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## CD Review

### Nox Arcana – “Winter’s Knight”

By Marcus Pan

As the wind and bone wrenching code envelops you this Christmas season, my suggestion is to let the latest brilliant dirge by Nox Arcana(1) increase the effect with their Christmas effort, **Winter’s Knight**. The duo of Joseph Vargo and William Piotrowski subdues the cold outside and replaces it with a deeper one from inside, but somehow interweave warmth into the otherwise bleak dirges they produce, a subtlety that is not missed on this reviewer.

**Winter’s Knight** is a Christmas album really, with some classical cold night accompaniment’s intermixed with some traditional madrigal songs such as *God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen*, and *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel*. One of my favorites, *Carol of the Bells*, closes **Winter’s Knight** in slot 21. Much of **Winter’s Knight** is very minimal when compared to Nox Arcana’s previous work. Songs are made of only a handful of melody, rhythm and overtone instruments at a time creating a very bleak atmosphere. Somehow they don’t lose in the minimal approach, all coming off as full bodied – some minimal creations have a tendency to sound like “something’s missing,” but Vargo and Piotrowski do it well.



*Vigil* opens us with a short spoken word from Joseph Vargo as he takes us into the mood of the album. And *First Snow* is made with the minimalist approach; a simple melody, harpsichord sounding backing rhythm and some chorale overtones. The rest is left to your imagination as the track flutters along to completion to be met by *Evening Star*’s piano which weaves into another choral background. Again the melody is simple but effective with a power of its own built on its very loneliness. *Reflections of Long Ago* is very small in sound and gives you that feeling of being lost before *December Winds* builds into a crescendo of classical chorales, tolling bell choruses and strings.

*Phantom Toccata* takes an operatic feel with its swift organ, one of the faster moving tracks throughout **Winter’s Knight**. *Gregorian Hymn*’s tolling bell calls to you. *Coventry Carol* is gorgeous, taking you back to medieval times with its tradition and sung beautifully by guest Jeff Endemann. *Lullaby* is twisted and dark, but subtlety plays a key role here as the darker elements of the music box accompaniment is kept underneath. At its first strains it almost sounds pretty, but close your eyes as the chorals sneak in and it becomes a waltz of despair. The closing *Carol of the Bells* is easily one of the most brilliantly produced versions of my favorite traditional Christmas song.

Nox Arcana tone it down a bit this time, taking a bleak theme of winter, mixing in some classical carols and don’t overstep the melancholy of the season. They step into a little bit of minimalism applied to their more heady efforts from before and still manage to create a full bodied moving sound. If you like the holidays, and most do I would suspect, and you like the dark solitude that winter brings and you’d like that reflected in the sounds that surround it, then you’ll certainly enjoy Nox Arcana’s latest, **Winter’s Knight**.

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