

# Thankful Heart, Joyful Mind

By

**Pam Asberry**

Written by

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The art in creating a really good holiday or Christmas album is to manifest a performance so warm, that the listener is there in front of his or her tree, watching the snow fall outside the ice covered windows, and listening to the logs crackling on the fire, that ambience and narrative is perfectly manifested on this latest release by Pam Asberry called Thankful Heart, Joyful Mind.

What I was so impressed with here is the content, some compositions, even I did not recognise, and those I was more familiar with were arranged sublimely by a musician who is clearly on a role with her musical muse. Take track one for instance, a composition that dates back to Italy in 1917 and entitled **Gesu Bambino**. This is such a gentle offering, so well played by Asberry that one can almost feel the childlike warmth emanate from the music.

**Pam Asberry** as a pianist has that creative edge that simply delights the listener, and on the following piece called **Sing We Now of Christmas**, we have another European offering originally from France; this has a mood all of its own and can be dated back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Asberry brings this up-to-date with a performance that is both empowering and imploring and is one of my favourite piece from the release.

The well know **Wexford Carol** is now upon us, this 18<sup>th</sup> Century Irish composition is as beautiful now as it was then, the performance here by Asberry creates exactly what I said in my opening statement, manifesting warmth and memory filled moments of this time of year, with an arrangement that is both stylish and fluent.

If you have never heard this next piece, then where have you been? This has been performed by many, sung by some, and played by Asberry here with such energy of the holiday season. I was in a reverie with this one, for some reason I imagined Bing

singing with Pam on piano, now that would have been something to have watched! Yes, **White Christmas** must be the ultimate track to play at this time of year.

I have felt thus far very emotional whilst playing this album, fond memories of my late parents and wonderful Christmas times with them and of course my children, all these compositions bring back those heart felt memories and a few happy tears. Speaking of children, this one probably more than any other hits home, and of course I am referring to **Away in a Manager**. This may appear to be a simple tune originally created back in 1887 by *John Ramsey Murray*, but Asberry's performance here is not only clever, it is incredibly moving as well, and a nice use of the minor chords can be found here which takes it into a whole new level of musical class.

We have arrived at the half way juncture of the album and come across one that I personally have not heard until now and entitled **Over the River and Through the Wood**. The aged mood and composition thus created has a wonderful sense of a time worn arrangement that stands still proudly to this day, dating back originally to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Asberry's performance here retains the charm and manifests a sense of a lightness of spirit to add into the mix as well.

We move back now into the well-trodden paths of Christmas classics as we come across **Bell Carol Melody**. This is a perfect opportunity to add another log on the fire. **Pam Asberry** doesn't only do this Ukrainian composition justice, she takes it to a whole new level, with some of the most colourful musicianship you're likely to hear, pulling back and then raising the rhythm's seemingly at will, making this an utterly charming offering indeed.

I have always adored **In the Bleak Midwinter**; this has to be one of the most descriptive, from its birth in England in 1906 and fathered by Holst, this would be the one I would always remember my father singing on Christmas day while he cooked the seasonal meal, now that's a nice memory to have isn't it? I am sure when you have listened to this version by Asberry, you will have had a few memories brought forward into your mind's eye, and perhaps also enjoy the creative arrangement that much, that you may well buy the album and play it this holiday season as well.

Now it's time for something quite powerful and regal and called **March of the Kings**, which draws its originality from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, okay, so you're going to listen to this and know you have heard it elsewhere before, but lay that to one side for a moment and enjoy one of the most prolific performances that Asberry has perhaps

ever given, power, grace and almost a little pomp and circumstance too, all mixed with a style that contains such an amazing helping of flair.

From the power and the glory of the previous offering, this song comes as a pleasant moment of a peaceful interlude for us, as we take in the refrains of **Still, Still, Still**. This Austrian composition from 1865 has all the gentleness required to make your listening even more pleasant. Asberry utilises her creative mastery perfectly on this piece, to give it a grand feel, yet not in a fashion that could be described as ostentatious. This dances perfectly as we listen, and the melody I am sure will live in your mind for a long while to come.

The penultimate piece is the well-known 19<sup>th</sup> Century French composition called **He is Born**. A proud and quite energetically fluent performance can be found here, but the gentleness of the previous offering is still here on what is indeed a classy arrangement indeed.

It's now very late on Christmas Eve and one could almost hear a mouse stir in the pantry, so let's move onto our very last offering from the artist and this one is called **Come, Let Us Anew**. This is from my homeland of England and created by *James Lucas* back in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and is our finale with our Christmas sojourn with **Pam Asberry** and a better way to leave the project you would never wish to find.

**Thankful Heart, Joyful Mind** enthralled me for most of the morning, it created an atmosphere of Christmas, it recovered lost memories and reintroduced me to others, it narrated a certain warmth of this time of the year for me, and I must admit I thoroughly enjoyed every second of it. What is so good here is that Asberry has not done the obvious, but really researched her subject matter brilliantly and brought to us some unusual offerings, mixed with a smattering of classics and laid a few favourite songs at the bottom of our musical Christmas tree. **Thankful Heart, Joyful Mind** has to be one of the best holiday based albums I have heard for absolutely ages.