

HAMMER HEADS
A HAMMERED DULCIMER SOCIETY OF SOUTHEASTERN VIRGINIA
*Enjoying, learning, and promoting hammered dulcimer music
throughout the Hampton Roads area*

December 2009

Vol. 9,

No. 12 Performance Review

When I was a kid growing up, two family traditions during the holidays were to attend the local symphony's productions of Handel's "Messiah" and Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker Suite." (They were NEVER on the same night ... that would have been too much for anyone!) Handel was explained to me as being "educational and spiritual," and I was duty-bound by Mother, Father, and Piano Teacher to "sit still, pay attention, and learn" from the experience. When I was a student at Guilford College in the '60s, the Guilford Chorus performed "the Messiah" in concert, and recorded it on LP ... a still cherished part of my music library, but I digress.

The "Nutcracker" was a whole different kind of experience. This was classical music for fun! I mean, how couldn't it be fun when it was performed by The Radio City Music Hall Symphony Orchestra, complete with the Rockettes, or by Walt Disney's always popular cast of characters, or by Olympic Champion Ice Skaters in amazing costumes???

Now the "Nutcracker" has become more than fun ... it's inspirational and awe-inspiring! I speak, of course, of Bob Wadsworth's newly released CD, "Suites for the Holidays." I've been playing it non-stop since it arrived in the mail. There are 21 tracks on the album, the first 8 being the complete "Nutcracker Suite" played by a one man orchestra. When I first learned of the project, I was somewhat skeptical ... I mean, how could a single instrument possibly do justice to a piece of music that was written for an entire orchestra? I got a hint of the answer to that question a couple of months ago when Bob Wadsworth played a piece from his "project-in-the-works" at a meeting of the Gathering in Newport News. I've been eagerly awaiting the finished project ever since!

In the previous paragraph I called Bob a "one man orchestra." I was wrong. He's so much more than that! Just read the liner notes ... "All selections arranged, performed, digitally recorded, mixed, and mastered by Robert Wadsworth." He's more than just an orchestra; he's an entire music industry, including the recording studios!

As if this magnificent performance of the "Nutcracker" isn't enough to make this CD mandatory Christmas season listening, Bob adds three additional suites, "Mostly Carols," "Mostly Anthems," and "Suite for Winter." These combine some traditional classical pieces from England and Ireland, France, Germany, the Ukraine, and other countries, with a selection from Vivaldi's "Four Seasons," along with two original pieces, "Watching for Santa," and "After the Ice Storm".

The entire performance lasts just over an hour, but if you set your player to repeat, you don't have to get up from your easy chair to restart it ... and I guarantee that you will want to, over and over again.

My solitary criticism of the CD is that it's a CD ... I wish it were a DVD so I could watch too!

- Andy Kleeger