



COOLSIDE OF YULETIDE
Original songs & carol arrangements by Jim Papoulis,
Francisco Nuñez, others
Rosanne Cash (How Many Christmases)

Young People's Chorus of New York City
Francisco Nuñez

Vital Records- VR2018(CD)
No Reference Recording

Artistic Quality **8/8** *Sound Quality*

Although this isn't exactly a "classical music recording"--the arrangements and instrumentation definitely say "pop"--the theme (clearly stated in the disc title!) is Christmas, and most of the tunes are familiar Christmas carols and songs, so the repertoire--and the fact that it's sung by one of the world's acclaimed youth choirs--certainly qualifies it for consideration here.

Jim Papoulis and Francisco Nuñez have made a major contribution to the worldwide children's choir movement in general, and specifically to the lives of thousands of young people in the New York City area who are now or have participated in their various choral projects. This latest includes a track--How Many Christmases--in which lead singer Rosanne Cash is joined by more than two dozen children's choirs from around the world (they recorded their vocals remotely and sent them to the producers, from various cities in the U.S., and from countries such as Canada, Japan, Malaysia, and Turkey). While it may seem a bit gimmicky, the idea was to bring thousands of children together in a song of hope for the true realization of peace on earth--and it works.

I must admit that not all of this music is my cup of tea--the song Where Are My Angels (sung by "American Idol" finalist Phil Stacey) is just too processed and pop-formulaic, and the recited poem Home is more than a little too "precious" in the context of the more sophisticated rest of the program. But it's kinda cool to hear We Three Kings as a really swinging trio (that threatens at any moment to evolve into a Brubeck-esque 5/4 meter); an African-influenced Little Drummer Boy; and the jazzy a cappella O Christmas Tree, Silent Night, and Hark! the Herald Angels Sing arrangements. This last is part of a medley that shows off the choir's more refined choral ensemble technique, as does the rhythmically tricky Let It Snow (also a cappella). It's also a treat to hear once again the Papoulis/Nuñez "hit" Give Us Hope, a song that justifiably has become a kind of universal youth anthem (and if you have a children's choir and haven't performed this, don't delay--you won't be sorry!).

Proceeds from the sale from this CD go to support the various programs run by the Young People's Chorus and the work of the Foundation for Small Voices. The engineering varies from overly processed pop layering and spotlighting to a more natural well-balanced choral sound in the a cappella selections. Definitely "cool" and sometimes a little too cute, but you know if this is for you.

--David Vernier