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More holiday music

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As a supplement to our critical picks of holiday albums, Ken Barnes and Brian Mansfield add a more comprehensive list of 2006 seasonal releases, with thumbnail descriptions:

•**African Christmas:** South African musicians provide a different take on the season's standards and add the a cappella title track.

•Todd Agnew, *Do You See What I See:* Christian rock singer Agnew tries to imagine the story of Jesus' birth from the perspective of its witnesses — Joseph, Mary, the innkeeper, the magi, etc.

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•Roberto Alagna, *The Christmas Album:* Leading tenor is joined by children's choirs for a multi-linguistic program of Christmas songs.

•Aly & A.J., *Acoustic Hearts of Winter:* Promising teen duo sandwiches a pair of original tunes around a batch of standards.

•Jon B, *Holiday Wishes From Me to You:* Veteran R&B singer mixes traditional and newer songs.

•David Berger & the Sultans of Swing, *The Harlem Nutcracker:* Jazz group (no relation to Dire Straits) filters Tchaikovsky's seasonal classic through music composed by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn.

•**Boston Brass & the Brass All-Stars Big Band Present the Stan Kenton Christmas Carols:** New interpretations of jazz great Stan Kenton's big-band charts for Christmas standards.

•Moya Brennan, *An Irish Christmas:* Clannad singer (and Enya's sister) tells the nativity saga from a Celtic perspective, with songs such as *The Wexford Carol* and *In the Bleak Midwinter*.

•**Broadway's Greatest Gifts: Carols for a Cure, Vol. 8:** 2-CD set of seasonal songs sung by the casts of top Broadway shows.

•Celtic Woman, *A Christmas Celebration:* The highly successful five-woman Irish ensemble puts its distinctive touch on 15 songs of the season.

•Richard Cheese, *Silent Nightclub:* Lounge parodist Cheese mixes seasonal tunes by Wham! and Vince Guaraldi with more adventurous, vaguely holiday-themed numbers such as *Like a Virgin*, Beyoncé's *Naughty Girl* and the Dead Kennedys' *Holiday in Cambodia*.

•**Christmas Break: Relaxing Jazz for the Holidays:** A jazz chill-out collection featuring "festive but easygoing" performances by the likes of Dave Brubeck, Oscar Peterson and Mel Tormé.

•**Classic Soul Ballads Christmas:** Standards from R&B stars such as The Supremes, Aretha Franklin, Luther Vandross and Donny Hathaway (with *This Christmas*, just covered by American Idol finalist Elliott Yamin).

•Jim Cosgrove, *Mr. Stinky Feet's Christmas:* The so-called "Jimmy Buffet for Kids" (spelling his publicist's; sounds tasty) performs originals and versions of standards aimed at younger audiences.

•Brian Culbertson, *A Soulful Christmas:* Smooth-jazz instrumentalist invites singers such as Michael McDonald and Ray Parker Jr. to join in on standards.

•John Fluker, *J Is for Joy:* Singer/keyboardist mixes vocal and instrumental versions of traditional holiday tunes.

•Tiffany Giardina, *We've Got Christmas:* 12-year-old singer/actress adds a few new tunes to a collection of seasonal favorites.

•Gordon Goodwin's Big Phat Band, *Bah Humduck! — A Looney Tunes Christmas:* Two CDs, one a soundtrack for the animated feature that shares its title with this package, the other a children's sing-along disc featuring Looney Tunes characters (Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck) singing along to the Big Phat Band's versions of familiar holiday

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tunes.

- Vince Guaraldi Trio, *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (expanded): Four unreleased tracks are added to the 1965 soundtrack to the evergreen animated Christmas special.
- Daryl Hall & John Oates, *Home for Christmas*: The veteran duo sings the seasonal standards, plus William Bell's soul classic *Every Day Will Be Like a Holiday*.
- Hillsong, *Celebrating Christmas*: Australian music ministry sings traditional Christmas songs in a variety of musical styles.
- Irving Berlin's White Christmas**: Score of the recent musical based on the 1954 film. Contains a wealth of Berlin classics (many non-holiday), including of course the title track.
- Jazz Yule Love II**: Sequel to 2002 collection features holiday jazz from Bud Shank, Oscar Brown and many more.
- Jigsaw Seen, *What About Christmas*: EP from L.A. pop band is not strictly holiday fare, but the title track deserves to be part of the permanent seasonal repertoire.
- Kids Rap Radio Holiday**: Child-friendly Christmas rap from a series launched by Beyoncé's father/manager, Mathew Knowles.
- The Klezmatics, *Woody Guthrie's Happy Joyous Hanukkah*: The growing field of Hanukkah songs adds a contribution from an unlikely source: folk hero Woody Guthrie, whose hitherto-unknown songs in the genre are burnished by klezmer titans The Klezmatics.
- Gladys Knight, *A Christmas Celebration*: The soul icon is joined by the Saints Unified Voices for this musical/narrative offering.
- Erich Kunzel & the Cincinnati Pops, *Christmastime Is Here*: Kunzel and the Pops are joined by John Pizzarelli, Tierney Sutton and Ann Hampton Callaway, among others, on this jazzy album.
- The Lawtunes, *Merry Lexmas From The Lawtunes*: Described as "allegedly humorous rock 'n' roll holiday songs," this is the third in a series of conceptual collections of seasonal songs about lawyers and the law. As to the concept's viability, well, the jury's still out.
- Ali Lohan, *Lohan Holiday*: Lindsay's 12-year-old sister is joined by big sis and mom Dina (plus Amy Grant) on her first album, a mix of new and old seasonal ditties.
- Love Tractor, *Before and After Christmas*: Some acts use Bing Crosby as the launching pad for their holiday offerings. These Southern eccentrics start with Brian Eno.
- Manhattan Transfer, *An Acapella Christmas*: Two a cappella Christmas albums in one season (the Mighty Echoes' *Doo Wop Around the Christmas Tree*, mentioned in the "Hark! Heralded Choices" story, is the other). Here the spectrum encompasses *Good King Wenceslas*, *Merry Christmas Baby* and *Christmas Is Coming (The Goose Is Getting Fat)*.
- Dean Martin, *Christmas With Dino*: Standards from the legendary crooner, plus a "new duet" on *Baby, It's Cold Outside* with Martina McBride.
- Luis Miguel, *Navidades*: Top-selling Mexican singer adapts familiar holiday tunes in Spanish-language versions, some not literally translated (*Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* becomes *Frente a la Chimenea*).
- Mormon Tabernacle Choir, *The Wonder of Christmas*: Latest from the famed choir contains tracks from the last five years' worth of its annual holiday concerts, with guests including Angela Lansbury, Renee Fleming, Audra McDonald and Bryn Terfel.
- Leigh Nash, *Wishing for This*: The former Sixpence None the Richer vocalist sings seven songs, including Ron Sexsmith's *Maybe This Christmas*, in a voice as soft as snowfall.
- NewSong, *The Christmas Hope*: The contemporary Christian act famous for *The Christmas Shoes* includes a new acoustic version of the hit as part of a *Christmas Shoes Trilogy*, with a mix of traditional and original songs also represented.
- Steve Oliver, *Snowfall*: Smooth-jazz singer/guitarist mixes carols with a pair of originals.
- Ginny Owens, *Bring Us Peace*: This sweet set from blind singer/pianist Owens includes a pair of winning originals — the lovely *This Is Christmas* and the bluesy *Nothin' for Christmas*, an angry ex-girlfriend song.
- Rachael Ray's How Cool Is That Christmas**: Budding queen of all media selects 12 songs from artists ranging from Billie Holiday to Buster Poindexter, covering a wide range of holiday moods.
- Redneck Christmas**: Stereotype much? Collection concentrates on the novelty side of country holiday tunes, the likes of *Santa Looked a Lot Like Daddy* by Buck Owens, Red Simpson's *Truckin' Trees for Christmas* and Joe Diffie's *Leroy the Redneck Reindeer*.
- Andre Rieu, *Christmas Around the World*: The PBS-friendly violinist performs, as the title suggests, Christmas

songs from many lands.

•**Santa Baby**: Eclectic collection of old and new tracks, from songs off Sarah McLachlan and Aimee Mann's current holiday albums to classics by the likes of Tony Bennett, Elvis Presley and Eartha Kitt (the title track).

•**A Santa Cause 2: It's a Punk Rock Christmas**: Benefit album for Cure Autism Now, which receives a portion of the proceeds, and available exclusively on myspace.com, this Immortal Records project features acts such as Sugarcult and Scary Kids Scaring Kids punking up Christmas standards and offering new tunes to the canon (from *It's Cold Out There* to *Gary the Green Nosed Reindeer*).

•John Signorello, *Hey Man, Merry Christmas*: Breezy title heralds a set of big-band-styled chestnuts by the singer, plus the original *Christmas Lullaby*.

•**Simply Christmas — Home for the Holidays**: Soothing instrumental treatments of carols and classical material, what they used to call "beautiful music."

•Sufjan Stevens, *Songs for Christmas*: Five-CD, budget-priced box from the acclaimed, geographically oriented singer/songwriter is the indie hipster's holiday album of choice this season.

•**Still Believing in Christmas**: A mixture of past country Christmas tunes by the likes of Tanya Tucker and Little Jimmy Dickens with newer tracks from Crystal Gayle and Lorrie Morgan.

•George Strait, *Fresh Cut Christmas*: The country superstar sings 12 holiday standards in a Hallmark-exclusive package.

•Carl Tanner, *Hear the Angel Voices*: Acclaimed tenor (and former bounty hunter) mixes classical and popular holiday repertoire in a generous seasonal serving.

•James Taylor, *At Christmas*: Reissue of recent Hallmark-only release, with two songs added and one subtracted. Includes, as does Sarah McLachlan's *Wintersong*, a version of Joni Mitchell's *River*.

•Twisted Sister, *A Twisted Christmas*: The veteran rock band makes its swan song a seasonal offering — all standards except for *Heavy Metal Christmas (The Twelve Days of Christmas)*.

•Rhonda Vincent, *Beautiful Star: A Christmas Collection*: The bluegrass star makes her holiday-album debut with 11 standards plus the original *Christmas Time at Home*.

•Andreas Vollenweider, *Midnight Clear*: The Swiss harpist and New Age star is joined by Carly Simon on four songs on this album of traditional tunes.

•Anne Sofie von Otter & Bengt Forsberg, *Noel*: Versatile Swedish mezzo-soprano joins pianist Forsberg for an eclectic mixture of classical and folk-oriented holiday selections.

•Kelly Willis & Bruce Robison, *Happy Holidays*: Charming tunes, Texas style, from this husband and wife — but watch out for the last tune, about what happens when a loutish Texan celebrates the holidays with conservative Oklahoma Christians.

•**Windham Hill Holiday Guitar Collection**: The label that helped define New Age draws 15 performances of holiday standards from the likes of Wil Ackerman, Tuck Andress and Steve Morse.

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