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Christmastime: When Our Souls Can Sing

Jenny Oaks Baker

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CHRISTMASTIME: WHEN OUR SOULS CAN SING

Jenny Oaks Baker

Abstract: Christmas is upon us, and it is a special, magical time. I have seen the love of God touch countless lives through the glorious music of the season.

Christmas is a magical time. It is a time when the joy of Christ's birth is heralded through the streets, and hearts are turned toward the Savior of the world. It is a time when Christians, without fear of offense, can publicly profess their faith through vocal and written greetings of "Merry Christmas." It is a time when people throughout the world publicly speak of the Savior of mankind and the peace, joy, and gladness that His birth brings to the earth. It is a wonderful time of spirituality, symbols, service, traditions, lights, gifts, generosity, faith, food, friends, and family. And it is a time of glorious and meaningful music.

There is something truly special about the music we hear and perform at Christmastime. It feeds our souls and gladdens our hearts. For a time, radio stations defer the next new song and instead play the favorite old song. As these classic songs reign supreme, we hear the tunes of our youth, and we rejoice together. And for the faithful Christian hearing these beloved Christmas carols, many of which are sacred testimonies to the divinity of the Savior Jesus Christ, it is a balm for the weary, isolated soul and feeds faithful devotion.

As a musician, I am often privileged to be the conduit of sacred music that provides sustenance to starving souls. As a performer, my most treasured performances have been those when I have felt God's immense love for everyone in the audience. This love is real, powerful, and all-encompassing. Good music softens hearts and opens them to feel the grace of God's love. It is joyously electrifying to be the deliverer of this divine love through inspired music.

I remember the first time I experienced this as a performer. In my early twenties I was invited to perform as a soloist with The Mormon Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra on Temple Square on President Gordon B. Hinckley's 90th Birthday Celebration, a concert held in the brand new 25,000-seat LDS Conference Center and broadcast throughout the world.

When the producers of the show contacted me to ask what songs I would like to perform, in my youthful desire to prove myself as a violinist and a performer, I suggested a few flashy and virtuosic violin show pieces — songs that would draw attention to the level of my playing. The producers conferred with President Hinckley and then related to me his desire to have me perform something slower and more familiar to the audience. It was decided that I would perform the Celtic ballad *Believe Me If All Those Endearing Young Charms*. I was disappointed at the time, worrying that I was missing a chance to show off my violinistic skills.

However, during the dress rehearsal, as I saw the entire program unfold, I could see this song was the perfect selection for the program, and I was so grateful for President Hinckley's wise direction. It was the perfect song because it was not about me as a performer — it was about unifying, uplifting, and touching the audience, honoring the prophet, and praising God.

As I performed the song in the show, I experienced for the first time what it feels like to be the musical vessel through which God's love shines down upon His children. It was an incredible experience and was a turning point in my career. From that moment on, I have come to understand that I was given a musical gift not to impress my audiences with *my* playing but to touch their hearts, give them joy through music, and bring them closer to God.

Good music is impactful. Sacred music is divine. Christmas is such a joyous time, when entire musical programs throughout the world are centered on Jesus Christ. Joining with fellow believers in praising the Savior of the world through music is a glorious, transcending experience. It truly brings the magic of Christmas into our lives and enables our souls to sing!

Jenny Oaks Baker is a Grammy Nominated, Billboard No. 1 performer and recording artist. She received her master of music degree from the renowned Juilliard School in New York City and her bachelor's degree in violin performance from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. She

has performed as a soloist at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Strathmore Hall, and the Library of Congress, and as a guest soloist with the National Symphony, Jerusalem Symphony, Pittsburgh Symphony, Utah Symphony, and Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Over the years Jenny has collaborated with such luminaries as Gladys Knight, Kurt Bestor, Marvin Hamlisch, and the former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and has released fourteen studio albums since 1998. Jenny, her husband Matthew, and their four musical children reside in Salt Lake City, Utah.

