

Saws encouraged to sing (alone and in groups) by Julian Koster

Singing Saws sing all by themselves. The idea that a Human Being could play one, as one might a cello or a tuba, is a common and understandable misconception, as this illusion is encouraged and cultivated by the Saws themselves. Saws are tremendous pranksters, and the ruse of causing Human Beings to believe that they are actually playing them is perhaps the most beloved and persistent joke in Saw-kind's long history. The absolute truth, however, is a bit more nuanced than that. Most Saws are incredibly shy about singing, and especially so in the audience of a Human Being. Saws regard Human Beings, their creators, much as children do their parents. Sometimes a Human friend can develop the ability to comfort and reassure them to such a degree that they can actually be encouraged to sing. The perpetuation of the Saws' age-old ruse, of causing the Human Being to believe they are playing them, simply serves to detract from their own shyness and fears while providing the comfort of another to take the blame should they sing poorly.

A Saw can be encouraged to sing by taking it into one's lap and cradling it there, while gently petting it with a small violin bow. Many of the Saws who sang on this record were encouraged to sing in this way. Some of the others, especially the youngest as well as the choir from the Singing Saw Symphony, sang without need of any such coaxing. This I have witnessed them do on several occasions. It was a challenge in the making of this record that they have thus refused to do so in front of the smallest audience. Even when recording, the Saws often waited until the album's co-producer Nesity Gallons retired to the control room before beginning to sing.

The Singing Saw's excitement for the Christmas holiday is quite like that of a Human child. Christ, being by far the most highly regarded and beloved carpenter of all time, was a great friend to the Saws. Left abandoned by Human Beings on Christmas Eve, workshops, barns, and such places become the sites of the Saws' Christmas festivities. Their observances, often attended by varying societies of small bells, usually begin at nightfall but do not begin in earnest until all the Humans have gone to bed. One of the most beautiful of these is the traditional beginning of their Christmas Eve celebrations: the Saws gather outside and arrange themselves into a giant circle, each angling itself so that it reflects the moon, so that in the darkness, one is surrounded by a vast circle of reflected moons. The field recording from which the version of "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" was chosen for inclusion on this album marked the first time that Human Beings have been allowed to be present at the Singing Saws' traditional Christmas Eve observances. This recording, made at a rural barn in the central Canadian province of Manitoba, was made possible by the generous loan of Mrs. L. Boulton's Presto Recording Lathe.

Certain songs have an almost inexplicable popularity among the Saws. There were so many who wanted to sing "Frosty the Snowman" that I actually had to record several versions of it in order to appease them. I ended up choosing the version of one of the youngest who, while lacking the maturity and polish of some of its elders, delivered the song with unmatched earnestness and sincerity. I only wish there were film footage to accompany this recording so that you might see the seriousness and solemnity of bearing with which he sang this song.

The Saws featured on this album represent a great range of ages and ability. Each Saw has its own unique voice and manner of singing. Some of their voices are quite high, others low; some have a great range, while others can only sing a few notes but with extraordinary sweetness. Saws are born a certain age and remain so for the rest

of their lives. Saw children are children forever, while others are born fully formed adults (I have yet to find a satisfying physiological explanation for this phenomenon). The children were all wonderful to work with and were often absolutely fascinated by the methods and practice of sound recording, never tiring of listening to playback and watching the tape reels go round and round.

Another challenge in the making of this record, from the standpoint of co-producer, was the tendency of Saws to occasionally skip notes in the melodies of Human Christmas songs, due largely in part to the fact that they, unlike us, do not sing with words. And so we would commit a wonderful recording of "White Christmas" to tape, only to find when singing along later that the song would conclude, "and may all your Christmases white"; they had left out the "be." And so the entire song would have to be recorded over. The ability to miss mistakes of this sort was heightened also by the fact that the recording of this album often went from night into the next morning, requiring myself and Nesity Gallons to ask the Saws to recreate some of our favorite versions often well into the beginnings of the next day. Luckily, the Saws remained inexhaustible.

It was a wonderful experience for Mr. Gallons and me to spend those days and evenings recording them and so take part in the extraordinary simplicity and sweetness of the Saws' observances of Christmas. There is hardly room here to describe all of the games and traditions they allowed us to observe and take part in. I only hope that a measure of the warmth and kindness of those wonderful hours has made its way onto the recording tape, and so through your record player, into your rooms.

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New York City
2008