

CC recommends

selected by [Louis R. Carlozo](#) in the [December 11, 2007](#) issue

In Review



Christmas Songs

Jars of Clay

Nettwerk/Gray Matters



It's Christmas, of Course

Darlene Love
Shout! Factory



Home for Christmas

Daryl Hall and John Oates

DKE



The 25th Day of December

The Staples Singers

Riverside



Memories of a Winter's Night

Dave Koz
Capitol

Paul McCartney's silly, slight "Wonderful Christmastime" gets a much-needed, taut makeover. There is a dreamy opening instrumental, "The Gift of St. Cecilia." "O Little Town of Bethlehem" takes on a dark (but not menacing) edge with its arpeggiated bass synthesizer and far-off-thunder drum machine, an apt flipside to the regal drone-and-jangle of the original "Peace Is Here," which builds into a satisfying rock anthem.

Hall was born into a family of preachers and sang in a Methodist choir that his mom directed. "Home" mixes live orchestration and swinging soul, as demonstrated on the Oates original "No Child Should Ever Cry on Christmas." A cover of "Jingle Bell Rock" adds welcome stride and sass to the tame 1957 country-rock version by

Bobby Helms, and there is a pleading rendition of “O Holy Night.”

Recorded at Chicago’s famed Universal Studios in 1962, *December* has been rereleased. “The Last Month of the Year” mixes Hammond B-3 riffing and a shuffling snare drum pattern—a sepia-toned backdrop for the Staples’ call-and-response singing. The gentle “Sweet Little Jesus Boys” suggests visions of a dirt-path sanctuary trimmed as humbly as a manger.

Even if smooth jazz makes you grab your earplugs, the genre’s sublime instrumental quality is still suited for the season. Saxophonist Dave Koz mostly plays it safe, adding classical guitar and organ stabs to “Santa Claus Is Coming to Town” and reverb-drenched chimes to “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.” Sax lines undulate in best smooth-jazz fashion, and while this record won’t engender Christmas epiphanies, it might comfort you like a steamy cup of cocoa in your snow-numb hands. A highlight: Kimberly Locke’s aching, rocking vocal on “Please Come Home for Christmas.”

The soulful vocalist behind “(Christmas) Baby Please Come Home,” Love tries her luck at Tom Petty’s “Christmas All Over Again,” The Pretenders’ “2000 Miles” and John Lennon/Yoko Ono’s “Happy Xmas (War Is Over).” “2000 Miles” turns into a piano-based, last-call tearjerker, while “Happy Xmas” gets recast in the gospel mode of the Staple Singers. Even the pedestrian “Christmas Is the Time to Say I Love You” is rescued by Love’s confident, dynamic soul growl and purr.

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