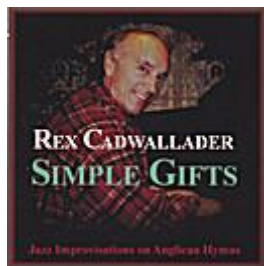


## Mp3 Rex Cadwallader - Simple Gifts



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SIMPLE GIFTS, the new solo CD by jazz pianist Rex Cadwallader, is a collection of jazz improvisations on Anglican (Episcopalian) hymns. Each track is a unique version of a familiar hymn, with reharmonizations and stylistic treatments. 12 MP3 Songs NEW AGE: Meditation, JAZZ: World Fusion

Details: You would think, wouldn't you, that choosing which of the seven hundred or so songs contained in the Episcopal Hymnbook 1982 would be an impossible task? Nearly every hymn is a favorite of someones, or has deep meaning through associations both happy and sad. Which to choose? The perfect solution was, fortunately, close by. I asked my wife Nancy to be the producer of the cd, and to choose her favorite hymns. She seems to know nearly every one by heart, and I knew that her choices would reflect both her own deep commitment to the music and a sense of how I, as the performer, would approach this familiar repertoire. It was, for me, a process filled with some uncertainty and some fearfulness. As a jazz pianist and composer, it's a relatively easy thing to improvise over blues changes and jazz standards, but even in that repertoire I've always tried to follow the path of finding the composers original intent and maintaining a faithfulness to the spirit of the music. The question, in approaching music from the Anglican tradition, was whether I could retain both the spirit of the music and the spirituality of the text in a way that would allow me to improvise in the jazz tradition and reflect my own spirituality. I adopted the precept that I would - admittedly based on my own experience and taste - let the simple beauty of the music shine through, and allow my performances to discover improvisations that seemed to flow naturally from that beginning. Simple Gifts, when it appeared on Nancys list, seemed a natural choice not only for improvisation on its lovely melody and harmony, but as the title of the cd. This gentle Shaker melody captures a purity of belief and simplicity of faith, and the approach to improvisation on this track reflects that in a simple, repeating chord progression which is more modal than tonal. Lully, Lullay, a

Coventry carol from the 15th century, received a gentle jazz waltz treatment reminiscent, I think, of Toots Thielmann's Bluesette. I've always loved this at Christmas, though it's not heard with the frequency of other carols. Actually, one of my favorite recordings of this was done by The Kingston Trio (remember them?) in the early 60s. Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence is Nancy's favorite hymn, and I tried to give this a particularly tender and loving interpretation. I'd like to think that in listening to the recording I also hear something of my deep admiration for the music of the Romantic pianist composers Chopin and Liszt - maybe you will, too. The melody is a 17th century French carol, but the harmonization is my own. Lo, How A Rose E'er Blooming is my own favorite Christmas carol. I don't remember when I first heard or sang it, but I have a particular fondness for a version we sang in the Varsity Mens Glee Club at the University of Nebraska (a few years ago), and it might be true that I first truly understood poetry in the simple imagery of the words to this beautiful melody. I'm very sure that this is my first acquaintance with this lovely hymn, Breathe On Me, Breath Of God, and I'm grateful to Nancy for putting it on her list. It's a very short-form melody in comparison with other tracks on the CD, but in its simplicity lies its charm, I think. It's remarkable how many hymns are in triple meter (3/4 time), and how comfortable they seem in the context of worship. Hail Thee, Festival Day (Salve Festa Dies) by Ralph Vaughn Williams receives a lively treatment here. I was inspired to create a Latin American/Salsa feel, because it somehow seemed appropriate. I admit to having had a great time recording this, and hope that you'll hear it in the uplifting spirit in which it was intended. For All The Saints (Sine Nomine), another of Ralph Vaughn Williams' compositions, is usually heard and performed as a powerful and rousing celebratory hymn. Here, though, I've given it a more tender, even sentimental, touch, and a gentle reharmonization that reflects the more pensive mood. In The Bleak Midwinter by Gustav Holst, is another beautifully simple melody in the Anglican tradition. I've approached it in a slightly different manner, smoothing the strict 4/4 meter with a triplet-based 12/8 feeling, which allowed me to play the music in a gentler, more linear fashion. The character of the original is very march-like, yet the melody and the sentiment of the text seems to suggest a more peaceful, spiritual intent which I've tried to capture. O Come, O Come Emmanuel is offered here as a more rhythmic variation of the more chant-like traditional version. Of all the tracks on the recording, this is the one that is perhaps farthest musically from the original. The slow salsa rhythm underpinning the 15th century chant is certainly a fusing of very different traditions. Yet, perhaps it suggests in a broad way the diversity of the contemporary Church more poignantly in this juxtaposition of the ancient and the

contemporary. At The Name Of Jesus (Kings Weston) is the third composition of Ralph Vaughn Williams on the cd, and perhaps here I should just make the, by now, obvious point that his music has, for me, a power and majesty that seems to reflect a strength of faith coupled with a unique musical dialect which is entirely linked in my mind to the traditions of the Anglican Church. I think that this particular rendition represents the directness and strength of his music in the simplest way possible. Amazing Grace is possibly the most popular, certainly the most well-known, of hymns. In this performance I tried to capture many of the traditions associated with the cross-denominational and multicultural nature of this simple statement of faith, from Scottish bagpipes to gospel, without losing its fundamental beauty. Were You There? / Simple Gifts begins with a traditional playing of this hymn from the African American spiritual tradition, embodying elements of the blues tradition so vital to jazz and modern popular music. This again recognizes the broad diversity of the Church, and the merging of many musical and cultural traditions through their coming together in faith. Finally, though, the opening theme of Simple Gifts returns, which for me symbolizes the circular, eternal nature of our lives, our loves and our faith. Thanks to Oxford University Press for their generous permission to use the Ralph Vaughn Williams selections mentioned above. Rex Cadwallader September 2005

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