Chanukah, New Year

1 **Season of Light** 2:31

Jacob Narverud

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2 **Grateful** 5:05

John Bucchino, arr. Ryan Nowlin

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3 **Carol of the Bells** 1:20

Mykola Leontovych, English text and arr. Peter J. Wilhousky

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4 **God Rest Ye** 3:46

Traditional English Carol, arr. David Chase

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Premiere recordings of tracks 1, 2, 4, 6, 8
All performances with Essential Voices USA
Tracks 2, 4, 6, 7, 8 with Lee Musiker, Piano
Judith Clurman, Conductor

5 **Ave Maria** 2:12

Jean Mouton

Public domain.

6 **The Chanukah Song (We Are Lights)** 4:27

Music Stephen Schwartz, Lyrics Steve Young, arr. Ryan Nowlin

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7 **A New Year Carol** 2:12

Benjamin Britten, Lyrics Anon.

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8 **Auld Lang Syne** 2:36

Traditional Folk Song, Lyrics Robert Burns, arr. Tedd Firth

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total time 24:08

Season of Light

At the season of the winter solstice, light diminishes in our world. To counteract the onslaught of the darkness, traditional religions have created festivals to hold fast to a small steady flicker of illumination. Essential Voices USA (EVUSA) presents a sampler of music celebrating this effort to infuse light and joy into the holiday season. We go from Thanksgiving, to Christmas, to Chanukah and to the New Year, with both new music and traditional carols; an emotional journey through the holidays.

I asked composer Jacob Narverud (b. 1986) to compose a piece for this *Season of Light* recording. He responded with a two-stanza poem inspired by the title of the recording, and a brief a cappella work for mixed voices. His heartwarming and melodic style asks us to stop and reflect as we anticipate the beginning of holiday time in late November.

*Come, sit by the fire, and share stories of old,
Bright visions of time and of wonders, we're told.
Surrounded by comfort and stillness of night
We live in the memories of the season of light.*

*Here at once, in the calm, all the world seems to know
As we gaze out the window at fresh falling snow.
For a moment on earth all the wrong turns to right
And we're warm in the spirit of the season of light.*

John Bucchino (b. 1952) conjures up the love and gratitude that we feel at Thanksgiving in his song "Grateful." Originally written in 1995, for solo voice with piano, here for this recording it receives a new treatment for mixed voices and piano from Ryan Nowlin (b. 1978).

Next, December ushers in the sounds of Christmas. The holiday surrounds us, as bells ring in the season all over—in streets, in stores, in concert halls, and in churches. First, EVUSA sings the familiar and uplifting "Carol of the Bells" by Mykola Leontovych (1877-1921) in the a cappella arrangement and English translation by Peter J. Wilhousky (1902-1978).

*Christmas is here
Bringing good cheer
To young and old
Meek and the bold*

David Chase's (b. 1964) arrangement of the English carol, "God Rest Ye," (aka "God Rest You Merry Gentlemen"), commissioned by EVUSA for this recording and scored for mixed chorus and piano, has a recurring rhythmic figure in the accompaniment that infects us with the joy of the season.

We continue on to remember the true sense of the season's holiness as we present a serene polyphonic setting of Jean Mouton's (1459-1522) "Ave Maria," from the French Renaissance.

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners.*

Another invocation of light occurs as the Jewish community kindles candles to celebrate the Festival of Chanukah. This holiday commemorates the ancient victory over an enemy that tried to deprive Jews of religious freedom. Stephen Schwartz (b. 1948) and lyricist Steve Young (b. 1965) transport us into another world in their uplifting piece, "The Chanukah Song (We Are Lights)." The song has a special place in my heart. I brought these two creative men together to write a holiday piece in 2001 for the Lincoln Center Holiday Tree Lighting celebration, and it was premiered, under my direction, with Stephen at the piano and my Juilliard Choral Union singing on the famed plaza that December. Ryan Nowlin has written a new choral arrangement for this recording.

Holiday celebrations are coming to a close. We have finished eating the turkey, candy canes, rich cakes, latkes (potato pancakes), donuts, and cookies as we anticipate the "new" and the unknown in the New Year. English composer Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) expresses a serene hope in his piece "A New Year Carol," scored for unison chorus and piano. The piece, originally written for children, is from *Friday Afternoons*, a collection of twelve songs by Britten, composed from 1933-35. He wrote it for the pupils of Clive House School, Prestatyn (Wales), where Britten's brother, Robert, was headmaster. The text is anonymous.

We end with Tedd Firth's (b. 1976) new year "carol" in a new jazz arrangement of "Auld Lang Syne." The song, with text by Robert Burns, is traditionally used to bid farewell to the old year and sung at the stroke of midnight.

We hope this album warms you with the spirit of the Season of Light.

—Judith Clurman

"Season of Light" (poem) © 2015 Jacob Narverud.



Season of Light
Team (l to r): Lee
Musiker (piano), John
Bucchino (composer),
Stephen Schwartz
(composer), Jacob
Narverud (composer),
Judith Clurman
(conductor), David
Chase (arranger)



Judith Clurman, Stephen Schwartz and
Lee Musiker



Recording session at the
American Academy of
Arts and Letters: Judith
Clurman, Lee Musiker and
EVUSA



David Frost (producer), Silas Brown
(engineer) and Doron Schächter
(assistant engineer)



Judith Clurman

Judith Clurman

Emmy and GRAMMY®-nominated Judith Clurman celebrates choral and vocal music in all its forms as a conductor and vocal educator. Currently she is the musical director for Essential Voices USA (EVUSA), collaborates with the New York Pops on their Carnegie Hall subscription series and is on the faculty of the Manhattan School of Music. Conducting performances as diverse as the Österreich Festival Orchestra and Chorus at the Mozarteum Grosser Saal, Salzburg, and the nationally televised July 4th Macy's Fireworks Spectacular, she has worked with many of the world's finest symphonies (New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of St Luke's); commissioned new works by over fifty of America's most estimable composers, some of which can be heard on her numerous albums on the Sono Luminous and New World Labels; and world premiered a newly-discovered canon text by Mozart for Lincoln Center's Mozart Bicentennial and a Leonard Bernstein arrangement of George Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue at the Leonard Bernstein: Boston to Broadway Festival. Perhaps her most familiar residence was when she was an Emmy-nominated Associate Music Director for Season 39 of Sesame Street. As an educator, she served as Director of Choral Activities at The Juilliard School from 1989-2007, has been a visiting artist/teacher at University of Cambridge, Harvard University, Curtis Institute of Music, Princeton University, the Janacek Academy, and Israel's Zimriya Festival at Hebrew University, and was faculty at the National Endowment for the Arts/Columbia University Institute of Classical Music. She edits choral editions for G. Schirmer, Schott and Hal Leonard and she is a member of ASCAP, ASCAP's Special Classification Committee, the GRAMMY® Membership Committee, and the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. Her music and arrangements are published by G. Schirmer and Schott.

judithclurman.com

Essential Voices USA

Judith Clurman's Essential Voices USA (EVUSA) is one of New York's preeminent choral ensembles; it performs in many of the city's iconic venues and events and records and premieres works by America's finest composers and lyricists. Regularly on stage with the New York Pops in its Carnegie Hall subscription series, televised on NBC's July 4th Macy's 2014 Spectacular Fireworks and the Rockefeller Center Tree Lighting in 2011 and 2012, the ensemble comprises a talented roster of seasoned professionals and auditioned volunteers, dynamically fitted to the unique needs of each project. Among other national highlights, EVUSA participated in the 2013 Presidential Inaugural activities and held a month-long residency at National Public Radio. The impressive cohort of musicians that have worked with EVUSA run the gamut from the young opera sensation Jamie Barton to Broadway star Idina Menzel to musical theater luminaries Stephen Schwartz and Sheldon Harnick to composers Milton Babbitt and Jennifer Higdon. EVUSA currently produces *The Composer Speaks* at the DiMenna Center for Classical Music, a series of musical performances complemented by panel discussions with composers and lyricists. EVUSA Youth Workshop provides select high school students the opportunity to participate with the main ensemble in the heart of New York City's music scene; it has recorded works by Marvin Hamlisch and Howard Shore. The ensemble's other Sono Luminus albums are: *Celebrating the American Spirit* (DSL-92162); *Cherished Moments: Songs of the Jewish Spirit* (DSL-92182); *Holiday Harmonies: Songs of Christmas* (SLE-70003).

essentialvoicesusa.com

Lee Musiker

Lee Musiker is a GRAMMY® and Emmy award-winning pianist, conductor, music director, and arranger/orchestrator/composer. He has collaborated with the premier artists in the Classical, Operatic, Broadway, Jazz, and Pop music genres including: Joshua Bell, Tony Bennett, Andrea Bocelli, Chris Botti, Michael Bublé, Kristin Chenoweth, Judy Collins, Barbara Cook, Michael Feinstein, Renée Fleming, Lady Gaga, Josh Groban, Marvin Hamlisch, Diana Krall, Jerry Lewis, Seth MacFarlane, Wynton Marsalis, Audra McDonald, Maureen McGovern, Bernadette Peters, Buddy Rich, Sting, Barbra Streisand, James Taylor, Mel Tormé, and Dawn Upshaw. A Steinway Artist, Lee Musiker has performed with the New York Philharmonic; New York City Ballet; American Ballet Theatre; Orpheus Chamber Orchestra; Hollywood Bowl, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and London Symphony Orchestras; and the New York, Boston, and Philly Pops. Lee was a guest on NPR's Marian McPartland's "Piano Jazz", Judy Carmichael's "Jazz Inspired", and was featured in *Steinway* and *Keyboard* magazines. He has served on the faculties of the Mannes School of Music, The New School, and New York University, and has given master classes at The Metropolitan Opera and Indiana University.

Essential Voices USA

Season of Light:

Songs of Thanksgiving, Christmas, Chanukah, New Year

SLE-70006

Judith Clurman Conductor

Lee Musiker Piano

Members of Essential Voices USA Maria Becvar, Joseph Beutel, Lianne Coble, Margery Daley, Marc Day, Dominic Inferrera, Melissa Casey, Helen Karloski, Drew Martin, Steven Moore, Tami Petty, Heather Petrie, Jamet Pittman, Elisa Singer, Garrett Taylor, John Tiranno, Lewis White

The Recording Team

Judith Clurman Executive Producer

David Frost Producer

Silas Brown Recording Engineer

Doron Schächter Assistant Engineer

Silas Brown and David Frost Mixing and Mastering

Personnel Director Margery Daley

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Judith Clurman Picture © Frank Wang – used with permission

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Caleb Nei Graphic Design



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