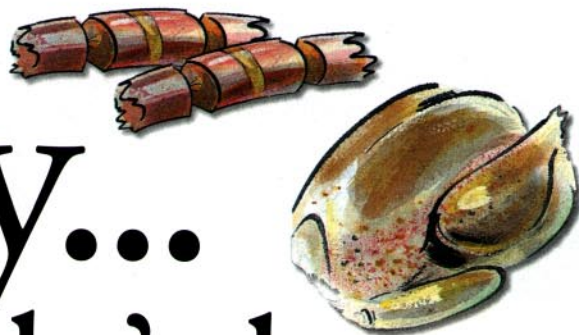


No really... you shouldn't have



A great and mighty wonder... or the worst Nowell? We name the ten best and ten most dismal classical Christmas discs ever to have found their way under the tree

It's that time of year again! The season of goodwill, mulled wine... and, as the record companies go into Yuletide overdrive, the annual avalanche of festive discs to choose from.

Many, to be fair, are first rate. Some even go on to become recognised as classic recordings. But for every Mary and Joseph, someone also has to play the back end of the donkey. Rarely does a festive season pass without at least one top musical name tucking into a brandy too many, letting their guard slip, and before they know it, they're in the studio accompanied by a synthesiser, a misty-eared producer and a hastily arranged score of 'Carols made cheesy'.

So what are the best and worst classical Christmas CDs ever? Which musicians have really brought joy to the world? And which have gone awry in a manger, made great and mighty blunders or turned the midwinter truly bleak? We asked ten Yulophiles from Radio 3 and *BBC Music* to mull over the sackfuls of seasonal discs they have listened to, reviewed, enjoyed and endured over the years. Each was invited to name their top 'cracker' and grimmest 'turkey' of all time...

FESTIVE CDS: RATINGS GUIDE



CHRISTMAS CRACKER: A disc to cherish for years to come, whatever the season

CHRISTMAS TURKEY: Relatives driving you mad? Play this, and they'll soon be off...

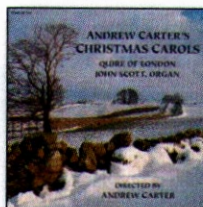
FEATURE BEST & WORST CHRISTMAS DISCS

HELEN WALLACE (*BBC Music* former editor)



Andrew Carter's Christmas Carols
Quire of London; John Scott (organ)

York Ambisonic CD 169



In the art of arrangement the key word is often restraint, and few know this better than Andrew Carter. He has an ear for the elliptical, harmonically ambiguous traditional carols, and transforms them into exquisite art songs. His 'I wonder as I wander' has a haunting beauty as does the deft 'There is no rose'. But he can also do powerful showpieces choirboys love, like 'Tomorrow shall be my dancing day' and his explosive 'O Come, O Come Emmanuel.'