

Poetry for the Winter Season

Selected by Christina Hardymnt

Read by **Sandra Douglas Weir** and **David Pepper**
and finalists of the **Voice of the Year – Poetry** competition
with guest readers **Roger McGough** and **Benjamin Zephaniah**



THE START OF WINTER

- 1 **Winter At Home**
©John Betjeman (1906–1984)
read by David Pepper 7:55
- 2 from **The Village Curate**
James Hurdis (1763–1801)
read by Liz Farmer 3:44
- 3 **The Burning Of The Leaves**
Laurence Binyon ©Elizabeth Jennings (1926–2001)
read by Sandra Douglas Weir 1:57
- 4 **The Smell Of Chrysanthemums**
W. B. Yeats (1865–1939)
read by Hazel Pardon 1:42
- 5 **The Wild Swans At Coole**
W. B. Yeats
read by James Barraclough 1:40
- 6 from **The Task: The Winter Evening**
William Cowper (1731–1800)
read by Sandra Douglas Weir 5:29
- 7 **A Shropshire Lad XXXI**
A. E. Housman (1859–1936)
read by James Murphy 1:20

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- 8 **No!**
Thomas Hood (1799–1845)
read by Christine Dimbleby 1:34
- 9 **Hot Cake**
Shu Hui (A.D. 265–306) Translated Arthur Waley
read by Liz Farmer 1:18
- 10 **Signs of Winter**
John Clare (1793–1864)
read by Ron Bloomfield 1:12
- 11 **November**
John Clare
read by James Barraclough 4:43
- 12 **Winter Stores**
Charlotte Brontë (1816–1855)
read by Sandra Douglas Weir 2:48
- 13 **Now Winter Nights**
Thomas Campion (1567–1620)
read by David Pepper 1:10
- 14 **from The Eclipse Of The Moon**
Lu T'ung (died 835)
read by James Barraclough 2:51

WINTER FIRES

- 15 **The Ways Of Wood**
Anon
read by Hazel Pardon 1:56
- 16 from **The Window**
Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892)
read by Tim Guilding 1:02
- 17 **When You Are Old**
W. B. Yeats
read by Sandra Douglas Weir 1:02
- 18 **Old Song**
Edward Fitzgerald (1809–1883)
read by Valerie Lennie 2:20
- 19 **Armies In The Fire**
Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894)
read by David Pepper 1:08
- 20 **Logs On The Hearth: A Memory Of A Sister**
Thomas Hardy (1840–1928)
read by James Barraclough 1:00

CHILDREN IN WINTER

- [21] **Picture Books In Winter**
Robert Louis Stevenson
read by Liz Farmer 1:23
- [22] from **Songs For The Nursery** 1805
Anon
read by Valerie Lennie 0:28
- [23] From **January**
John Clare
read by Sandra Douglas Weir 7:23
- [24] **Snow**
Edward Thomas (1878–1917)
read by Christine Dimbleby 0:37
- [25] **King John's Christmas**
©A.A.Milne (1882–1956)
read by David Pepper 3:51
- [26] **The Trouble With Snowmen**
©Roger McGough (1937–)
read by Roger McGough 0:50
- [27] **Winter-Time**
Robert Louis Stevenson
read by Christine Dimbleby 1:12

DEEP WINTER

- 28 **Winter** (from *Love's Labour's Lost* V, ii)
William Shakespeare (1564–1616)
read by Hazel Pardon 1:42
- 29 **Inscription For An Old Bed**
William Morris (1834–1896)
read by David Pepper 1:07
- 30 **Snow In The Suburbs**
Thomas Hardy
read by James Murphy 1:31
- 31 **Travelling In The Mountains**
Tu Mu (805–59)
read by Hazel Pardon 0:56
- 32 **Frost At Midnight**
Samuel Taylor Coleridge
read by James Barraclough 4:31
- 33 **London Snow**
Robert Bridges (1844–1930)
read by Sandra Douglas Weir 2:42

WINTER HARDSHIPS

- 34 **Winter, Plague And Pestilence**
Thomas Nashe (1567–1601)
read by James Murphy 1:51
- 35 **Winter Complaint**
Ogden Nash (1902–1971)
Read By Sandra Douglas Weir 1:56
- 36 **The Farm Womans Winter**
Thomas Hardy
read by Hazel Pardon 1:04

ROMANCING WINTER

- 37 from **Epicurean Reminiscences Of A Sentimentalist**
Thomas Hood
read by James Murphy 3:33
- 38 **Silent Is The House**
Emily Brontë (1818–1848)
read by Liz Farmer 1:54
- 39 **The Cold Earth Slept Below**
Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822)
read by Ron Bloomfield 1:35

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- 40 Chloris In The Snow**
William Strode (1602–1645)
read by Tim Gilding 0:44
- 41 The Eve Of St Agnes**
John Keats (1795–1821)
read by David Pepper 22:12
- 42 A Glee For Winter**
Alfred Domett (1811–1887)
read by Valerie Lennie 1:14
- CHRISTMAS TIME**
- 43 In The Bleak Midwinter**
Christina Rossetti (1830–1894)
read by Hazel Pardon 2:24
- 44 The Old Shepherds**
©Eleanor Farjeon (1881–1965)
read by James Murphy 0:53
- 45 The Night Before Christmas**
Clement Moore (1779–1863)
read by Ron Bloomfield 3:30

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- 46 from **Marmion**
Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832)
read by Sandra Douglas Weir 4:02
- 47 **Talking Turkeys**
©Benjamin Zephaniah (1958–)
read by Benjamin Zephaniah 1:52
- 48 **The Twelve Days Of Christmas...Or Too Much Of A
Good Thing**
Anon
read by Liz Farmer 1:55
- NEW YEAR**
- 49 **New Year Snow**
E. Nesbit (1858–1924)
read by Sandra Douglas Weir 1:33
- 50 **The Old Year**
John Clare
read by James Barraclough 1:12
- 51 **To The Nightingale Which The Author Heard Sing
On New Year's Day**
William Cowper
read by Hazel Pardon 1:19

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- 52 **The New Year**
Edward Thomas
read by David Pepper 1:18
- 53 **Auld Lang Syne**
Robert Burns (1759–1796)
read by Valerie Lennie 1:50
- THE END OF WINTER**
- 54 **I Heard A Bird Sing**
Oliver Herford (1863–1935)
read by Hazel Pardon 1:07
- 55 **An Epitaph On A Robin Redbreast**
Samuel Rogers (1763–1855)
read by Christine Dimbleby 0:53
- 56 **The Lover In Winter Plaineth For The Spring**
Anon
read by James Murphy 0:28
- 57 **At Candlemas**
©Charles Causley (1917–2003)
read by James Barraclough 0:58

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- 58 **Ceremonies For Candlemas Eve**
Robert Herrick (1591–1674)
read by Liz Farmer 1:15
- 59 **The Darkling Thrush**
Thomas Hardy
read by David Pepper 1:28
- 60 **The Fight Of The Year**
©Roger McGough
read by Roger McGough 1:18

Total time: 2:21:54

Poetry for the Winter Season

'Winter is the time for reading poetry' John Betjeman points out in his comfortably belted way in the essay which prefaces this collection of poems to cheer you through the wild and the wind and the wet of our darkest months. As 'time stretches out a little more' we can give up gardening and be snug around fires by candlelight. There are anonymous medieval poems here and thoroughly modern ones, bouncy ballads and graceful eighteenth century pentameters. I have included all Betjeman's winter favourites: a rousing extract on Christmas feasting from Walter Scott's *Marmion*, William Cowper's famous word portrait of a cosy eighteenth century evening by the fire on the sofa, sipping 'the cups that cheer but not inebriate', and some hilarious lines on winter domesticities by an obscure bachelor English curate, James Hurdis. What all these great old poems show is how much a part of life reading aloud used to be. All were written to be declaimed while the family occupied themselves with sewing and

making, and this makes them the more suited to a spoken poetry collection.

But the collection would be highly indigestible if these mannered eighteenth century lumps were not leavened with the simplicity of Thomas Hardy and Edward Thomas and the caustic wit of Roger McGough. We also look out beyond the western literary tradition. Some of the most startlingly fresh observations of winter weather appear in ancient Chinese poems: sublime in Lu T'ung's description of a winter eclipse of the moon, humorous in Shu Hui's paeon of praise to hot cake when 'rheum freezes the nose' and 'frost hangs about the chin'.

The poems are grouped not by date but by theme. First is **The Start of Winter**, signalled for Elizabeth Jennings by the 'acid incense' of chrysanthemums. We hear Houseman awed by gales on Wenlock Edge and Yeats musing on the wild swans at Coole. William Cowper draws up a sofa beside the fire to sip the cups that cheer but

not inebriate' from the 'bubbling and loud-hissing urn', and John Clare catalogues all the tiny signs of the changing season. 'From mossy barn the owl/Bobs hasty out'; 'The maids in haste/Snatch from the orchard hedge the mizzled clothes/And laughing hurry in to keep them dry.

Next comes **Winter Fires**, beginning with a traditional rhyme on the best burning woods which is sure to set you off in search of ashwood logs, which 'wet or dry / A king could warm his slippers by'. Tennyson complacently looks out from his snug fireside to the biting frost outside, Edward Fitzgerald sits by his hearth reading of 'gallant chivalry', Robert Louis Stevenson sees armies in the fire and Yeats a pilgrim soul. Thomas Hardy's memories of a dead sister are recalled by burning a log from an apple tree she once climbed 'laughing, her young brown hand awave'.

These are followed by poems written for or about **Children in Winter**, with memories of picture books from Robert Louis Stevenson and John Clare's rural mother telling spooky stories to her brood as she knits, A.A. Milne's Father Christmas

letter from bad King John begging for a 'a great big red india-rubber ball', and Roger McGough's macabre 'The Trouble with Snowmen', in which a father, impatient by the snowman's brief lifespan, builds his son one of concrete.

Deep Winter is cocooned in snow. It opens with Shakespeare's famous 'When icicles hang by the wall', then cosies up in William Morris's Old Bed and concludes with Robert Bridge's 'London Snow'.

The long story poems of **Romancing Winter** make superb listening. Thomas Hood's gluttonous 'Epicurean reminiscences of a sentimentalist' fits well with our own food-obsessed times, and Emily Brontë's unearthly 'Silent is the house' prepares us for the ultimate in long-drawn out melancholy and bitter chill, John Keats' exquisitely atmospheric 'The Eve of St Agnes'.

Christina Rossetti's 'In the bleak midwinter' opens the **Christmastime** poems, and Clement Moore's 'Twas the night before Christmas'. More contemporary delights include Benjamin Zephaniah's irreverent ode to jailbirds, 'Talking Turkeys' and an anonymous skit 'The Twelve Days of

Christmas ... Or Too much of a Good Thing' ('On the seventh day of Christmas, my true love gave a wince, / When he sat down at table and was offered turkey mince'). The **New Year** poems include John Clare's nostalgic 'The Old Year', Edith Nesbit's delicate 'New Year's Snow', and all ten verses of Robert Burns' 'Auld Lang Syne'.

I made this collection as winter was grudgingly turning into spring, which made me realise that the ending of winter is as much part of it as its beginning. **The End of Winter** celebrates Candlemas, a traditional ceremony that few of us now observe, although falling as it does on February 2, it is nicely timed to cheer us up at a low time of year. Charles Causley sees it as a weather prophet, Robert Herrick uses its tradition to list the seasonal succession of different tree branches used to deck halls and tables (early flowering box, then yew blossom, then birch catkins). In 'The Darkling Thrush' Hardy, with his inimitable knack of noting the tiny, significant incident, sees the 'full-hearted evensong of joy' from the aged bird, 'frail, gaunt and small', as signalling the end of

winter. Finally Roger McGough offers a splendid boxing match between Winter and Spring, its knockout countdown listing all Spring's coming pleasures – tadpoles and 'mad march hares', 'scallywaggy clouds' and 'any amount of lettuce'. For though Cowper is right that winter is 'king of intimate delights', there is no doubt that after it has traipsed on for months on end we feel, as Gerard Manley Hopkins famously did, that 'nothing is so beautiful as spring'.

Gerard Manley Hopkins**SPRING**

Nothing is so beautiful as spring.

When weeds in wheels shoot long and lovely and lush;
Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush
Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring
The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;
The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush
The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush
With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling.

What is all this juice and all this joy?

A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning
In Eden garden. – Have, get, before it cloy,
Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning,
Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,
Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the winning

Notes by Christina Hardyment



Sandra Douglas Weir spent her teaching career in Suffolk as an FE tutor, peripatetic creative subjects teacher and finally county advisory teacher, particularly enjoying work related to dance-in-education, Shakespeare workshops for younger children and drama-based approaches to early years reading. Her husband encouraged her to enter the poetry reading competition – as flabbergasted as her at the result.



David Pepper is a veterinary surgeon with a head full of other people's poetry, much of which was learned before he was thirteen. Nowadays, his life is spent mostly on the telephone, behind a computer, relieved by occasional trips to his lathe. With his interest in words and language he often makes himself a nuisance to his colleagues who, understandably, regard anyone with the full version of the OED resident within his laptop as a nerd of the first water.



James Barraclough won a poetry declamation prize at school, and acted in student productions at Cambridge University, and toured colleges in the USA with the Oxford & Cambridge Shakespeare Company . He has worked as a film editor, proof reader and diary journalist in the UK, and as a photographer in Australia. He is currently a volunteer reader for the Kensington and Chelsea Talking Newspapers in London.



Ron Bloomfield was educated at an East End grammar school, then Cambridge, where he studied medicine. Doctoring did not suit him, however, so he moved to the BBC where he spent 24 happy years wandering around Britain making documentary films. After the BBC came an MA in creative writing and cookery lessons at Leiths in Kensington. Now he enjoys retirement, writes and lectures on wine and is an enthusiastic churchgoer. He is currently writing a musical based on the life of Jesus.



Christine Dimbleby was born in Leamington Spa and went to the local girls grammar school. In the 1960s she was a keen amateur actress at the Loft Theatre and the Talisman in Kenilworth. In the early 1970s she went to live in Kenya and joined an amateur dramatic society. After 10 years in Kenya she moved to Switzerland and finally back to Leamington Spa. She has also been a life model for the last few years which is a good talking point at parties!



Liz Farmer grew up in Hull and is a graduate of Leeds University. She has been an English teacher, secretary, publicity officer and journalist. An award-winning short story writer, she enjoys reading, learning Spanish and composing song lyrics. She is married with two daughters and lives in North Yorkshire.



Tim Guilding who lives in Alton, Hampshire, took fifth place in the competition with his individual readings of Sonnet 116 and The Laws of God, The Laws of Man by A.E. Houseman.



Valerie Lennie was born in London but moved to Edinburgh when she was 17 and has lived there ever since. Her interests include theatre, travel, hill-walking, music, dressmaking, but particularly drama and poetry; and with Edinburgh theatre groups she has been able to indulge her love of the stage, acting in or directing a variety of plays, as well as reading/recording poetry.



James Murphy. Born in 1957, James is a poet and playwright. He grew up in London and later graduated in Philosophy from the University of East Anglia. He lived in Italy during the 1980s. In 2005 his play, 'The Poets' about Byron and Shelley, was produced at the Bedales Olivier Theatre.



Hazel Pardon has taught Drama to both adults and children ending her teaching career as Head of Performing Arts in a Norfolk high school. Amateur acting has always been part of her life, particularly at the Maddermarket Theatre Norwich. She now regularly records for the charity Link Up a talking newspaper for the blind.



Roger McGough Roger McGough is one of the country's best-loved poets for both adults and children. He is an international ambassador for poetry, much travelled and translated, who made his name in the 1960s with Adrian Henri and Brian Patten as one of the Liverpool Poets who did so much to popularise contemporary poetry.

For further details: www.rogermcgough.org.uk/



Benjamin Obadiah Iqbal Zephaniah was born and raised in Birmingham. His poetry is strongly influenced by the music and poetry of Jamaica and what he calls 'street politics'. He has read all around the world, from Argentina to Palestine, in prisons, theatres, youth clubs, demonstrations, taking poetry to those who don't read books. He has released several records.

For further details: www.benjaminzephaniah.com

The music on this CD is taken from the NAXOS Catalogue

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Cover picture: Crows in the snow, Walther Georgi in 'Jugend' 1902
Courtesy of Mary Evans Picture Library

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Poems for the Winter Season is read by Sandra Douglas Weir and David Pepper, the winners of the Naxos AudioBooks/The Times Voice of the Year – Poetry competition. They are joined by other finalists from the event.

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