







MORE

# *Joyful Sounds*

## OF THE SEASON

RECORDING A HOLIDAY  
ALBUM OF YOUR OWN

by Michael Berg Raunick

If your choral program is like mine, you have more than a few holiday traditions that happen every year. This year at North Central High School in Indianapolis, Indiana, we decided to capture some of those traditions and create a few new ones by recording a holiday album with our choir, the Counterpoints.





## Creating a Track List

One of the first challenges we faced was choosing the songs that would be on the album. We started by choosing the traditional Counterpoints holiday songs that needed to be on the album. After we selected those, we used the album as an opportunity to have several brand new arrangements done just for us.

We also included on our track list a place for an original Counterpoints holiday song. This was a big undertaking, but proved to be incredibly special. One of our alumni, arranger Garrett Breeze, and I worked together to write lyrics that referenced some of the traditions of the group, and the “family of friends” that they create each year.

## Sacred, Secular or Both?

We spent a lot of time discussing what to do about including sacred texts on this holiday album. There aren't any rules at North Central about what we can or can't perform, but as a member of the Jewish faith myself, and teaching at a diverse public school, I always work to be aware of the variety of backgrounds of our students and community. I want to be able to perform some of the great Christmas music that's out there, but I also never want a student from a different tradition to feel like our concert (or in this case, our album) isn't meant for them or their family.

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In the end, we decided to include a few texts that told the story of the holidays. This included "The First Noel," "Still, Still, Still," and the traditional Hebrew song "Maoz Tzur." Garrett and I wrote these arrangements in a more traditional choral style, which gave a nice balance to the album and gave the students the opportunity to sing about the actual meaning of their holidays—and allowing us to create some excellent arrangements of these beautiful melodies.

### The Recording Process

Our goal was to release this album by Thanksgiving, which meant that we had a very early start to the holiday season. To meet our deadline we had to set a recording date in mid-October, and that meant an early August start to the preparation process. As you might expect, the kids loved getting to start the year with this holiday music, but as November rolled around they couldn't quite believe that we were still singing it!

On the recording day with the students we booked a full 8 hours in the studio and made a very strict plan for how much time we would spend on each song. The kids were performance-ready when we went into the studio, but it is amazing how many details those microphones can reveal. It was a long day of singing, but the kids did a great job and gave us great material to work with.



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After everything was recorded, I didn't expect what a long process mixing the album would be. The mixing process took almost two full days of work to complete.

On each song we not only had to select the best takes, but we also had to do a lot of work choosing which microphones gave us the best clarity of diction, tuning, and tone quality, and the correct combination was rarely the same for two different songs.

### How Much Did This Cost?

Including copyright of new arrangements, arranging fees, mechanical rights, studio time, and production costs the entire project cost approximately \$10,000 to complete.

To help cover these costs we created a Kickstarter campaign that ran at the beginning of the school year. We offered lots of incentives like free copies of the album, free tickets to our end of the year show, and even a live performance at a holiday party for people who gave \$500 or more. We set a goal of \$5,000 and made almost \$6,000 through donations of family, friends, and alumni. Our hope



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is that we can recover the rest of the cost (and perhaps even make a little money) through album sales during the holiday season.

### Making a Joyful Sound

Recording the album was a great opportunity for the kids to learn about the professional recording process, and the final product is something that we are all really proud of. I would highly recommend this type of project as something that your kids can get excited about, and an opportunity to capture some of the holiday traditions that your community holds dear. If you're in the Indianapolis area during the holidays, feel free to stop by and pick up a copy at one of our performances.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Michael Berg Raunick is the Director of Choirs for North Central High School. His arrangements and compositions have been performed by many schools in Indiana and Ohio. Raunick is a member of NAFME and ACDA and the recipient of the New Jersey Governor's Award in Choral Music.



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