

COLD FROSTY MORN AT WEST RIVER

Maggie Sansone

*Andrea Hoag, and Sharon Knowles
with Patrick Egan*

Reviewed by Neal Walters

It seems a little strange to be writing a review of a holiday album in the summer, but the latest release from Maggie's Music — *Cold Frosty Morn at West River* — is good enough to make me reach for some hot buttered rum and fruitcake and start counting the shopping days until Christmas. The music is jigs and reels from Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and the Shetland Islands; old time fiddle tunes from the Southern Appalachians, ancient medieval carols, hymns, and traditional holiday songs performed on fiddle, Celtic harp, hammered dulcimer, guitar, and vocals. The band is a multi-cultural mix: Maggie Sansone is one of America's finest hammered dulcimer players, and is renowned for her Celtic and holiday recordings on her own Maggie's Music label; Andrea Hoag is a Grammy-nominated fiddler known for Celtic, Swedish, and old time styles; Sharon Knowles is a Celtic harp champion from Scotland, and guitarist and singer Patrick Egan is an award-winning traditional Irish musician and singer. The recording itself was done in the historic Christ Church in West River, MD and mastering engineer Charlie Pilzer perfectly captures the warmth and richness of the band's sound.

Dulcimer

PLAYERS NEWS

All too many holiday albums are filled with old chestnuts that seem to present the same old stuff in the same old way. From the first note of "Oh Come, O Come Emmanuel," you know that this is not one of those albums, but instead is going to be very special. For starters, the material is definitely not something you're going to hear in every elevator at Christmas time and even the more traditional carols are given a fresh and imaginative treatment by some of the most talented musicians around. We've come to expect this delicious holiday bounty pretty much annually from Maggie's Music and this album is among the very best they've released.

The blend of instruments is simply stunning and each arrangement sparkles with creativity and nuance. DPN readers will be very familiar with Maggie's very special ability to create a holiday atmosphere through her spectacular dulcimer playing combined with her equally impressive choice of material. She's in fine form. Andrea Hoag is an equally brilliant fiddler, comfortably providing either an intricate driving rhythm or an achingly beautiful and warm

legato complement to the dulcimer and harp. Sharon Knowles finds her own musical space and seems to float in and out of the arrangements in a way that gives a whole new meaning to the word tasteful. Patrick adds the kind of guitar presence that propels the music forward with rhythmic intensity and a sense of purpose that marks only the very best Celtic musicians. He also sings beautifully on the five songs in the set. This is a terrific band that combines excellent musicianship with thoughtful and provocative arrangements. The combination results in equal measures of high energy and majestic grace.

The liner notes by Washington radio personality Robert Aubrey Davis provide an interesting narrative describing how the various religious elements in pioneer Maryland came

together to encourage a spirit of tolerance amidst the merging traditions that are reflected in this album. Similarly, each musician comes from a somewhat differing cultural tradition and each brings an aspect of that tradition to the project. So it works on several musical and cultural levels. Above all, it's just great music played by great musicians.

The holidays are still a ways off, but I'm guessing many of you will find a reason to top off somebody's stocking with this wonderful recording. Though, if you like good music exceptionally well played, that should be reason enough. This is really a gorgeous album and, along with the musicians, I certainly encourage you to "celebrate the many moods of the holiday season with this unique blend of Celtic and American roots music."

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