Nova! Nova! Reviews

Hertfordshire Chorus
Nova! Nova! Review by Geoff Brown Times Arts section
★★★★☆

Offering 23 familiar carols in straightforward arrangements by the choral music veteran Louis Halsey, here is the only album in this list that practically encourages listeners to join in. The handful of French language items may sound over-genteel coming from very delicate English trebles, but David Temple's Hertfordshire choir generally deliver a warmly robust sound that is in the best sense congregational. Seeking a thoroughly unpretentious Christmas album avoiding high art and corporate industry tinsel? Here it is. *Signum Classics*

The Royal School of Church Music

https://www.rscm.org.uk/our-resources/magazines/reviews/reviews-december-2023/

This is an attractive CD of many familiar Christmas hymns and carols in arrangements by Louis Halsey for choir and organ. People looking for different, singable and listenable settings of some familiar music need not look further than this disc. 'Joy to the world', 'Ding dong! merrily on high', 'O come, O come, Emmanuel', 'Deck the hall with boughs of holly' and many others are found here. The Hertfordshire Chorus give spirited and committed performances of this repertoire. Their diction is clear and crisp, the dynamic contrasts are excellent and their command of French and German is impressive. Perhaps lacking the sheen of some choral societies, the Hertfordshire Chorus certainly give a good account of themselves. Halsey's descants are very different from those of David Willcocks, but, if maybe you want your descants to be less over-the-top, Halsey should be your go-to!

The Arts Desk

https://theartsdesk.com/classical-music/classical-cds-christmas-2023

Hertfordshire Chorus/David Temple, with Rufus Frowde (organ) (Signum)
Here's a generous selection of traditional carols, very well-sung by a good amateur chorus. All are in appealing arrangements by the veteran composer and arranger Louis Halsey (b.1929). He's still active, these settings published in a 2021 anthology. Halsey plays things commendably straight,with even the more complex a capella numbers feeling incredibly singable. If I lived in Hertfordshire, I'd be knocking on David Temple's door asking to join this choir. It's good to hear "Stille Nacht" in the original German, Temple's singers marvellous in the richly harmonised second and third verses. "Noël Nouvelet",

beautifully sung, was new to me, and it's good to hear "Il est né, le divin Enfant" and "Quelle est cette odeur agréable?" delivered in idiomatic-sounding French. "Hajej, nynej, Ježíšku" is another highlight, better-known here as the "Rocking Carol". Halsey's "Coventry Carol" is delectable and "Here we come a-wassailing" swings. A lovely collection – my one slight gripe being the slightly distant balance, meaning that the more extrovert numbers lack impact. Full texts are provided, and the cover art is appealing.

All Music

https://www.allmusic.com/blog/post/recent-classical-highlights-for-november-2023

Nova! Nova! Joy to the World! Review by James Manheim
The title Nova! Nova! comes from that of a new collection of Christmas carol arrangements by Louis Halsey, used here by the Hertfordshire Chorus. There are a few unusual items, but mostly the chorus hews to the traditional carol repertory, and it is not wrong to call this a collection of favourites. In many ways, this is a traditional carol recording that could have been made half a century ago. The Hertfordshire Chorus, 130 voices strong, bucks the trend toward small-group singing, and the foreign-language carols are French, German, and Czech, not drawn from non-European cultures. The chorus admits singers by audition and has strong roots in its community; there might be cleaner-sounding groups, but there are few with more of a genuine sense of enthusiasm. The Hertfordshire Chorus is actually known for commissioning contemporary music, but what the group has produced here is a thoroughly traditional holiday release.

Europadisk

For a beefier selection of mainstream seasonal fare, turn to ***Hertfordshire Chorus***'s gloriously full-throated *Nova! Nova! Joy to the World!*, a selection of carols from across the British Isles and Europe in expert arrangements by **Louis Halsey** and directed with a combination of sensitivity and palpable enthusiasm by ***David Temple***."