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Carols For Choirs 5 Fifty Christmas Carols For Cho

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Bringing Festive Harmony: A Deep Dive into Carols for Choirs 5

For generations of choral singers, the very mention of **Carols for Choirs 5 Fifty Christmas Carols for Cho** evokes a sense of tradition, musical excellence, and seasonal joy. As the fifth instalment in the celebrated Oxford University Press series, this volume stands as a cornerstone of the Christmas choral repertoire. While its predecessors established a global standard for carol books, this particular collection carved its own unique niche by focusing intensely on fifty carefully selected pieces that range from timeless classics to contemporary gems. Whether you are a choir director planning an elaborate Nine Lessons and Carols service, a school teacher looking for accessible part-songs, or a singer seeking fresh inspiration, understanding the contents and context of this volume enriches the entire festive music experience.

In this article, we will explore the historical significance of the Carols for Choirs series, unpack the specific offerings of the fifth volume, examine its structure and usability, and provide practical insights for choirs of all levels. By the end, you will have a thorough appreciation of why this blue-covered book remains a beloved fixture on music stands around the world each December.

The Legacy of the Carols for Choirs Series

To fully appreciate **Carols for Choirs 5 Fifty Christmas Carols for Cho**, it is essential to understand its place in a larger tradition. The first Carols for Choirs book appeared in 1961, edited by Sir David Willcocks and Reginald Jacques. It quickly became indispensable for British cathedral choirs, parish churches, and school music departments. Subsequent volumes—2, 3, and 4—expanded the repertoire, each time reflecting evolving musical tastes while maintaining the rigorous choral standards set by the original editors. The fifth volume, published in 2010 and edited by Bob Chilcott and David Hill, was designed to respond to a growing demand for newer carols alongside classical favourites. It aimed to bridge the gap between the established canon and the vibrant output of contemporary composers such as John Rutter, Cecilia McDowall, and Chilcott himself.

What sets this fifth book apart is its deliberate curation of exactly fifty carols. The subtitle “Fifty Christmas Carols for Choirs” is not merely a description but a promise of variety and completeness. Each piece was selected to suit a wide range of voices, from upper-voice treble choirs to full SATB ensembles. The editors also paid careful attention to the inclusion of congregational singing sections, descants, and simplified arrangements that allow amateur groups to achieve a polished sound quickly.

Inside the Pages: The Musical Content

When you first open **Carols for Choirs 5 Fifty Christmas Carols for Cho**, you will notice a thoughtful balance of styles. The book opens with the familiar yet glorious *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*—but in a fresh setting by David Hill that adds subtle harmonic colour. From there, the collection weaves through traditional English carols

The Coventry Carol and *The First Nowell*, presented in sensitive reharmonizations that respect the original melodies while offering new interest to seasoned singers.

One of the standout sections is the group of carols from around the world. The editors included pieces such as the French *Il est né, le divin Enfant*, the Polish *Infant Holy, Infant Lowly*, and a lovely arrangement of the Spanish *Riu, Riu, Chiu*. These international inclusions make the volume particularly valuable for choirs that wish to program a culturally diverse Christmas concert. The book also features several well-loved carols by John Rutter, including *Shepherd's Pipe Carol* and *Angels' Carol*, both of which have become modern classics.

For those seeking more contemplative works, the collection offers pieces like Bob Chilcott's *The Shepherd's Carol* and *Out of Your Sleep*, a gentle medieval text set to a hauntingly beautiful melody. The more jubilant carols, such as *Ding Dong! Merrily on High* and *Joy to the World*, come with optional descants and rhythmic twists that keep them fresh even after countless rehearsals. The editors also ensured that the book includes a strong representation of Advent hymns, such as *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, so that the volume can be used throughout the entire season, not just on Christmas Eve.

Practical Features for Choirs and Directors

Any choir director will appreciate the thoughtful layout of **Carols for Choirs 5 Fifty Christmas Carols for Cho**. The book is printed in a clear, readable font with large staves, making it easy to follow during performances even under low festive lighting. Each carol includes historical notes and performance suggestions at the back of the book, offering insights into tempo, phrasing, and the background of the text. This is especially helpful for those who wish to educate their singers or audience about the origins of the music.

The editions are designed for practical use. For SATB choirs, the voice parts are clearly separated, and piano reductions support rehearsals. For upper-voice groups, the book includes a number of two-part and three-part arrangements that retain the full harmonic richness of the originals. The index is meticulously organized by both title and first line, allowing for quick access. Moreover, the book incorporates guitar chords for several carols, broadening its appeal to folk ensembles or less formal gatherings.

Another notable feature is the inclusion of "carol medleys" that combine several short pieces into a continuous narrative arc. These medleys are ideal for processional music or for moments during a service when a sustained musical flow is desired. The editors also provided optional instrumental parts for some pieces, which can be downloaded from the publisher's website, enabling a fuller sound with brass or woodwinds without requiring a separate full score.

Why This Collection Stands Out Among Christmas Repertoire

In a market flooded with carol books, why should a choir invest in **Carols for Choirs 5 Fifty Christmas Carols for Cho**? The answer lies in its editorial integrity. Bob Chilcott and David Hill brought decades of experience as choral conductors and composers to the task. They did not simply throw together fifty popular carols; they carefully balanced well-known favourites with less familiar gems that deserve a wider audience. The result is a book that challenges intermediate and advanced choirs without intimidating less experienced groups.

Furthermore, the volume serves as a valuable resource for churches that follow the liturgical calendar. The carols are arranged thematically, following the progression from Advent anticipation to Nativity joy and on into Epiphany. This liturgical sensitivity ensures that each piece finds its natural setting within a service, preventing the awkward feeling of singing "Christ is born" before the Christmas Eve vigil.

The book also champions new compositions. In a choral world that sometimes clings too tightly to the familiar, this collection boldly features works by living composers such as Howard Goodall, Alexander L'Estrange, and Joanna Forbes L'Estrange. These contemporary voices bring fresh rhythms, harmonies, and texts to the carol tradition, ensuring that the genre remains relevant for new generations of singers and listeners.

Integrating the Book into Your Choir's Season

Getting the most out of **Carols for Choirs 5 Fifty Christmas Carols for Cho**requires strategic planning. For a choir that rehearses only a few weeks before Christmas, the book's fifty-carol count might seem overwhelming. However, the editors have included a helpful "seasonal planner" in the preface, suggesting combinations of three or four carols that work well together as a mini-set. Directors can also choose one or two challenging new pieces to learn each year, gradually building a library of performance-ready material.

Because the arrangements are of consistently high quality, you can mix and match pieces from earlier volumes in the series. For instance, pairing a traditional descant from Carols for Choirs 2 with a contemporary arrangement from Volume 5 creates a dynamic concert programme. Many choirs find that the fifth volume is particularly strong in its quiet, reflective carols—perfect for candlelight services or intimate gatherings.

Additionally, the book is an excellent tool for teaching vocal technique. The varied textures, from unaccompanied sections to intricate counterpoint, help singers develop blend, intonation, and musical independence. The soprano lines are usually within a reasonable range, while tenor and bass parts are engaging without being unreasonably demanding. This accessibility ensures that community choirs and university ensembles alike can approach the repertoire with confidence.

Reviews and Reception from the Choral Community

Since its release, **Carols for Choirs 5 Fifty Christmas Carols for Cho**has received acclaim from choral directors and educators worldwide. Many praise its ability to breathe new life into tired annual programmes. One reviewer noted that "this volume rescued our church choir from the same twelve carols year after year." Others have highlighted the intelligent juxtaposition of pieces, such as placing a buoyant African-American spiritual arrangement next to a serene English lullaby, creating a vivid emotional journey.

The book has also become popular in school settings. Music teachers appreciate the clear notation and the inclusion of classroom-friendly keys. Several carols are arranged to allow for flexible voicings, so that a mixed-age choir can perform them even if the bass section is small. Furthermore, the availability of separate vocal scores for each part (purchased separately) makes it easy for students to practice at home.

Of course, no publication is without criticism. Some traditionalists have expressed a desire for more of the old Victorian carols and fewer contemporary settings. However, the editors have always made clear that the fifth volume is intended to complement, not replace, the earlier books. In fact, many choirs purchase the entire set to have a comprehensive library. The fifth volume stands as a testament to the living tradition of choral music—honouring the past while embracing the future.

Conclusion: A Timeless Addition to Any Choral Library

In a world of digital downloads and instant playlists, there is something profoundly enduring about a physical book that gathers a community of voices around a shared repertoire. **Carols for Choirs 5 Fifty Christmas Carols for Cho**is more than a collection of songs; it is a curated journey through the sounds of the season, crafted by two of the most respected figures in choral music. Whether you are preparing for a cathedral service, a school concert, or a family gathering, this volume offers the depth, variety, and quality that will serve you well for many Christmases to come.

To open its covers is to hear the echoes of countless choirs past, present, and future. So gather your singers, choose your carols, and let the music of Carols for Choirs 5 fill your halls with warmth, wonder, and the timeless message of Christmas.

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