

Rejoice with Sister Dorothy

by Sarah Klassen

Sister Dorothy's new CD, *Kernlieder*, ventures into territory this singer-songwriter has not previously explored in her recordings: the musical heritage of German-speaking Mennonites. "Kernlieder" means "core songs," and refers to songs that were once at the heart of Mennonite church singing. Deeply spiritual and often nostalgic, the Kernlieder sustained Mennonites through times of suffering and loss in Ukraine, and emigrated with them to Canada. "I sing them to my grandmother," says Sister Dorothy, who still understands German. "Her favourite is 'Auf ewig bei dem Herrn,' so I end my CD with that one."

With help from her grandmother, and after consulting Mennonite musicians, Sister Dorothy selected 17 songs from *Gesangbuch*, a German hymnal published in 1952. Traditionally sung in four part harmony, these songs include in their credits Martin Luther, Ludwig von Beethoven and Graf Zinzendorf. She arranged the music for voice, guitar and flute, and performs them here in that inimical, lively style familiar to fans of her previous eclectic repertoire.

Sister Dorothy, who describes herself as "classically trained and influenced by classic rock", has delighted and entertained audiences with her energetic performances of a wide range of music in venues as diverse as McNally Robinson's Prairie Ink Cafe, the Millennium Library, festival and concert stages and many classrooms.

The importance of valuing heritage was reinforced for her when she visited the Sagkeeng First Nation near Pine Falls, Manitoba, where she helped teachers develop songs in Ojibway for their students to sing. Besides picking up some Ojibway language and lore, Sister Dorothy learned the value of treasuring and preserving a cultural legacy. The result of that lesson is this lovely collection of songs, mainly from the 18th century. *Kernlieder* invites listeners to: "Kommt stimmet alle jubelnd ein" (Come, join in, rejoicing).



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