



Stille Nacht... - Christmas Choir Music

aud 97.711

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[American Record Guide](#) (Lindsay Koob - 2015.11.01)

This fascinating Christmas collection is a musical relic of the cold war years in the then divided city of Berlin. The “Radio in American Sector” (RIAS) chamber choir was founded in 1948 at West Berlin’s American-run German language radio station. But the ensemble lost no time in earning an international reputation for excellence. It remains one of my top four or five favorite professional choirs.

The 34 selections heard here were recorded between 1972 and 1986, when Uwe Gronostay was the choir’s director. He was one of the one of the primary leaders in establishing the nation’s very high overall choral standards.

Another aspect that sets this collection apart is its repertoire: most listeners are likely to recognize only a handful of the selections.

It is in three sections: the first is 13 pieces from the Renaissance and early Baroque, the second is (per the notes) a “romantic intermezzo” of three numbers, and the final (and biggest) 17-piece section covers a broad range of compositions from the mid-20th Century.

Finally, this serves as a vehicle for tracing the RIAS ensemble’s development and gradual refinement over Herr Gronostay’s 14-year tenure. The notes are very interesting and informative, including the choir’s history. Even though everything was recorded in their radio station’s studio, the generally excellent sonic characteristics and quality vary from one number to the next—no doubt owing to many different recording producers and engineers.

So, if you’re getting tired of the same old Christmas recording formulas—and especially if you’re one of this choir’s rabid fans—here’s a real change of pace for you, with plenty of appealing holiday music that you’ve probably never heard before.