

The Century recommends

selected by [Louis R. Carlozo](#) in the [December 16, 2008](#) issue

In Review



Think Global: World Christmas

various artists

World Music Network



A Swingin' Christmas

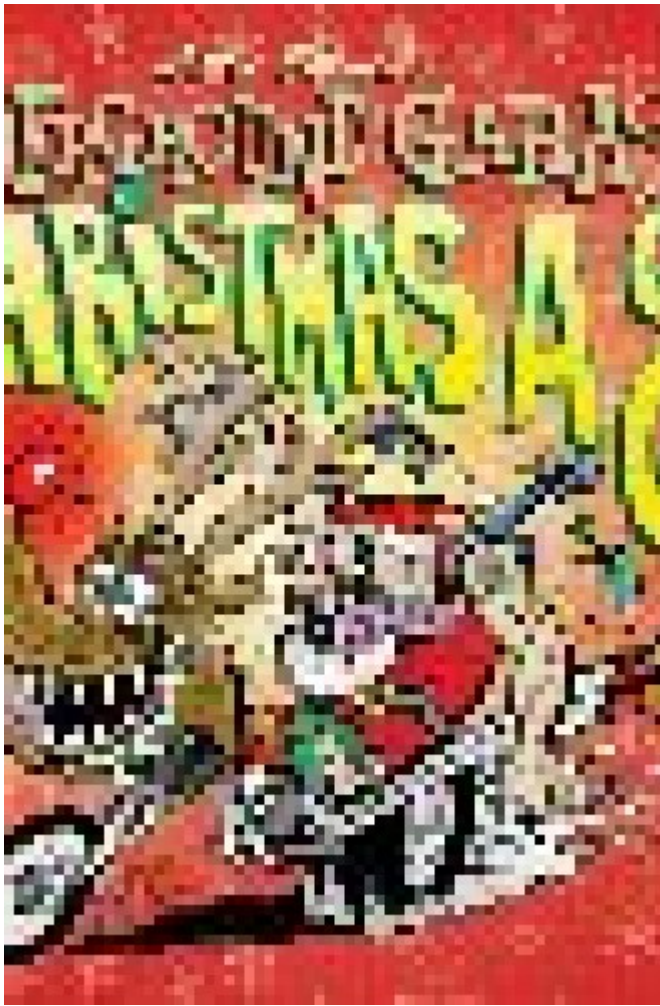
Tony Bennett and the Count Basie Big Band
Sony



The Dawn of Grace

Sixpence None the Richer

La Face



Christmas A Go-Go

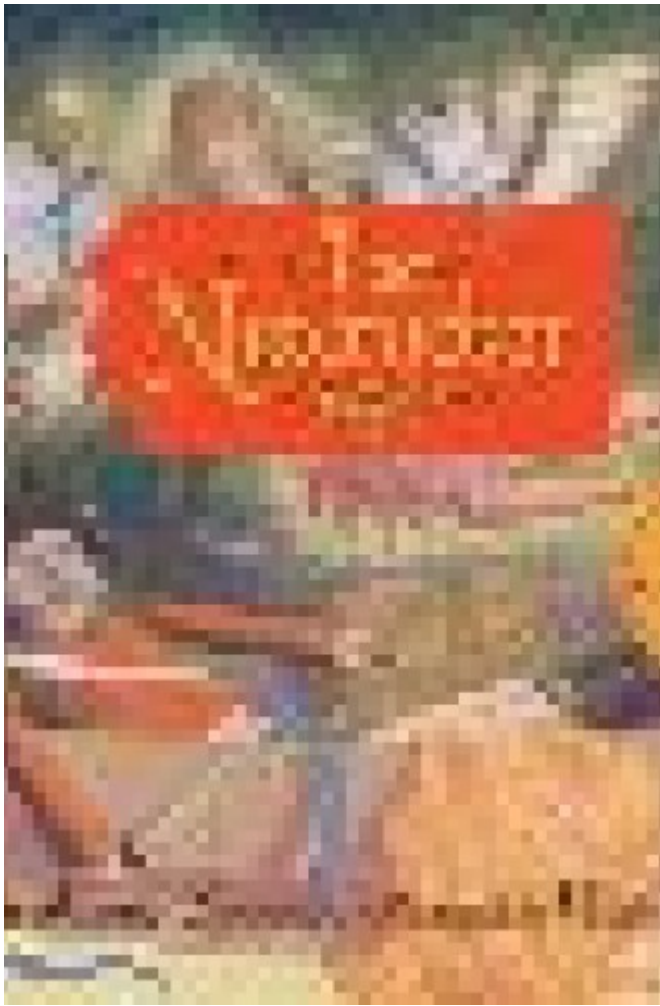
various artists

Wicked Cool



Christmas Cheer

the Boxmasters
Vanguard



The Nutcracker

Utah Symphony Orchestra

Artemis



It's Christmas

Ledisi

Verve



A Jazz and Blues Christmas

various artists
Putumayo

This collection ranges from the merengue of Dominican superstar Reynold to the earthy Hungarian folk of Marta Sebestyen (knit with Arabic textures on “Bethlehem, Bethlehem”). The Cox Family’s dawn-in-Appalachia rendition of “Go Tell It on the Mountain” is a highlight. Other tracks sample holiday pieces from Sweden, Italy and Africa. Proceeds benefit Oxfam’s work to end poverty.

At 82 years young, Tony Bennett remains in top vocal form. With legendary producer Phil Ramone at the helm, Bennett propels “I’ll Be Home for Christmas” with energy that concedes nothing to time, while his piano-tinged take of “Silver Bells” sounds deliciously raspy, as if heard in a smoky jazz salon. Basie’s band keeps the sparkle sublime, and Bennett’s daughter Antonia joins the vocals on “I’ve Got My Love to

Keep Me Warm.”

It's good to have Leigh Nash and Matt Slocum together after a lengthy hiatus. Nash's snow-fragile voice sends winter shivers through you. “Angels We Have Heard on High” marries Nash's voice to jangling electric and muted classical guitars. The music gets gentler on the lightly orchestrated “Riu Riu Chiu,” allowing Nash to sing in Spanish like a shimmering apparition spotted on a Mexican winter morning.

It's hard to imagine a more cheeky collection of garage-rock gems. The album was assembled by Bruce Springsteen sideman Steven Van Zandt's Wicked Cool Records. Joey Ramone sounds a note of punk reconciliation on “Merry Christmas (I Don't Want to Fight Tonight),” while Darlene Love belts “All Alone on Christmas” in the best tradition of a Springsteen rocker. Beatles fans won't want to miss the sly “Silent Night,” performed to the chords of “Norwegian Wood.”

The Boxmasters—actor Billy Bob Thornton's band—do Christmas the twisted country way: “My Dreams of Christmas” describes a dysfunctional scenario in which Thanksgiving is “lunchmeat and bread and mayonnaise,” and on Christmas the singer laments, “I didn't get the gifts again I didn't get last year.” “Silver Bells” comes off like a woozy Texas two-step; “We Three Kings” gets a shot of Johnny Cash rockabilly thunder. “Blue Christmas” seems a natural for this collection, as does the mandolin-spiked “Christmas in Prison.”

This disc accompanies the illustrated book *The Nutcracker*, by Stephanie Spinner and Peter Malone. Some Christmas tales require a soundtrack. While not the definitive version of Tchaikovsky's masterwork, this disc provides a fitting frame for the story, which was adapted by Spinner into child-friendly prose. Once the kids fall asleep, you will want to cue up the music again.

New Orleans chanteuse Ledisi Young combines jazz, hip-hop and soul, and the combination soars on “I'll Go,” a plaintive gospel cry rendered like a piano-bar showstopper: “I'll go / where You want me to go.” The song sets up the funkier rendition of “Children Go Where I Send Thee” this side of Stevie Wonder. More in the home-and-hearth vein is “Be There for Christmas.”

This diverse and delightful CD runs the gamut from B. B. King (who dishes the growl and strut on “Christmas Celebration”) to onetime Chicago swing heavyweights the Mighty Blue Kings (sprinkling some samba timbales with those sleigh bells on “All I Ask for Christmas”). Only a talent like Ray Charles could gild “Rudolph the Red-

Nosed Reindeer” with electric piano and horns until it shines like a Christmas ornament. Most joyous: Ramsey Lewis’s “Here Comes Santa Claus,” reminiscent of Peanuts master musician Vince Guaraldi.

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