

PASTORALE ON *WHAT CHILD IS THIS?*

by Douglas Mears

Instrumentation

Flute
Oboe
English Horn
Clarinet in B^b
2 Bassoons
4 Horns in F
Timpani
Suspended Cymbal
Mark Tree
Vibraphone
Celesta
Harp
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Cello
Contrabass

Notes

The popular English folk song “Greensleeves” first appeared sometime during the 16th century. There are many theories regarding the origin of the song. Some legends trace it back to King Henry VIII’s time, claiming that he originally composed and wrote the song for his second-queen and former-mistress Anne Boleyn. More historical evidence exists to suggest that the song was actually created in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Actual historical data shows that the song was first registered as a ballad in 1580 entitled “A Newe Northen Dittye of ye Ladye Greene Slevs.” It then became a popular tune for musical manuscripts and publications in the 16th and 17th centuries.

“Greensleeves” was first referenced as a carol tune in *Good and True, Fresh and New Christmas Carols* (London, 1642), where it was named as the recommended tune for “A Carrol for New-yeares day,” which began “The old yeare now away has fled.” Since its pairing with “What Child Is This?” by William Chatterton Dix in 1868, Greensleeves is known predominantly by that text and is often associated with Christmas even when played instrumentally. The haunting Greensleeves melody and the moving lyrics of “What Child Is This?” combine to create one of the most popular and beloved of all Christmas carols.