from *An American Christmas*

The Boston Camerata, directed by Joel Cohen, Erato Records

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**The Heavenly Courtier**

Source: *The Christian Harmony, or Songster's Companion* (Exeter, N.H. 1805)

A few pieces from *The Christian Harmony*, Jeremiah Ingall's collection of hymns and songs from Northern New England, found their way into the Southern books and are still sung today; but most of Ingalls' music is still too little known and rarely if ever heard. Evidently at work for a more countrified clientele than his Boston colleagues just a few miles down the road, Ingalls in his 1805 songbook created a priceless source of Anglo-American folklore, and the true ancestor of the Southern shape-note style. The many folk tunes and their simple, rugged three-part settings have little to do with the aesthetic norms of late-baroque or classical style. They sound, therefore, "earlier" than most works in the eighteenth-century hymnbooks. "The Heavenly Courtier" is probably an adaptation of an English secular ballad; its melody seems to be related to "La Mantovana" (a.k.a. "The Italian Rant"), a dance tune popular in Elizabethan England. Our performance extracts the melody from Ingalls-setting, and adds a basic guitar accompaniment.

Let Christ the glor'ous lover
Have everlasting praise;
He comes for to discover
The riches of his grace:
He comes to wretched sinners,
To woo himself a bride;
Resolving for to win her,
And will not be deny'd.

Unwilling she discovers
Herself for to deny,
To cast away her pleasures
And lay her honors by -
To part with every notion
That puffs her up with pride,
And take him for her portion,
And be his loving bride.

He calls aloud unto her,
Pursue your ways no more;
She thinks it will undo her,
To part with all her store;
She willingly refuses
To yield unto his will,
And in her heart she chooses
Her former lovers still.
She bolts the door upon him,  
And bids the Lord depart;  
She will not serve his honor,  
Nor let him have her heart;  
Yet Jesus loves the sinner,  
And will not leave the door,  
But cries, 0 wretched creature!  
Reject my grace no more.

Behold my matchless fulness!  
Arise and let me in:  
How can you be so cruel  
To bar your hearts with sin?  
If calls and invitation,  
Will not excite your love,  
Prepare for condemnation,  
For I will not remove.

She now begins to languish,  
And none can her relieve;  
Her heart is full of anguish,  
To find she can’t believe,  
Her hopes are now departed,  
And left her full of woe,  
With all the broken hearted,  
She cries what shall I do?

But Jesus has compassion,  
Still moving in his breast,  
Intends to give salvation,  
Unto the souls distress’d:  
One glimpse of love and pow’r,  
Makes her forget her pain,  
She cries, 0 happy hour,  
Is this the lovely Lamb?

Is he whom I rejected,  
Stoop’d down to me so low?  
Goodness, but unexpected.  
It hardly can be true:  
And still she cries more fervent,  
Lord, don't thy mercy hide,  
May I become a servant  
And fit to be a bride.
The marriage is made ready,
The parties are agreed,
The holy Son of David,
And Adam's wretched seed;
The sinner is attir'd,
With raiment clean and white,
Her sins are freely pardon'd,
And she's her Lord's delight.

They eat and drink together,
And mut'ally embrace,
Both saints and angels wonder,
At the surprising grace;
This union shall continue,
For evermore the same,
And nothing part asunder,
The Christian and the Lamb.

**Boston**

Billings' jaunty setting of his own poetry is, characteristically, resonant with echoes of English folksong—yet the music is unmistakably his alone.

Methinks I see a heav'nly host
Of angels on the wing;
Methinks I hear their cheerful notes,
So merrily they sing.
Let all your fears be banished hence;
Glad tidings we proclaim,
For there's a Savior born today,
And Jesus is his name.

Lord! and shall Angels have their Songs,
And Men no Tunes to raise?
O may we lose these useless Tongues
When they foget to praise!
Glory to God that reigns above,
That pitied us forlorn,
We join to sing our Maker's Love,
For there's a Savior born.