

Noel III

The Noel III album is a continuation of my work with this collection of 24 well known Christmas carols and songs. The odyssey began in 2002, when I fashioned hand-written visualinear tablature scores for the 24 melodies. I chose the keys without regard to the original keys, focusing instead on using the interior strings as much as possible, and making the melodies as easy to play on the guitar as possible. Then in 2003, I wrote 5-part guitar ensemble arrangements for each song, solely by ear, by jamming with a 4-channel cassette deck. The scheme for the 5-part arrangements consisted of two simple drone-like parts, the melody, and two more complicated and elaborate parts, one above the melody and the other below. I completed hand-written 5-part visualinear tablature scores for all 24 carols and songs, but they became irrelevant soon thereafter in 2004, when Matthieu Leschemelle developed visualinear tablature support in his TablEdit music notation software. By the end of 2004, I had transposed the 24 5-part Noel arrangements, along with the 166 other arrangements in the Guitar Ensemble Catalog, into the TablEdit format, thus creating e-scores, my name for the fascinating and efficient learning and practicing environment made possible by the TablEdit software.

In 2006 I fashioned rhythm guitar duets for each of the 24 Christmas carols and songs. Each duet consisted of a flatpick arrangement and a fingerstyle or fingerpick arrangement. All of the arrangements were played in standard tuning, and extensive use was made of the capo. All but 1 of the 24 duets required a capo on one or both guitars, and for 18 songs one of the two rhythm guitars was capo'd at the fifth fret or higher, which created a higher register - normal register interaction of the two rhythm guitar arrangements. For ease of

learning, I recorded the two rhythm parts separately, then later combined them in the recordings for the Noel Duets. For all of these recordings, I assigned the 5-part ensemble arrangements to different combinations of synthesized instruments, with a view toward making the music more interesting and more varied, and thereby making the recordings a better vehicle for learning.

My initial plan for the Noel III album was to write and record a third rhythm guitar arrangement for each song, then combine these new (primary) rhythm arrangements with the two other rhythm parts, and with the 5-part ensemble arrangements sounded by synthesized string orchestra. The 24 primary rhythm arrangements are more or less evenly divided between flatpick styles and fingerstyles of play, and 7 of the 24 are played in alternate tunings, with six different tunings used. A capo is used for 9 of the 24 primary arrangements, but never above the third fret. When I started mixing the Noel III recordings, I decided instead to use only one of the rhythm duet arrangements for each song, and in so doing created new rhythm guitar duets for all but 2 of the 24 songs (for the other 2 songs, “I Wonder As I Wander” and “Oh, Christmas Tree”, I used both duet arrangements to produce rhythm guitar trios). The new rhythm duets in Noel III differ from the Noel Duets in three respects – the higher-normal register scheme was not used, the use of alternate tunings made for some interesting new sounds, and only half of the new rhythm guitar duets consist of a flatpick arrangement combined with a fingerstyle/fingerpick arrangement, while for the other half two arrangements that are both in one basic style of play or the other are combined.

The decision to include vocals on the Noel III recordings, which was made at the very last, was prompted by my desire to make these wonderful songs more

accessible to those who do not already know every song, and want to learn the songs they don't know. I was reluctant to do so because my initial choice of keys, based on ease of play on the guitar, came back to haunt me in the matter of my singing the songs, since several of the keys were not very well suited to my vocal range and registers. In my defense, and in the hopes that I have not embarrassed myself, I did the best I could under the circumstances, which in the end is all one can do, and I added vocal harmonies on 8 of the 24 songs, which made for some interesting and not altogether displeasing results.